

Units of Study for Teaching Reading
A Workshop Curriculum, Middle School Grades

FAQ Video Transcripts

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Question: *What are some of the ways to sequence units across grade levels in this first year of their publication?*

Mary Ehrenworth:

When you're thinking about which units you might want to teach in which grade, those decisions in the end are so site-specific because of what you know about your kids, and their histories with reading, and your teacher's histories with readings. So let's just talk about that for a minute and we can just think a little bit about the kinds of thinking that might inform your decision making. Ultimately, we definitely hope and want that you have at least three options for each grade level. It's just going to take us a little time to get that to you, because, you know, with this kind of research and writing it's time consuming to do it well.

Right now, this year, it's pretty easy for sixth grade, because sixth grade could have, they could launch with a deep study of character, then they can move to tap the power of non-fiction, and then they could do social issue book clubs. If they decided they needed it, There's a mini unit in the guide on launching and sustaining independent reading, which they could add in as well. So, sixth grade feels really golden. So here's the thing, right now we have schools all over around the world that might feel like, that doesn't really just feel good for sixth grade, that feels pretty good for our seventh or eighth graders, because our seventh or eighth graders didn't come out of a deep history of independent reading. They haven't been reading hundreds of pages a week and dozens of books across the year. In which case, then maybe that is, for this year, you could do that same lineup of deep study of character, tap the power of non-fiction and social issue book clubs. You could do that at any grade level if you think it will help your kids, which will also help your teachers be able to learn and workshop together and study together. Take comfort knowing that our reading units, like our writing units, are tremendously high level. The promise we made in our writing units is that if you got the kids through their eighth grade writing units, that they were firmly at the end of ninth grade in terms of their writing levels. That's how far ahead we want to make sure kids are.

So, you could do the sixth grade reading units, and you could do them in seventh grade, and you could do them in eighth grade, and you could know that your kids will be very, firmly, situated as readers. But, here's what's going to happen. A year in, your sixth graders will have had those units, they're not going to need them again in seventh grade. And that's why we were hoping to have by then, we're working on a characterization unit, which would take the level of character work up a level, and then you could do that in your seventh or eighth grade the following year. In the same way, once they've done social issue book clubs, listen, on the one hand you

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could do those the rest of your life 'cause the books change and its incredibly fascinating, but you probably want to move to dystopian book clubs or historic fiction just because there's only so much room in your curriculum and you're going to want to get to those. So, we've planned dystopian historic fiction, so they are more complicated and a little bit more independent, and a little bit higher level of thinking than the sixth grade social issues. Although, social issues is not just for sixth grade. It's a really complicated, interesting unit.

So, some of this is going to be you knowing your kids and knowing a little bit of: what are they ready for their first year? And are there two grades that could be doing the same units in your first year of this? Yeah, probably. We ended up doing that in writing. I had plenty of eighth grades that said, "You know what, this journalism unit is really, really ambitious. This position paper unit is really, really ambitious. Our kids didn't even get the seventh grade units yet. Maybe our first year, seventh and eighth grade are going to do the same units of study." And it's perfectly okay to have like, a two to three year plan, knowing that all the work you are going to see, it's all high level. It's all working on really high level thinking skills. You're not going to feel like, "Wow, I feel like my kids can immediately do this really, really well", with any of the units of study. There's going to be room for them to grow. Plus, because kids are working within their band of text complexity in their novel, you could have kids in the social issue book club, and if their reading an X-Y-Z book, it's going to feel really different than if they are reading an R-S-T book, in the sense of how far they take the work, in terms of what it looks like in their actual novels.

But, ultimately, we're hoping that this year, your sixth grade is very well provisioned, and your seventh and eighth grade might decide to share those units. That, next year, we know you'll have your book club units out, we're hoping for a new launch unit, and we'll be working on an argument reading unit. Certainly by the end of that year, you should by that point have sixth and seventh and eighth grade fully provisioned. And we're just trying to figure out a couple things. We're really trying to figure out memoir, classics, or poetry. Do we want to do just one of those, I mean if you've got feedback, you can come back on the Facebook page and let us know, but teachers are trying to let us figure out, what do we most think kids need in eighth grade and help them to high school. While not turning eighth grade into high school curriculum, which as we know if not all that successful. So, we're in the midst of that research, and we'll, as soon as we figure that out we'll let you know.