

## **Curriculum Review**

The curriculum I am reviewing is Collections: 6th grade English/Language Arts curriculum. It is a standards based curriculum that has a textbook as well as online curriculum. I am reviewing this curriculum because I feel like developing a solid understanding of language arts skills before high school contributes to student success. Additionally, this is the curriculum that is used by 6-12 Language Arts teachers in my district. I have very little experience with curriculum and so I thought starting with the first grade level would be helpful. The unit I am reviewing is the first collection (first unit) titled Facing Fear. Every unit has six components. The first unit has two short stories (one is an anchor text), a poem, an online article, an informational anchor text, and a video. These lessons are available in the book as well as online. In visiting with the language arts teachers, some use only online resources, some use only the textbook, and a few use both forms of instruction.

### **Consideration 1: Organizing Centers**

The title of the unit is called Facing Fear. The title does describe the theme of the unit. While there is no evident essential question, each lesson contains a key learning objective. In looking over the key objectives of each lesson, students will learn to describe characters and settings, describe plot elements, describe the structure of a poem, cite textual evidence, determine central ideas, and understand the purpose of a video and its visual elements. In each lesson there is a task that describes what the student will need to do or overall outcome of the lesson. The big question in this unit of study is a theme. Students will understand what fear is and how people react and overcome fears while using the key learning objectives above to identify the parts of stories.

As someone who has not incorporated this curriculum before, having a more articulated organizing center, specifically an essential question and big idea, would be helpful for understanding the purpose of the unit. Although we can see the title is in relation to fear, it is not evident in the instructional overview how fear (title) plays into the unit. The only way I was able to determine the content of the stories was to read through the stories. This is a language arts curriculum so I understand the learning objectives presented have to do with language but it would be helpful to have the theme of fear displayed somewhere in the overview/big idea. Having said all of that, I believe this unit does have quality centers because the big idea is relevant in today's world, however, it is difficult to identify the big idea in the overview of the unit. The unit aligns to my school's mission and vision of becoming life-long and responsible learners.

Lastly, the key learning objectives are important in the student's learning process as habits are being formed through the teacher's instruction. The stories, poems, and videos are not only a variety of media but appear to be engaging for students to read and watch. In this particular unit, there are two anchor texts that are appealing to students. One anchor text is titled, "Fears and Phobias," and it outlines what fear is, what phobias are, and how people overcome their fears. The other anchor text, "The Ravine," is about a boy named Vinny and how he overcomes his fear after enduring a tragic event. Both of these anchor texts are relevant and appealing to this age group.

### **Collection 1 Big Idea**

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Unit Title         | Facing Fear   |
| Essential Question | What is fear and how do people overcome their fears?  |
| Big Idea           | This unit focuses on what fear is, how people react and overcome their fears, and how fear affects the brain and the body. This is done through identifying |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | parts of the story as presented in the key learning objectives. |
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### Key Learning Objectives

|   |   |   |   |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|--|--|--|
| Collection 1 Lessons  | Short Story by Graham Salisbury, "The Ravine"                                       | Short Story by Margaret Peterson Haddix, "Fine?"                  | Poem by Maya Angelou, "Life Doesn't Frighten Me"                                | Online Article from kidshealth.org, "Fears and Phobias"      | Informational Text by Glenn Murphy, "In the Spotlight"                   | Online Science Exhibit by The CA Science Center, "Wired for Fear"                      |
| Key Learning Objectives:<br><br><b>The student will be able to...</b> | Describe characters and setting and make inferences in the context of a short story | Describe plot elements and analyze point of view in a short story | Describe the structure of a lyric poem and identify repetition and rhyme scheme | Cite textual evidence to analyze text features and structure | Determine the central ideas and supporting details in informational text | Analyze the purpose of a video and understand the visual and sound elements used in it |

### Consideration 2: Alignment to Standards

The Collections curriculum and this unit are strongly tied to standards. In the preface of the book, it describes all the standards being attained and in the beginning of each unit, it describes the specific standards addressed. More specifically, at the beginning of every unit, a graphic is provided that states the reading, writing, speaking, and listening standards that are addressed. The skills identified in the standards are identified in the tasks provided (see below). The curriculum has a strong alignment between task and standard. The task and standard are almost one and the same and the task addresses all parts and honors the intent of the standard (see below).

