



Design and Structure of Classworks Classroom Reading Instruction

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Integrated Reading Development Process.....	3
Step 1: Specifying Passage Characteristics.....	3
Step 2: Selecting the Development Team.....	4
Step 3: Training.....	5
Step 4: Development of Topics.....	6
Step 5: Passage Development	6
Step 6: Question Development.....	7
Classroom Use	8
Conclusion.....	10
Appendix.....	11
Sample Passage.....	11
Scope and Sequence.....	12
Author Biography.....	12

Introduction

Today's students are preparing for a world in which the demands of college and careers are growing more challenging, and in which students who lack the skills needed for success have fewer and fewer opportunities. Among the skills that are most important for all students are high levels of reading, writing, and communication. Classworks is designed to address this critical need and ensure that all students reach high levels of achievement in language arts.

To reach these high levels of achievement, students must consistently read appropriate and challenging texts. Popular children's literature and leveled texts have their place, but for success in the 21st century, students must interact with texts that are complex and challenging and that spur readers to develop habits of close and careful analysis.

The texts and instruction students need can be summarized in these shifts in classroom focus:

- **Balancing Literary and Informational Texts** ~ Students encounter a balance of literary and informational texts, including high quality literature and nonfiction texts in the areas of science, history/social studies, technical subjects, and the arts. At least 50% to 60% of what students read is informational text.
- **Building Knowledge Across the Disciplines** ~ Students build an extensive reservoir of knowledge about the world primarily through reading text, rather than having this knowledge provided by the teacher or through activities. Much of this process of building knowledge originates in questions students have about the texts they read, as opposed to having extensive background knowledge and summaries provided before students begin to read.
- **Close Reading of Rigorous Text** ~ Students are expected to read challenging grade-level texts around which instruction is centered. Scaffolding support is provided to help students reach the skill levels required for reading complex text, as opposed to providing the information in simplified or summarized form. Classroom schedules allow time for students to engage in the close reading and re-reading needed to master complex texts.

- **Focusing on Evidence in the Text ~** Students respond to what they read in ways that keep them connected to the text; they develop the habit of using evidence from the text to analyze and deepen their understanding of what they read. They learn to go back into the text to find evidence, to support an argument, or to respond to questions. Instructional questioning is rigorous and focuses on the important and often challenging aspects of the text in ways that lead to deeper understanding.
- **Comparing Information from Multiple Texts ~** Students need to develop the skill of comparing and analyzing information from paired or multiple texts. They learn to cite evidence showing how texts and authors' opinions differ and to evaluate the strength and quality of varying arguments. They are able to assess and compare how well authors support their arguments with credible evidence.
- **Using Evidence in Writing ~** Students' writing emphasizes the use of evidence from the text to inform or make an argument, rather than using valuable instructional time for personal responses or other decontextualized writing prompts. Students develop skills through written arguments that refer to facts, events, or concepts in the texts they read. They have many opportunities to analyze ideas from paired or multiple texts about a single topic and to apply these concepts in writing.
- **Building Academic Vocabulary ~** Students must constantly develop the vocabulary they need to understand complex grade level texts and to participate in academic discourse. Materials and instruction focuses on academic vocabulary – words such as “theory,” “generation,” “analysis,” and “simplify” that occur frequently in reading and academic conversations. These academic words appear in both literary and informational texts and are used across content areas. The texts students read provide many opportunities to learn academic vocabulary.

To meet the criteria above, Classworks teamed with Victory Productions. Victory Productions is a national leader in creating educational content and technology. Victory's clients include the largest and most respected educational publishers in the world, including leading education nonprofits, who rely upon Victory to create assessments, curriculum, translations, design, technology, and professional development programs in all subject areas and at all grade levels. Victory is also creating new breakthrough technology that helps capture and interpret data about student metacognition. Victory Productions is headquartered in Worcester, Massachusetts, and also has offices in Medellin, Colombia.

Classworks Classroom Reading Development Process

The reading passages and questions in Classworks were selected and developed in an extensive and carefully managed process.

