

[Match Fishtank](#) is an open-source curriculum site that shares the instructional materials we have developed, tested and refined over many years in our classrooms at Match Charter School in Boston.

Rigorous, College-Ready Curriculum

Grounded in best practices for teaching and learning, our curriculum is designed to prepare students for postsecondary success. All our lessons are built around rigorous texts, and consist of target tasks and key questions that push students to think critically and make meaning of what they read. Our central goal is to help our students become excellent readers, writers, problem-solvers, creative thinkers, and community members.

Standards-Aligned Materials

Our curriculum is aligned to the Common Core State Standards and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Every unit and lesson identifies specific standards that are the focus of instruction. Teachers can search and use our curriculum by standard.

Flexible Content

We believe teachers need the flexibility to adapt lessons to meet the unique needs of their students. Sometimes scripted curricula can curtail teacher autonomy and creativity about how they deliver their lessons. We strive to produce unit plans and lessons that provide a comprehensive road map that ensures teacher and student success, but can still be easily adapted to fit various teaching styles and classroom formats.

Culturally Relevant

We are committed to developing curriculum that resonates with a diversity of students' lived experiences. Our curriculum is reflective of diverse cultures, races, and ethnicities, and is designed to spark students' interest and stimulate deep thinking. We are thoughtful and deliberate in selecting high-quality texts and materials that reflect the diversity of our country. Further, the flexibility of our curriculum supports culturally-relevant pedagogy as it allows teachers to easily include strategies and supports to meet the unique needs of their students.

Research-Based Approach to ELA

Through our ELA curriculum we strive to create critical readers, thinkers, and writers while building content knowledge and an appreciation for quality literature. Our ELA curriculum is designed with the texts first, meaning the text drives instruction, followed by the standards. It is also designed to offer frequent opportunities for writing and discussion, build knowledge and critical thinking, and generate a love of lifelong learning.

Key elements of our ELA approach and the research base that supports it are described on the following pages.

Text First vs. Skills First

- Rather than organizing our lessons around specific reading skills (e.g. how to find the main idea) and teaching these skills in isolation, we organize our curriculum around carefully-selected texts that will engage students and facilitate deep thinking and skill development.
- Students spend the majority of class time closely reading extended texts, including the core unit text and paired texts that deepen student engagement with and understanding of key ideas and thematic topics.
- Text-dependent questions in each lesson focus on the key ideas and themes presented by the texts. The questions are carefully sequenced to build a deeper understanding of the text.

Supporting Research:

Classroom time should focus on “students and teachers practicing reading, writing, speaking, and listening in direct response to high-quality” literary and informational texts of grade-level complexity (Liben and Liben, 2013). Students need to read longer texts to build stamina and engage in discussions about the full text as well as close readings of specific passages that draw students’ attention to author’s craft and text structure, word choice, and challenging vocabulary and syntax features (Coleman and Pimentel, 2012). Instruction and supports should help students make sense of these features of complexity in context.

Content Selection and Knowledge Building

- Students engage in Literature and Science and Social Studies units simultaneously to increase exposure to informational texts and build background knowledge and vocabulary.
- In our literature units, students read texts that explore themes applicable to their lives and push them to think critically about their world.
- In our Science and Social Studies units, students read nonfiction and informational texts that build their background knowledge about key historic events, scientific concepts, and their own and other cultures.
- End-of-unit projects and writing assignments allow students to apply content knowledge learned in the unit to deepen and solidify understanding.
- Content knowledge builds systematically from year to year.

Supporting Research:

“Knowledge of content and of the vocabulary acquired through learning about content are fundamental to successful reading comprehension; without broad knowledge, children’s reading comprehension will not improve” (Hirsch, 2016). Scientific and historical texts need to be given the same time and weight as literary texts (Coleman and Pimentel, 2012).

Teacher Autonomy with Guidance on Decision-Making

- Our materials are designed to support innovation and differentiation without compromising content or quality.
- We provide the core content of units and lessons including text selection, standards alignment, target tasks, and text-dependent questions, but do not prescribe how to deliver each lesson.
- We provide resources to help teachers internalize units and lessons in order to bring the units to life.
- The structure and flexibility of our curriculum allows teachers to design lessons that meet the needs and diversity of the students in front of them.

Supporting Research:

Curriculum implementation consists of a dynamic relationship between teachers and curriculum materials. Curriculum materials need to be educative and support teacher decision-making. Scripted curricula can curtail teacher's interaction with the curricula (Remillard, 2005). "Instead of focusing on the perfect method to use or scripted recipe to follow, it's vital to offer a framework and perspective for making decisions" (Kang, 2016).

