

### Introduction to the Basal Alignment Project (BAP) – Sets of Revised Materials.

You are reading the collected work of hundreds of educators who volunteered to revise the questions, tasks, and directions for your reading program. This set of questions, the vocabulary words selected for you to discuss with your students, and the new culminating tasks for each text selection have all been carefully aligned to the Common Core English Language Arts Standards (CCSS).

This work is still in progress, so more units will be available during the school year, but this is a solid start for you to begin your teaching year with your students. As the writing teams and reviewers learn more about what works best, we will also offer suggestions and corrections through the site. You can sign up to be notified when changes are posted.

Because different district teams worked on different units and texts, you will notice there is not 100% consistency in the approaches and styles of these materials even though they might look uniform. This was the nature of the cooperative project and cultivated by design, as we felt teachers who used these materials would learn more if they saw a variety of approaches. Nor are these materials perfect by any means! We all did this work while we did all our other work. We all learned from and taught each other, argued and conceded points as we worked hard. These materials are solid. They are materials better matched to the Common Core ELA Standards – a bridge to let you and your students use your existing materials while new materials are developed. While they are not perfect, they are better, and they will allow you and your district to be selective when you judge your next purchases of materials. BAP is designed to be a temporary solution, not a permanent one.

We all agreed that doing this work was the richest professional development we could have possibly received on the shifts the Common Core ELA standards need us to make. We encourage you to use these as “before and after” experiences with your colleagues too and to study the standards for the grades you work with to see why these revised units are better aligned than your existing materials. Then, use the training templates and support materials to do revisions as professional development in your own setting!

We are hosting these materials on an open platform. They are yours to take and modify. But we do want you to come back and tell us and each other about the changes you made! Please feel free to form subgroups and communicate right here on the BAP site to discuss these materials and what it means to teach reading this way.

One thing that has not changed with the Common Core Standards is that students need to work with ideas in a variety of active ways. This is even truer when those ideas are expressed in complex or unfamiliar text. Students need to read, hear the text read aloud, reread sections themselves, think about things, and discuss them in pairs or small and large groups. They need to write, write, write about their ideas to discover what they really think and where the evidence is really leading them. We *already* feel that we did not emphasize enough the variety of tools and approaches you should employ with these texts and in having your students work with these questions. Good

teaching is still good teaching, so don't abandon the excellent techniques you already use while you make these shifts your own.

That said, you will notice several major differences in approach in these aligned materials. These are driven by the shifts in instruction called for by the Common Core ELA Standards:

- *The questions and tasks all focus on the core text itself, not on having students make personal connections or respond personally to the text.* The reading and learning students gather from the text are the focus. This increased focus on how much the text has to offer means much more of your class time will be spent discussing the text and not students' personal experiences. This also means you will *always* have to read the core text and these revised question sets carefully as you prepare to teach the core material each week.
- *The questions demand that students provide evidence from their reading to support their answers.* To do this well, your students will have to reread the text several times, sometimes with you, sometimes alone, sometimes in small groups or pairs.
- *It is critical that students have a solid command of the evidence they are providing in support of their answer.* This means that the evidence is accurate, relevant, and complete. These revisions all offer guidance for the evidence students should be providing for each question or activity.
- *There is not much emphasis on pre-reading activities.* Because they are rereading and focusing on the text, students will understand what they read better for themselves. There will be little need to preview the texts before students start to read and work with them each week. Knowing your students, you will have to judge when to lend them a helping hand or to provide needed background. But you should pre-read each text carefully to see what a reader can extract from the text itself.
- *The core text has only one set of questions and one set of vocabulary for all your students.* This means you will need to support your readers in a variety of ways: by encouraging them in the rereading process, framing the questions in a different way, modeling the writing expectations and the use of academic language, and occasionally reading aloud to them. When reading aloud, it is critically important your students always follow in the text. This will support fluency for all students and keep them focused on the text.
- *The questions are not built around a specific strategy; strategies are not the focus of instruction.* The questions are built around the core reading and the Standards. Students will use strategies to find evidence for their answers to the questions, but what strategies they use will depend upon what reading challenge they face. They will need modeling and discussion from you to learn these habits of reading and how to connect the right strategy to various challenges.
- *There is an intensive focus on students learning more about rich words and language.* Each revised unit contains a vocabulary quadrant immediately after the new set of questions. The writing teams worked very hard to identify all the rich academic words and any specific content words the text contained. Then, they thought long and hard about whether or not there was enough support for students to learn the words from context. You need to insist that your students do this regularly. For all students to succeed with the level of rigor in the

Common Core, all students must grow their vocabulary. This means they must improve their ability to learn words in context and must have an understanding of far more abstract and rich words than they do now. There is more on vocabulary below.

This next section offers a brief rationale for the approach taken in these revised materials.