Step 1: Passage Characteristics

Development began with a thorough review of current academic research and educational policy goals, leading to the establishment of these specifications for the content of Classworks:

- **Proportions for Narrative and Informational Text** ~ Because informational text is often more challenging and has frequently been under-represented in classrooms, the decision was made that at least 60% of the reading passages in Classworks are informational, with 40% being fictional.
- **Range of Topics** ~ Informational passage topics include all the major content areas, with emphasis on science and social studies, but also including the arts, technical subjects, and other areas. Narrative passages include a wide variety of genres such as realism, fantasy, mystery, myths, folktales, poetry, and historical fiction; these passages also include a wide variety of settings, characters, and narrative techniques.
- **Student Appeal** ~ Reading passages are engaging for student readers. Passages address topics that are recognized to be of high interest for young readers, and in many cases from previously published works that are known to be student favorites. All passages are reviewed by experienced teachers, ensuring that they are highly appealing to students.
- **Passage Length** ~ Passage length varies by grade level, with the goals being that passages are long enough to be complex and challenging, but not so long that students struggle to finish reading. Students are able to spend most of their time analyzing the complex and difficult aspects of the passage, not just getting to the end.
- **Text Difficulty** ~ Passages are appropriately challenging for the designated grade level. Passages are leveled using the Flesch Kincaid readability formula and the following target Lexile levels:

Grade	Reader Measures, Mid-Year 25th Percentile to 75th Percentile (IQR)
1	Up to 300L
2	140L to 500L
3	450L to 790L
4-5	770L to 980L
6-8	950L to 1155L

- **Quality of Writing** ~ All passages are of very high quality. Informational passages use sources of recognized authority and accuracy. Narrative passages represent outstanding examples of quality in writing style, vocabulary, and exemplary use of language.
- **Quality of Questions** ~ The questions accompanying each passage are of exceptional quality. Questions focus on higher order thinking and the important points of the passage, not on recalling details or literal meanings. Questions engage students in reading closely and analyzing the challenging portions of the text – citing evidence, drawing conclusions, clarifying ambiguities, identifying the author's purpose, and evaluating the quality of the author's reasoning.

Step 2: Selecting the Development Team

For passages to meet the high quality required, they were developed by researchers and writers who know students and who are experienced in creating content that motivates and challenges young learners. The Editorial Director who led the development of Classworks content has over 25 years of experience as a writer and editor for children and a developer of educational materials. The project Supervising Editor has five years of teaching experience at primary through middle school levels, in both classroom and learning center settings. The Supervising Editor also has 12 years of experience in developing language arts materials, both digital and print, including student reading passages, lessons, and a wide variety of practice materials.

The Editorial Director and Supervising Editor initiated a nationwide call for expert researchers and writers for young people. After reviewing the credentials and sample work of more than two dozen potential team members, they selected 15 experienced researchers and writers. All of the writers had previously published materials for young readers, and all of the researchers had established track records as experts in evaluating and selecting content that is accurate, age-appropriate, and engaging for student readers.

The editors also selected a team of writers who are experts in developing meaningful questions that support readers in close reading and analysis of texts. All of the question writers selected also had experience in developing high-stakes state assessments. While the purpose of Classworks is not test preparation, the team wanted to be sure that the questions included in Classworks reflect the same level of rigor and higher-order thinking that students encounter in state tests.

The team also included an expert project coordinator. The passages went through multiple versions as they were selected, created, and revised to meet the demanding criteria of the project. An expert coordinator was brought in to maintain the flow of materials, to make sure all the necessary steps of the development process were addressed, and to keep the production process on schedule.

Finally, the team included a quality control group – expert proofreaders and detail checkers who made sure all the passages were letter-perfect, accurate in all details, and ready for classroom use.

Step 3: Training

Training of the development team was a vital initial step in the process. Although all the members of the development team were highly experienced writers and researchers, they still needed to be trained to make sure everyone understood the high expectations and cutting-edge criteria set for Classworks. It was particularly important that all team members understood the shifts in instructional emphasis described above and were prepared for those expectations to be rigorously upheld in the development process. All members of the team received extensive written specifications and descriptions of the materials to be developed, and these criteria were further discussed in group and individual conferences. This thorough initial training assured that materials were on target from the start of the process, and that team members were committed to revising and reworking material when needed to achieve the project goals.

Once the work was underway, the editors monitored submissions closely for alignment with the criteria. Any concerns that surfaced were addressed in follow-up training with individual contributors. This step was seldom needed – the careful recruiting of contributors and the thorough training and specifications led to initial submissions that were on target with few exceptions.