For example, one of the standards being addressed is reading standard one: cite textual evidence and make inferences. In the short story, "The Ravine," teachers must explain to students that characters in a story have traits and motivations just as real people do. The instructions in the curriculum are to ask the students to reread specific lines and tell what they

learned about Vinny’s feelings. In every lesson in this unit, the text displays instructional strategies for the teacher to use to align to standards.

### Standard Tasks

| Standard  | Task (direct instruction)   | Task (student)  |
|---|---|---|
| CCSS RL.6.1<br>Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.  | The teacher explains to students that sometimes readers need to use what the author writes as well as their own knowledge and experience to understand a character more deeply. Students will make inferences to explain why the character, Vinny, has an urge to fly as he looks down into the ravine. | Through the online curriculum, students will annotate the story. Students will highlight in yellow the factors about the setting, such as time and place, including details of the place. They will highlight in green the character’s thoughts and actions in response to elements in the setting. On a separate sheet of paper, students will record what effects the setting has had on the character. |
| CCSS.RL.6.3<br>Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution. | The teacher explains to students one way authors develop characters is by describing thoughts and feelings the character has. Students will reread lines in the story and then share what these lines help explain about Vinny and his fears.   |   |

### Consideration 3: Standards Placement and Emphasis

This curriculum identifies the placement of standards in a variety of places. First, at the beginning of the teachers edition, the 6th grade English Language Arts Common Core Standards are listed. Following the list, every strand of the standard is listed with the correlating page number of both the teacher and student edition where the standard is taught (pg T41-T71). Next, at the beginning of each unit, it states the tasks the students should be able to perform once completed. These performance tasks relate directly to the standards. Finally, before each story every common core standard that is addressed is listed. These standards are also listed

throughout the teachers edition with directions to ensure they are emphasized as well as an activity for students to complete such as rereading lines, citing words and phrases, and annotating the text. At the start of each story, there is also a page that describes the lexile of the story and the complexity level which is broken into different categories.

When looking at the analysis process in the Lalor (2016) text, it is easy to determine the standards that are emphasized throughout the unit with notes for practice and application throughout the text. Almost all of the notes in the teacher edition are related to the standards. It is difficult to determine if the standards that address foundational skills are placed early in the school year as the book does not need to be used sequentially. I feel this would be up to the teacher to determine. Having said that, it appears there are foundational skills in every collection as well as ideas for reteaching and struggling students. On the flip side, there are also ideas to challenge students. Because the whole book is in relation to standards of 6th grade, I believe they are developmentally appropriate and represent grade-level learning progression.

#### **Consideration 4: Assessment Types and Purposes:**

The curriculum includes multiple measures of assessments. This includes formative and summative, however, it does not appear to include diagnostic assessments. All of the assessments are clearly linked to the standard in which they apply. The formative assessment techniques used are asking students to explain characters and settings, making inferences, and annotating the text during direct instruction. These assessment techniques help the teacher know if they need to extend the learning or reteach certain standards. The textbook also gives teachers independence in how to assess learning. The summative assessments are in conjunction with a performance task. For this unit, students need to independently create a chart of each character's words, thoughts, feelings, and actions then use the chart to list character traits for each boy. Additionally,

they need to group similar traits and different traits in separate paragraphs. This will assess if the student has mastered the standards in this unit.

Product assessment is suggested to be used informally when teachers ask students to describe Starlene's personality based on specific lines in the story. Demonstration assessment is used by asking students to do a think-pair-share activity where they discuss specific questions with a partner then share them with the class. Although there isn't a specific process assessment, it would be easy to add one to relate to self-reflection. For example, the story talks about internal and external conflicts. Students could journal about personal internal and external conflicts. This would help the teacher know they understand the difference.

#### **Consideration 5: Curriculum Embedded Performance Assessments**

This curriculum has performance tasks embedded into the curriculum. At the end of each lesson in the unit, there is one performance task that aligns to the standards. The standard the task is addressing is outlined in the text. The text uses informal performance tasks/assessments to produce and measure learning. These are some of the formative assessments discussed in Consideration 4. These type of assessments occur throughout and at the end of each story in the unit. These assessments *do not* include a rubric.