### Pre-reading Activities and Basal Side Trips

Your basal series contains extensive pre-reading activities and extension activities connected to the core reading passage, often as many as 40 pages surrounding the core reading. Each activity takes time, a precious resource for elementary teachers and students. Since working with the aligned questions and tasks will take considerably more time, you are going to have to be choosier about what you decide to include and what you decide to ignore in this area.

Dr. Tim Shanahan recently noted that pre-reading “has run amok in America’s classrooms” (<http://www.shanahanonliteracy.com/search/label/pre-reading>). We recommend you think carefully about whether your students really need the pre-reading and side activities provided and consider eliminating them entirely or thinning them considerably. Keep in mind that students will now be doing multiple readings of the central text. Ask yourself two related questions:

- Is this pre-reading *absolutely* essential to understand the text?
- Can careful reading and questioning support students to figure out much of the same information the pre-reading provides?

The information we often believe students need before reading a text can be provided *during* the questioning process. The benefit here is this: the same information can be provided if it is needed, but *after* students have had the opportunity to read the sections of text for themselves. That way, you and they can see what they could make of it through calling up the information from their own background or by inferring the information they needed through careful reading.

After all, if we want students to be able to read and learn for themselves eventually, we have to support them and offer them regular opportunities to learn how to be self-sufficient learners at all levels of their education. Learning to read independently and proficiently even when text is challenging is key to that self-sufficiency.

The revised questions, activities, and writing tasks will take longer than you are accustomed to spending on the core text. So, you need to consider the needs of your students carefully and allow yourself to be very selective about what side trips you make to the wide variety of extension activities the basal – and even these revisions – offer. We offer some concrete recommendations later.

### Vocabulary:

The ability to determine a word’s meaning from context is essential to comprehending the increasingly complex text called for by the Standards. Only by developing the ability to learn words

from context will students develop the vocabulary they need to be successful readers. We considered the following when selecting words on which to spend time:

- *Words that need to be taught directly:* Words that are essential to understanding the text but are hard to determine from the context need to be provided directly to students. But you also need to spend time on words that are powerful academic (Tier 2) words likely to appear in their future reading *even if they are not* essential to understanding the text. In addition, words that are part of a semantic word family (base, basic, basically; or send, resend, sender) offer a bigger “bang for the buck,” as they provide a two or three to one payback. Most students will ignore these words unless you insist they develop the habit of noticing words and seeing what they add to the text.
- *Which words should be learned in context (often with the guidance of working in groups or with you, but sometimes on their own)?* Identifying these words is a challenge and worth time discussing specific words with colleagues and studying how they are placed in the text. Many of the liveliest discussions during our revision process were about whether or not the words selected could be figured out from context. The question is whether or not there is support in the text for getting a sense of how a word is being used and then whether or not your students should be expected to find and use that support. We did our best to point out these words and encourage this habit in your students by making questions that would send students back to gather the context clues and figure out a word’s meaning. But you will need to get good at this too and work with your students so they develop this skill more.
- *Which words should command more time and which less?* Abstract words (manage, incredible, fate, directly) require more time and attention than concrete words, even unusual ones (currents, docks, attaché case, souvenirs,). Abstract words have a variety of related meanings (it was an *incredible* game, his excuse was *incredible*, he is very direct, go directly to the office, she ignored a direct order) and, therefore, are likely to appear in a variety of contexts. They are also more complicated to explain and harder to grasp.
- *How should these words be taught?* Students need opportunities to use the words, to think about how the different meanings are in fact related, to wonder why an author chose this word and not another, to wonder how the text might be different with a different word, how the word differs from synonyms (how *incredible* is different from *unbelievable* or *amazing*). In sum, they need to think actively about the word and to hear and see it more than once before the meaning and nuances will stick. It is important to keep in mind that the appearance of the word in the text is the beginning of this learning. Because the student has been thinking about the text, it is likely the strongest avenue to this learning will be the discussion of how the word is used *here in this text*.

There will be times when vocabulary is directly integrated into a question or task. But we couldn’t do it for all the words worth your students’ time and consideration. We have identified many words worth students’ attention. They are worth all the time you can spend on them and more.

Each aligned set of replacement questions and tasks includes four boxes for vocabulary. Two boxes identify words that are essential to understanding the text; one includes words that students should be able to understand from context, and the other includes words you will probably have to tell

them the meaning of. The other two boxes contain words we think are especially worth more instruction, even if they aren't essential to the text you're studying. Again, these words are also separated according to whether you may have to provide the meaning or whether students should be encouraged to learn them from context. This may sound confusing, but the boxes are clearly labeled!

Finally, many of the texts contained in your basal do not meet the grade-level complexity called for Common Core Standards, but we have found that they all contain many words worth time and attention. For this reason, nearly all of the passages include between 20 and 30 words we have culled for instruction. The increased emphasis on vocabulary will help make up for the fact that these texts are not as complex as the standards call for. It will also improve your students' reading abilities.