Step 4: Development of Topics

Before researchers and writers began their work, they submitted potential topics to the editors. These included both informational topics and concepts for fictional narratives. The topics were assembled by grade level and extensively reviewed. The editors then worked with the contributors to revise the overall plan, making sure that at each grade level all the passages together meets the key project criteria:

- **Range of Topics** ~ Each grade level includes a variety of narrative genres and a wide range of informational text including science, social studies, and other content areas. Passages do not overlap or are too similar in content or approach. Also, topics vary from grade to grade to avoid repetitiveness and to maintain student interest and engagement.
- **Appropriateness** ~ Topics are reviewed for multiple dimensions of appropriateness: Do they appeal to students at the intended grade level? Are there topics that appeal to both girls and boys? If a proposed topic is very popular and frequently used, such as animal camouflage, does it offer a new and fresh approach to the information? Do topics align with and support the common grade level content in science, social studies and other areas? Do narrative concepts coordinate well with the literature most frequently taught at each grade level? Is there an appropriate range of settings including urban, suburban, and rural environments? Do topics engage students and promote discussion and further research? Are all the topics respectful of individual differences, free of bias and negative attitudes? Do the topics encourage all students to learn more and envision themselves as positive contributors to the world?
- **Overall Balance** ~ Taken as a whole at each grade level and across levels, do the topics represent an overall balance that has appeal for all students and that engages the sense of wonder and vitality that children bring with them when they enter the classroom?

Step 5: Passage Development

With the overall plan for topics finalized, passages were assigned to writers for narratives and researchers or writers for informational text. Initial drafts submitted by writers were reviewed by the editors for quality, accuracy, and appropriateness for student readers in school settings. All passages were

scrutinized to make sure they were free of bias or content that might be upsetting for children, and to assure that the program fully represented the diversity of American life and culture. Special attention was given to making sure that each passage met the expectations for rigorous and complex text, and that the content of the passage provided robust opportunities for questioning that engage students in close reading and analysis. The editors then conferred with writers and researchers to specify revisions or improvements to be made to each passage.

Revised passages were then submitted by researchers and writers. Editors reviewed the revised passages and requested further revisions when necessary. When editors determined that the content of each passage met the stringent criteria for inclusion in Classworks, the passage was then extensively rechecked by the quality control team for accuracy of information and grammatical and technical correctness.

At this point, passages were reviewed by Classworks managers. Any further requested revisions were made.

Step 6: Question Development

Once the content of each passage was firm, item writers developed the questions to accompany each passage. As noted above, the item writers were experienced in developing questions for state assessments. They reviewed the passage content to determine the aspects of the text that were most salient and that support questions that met the project expectations for rigor and close reading.

Drafts of the questions were reviewed by the editors for alignment with the project specifications:

- **Closeness to the Text** ~ Are all questions closely grounded in the text of the passage? A student must read and understand the passage to respond correctly to the question.
- **Focus on Key Aspects of the Text** ~ Do all the questions focus on important features of the text, not on trivial or unimportant details? Questions ensure that students read and understand the most important text aspects.
- **Close Reading** ~ Do the questions require students to have read the text closely? Do the questions call on students to analyze and think through the challenging parts of the passage?

- **Distribution ~** Do the questions for a passage address the various parts of the passage? Students are required to read and think through the whole passage. Questions are not concentrated on one single paragraph or part of the text.
- **Standards Alignment ~** Are all questions aligned with the learning standards for the grade level? Across all the questions for the passage, is there a broad distribution of standards focus, so that all key learnings are addressed in the program? Do the passages as a whole adequately address the standards for the language arts, social studies, and science?
- **Answer Options ~** Are all the answer options plausible? Options do not include throwaway choices – answers that are clearly wrong and that can be immediately discarded. All the answer choices require students to think them through to determine which is correct. Rationales are provided for the teacher explaining why each distractor, or incorrect answer choice, is plausible.

Is there only one answer that is clearly correct? While all answer choices are plausible and require careful thought, the correct answer, or key, is the only possible correct answer once the student has thought through the options.

Do the questions avoid overlap or hints? Each item is independent of the others, so that the phrasing or answer of one item does not provide help in answering another. Also, the phrasing of questions and answer choices avoid repeated words or hints that clue a student to the correct answer.

