

Explicit Instruction within EL Education ELA Grades K-5

**below information comes directly from NYC Read Instructional Shifts, K-5*

NYCPS Shift 7: Direct, explicit instruction in service of comprehension One of the most important factors to strengthen reading comprehension is to teach knowledge and vocabulary relating to a topic. When it comes to improving reading comprehension, strategy instruction may have an upper limit, but building background knowledge does not; the more students know, the broader the range of texts they can comprehend (Willingham, 2014). Additionally, without knowledge of word meanings, students will have limited comprehension of a text. To ensure all students are able to make meaning of grade-level texts, texts must be evaluated to inform planning, instruction, and accessibility. Background knowledge and vocabulary must be explicitly taught, along with verbal reasoning, language structure, and literacy knowledge.

NYCPS Shift 8: Explicit, Systematic, and Cumulative Writing Instruction, Integrated with reading

Reading and writing rely on common knowledge and skills, despite the fact that historically, they have been taught separately (Kim, 2020; Kim & Graham, 2022). Learning to write, just like learning to read, is not a natural process. To ensure that all students become skilled writers, we need to provide explicit, systematic instruction, with many opportunities for practice and feedback, while also making connections between reading, writing, and content knowledge. In the early grades, handwriting fluency is critical in preparing students for reading acquisition (James, 2012), and it is shown to improve oral language, writing quality and quantity, planning, thinking, and learning (Berninger, 2012; Graham & Santangelo, 2012; Peverly, 2012).

Explicit Instruction	Information from <i>Your Curriculum Companion</i>	Example
----------------------	---	---------

Building background knowledgepriority science and social

Content-Based Literacy

» Module lessons build world knowledge on a variety of worthy topics across grades K-5, allowing students to acquire a broad array of knowledge as they practice literacy skills
» Module topics are aligned to

studies standards across »

Module topics are aligned to compelling guiding questions and big ideas

» Modules include multiple texts on the same topic at varying levels of complexity » Module knowledge is deepened with

- [K-5 Module Topics](#)
- [Learning and Accessing Deep Knowledge - Grade 1 Example](#) • [Learning and Accessing Deep Knowledge - Grade 5 Example](#) • [The Johns Hopkins Knowledge Map](#)

	compelling performance tasks	for EL Education
Unpacking Learning Targets	» Unpacking Learning Targets. Using the learning target that serves as the heading for this section as an example - <i>I can describe what learning targets are and why they are important</i> - let's start with the verb <i>describe</i>. The verbs in learning targets are important because they dictate what students will be doing and give an indication of the cognitive rigor of the lesson. <i>Synthesizing</i> will be more cognitively rigorous for students than <i>describing</i>; <i>evaluating</i> more so than <i>labeling</i>. No matter the verb or the rigor it signals, the first step is to make students know what the verb means and what is going to look like and sound like for them to do that work. » Reviewing, or unpacking, learning targets is an excellent way to teach academic vocabulary: "What does it mean to <i>describe</i>?" Often the curriculum will suggest a total participation technique, such as a Turn and Talk, to give all students a chance to think and talk about what it will mean for them to describe (or synthesize or evaluate or label, or whatever the verb is). This engages all students in beginning to take aim at the learning target; it sets a course for their learning throughout the lesson.	Videos • Kindergarten - Using a Learning Target Throughout a Lesson • 4th/5th Grade Students Unpack a Learning Target • 6th Grade Students Unpack a LT and Discuss Academic Vocabulary Lesson Example • Grade 3 M1U1L5 Opening Part B - Unpacking a Learning Target Other Resources • I know learning targets are important, but how can I make them come alive more during lessons?

Close Reading	» Close reading is a process of careful, analytical reading. It involves repeated reading, text-based discussion, and (often) written analysis of complex text. In Grades K–2, this process usually means a close read-aloud by the teacher; students draw or write simple words in response to the text, leading to full sentences and paragraphs as they move toward third grade. » Focused mini lessons and activities help students analyze the use of <i>effective</i> evidence and apply this learning to their writing.	Videos • K Close Read Aloud Part 1 • K Close Read Aloud Part 2 • 3rd Grade Close Reading • 5th Grade Lesson Example • Grade 1 M1U2L2 Session 1 Close Read Aloud/Session 1
---------------	---	--

© 2025 EL Education Inc. (NY Team)

2



	» We position the text as the “expert” in the room. We structure lessons so that students are active readers, annotating as they go, using note-catchers to organize information and ideas, engaging in discussion protocols, and completing short writing tasks that bring them back into the text over and over.	Lesson Plan Close Reading Guide • Grade 1 M1U2L2 Close Read Aloud Guide
--	---	---

Language Dives	» Students engage in frequent Language Dives: 10- to 20-minute conversations between teacher and students about the meaning and purpose of a compelling sentence from a complex text, followed by frequent practice using the language structures from the sentence. (See Chapter 2C for more on Language Dives). Each Language Dive conversation adopts a “Deconstruct, Reconstruct, Practice” routine as a necessary part of building language, building literacy, and building habits of mind. First students work with chunks of the sentence and discuss each one. Then, they work collaboratively to put the sentence back together chunk by chunk. Finally, they practice using one or more of the language structures in a sentence.	Videos • Implementing Language Dives • Behind the Scenes of Language Dives • Small Group Language Dives • Scaffolding Literacy Instruction for English Language Learners Lesson Example • Grade 5 M2U1L6 - Language Dive Embedded in Lesson Language Dive Guide • Grade 5 M2U1L6 - Language Dive Guide Other Resources • EL Blog Post: Empowering English Language Learners through Language Dives
Writing	» Composition of shared writing. Students do the thinking while the teacher does the actual writing. Generally this work is done as a whole group. First, students talk together about the contents of what they want to write, often with a Turn and	Videos • Interactive Writing • Co-Constructing Anchor Charts

