



# Fishtank Plus 6<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA

## About Fishtank Learning

Fishtank Learning provides teachers with the curriculum resources they need to engage, challenge, and inspire their students. Through our easy-to-navigate curriculum site, [www.fishtanklearning.org](http://www.fishtanklearning.org), teachers can access comprehensive instructional materials for English Language Arts grades K–12 (Fishtank ELA) and for Mathematics grades 3-11 (Fishtank Math). Fishtank Learning offers both an OER curriculum solution and an enhanced curriculum solution called Fishtank Plus for schools seeking expanded resources that guide and support implementation.

## Values that Inform Our Approach

Fishtank Learning envisions a world in which all students are empowered to become critical thinkers, problem solvers, and change agents. All of our work and curriculum materials are grounded in four key values.

- **We believe in students.** All students can master grade-level content, solve critical problems, and discuss complex ideas. When they receive the support they need, all students can achieve at high levels. The Fishtank curriculum is grounded in best practices for teaching and learning, built around rigorous objectives, and aligned to the standards.
- **We trust teachers.** Teachers are our essential partners in fulfilling our mission, as they are in the very best position to understand the unique strengths and needs of their students. We aim to provide teachers with the right balance of flexibility and support in the resources we create. Fishtank curriculum does not script lessons and focuses instead on providing tools that help teachers to deeply internalize and differentiate unit and lesson content.
- **We strive for racial equity and social justice.** A rigorous grade-level curriculum is at the heart of any anti-racist classroom. We seek to create curricular materials that center students, reflect multiple perspectives and experiences, and empower students to think critically about the world they live in.
- **We listen, learn, and adapt.** We challenge the status quo and experiment to find new and better ways to support teachers and students. We continually improve and refine our resources by turning to the research, collaborating with partners, and actively seeking feedback from users.

## Research-Based Approach to ELA Curriculum

The Fishtank ELA curriculum aims to develop students into critical readers, writers, and thinkers. The curriculum is designed around the following research-based guiding principles.

- **Building knowledge to nurture critical thinking.** Effective literacy instruction builds students' reading/writing skills and knowledge, develops students' identity and agency, helps students understand the world around them, and creates independent critical readers.
- **Centering diverse, relevant, and rigorous texts.** Every student, regardless of background and reading level, should read complex, engaging texts written in a variety of genres and by diverse voices, to highlight the diversity and richness of the human experience.
- **Prioritizing student voices and ideas to build agency.** Engaging in regular academic discourse is essential for students to synthesize texts and content, spark their curiosity, develop original ideas, and find their own voices.
- **Learning to write, writing to learn.** Writing and language skills are best taught in context, allowing students to authentically analyze an author's craft and structure, develop their own voice as writers, and build deeper meaning with the texts and ideas.
- **Preparing teachers to support students.** Intellectual preparation allows teachers to do their best teaching: when teachers deeply understand the text and unit themes they can help all students master grade-level content and standards.

To learn more about the research behind each of the guiding principles, see [Foundations of Fishtank ELA](#).

## Features of Fishtank ELA Curriculum

The Fishtank ELA curriculum is designed to be taught over the course of a single school year. Each grade-level course includes five or six units, built around a core text and supplemental materials, with 19-30 lessons in each unit. For each course, teachers can access a **course overview**, a **standards map** which indicates how the grade-level standards are covered across the units and a **standards overview** that tells the specific focuses of each unit, a **pacing guide** which provides a high-level view of how units can be scheduled throughout the year, and a **course materials list**.

### Unit Level

At the unit level, a **unit summary** describes the main focus of the unit along with how the unit fits in the overall sequence. Teachers are also able to access a list of the **core texts** and **supporting materials** (including recommended lists for independent reading), the **content assessment** and **answer key**, a **fluency assessment**, the **unit essential questions** and **enduring understandings**,

unit vocabulary, and a **vocabulary package** to support vocabulary instruction, **connections to previous and future learning** to provide context for the unit, a **lesson map** that outlines the flow of the unit, and the **unit standards**.