### Syntax (Sentence Structures):

Just as difficult and important as vocabulary is sentence structure (syntax). Syntax and vocabulary are the two features of text that most predict student difficulty (Nelson, Perfetti, Liben and Liben, in press 2012).

Hardly any of us have been taught to attend carefully to syntax with our students. But we have to, since that is the source of much of their struggle. The basals are silent on sentence structure, even when they address features of grammar and parts of speech. We have created questions and activities to address syntax in the revised question sets. But, just as we could not point out all the *words* that were worth time and attention, we could not point out every *sentence* in every text selection that was worth close study.

You will need to do more when you work with your students on the central text. Find those sections of the text that have the longest or most complicated/confusing sentences. If we did not provide a question that focuses attention here already, ask one yourself. Or ask your students to paraphrase the meaning of that sentence. At other times, you can ask your students to pull apart a long sentence and to revise it as two or three shorter sentences. Or you can take short, choppy sentences and have students combine them into one long sentence. These activities can all be done orally or in writing.

Another possibility is to ask what role that sentence plays in the paragraph or the whole passage: What would be different if that sentence were gone? As with vocabulary, the more time you can spend with these 'juicy sentences' (Lilly Wong Fillmore), the better off students will be as readers, writers, and speakers. While this is most true and important for your struggling readers and English learners, *all* your students will benefit from this work.

### Fluency

As you know, struggling readers often need more work to achieve fluency. Their comprehension suffers greatly from their lack of fluency. You can use your central texts and the other materials in your reading program to work on improving fluency. Fluency improves best with repeated

readings of grade level text. It improves second best with students following along while they hear a fluent reader say the words and sentences they are seeing. We suggest that for each central text, you pick a fun or well-written section to use for multiple oral readings. This does not have to be done with students who are already fluent, but they would enjoy it too. Consider a dramatic reading of an exciting part, with students taking parts and practicing.

### Culminating Assignments

Evidence-based text-dependent culminating assignments will, at first, feel new to you and your students. In every series, the culminating assignments were the most in need of revision to be aligned to the CCSS. All the strands of the ELA CCSS (reading, writing, speaking and listening, language) place a great emphasis on gathering evidence from what you read (or see or hear) and then presenting it as support for what you believe to be true about the subject or text being studied. Your students need lots of practice and modeling in how to do these sorts of tasks. Think of it as asking them to read like a detective and write like a reporter, and prepare to focus a lot of time and effort into these culminating assignments. We have tried to make them well worth that time and energy.

### Using the Leveled Readers Provided:

As you know, the reading programs generally contain leveled readers for use in guided reading and additional practice. These texts tend to be far lower quality than the central text. The booklets designed for weaker readers are the thinnest and offer far too simple vocabulary. A steady diet of these words and sentences would starve any budding reader.

We did *not* make text-dependent questions for the leveled texts. We suggest that these texts be repurposed as much as possible for independent student reading to develop fluency and some vocabulary (though given the simplicity of the lower levels this would not be much). The reduction in instructional time spent with these texts could allow more time with the weaker readers on the more complex central passage, in building fluency, and in developing grade appropriate facility with vocabulary and complex syntax.

### What else we did *not* do in the Basal Alignment Project:

As we mentioned earlier, basal reading programs contain far more than text passages and questions: many include grammar, word study (including phonics and spelling), science and social studies connections, authors' bios, and more. This project did not address any of these; it is up to each district or school to determine which of these features to include in instruction. This, of course, is nothing new. Very few schools or teachers were ever able to do everything in the basal.

*Another note on the leveled readers:* Leveled readers have been central in many classrooms. We believe they still have an important role to play, but in a Common Core aligned classroom they cannot be the main tool of reading instruction. This is because of Standard Ten, which requires that *all* students be able to read and understand grade level complex text (with scaffolding as

necessary). Leveled books for weaker readers are not generally at grade level, so they cannot be all students are exposed to.

But as we noted just above, your students will need plenty of access to a wide range of texts of all types and difficulty in order to provide them with the volume of reading they need. So, the leveled readers can be a great source to fill this need.

We also could not do anything to help you address the new balance of informational and narrative text called for in the CCSS. Elementary school students are supposed to read 50% informational text and 50% narrative. This is not the current balance in most classrooms or in your basal.

You will have to work with your colleagues at the school and district level to locate and develop more informational text. There *is* a source built in to some of the basal reading programs: the read aloud section. We noticed these texts were generally of high quality. They were usually recommended to read aloud, but we did not feel this would be necessary, as all the texts we examined fell within the grade level of complexity and were appropriate for students at that grade to read in a guided situation with you.

We are taking a clear stand on what work is most important. Working with these aligned questions and tasks will mean you will spend much more time with the central text each week than you probably did before. Again, you will have to work with your district and school curriculum teams and with colleagues to decide what other activities can be lessened or eliminated.