	Talk, and then they decide together what words they want the teacher to write. As students progress through the year, they transition from talking about what they want the teacher to write to doing some draft writing and bringing it to the teacher for the final draft. The nature of the writing changes by grade level: In kindergarten, students might just draw a picture and add a few words; in Grade 1, they may add a sentence; and by Grade 2, they may draft two or three sentences. » Scaffolded high-quality writing (K-2). For performance tasks that involve writing, students use sentence frames or models to craft their writing (often with accompanying sketches) to form well-developed sentences (kindergarten) and paragraphs (Grades 1 and 2) with a beginning, middle, and end. (For more information, see the following Scaffolded High-Quality Writing section.) » Scaffolded high-quality writing (Grades 3-5). In Grades 3–5, for performance tasks that involve writing and for some other writing tasks, students begin to spend more time on scaffolded high-quality writing tasks, with particular focus on expository and narrative writing structures, the elements of writing (e.g., focus statements, conclusions, linking words, character development, narrative techniques), and the writing process. (For more information, see the following Scaffolded High-Quality Writing section.) » Lessons are sequenced to ensure that students deeply understand the content before they begin writing about it. Students prepare to write about the	Lesson Example ● Grade 3 M1U3L5 - Introduces Painted Essay Other Resources ● Writing Rubrics and Checklists: Grade K ● Writing Rubrics and Checklists: Grade 1 ● Writing Rubrics and Checklists: Grade 2 ● Writing Rubrics and Checklists: Grade 3 ● Writing Rubrics and Checklists: Grade 4 ● Writing Rubrics and Checklists: Grade 5 ● Writing Rubrics and Checklists: Grade 6 ● Writing Rubrics and Checklists: Grade 7 ● Writing Rubrics and Checklists: Grade 8 ● How Models, Critique, and Descriptive Feedback Help Students Produce High-Quality Writing
--	--	---

	topics and content they have studied deeply through reading, discussion, and other activities that scaffold toward effective writing.	
--	---	--

	» Students use graphic organizers and note-catchers to help gather information and plan their writing. They are exposed to a variety of tools—such as sketching, text-coding, marking evidence with sticky notes, and completing structured note-catchers—and especially in Grades 3–5 are empowered to analyze which tools work best for them. » Many lessons make use of class anchor charts, which are a way to collaboratively collect evidence, make inferences, and synthesize thinking. Anchor charts make the thinking permanent and public. These charts then serve as a critical scaffold for students' writing. Students can use the anchor chart for ideas or as a source of evidence that the class has gathered that they can then use in their writing. » The Painted Essay structure developed by Diana Leddy at the Vermont Writing Collaborative (see Figure 6.3). The Painted Essay helps students visualize the parts of an essay using colors that help them organize their information. During Painted Essay writing lessons, students start by analyzing a model essay for content. » The curriculum follows an instruction sequence called the Rule of Three when it is time to write. First, students analyze a model, a teacher-written piece designed to help students understand how to effectively communicate their thinking about the content. Second, students write a practice piece, similar to the model, with direct instruction and support. Third, students write an independent piece, similar to both the model and the practice piece, but done independently. » Most writing lessons include use of models and checklists. Models are generally provided and are used to	
--	--	--

	show students	
--	---------------	--



	where they are headed. When students analyze models, they first have time to think about the content and then analyze the craft. Students use checklists (one for each writing type: informative, narrative, and argumentative) to identify criteria within the model they are analyzing.	
Vocabulary Protocols	» Lessons at all grade levels feature a heavy focus on volume of reading and close reading of complex text (in Grades K–2 this is done primarily through teacher read-alouds and close read-alouds, which are equally critical for primary age students’ literacy development). » Students learn to analyze the morphology of words (i.e., roots, affixes, suffixes), which is taught explicitly in earlier modules and becomes a habit in later modules. This helps them learn word-learning strategies, rather than just learning specific words. » Explicit vocabulary instruction occurs in almost every K–5 lesson (e.g., unpacking academic vocabulary in a learning target, focusing on vocabulary words in text). » In addition to addressing specific standards related to vocabulary, we paid as much, if not more, attention to choosing rich texts and designing meaningful activities that build students’ knowledge and academic vocabulary.	Videos • Science Talk Protocol • Interactive Word Wall Lesson Example • Kindergarten - M3U1L7 - Preparing for a Science Talk • Kindergarten - M3U1L8 - Science Talk Other Resources • EL Education Blog: Building Vocabulary Takes Wide Reading

ALL Block	» The ALL Block reinforces work from the Module Lessons by providing students with additional time and differentiated support to work with literacy skills they are learning in those lessons. During the ALL Block students work independently with task cards that bring them back to texts, word work, or writing tasks begun in the Module Lessons. Additionally, the teacher-guided mini lessons that are also a	Videos • ALL Block Overview • Implementing Grades 3-5 Additional Language and Literacy ALL Block • Behind the
-----------	---	--

© 2025 EL Education Inc. (NY Team)

6



	feature of the ALL Block each day make room for additional instruction that clears up misconceptions or deepens learning from the Module Lessons.	Practice: Approaching the Grades 3-5 ALL Block Other Resources • ALL Block PL Pack
--	--	--

© 2025 EL Education Inc. (NY Team)

7