

# Fishtank Plus 6th–8th ELA

## Publisher’s Response

### Fishtank’s Values Informed Approach Overview

At Fishtank Learning we believe in students and we trust teachers. In all of our materials, we strive to honor teachers’ experience and expertise. As a team of former teachers, we know well that lesson plans are only one piece of the puzzle. No lesson plan can take the place of the myriad choices teachers make every day about how to best support students’ learning. We’ve designed our curriculum to help teachers make good decisions, allowing room for teachers’ different instructional routines and personal teaching styles, while ensuring that all students get access to what is important - grade level texts and tasks.

Fishtank materials are built on the premise that teacher intellectual preparation and professional development is essential for ensuring all students are successful with grade-level content. Research shows the highest leverage professional development is directly connected to building teachers' understanding of the curriculum and the content they are teaching. Therefore, Fishtank Plus ELA includes embedded professional development; instead of scripting instructional moves, we provide teachers with resources to deeply learn the content, so they can make the right decisions to support their students.

### Writing Instruction in Fishtank ELA

Fishtank ELA units are organized around central topics to build students’ knowledge of themselves, the world around them, and their ability to impact the world. One of the key avenues through which students develop that knowledge is through writing, both in response to daily Target Task prompts and longer, multi-day writing assignments (**Indicator 1F**). [Fishtank’s approach to writing](#) is twofold: 1. Students learn to be effective writers through daily writing and 2. Students use writing to deepen their knowledge of content as they synthesize ideas, clarify and organize their thoughts, and retain key information.

While there are frequent opportunities for students to engage in writing in Fishtank ELA, we recognize and are committed to continuous improvement. We are working on a plan to address grade-level writing proficiency based on user feedback as well as feedback from EdReports (**Indicators 1J, 1K, 2E, 2F**). We are currently focused on adding more research-based writing and paragraph-level writing instruction. We intend to continue focusing on writing within Fishtank ELA lessons.

## Usability in Fishtank ELA

While most of the research based principles that support Fishtank ELA's design align with EdReports' rubric, we believe their application of the *Usability* criteria undervalues certain curriculum features that were explicitly designed to support implementation and make the curriculum more "usable" for teachers.

Fishtank ELA is not designed to be a script that teachers can read for the first time in front of students. Instead, units and lessons are intended to be intellectually prepared before instruction begins. Fishtank's Unit Launches provide comprehensive guidance to ensure teachers deeply understand the features of complexity present in each unit text, the key reading and writing standards students are expected to master, and how students will show mastery of those standards on assessments. Additionally, teachers are able to see the relevant content connections for each unit while intellectually preparing to understand how current standards both build on previous learning and prepare students for future courses. These resources specifically address indicator—**3B: Materials contain adult-level explanations and examples of the more complex grade-level/course-level concepts and concepts beyond the current course so that teachers can improve their own knowledge of the subject**—as they are designed to improve teachers' subject knowledge.

Within each Enhanced Lesson Plan, there are also Key Questions with detailed sample responses that teachers can use to check for understanding throughout the lesson. These features of the curriculum ensure that teachers can focus their attention on supporting students in the best way possible, based on their knowledge of the unique needs of their students, because they have taken the time to deeply understand lesson material in advance.

Not only does this allow teachers to provide more thoughtful, engaging, and relevant lessons for their students, but it also allows teachers to feel confident that they are appropriately addressing the relevant ELA standards. Our approach to what makes curriculum educative differs from EdReports: we have chosen to focus on deep understanding of the nuances of the content, standards, and texts and not on routine instructional moves, which most teachers are familiar with already. Furthermore, this approach allows our curriculum to be more culturally responsive as teachers have the ability to make learning experiences relevant for their individual students.

While we purposely do not script prescriptive teacher moves throughout lessons, we recognize that teachers may need support employing a new instructional technique and therefore offer a library of [Teacher Tools](#), linked within relevant lessons, that provide guidance. This further builds upon the usability of Fishtank ELA as teachers are able to recognize when they need support and easily find it on the Fishtank site. Rather than unnecessarily dedicating their time to reviewing procedures they know how to use, they can determine when and where to introduce new procedures with the support of Teacher Tools.

## Student Supports in Fishtank ELA

We believe that, when they receive the support they need, all students can master grade-level content. Because of this belief in the importance of appropriate support, we fundamentally disagree with EdReports' requirement to label supports for specific student groups including English Language Learners and Special Populations as outlined in indicators **3M: Materials provide strategies and supports for students in special populations to work with grade-level content and to meet or exceed grade-level standards that will support their regular and active participation in learning English language arts and literacy** and **3Q: Materials provide strategies and supports for students who read, write, and/or speak in a language other than English to meet or exceed grade-level standards to regularly participate in learning English language arts and literacy.**

We, instead, believe that supports should be made available to any student that needs help accessing a given text or task. Throughout each Enhanced Lesson Plan, teachers can find recommendations to support students based on specific needs including Language and Foundational Skills Supports, Opportunities to Activate Prior Knowledge, and resources to Build Background Knowledge. We trust teachers to know their students and decide which supports will provide the necessary entry point for the text or task at hand.

To further support teachers in addressing their students' unique learning needs, we have designed Teacher Tools for supporting Foundational Skills Development, Providing Access to Complex Text, and Supporting English Language Learners. These tools offer additional recommendations, strategies, and instructional moves that teachers can employ based on their own knowledge of students and their unique teaching style.

In addition to the included recommendations for supporting students reading and writing below grade level, Enhanced Lesson Plans also include Opportunities for Enrichment to support students performing above grade level. These recommendations, aligned with indicator **3N—Materials regularly provide extensions to engage with literacy content and concepts at greater depth for students who read, write, speak, and/or listen above grade level**—rely on teachers to determine when to utilize them and for which students.