At the end of the unit/collection there are two performance tasks. These tasks include standards, how to measure learning, are connected to formative measures, and include a rubric. The end of the unit performance assessments measure the most important learning.

| Task:                    | Measure Learning   | Standards  | Audience and Purpose                       | Feedback  | Rubric   |
|--------------------------|--|--|--|---|--|
| A. Present a response to | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain understanding of texts</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>W 2a-b</li> <li>W 9a</li> <li>SL 4</li> </ul> | Peers - will have to convey your ideas and | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share verbally with the class</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ideas and Evidence</li> <li>Organization</li> </ul> |

|                               |  |  |  |  |  |
|-------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| literature                    | meaning and convince others that your interpretation is valid  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● SL 6</li> </ul>   | explain your interpretation  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Assign 3 students to score each presentation</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Language</li> </ul>   |
| B. Write an informative essay | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Write informative texts</li> <li>● Link ideas</li> <li>● Understand text structure</li> <li>● Use language resources</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● W 2a-3</li> <li>● W4</li> <li>● W5</li> <li>● W8</li> </ul> | Think about who will read your essay (peers) and what you want them to know. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Present as speech to class</li> <li>● Record as news report</li> <li>● Have others write comments and have author respond to comments</li> <li>● Partners exchange final draft and score with rubric</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ideas and Evidence</li> <li>● Organization</li> <li>● Language</li> </ul> |

### Consideration 6: Instruction

This curriculum is very thorough in establishing what a teacher should say or do to help students learn. Additionally, it often points out what to do with struggling students, how to challenge students, and the eBook provides opportunities to practice specific skills further. The curriculum has an instructional overview that lays out the key learning objective, performance task, vocabulary strategy, language conventions, EL support, and differentiated instruction for the whole collection. In each story, specific standards are addressed with activities for students to understand and eventually master the standard. It is suggested that some of this work is done independently and some is done as a class or in small groups. Examples include analyzing the

language, describing the character in the story, rereading lines, and working on specific vocabulary words.

Content learning is addressed by focusing on the standards in the unit which is clearly defined in this curriculum. Process learning experiences are used when students are asked to annotate the text by highlighting in yellow the characters thoughts and feelings, in green the character's actions, and in blue the character's spoken words. Then review what all the highlights indicate about the character. This helps engage students in the content. Dispositional learning experiences are used in the performance tasks described in consideration 5 regarding peer review.

### **Consideration 7: Resources that Support Instruction**

I was informed that this curriculum was chosen by the district because it fulfills all the standards required in language arts in grades 6-12. The text has a purpose and each learning experience is aligned with a specific standard. Teachers have the option to use the eBook which allows for more interaction with the text. A variety of learning experiences are used in the text from annotating and rereading to information essays, online articles, character web, and collaborative peer work.

### **Consideration 8: Success with your Curriculum**

As a non language arts teacher, I can easily see what content is included in each unit from the instructional overview at the beginning of each collection as stated previously. Additionally, each story has a plan and reason for including the story in the text and supporting articles and readings teachers may use. When I first started reviewing this curriculum, I was a little overwhelmed with all the different layers as there is so much information before you get to an actual lesson. In talking with teachers who use this curriculum, they often analyze student work

to ensure learning is happening. They do this by reading through work submitted by students. If a vast majority of student work did not meet expectations, the teachers know they may need to reteach that standard in a different way. I was informed that when the curriculum was first purchased, there was professional development available, however, they now offer a representative each year to answer questions. Additionally, the curriculum is discussed in the language arts PLC each month.

### **Summary**

I believe this curriculum is good quality. For beginning teachers, you could open the book during workshops and read through the overviews and know exactly what you will be teaching, how to teach it, how to meet the standards, and how to enhance learning with this curriculum. As I stated before, it is almost too much information, but as a new teacher I would rather have too much information than not enough. This curriculum is very standards based and offers a variety of assessment techniques as well as online resources (which were very helpful during distance learning).

Although I am not a teacher, through reading the Lalor text and discussing the curriculum with language arts teachers, there are a few areas of weakness. As I said, there is a lot of information which can initially be overwhelming. The curriculum does not tell you how fast or slow you should go through the content. It does not offer diagnostic assessments. There is nothing that I could find in the text that discussed how to assess prior knowledge. The teachers said they have made their own notes and know what students need to know before they start a collection. They believe this is a really awesome curriculum and the pros definitely outweigh the cons!

## References

Beers, K., Hougen, M., Jago, C., McBride, W., Palmer, E., and Stack, L. (2017). *Collections*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.

Di Michele Lalor, A. (2016). Ensuring high-quality curriculum: How to design, revise, or adopt curriculum aligned to student success. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.