- **Overall Quality ~** Do the questions as a whole reflect the Classworks expectations of rigor, close reading, and higher order thinking? Will students be motivated and guided to read with accuracy and thoughtfulness?

Following this review, drafts of the questions were revised as necessary. After a final review by the editors and the quality control team, passages and questions were again reviewed by Classworks management, and final changes made. At that point, the passages and questions were ready for inclusion in the program.

Classroom Use

The passages and questions in Classworks are carefully developed to support students in actively engaging and interacting with the text. In addition, Classworks includes a variety of tools students can use to build meaning and to promote close reading and understanding.

- **Dictionary Tool ~** The dictionary tool includes student-friendly definitions of words in the text, plus pictures, usage examples, and other information about the word. Students have instant access to this information by clicking on the word. Whenever they encounter an unfamiliar word, students can immediately access what they need to know to make the word an active part of their vocabulary.
- **Highlighter ~** The highlighter allows the student to mark selected portions of the text in various colors; this tool can help the student identify and remember key portions of the text, answers to questions, related sentences or paragraphs, and other important features. The highlighted parts of the passage can also help students in summarizing and writing their ideas about the passage.
- **Note Taking ~** The note-taking tool provides space to record comments or notes, ask questions, or point out important things the student notices during reading. Student notes are an important part of the process of exploring and analyzing text, and provide important support for the student in discussing and writing about what he or she has read.
- **Audio Version ~** Students also have the option to listen to an audio version of the passage using the text-to-speech tool. Hearing the passage read aloud can provide important scaffolding support for struggling readers, and can help all students better comprehend the passage. Audio versions also provide a model of fluent reading that helps students develop their own fluency, intonation, and phrasing.
- **Multiple Choice Questions ~** Once students have explored the text thoroughly, the multiple-choice questions present additional opportunities to analyze, synthesize, and demonstrate deep understanding of what they have read. These questions call on students to go back into the text to find evidence and explore the key ideas presented.
- **Open Ended Questions ~** In addition to the multiple-choice questions, each passage includes an open-ended response question. Students can respond by drawing or writing. In either case, the question requires students to use evidence from the text to support their answer. They can use their notes, highlighting, and other responses in crafting their response to the open-ended question.
- **Paired Passages ~** Grade levels 2-8 have the opportunity to work with paired passages. Pairing passages allows students to analyze and compare texts helping to prepare students for real world application of citing multiple sources, finding common themes and contrasting ideas. Text dependent questions for these passages are specifically designed to guide students through an analysis of the texts.

Classworks also includes tools to support the teacher in helping students reach high levels of reading achievement.


- **Fluency** ~ Each passage has a fluency version for teacher use. This includes a page for students to read and a page for teachers to conduct a running record to record student WPM (words per minute) score and accuracy percentage. Since these are complex texts, this exercise is meant to serve as a warm read, meaning the student's fluency may be evaluated after the student has done several read-throughs of the text.
- **Source Notes** ~ For informational text, source notes include references to additional materials that can be used for additional research, to extend student knowledge, or to broaden digital literacy.
- **Standards** ~ Each multiple-choice question is standards aligned. Standards thread throughout the passages to ensure student understanding and build upon their knowledge base to apply new concepts.
- **Teacher Resource Page** ~ Teacher resources provide rationales for each of the answer options. This information can be used in lesson planning and to help the teacher gain insight into student thinking and areas of need for further instruction.
- **Sample Answers** ~ For open-ended responses, the teacher tools provide sample answers and a rubric to aid in evaluating student work.


Conclusion

Classworks is a flexible program that can be used in a variety of ways to support and enhance literacy instruction. It is well suited for on-grade-level instruction, providing weekly practice in achieving the grade level standards. It can also be used interactively with the teacher using a whiteboard while students respond on individual devices. Classworks passages provide an ideal base for modeling comprehension strategies or for think-aloud sessions that model the standards. Passages are also ideally suited for fluency practice. They can be used for developing running records to demonstrate students' growth in accuracy and words correct per minute. They can also be used for daily fluency practice – having pairs of students time each other to see how many words they read correctly in one minute and then recording their times and improvement from day to day.







Appendix

Sample Passage

 3-9 | Science 680L - Animal Tracks

 Close

Classworks Administrator ▾




3-9 | Science 680L - Animal Tracks

Animals have different ways of leaving messages for each other in nature. They leave signs or tracks that say, "I was here." If you go on a walk in the woods, you will probably notice footprints in the mud. If it looks like a fork, it was probably a bird. Paw prints could be from foxes, bears, or cats. They come in many sizes and shapes.