Language and Vocabulary Development through Discussion and Writing

- Speaking and listening, writing, and language development are intertwined and embedded in all aspects of our program design.
- Students regularly engage in academic discourse with partners, small groups, and large groups with minimal teacher facilitation. Discussion questions are carefully framed and encourage students to test out ideas, listen to other ideas, reconsider arguments and strengthen their reasoning.
- Students regularly write about what they read. Through on-demand and process-writing exercises, students learn to build powerful evidence-based arguments and develop their ability to express their own voice in a variety of genres.
- Writing lessons focus on developing the characteristics of strong writing without relying on formulaic writing supports and tools.

Supporting Research:

Materials should give students extensive opportunities to write in response to texts and writing instruction should focus on the "characteristics of good writing including drawing sufficient evidence from texts, writing coherently with well-developed ideas, and writing clearly with sufficient command of standard English." Discussion should be used to promote academic language, build literacy and communication skills, and develop critical thinking skills (Coleman and Pimentel, 2012).

Evidence of Efficacy

Match Fishtank's ELA curriculum for grades 3-5 was launched in our schools in the 2017-18 school year. We began sharing it through our open source curriculum website in Fall 2017, though we continued to refine our instructional materials throughout the 2017-2018 school year based on feedback from teachers and instructional leaders in our schools. Therefore, there has been limited opportunity for third-party research to study the effectiveness of our completed curriculum. However, we have seen remarkable improvements in our own school since it was implemented. In particular, our fifth-grade students showed very high growth on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) for ELA after one year of implementation of our curriculum. The percentage of these students meeting or exceeding expectations on that exam rose dramatically from just 5% in 2017 to 66% in 2018. This fifth-grade cohort significantly exceeded the state average (54%) though the percentage of English Language learners in the cohort is three times the state average and the percentage of High Needs students is twice the state average.

Anecdotally, teachers have noted that students have shown increased engagement in reading high-quality texts and demonstrate greater knowledge and excitement about topics covered in the curriculum. Teachers have also reported improvements in student writing and discussion skills given the additional class time spent writing and discussing whole-class texts. We have also received similar positive feedback from a wide range of teachers all over the country, which is shared below.

Feedback Received Directly from Users of Match Fishtank's 3-5 ELA curriculum

My favorite thing about the curriculum is the autonomy that it offers to teachers who are planning their lessons. Fishtank offers the end result, but your path is up to you; it takes away the common struggles of lesson planning while giving me the autonomy to teach my lessons the way that I want!
- Teacher, Brighton Park Elementary

We just began using it after using Engage NY ELA curricular materials. Teachers say it is more content-focused and used elements common with Engage NY. Nice rigor and social justice themes. - Superintendent, Woodbine School District NJ

The books are amazing. The themes are relevant and are very thought provoking. It makes the students think and discuss ideas they would not be exposed to in a traditional Basil series. Students are very engaged! - Teacher, Woodbine Elementary School NJ

The "skinny" lesson plans make the process of planning a lesson so much easier, because all of the important elements are on one page. The texts themselves are also more culturally responsive and engaging than most curriculum resources I have used. - Teacher, University Academy Charter School Kansas City

Match Fishtank is a wonderful resource to help teachers with the daunting task of long-range and weekly lesson planning. I like that your lessons are designed to encourage critical thinking and an appreciation for diversity. The lesson plans are amazing! - Teacher, Marietta Johnson School of Organic Education, Alabama



Program Background English Language Arts, Grades 3-5

Well-thought out, high-quality units that push students' thinking. The units are focused around amazing books! You've included everything-discussion questions, written response, rubrics. It's everything I want in a quality literacy program. - Teacher, Union Academy Charter School

I love that units are thematic and use culturally relevant texts. I find the task/exemplar response and text dependent questions the most helpful. - Teacher, Metro Nashville Public Schools

The learning goals are on point, the questions are rigorous and aligned. I love the key understandings students are supposed to get from each lesson, which has helped me craft very strong questions for my novel unit. - Curriculum Director, Memphis Grizzlies Preparatory Charter School

Professional Development and Implementation Support

Teacher Tools

Match Fishtank provides support to teachers on curriculum implementation through an array of [teacher tools](#). Resources for elementary ELA include three different guides to teaching writing, a guide to using assessments, a guide to leading rigorous discussions, a guide to supporting English Language Learners, a guide to teaching vocabulary, and many others.

Affiliated Resources

In addition to these tools, a library of 50 free online videos is available on an affiliated website called [Match Minis](#). These short, animated videos explore effective teaching practices such as running a “Turn and Talk,” leading a class discussion, a starting a lesson with a “Do Now.” Through [Match Schoolhouse](#), teachers can also access full online professional development courses on instructional practices, classroom management and coaching teachers. In 2019, Match Fishtank will introduce new online mini-courses for teachers that provide more support and guidance on implementation, including topics such as unpacking unit standards and essential questions, leading writing lessons, facilitating class discussions, reading routines, and assessing student work.

Resources referenced in the creation of Match Fishtank

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