Each unit also includes an embedded **Unit Launch**. In these on-demand, multimedia learning modules, participants dive into the complexity of the core texts, build an understanding of the unit essential content, unpack the core reading and writing standards, and examine the unit assessment in depth. Unit Launches are intended to be completed before the start of instruction of each unit and are an essential part of unit intellectual preparation. Teachers can use the Unit Launch modules individually or as part of a professional learning community.

### Lesson Level

Each Fishtank ELA lesson includes components that work together to support teachers in making a rich lesson plan that fits the needs of their students. These components include:

- A **lesson objective**, which is an appropriately-sized learning goal for students that connects to the core text and at least one standard in the unit
- A list of **readings and materials** that identify the section of text or texts that will be studied during the lesson
- A tool to **edit student handouts and lesson slides** in order to customize the materials for students and simplify lesson preparation
- A **Target Task**, a critical thinking question that guides the entire lesson, along with a sample mastery response, that can be used as an indicator of student understanding
- A series of text-dependent **Key Questions** that guide student's analysis of the text through close reading and discussion
- An overview of the **Key Understandings** students will develop in the lesson including the specific knowledge they will build and the skills and strategies they will address
- A list of **vocabulary words** and definitions, along with downloadable word cards
- **Homework** that includes the reading assignment and aligned questions
- **Enhanced Lesson Plans** that include guidance on how to structure the lessons, with suggestions for student supports and extensions
- A list of connected **standards** that are taught or reinforced during the lesson

### Detailed Description of Enhanced Lesson Plans

Enhanced Lesson Plans offer comprehensive guidance on structuring each lesson and supporting all students. Lessons include opportunities for teachers to activate prior knowledge, deeply engage students with the text, and ensure all students are both speaking and writing every day. The key sections of the Enhanced Lesson Plans include the following: A **Comprehensive Review and Vocabulary** with embedded explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction guidance, **Building Background and Engagement**, a **Close Read** with supports for diverse learners, a daily written **Target Task** with guidance for reviewing student work, **Class Discussion**, and multiple choice **Exit Ticket**.

To ensure all students are able to meaningfully access the texts and the tasks, Enhanced Lesson Plans offer a number of supports. Teachers can see the Supporting All Students recommendations, embedded in each lesson, which include **Key Moments to Analyze in the Text, Key Understandings** the summarize the main takeaways from a section of text, **Scaffolding Questions, Sentence Stems** and other language supports, **Opportunities to Build Background and Access Prior Knowledge**, and **Opportunities for Enrichment** that include additional multimedia resources.

## Fishtank Professional Learning and Implementation Support

An important part of Fishtank ELA's approach is the need for teachers to engage in meaningful intellectual preparation prior to teaching a unit. Fishtank ELA offers a variety of resources to support the intellectual preparation work.

- **Unit Launches** - On-demand, multimedia learning modules, through which participants dive into the complexity of the core texts, build an understanding of the unit essential content, unpack the core reading and writing standards, and examine the unit assessment in depth.
- **Teacher Tool Library** - The [Teacher Tool Library](#) includes a variety of resources to support the implementation of Fishtank ELA, including resources on how to prepare to teach fishtank ELA, strategies and supports for writing instruction, providing access to complex text, academic discourse, reading structures and routines, foundational skills, supporting English learners, vocabulary, and independent reading.
- **Fishtank ELA Launch Professional Learning** - A five-session workshop that covers the core elements of the curriculum for teachers and instructional leaders.
  - Session 1: Setting a Vision for ELA Instruction
  - Session 2: Centering Complex Text and Knowledge Building
  - Session 3: Preparing to Teach a Fishtank Unit
  - Session 4: Getting the Most Out of a Fishtank Lesson
  - Session 5: Intellectually Preparing a Fishtank Lesson
- **Additional Fishtank ELA Professional Development** - These additional sessions are offered as optional add-ons for school-based professional learning workshops.
  - Vocabulary Instruction
  - Centering Student Voices
  - Supporting Multilingual Learners
  - Embedding Foundational Skills and Supports
  - Monitoring Student Progress
- **Implementation Consultation** - Opportunities for schools to have consultation meetings with our Curriculum Directors and designers.

To learn more about our Professional Learning opportunities, [click here](#).