

Fishtank Plus 3rd – 5th ELA Publisher’s Response

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. 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 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. 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.

Below we explain how EdReports’ review misses key features and content in Fishtank Plus ELA that is specifically designed to support teachers and students.

1M -

Vocabulary is seamlessly integrated into all lessons. Depending on the complexity of the text and demands of the task, vocabulary is introduced explicitly or implicitly at the beginning of a lesson and then reinforced in key questions, close reading moments, target tasks, quick review questions, discussion lessons, writing tasks, and on the content assessments. EdReports said that lessons were “limited in providing specific instruction for the teaching of vocabulary words.” By design, the vocabulary instruction is embedded in writing tasks and discussion prompts so that students are constantly and authentically interacting with and using the unit vocabulary words after they are introduced. Due to the seamless nature of vocabulary instruction, it does not

become something extra that teachers need to find a way to fit into an already tight block. [Appendix 1](#) show how vocabulary is integrated within a Fishtank ELA unit.

1N-1P

We acknowledge that our program does not include explicit instruction in phonics, word analysis, and word recognition (1N and 1O), but we disagree with EdReports interpretation of the standards to say all 3rd-5th grade students need direct phonics and word recognition instruction. Fishtank ELA does include a wide variety of opportunities for students to practice and achieve reading fluency (1P), however, EdReports felt there was not enough guidance for teachers on how to teach self-correcting. If self-correcting is the fluency focus area for a particular unit, there are multiple opportunities within lesson plans for teachers to model and provide feedback on self-correction.

2A -

Building knowledge is at the core of all Fishtank ELA units. The unit essential questions guide the knowledge students build. In Fishtank ELA knowledge building is multifaceted, including: foundational knowledge students need to engage with novel challenges and texts (e.g. history and science topics); the knowledge that helps students understand and interact with our world (e.g. topics of social concern, inequality, and injustice); and the knowledge that helps students understand the diversity of human experience and explore their unique identities. EdReports does not consider our literature units, organized around themes, as knowledge-building, despite the rich array of essential questions at the center of these units (see examples below).

- [Third Grade Literature Unit 1](#)
 - What makes me who I am?
 - How should we treat people who are different from us?
 - Why are our names important?
- [Fourth Grade Literature Unit 1](#)
 - How do beliefs, ethics, or values influence different people’s behaviors?
 - When should an individual take a stand against what he/she believes to be an injustice?
 - What does it mean to show courage?
- [Fifth Grade Literature Unit 1](#)
 - How can one person impact a community?
 - In what ways can prejudice impact the way people treat one another?
 - What steps can be taken to overcome prejudice?

3J

EdReports noted that there are “limited/generalized suggestions to teachers for following-up with students.” Our approach to summative data analysis is not about identifying discrete skills that teachers should reteach with students, because, by design, skills are not taught in isolation. Rather, [summative data analysis](#) should be a space where teachers can use student work to

identify ways to improve their own practice in upcoming units. This approach aligns with the research on reteaching and the emphasis on building teachers' practice.

3K

All standards are assessed to the full intent across the series. Appendices [2](#) (3rd grade), [3](#) (4th grade) and [4](#) (5th grade) share details on how Fishtank Plus ELA assesses the standards EdReports said were not assessed to the full intent.

3M

Fishtank Plus ELA provides guidance on both Tier 1 and Tier 2 levels of support, aimed at ensuring that all students, including English Learners and other special populations, can access the curriculum in the general classroom. Research-based suggestions for support are provided within each lesson and align with the demands of the lesson's text and task. Our suggestions for support are divided into six categories: Building Background and Accessing Prior Knowledge, Language Supports, Foundational Skills Supports, Additional Supports, Opportunities for Enrichment, and Progress Monitoring Support. Based on this approach, each lesson includes supports that teachers can use depending on their students' specific needs, and are not limited to the special population they belong to. We disagree with EdReports that supports need to be labeled for individual groups of students and that the "level of specificity for individual groups of students does not provide enough clarity and detail to support successful implementation." The decision for what support to use should not be based on the label of the support, but rather on the teacher's understanding of the text, task, and their student.

Fishtank ELA Sample Support	Other Curricula
<p>"If students are struggling to identify and analyze figurative language, close read the following examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Page 37 - "Ma made a noise like a shrieking cat"● Page 37 - "Her words cut into Ba like slices from a knife"● Page 38 - "It seemed as if the whole village poured from their homes"● Page 42 - "The water was warm, like bathwater, and clear as glass"	<p>"Students may need additional support identifying and interpreting figurative language. Remind students of the work they did in the first half of the unit, interpreting language that was made to stand in for or convey another idea. Guide small groups or partners who are struggling to identify and analyze this language."</p>

While both curricula in the example above guide teachers on how to support students with interpreting language, we believe the Fishtank ELA support is more actionable because it identifies exactly which moments in the text to hone in on. We trust that teachers, at all levels, can look at this support, think about their students, and then decide to guide their students into small groups or partners if needed.

3N

Lessons include standards-based extensions for students who read, write, speak, and/or listen above grade level. The design of our curriculum focuses on building content knowledge through rigorous texts, therefore, many of our opportunities for enrichment involve additional texts that allow students to integrate knowledge and interact with standards RL7, RL8, and RL9 in greater depth. EdReports saw this as additional work and noted that they were “not specific to advanced students.” We disagree. [Appendix 5](#) includes examples of extensions.

3Q

Fishtank Plus ELA is designed to support English learners. The Language supports we include in the Enhanced Lesson Plans are only one part of a comprehensive approach to ensuring that English learners are successful. Using ELSF’s [Guidelines for Improving ELA Materials for English Learners](#), Fishtank designed a curriculum that leverages English learners’ strengths and provides teachers with structures and supports to promote English development. [Appendix 6](#) includes examples of how Fishtank Plus ELA aligns to these guidelines and supports English Learners.

Fishtank ELA made an intentional decision not to label our Language Supports as EL supports because we know that they can benefit many students (e.g. students who have language delays, are non-verbal, have dysgraphia, or other language needs), not just English Learners. When resources are labeled as EL supports, teachers often overlook them if they don’t have EL students. But in reality these supports are useful for all students who may need help accessing the core curriculum. Based on [this approach](#), each lesson includes supports that teachers can use depending on their students’ specific language needs.