Animal tracks have one of two messages. They can welcome other animals or tell them to keep away.

Animals like cats depend on scent to "talk" to each other. That is why they rub their cheeks and sides against many things. Another way is through scratching. Cats do these things to leave their smell behind. Humans cannot smell this kind of track, but other cats can.



Bears like to use trees to leave messages. They bite and rub their bodies against tree trunks. The bears stand up on their back legs and "scratch" their backs" against the tree. This leaves a track. Other bears will know they have been here.

Some animal tracks are not messages. For example, peacocks drop their beautiful feathers at the end of every summer. Seven months later, the large birds grow longer and fuller feathers. In the summer, they will drop those feathers again. Animals and people may find the feathers. The feathers are not a message. The birds simply did not need the feathers anymore.

Another animal that leaves waste behind is the snake. Snakes shed their skin a few times during their lives as they grow. Younger snakes shed more often because they grow faster and more often. Adult snakes will shed their skins about twice a year.

Different animals leave different marks or signs. The tracks they leave behind are clues or messages to their own kind or to other animals. It could be a claw or a paw print on the ground. It could be their scent. It could be leftover food or something they dropped. They are all signs that they were in a certain place and at a certain time.

Sources:
"Minnesota Animal Tracks." State of Minnesota: Department of Natural Resources. 2011. Web. 4 Oct. 2013. http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/education_safety/education/project_wild/animal-tracks.pdf
"Animal Tracks Key." Kids' Inquiry of Diverse Species. n.d. Web. 4 Oct. 2013. http://www.biokids.umich.edu/guides/tracks_and_sign/tracks_key/

NEXT

Scope and Sequence

Classworks Integrated Reading is designed for weekly teacher use in the classroom. Additional information below:

- Grades 1-8
- 36 activities per grade level
- 288 activities
- Informational: History and social studies; Science; Technical
- Literary: Folktales, fables, myths; Poetry; Historical fiction;
- Fantasy; Drama/plays
- 5-7 questions per activity in grades 1-3
- 7-8 questions per activity in grades 4-8

Grade	Information	Literature	Paired	Lexile Rating
1	22	14	0	Up to 430 ~ Average 242
2	19	11	6	270 - 650 ~ Average 434
3	19	11	6	530 - 770 ~ Average 673
4	19	11	6	630 - 1010 ~ Average 799
5	19	11	6	640 - 960 ~ Average 832
6	19	11	6	830 - 1080 ~ Average 928
7	18	12	6	600 - 1090 ~ Average 943
8	18	12	6	590 - 1160 ~ Average 964

Author Biography

Jim Chapman, author of this document, is a highly experienced educational publishing professional with particular expertise in reading pedagogy, vocabulary development, beginning reading, English-Language Learners, intervention, and assessment.

Jim joined Victory Productions early in 2012 as Editorial Director of English Language Arts and has maintained an active role with the company since, turning his attention for the past year to the development of the digital vocabulary project Space Investigators.

Prior to joining Victory Productions, Jim enjoyed a career of more than 20 years with Houghton Mifflin (HM). He joined the company in 1984 as an editor, was promoted to Editorial Director for Reading in 1999, and to VP & Editor in Chief for Reading and Language Arts in 2004.

During his time at Houghton Mifflin, Jim oversaw many significant projects, including:

- HM's 2001 reading program, addressing the challenges of curriculum change presented by Reading First and No Child Left Behind. Lifetime revenue for this program reached more than \$1 billion.
- HM's California reading submission, which captured an 85% market share in that state.
- The planning and initial development stages of a new HM reading program, which won a 40% market share in the most recent Texas adoption.
- Successful products in Intervention, Leveled Books, Pre-K, and Spanish bilingual programs.

Jim has also been involved in program planning, writing, and editing services for other clients including National Geographic, Options, CAST, and Cambium Learning. Worthy of note is the National Geographic project, where Jim was closely involved in market research, overall planning, design, and editorial execution of NG's flagship K-5 Reach ESL program. Jim holds a BA from Harvard University.

For more information, contact Classworks at help@classworks.com, call 770-355-5555, or visit classworks.com.

