



Grade 6 Strategic Reading

Text Selections & Complexity

Unit 1: Setting Out: Voice, Self & Agency | *Look Both Ways*

Unit 2: The Art of Learning: Craft, Mentorship & Tradition | *A Single Shard*

Unit 3: Curiosity, Evidence & Discovery: Hidden Figures | *Hidden Figures (YRE)*

Unit 4: Myths, Monsters & Modern Stories | *The Lightning Thief*

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Text Selection Philosophy

Newsela *Threads & Themes*'s Grade 6 curriculum is built on the conviction that every student deserves access to rich, complex, and culturally affirming texts—and the structured support to read them with increasing independence. This document details how all four Grade 6 units curate, sequence, and scaffold their reading selections to meet the text selection and complexity standards outlined in the California ELA/ELD Framework.

The four anchor texts—*Look Both Ways* (Reynolds), *A Single Shard* (Park), *Hidden Figures* (Shetterly), and *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan)—span contemporary fiction, historical fiction, narrative nonfiction, and mythology/fantasy. The program balances literary and informational text across the year, with each unit pairing its anchor with short-form informational texts, poetry, primary sources, and cross-disciplinary content.

Path of Text Complexity

Threads & Themes considers both the **quantitative** and **qualitative measures** described in Appendix A of the CCSS:

Quantitative (QT)

Lexile band for Grade 6–8: 925L–1185L. Anchor texts range from 680L (*Lightning Thief*) to 950L (*Hidden Figures*). Complexity increases across units, with qualitative demands compensating where Lexile falls below the band.

Qualitative (QL)

Structural and stylistic complexity, layers of meaning, and knowledge demands. All four anchors rate Middle High overall, with different primary drivers: structure (*Look Both Ways*), knowledge (*A Single Shard*, *Hidden Figures*, *Lightning Thief*), and language (*A Single Shard*). See Appendices A–D for full analyses.

The qualitative analyses in Appendices A–D were conducted using the Student Achievement Partners text analysis toolkit, including the Know Yourself, Know Your Students reflection protocol, the Initial Considerations for Complexity and Cultural Relevance analysis tool, and the Qualitative Analysis Tools for literary and informational texts (achievethecore.org).

Grade 6 Anchor Text Progression

Anchor text Lexile increases from 750L (Unit 1) through 920L (Unit 2) to 950L (Unit 3). Unit 4’s anchor (680L) has lower quantitative complexity but the highest knowledge demands of the year, requiring a dense mythological background. Qualitative complexity increases steadily across all four units as students build analytical skill, content knowledge, and tolerance for ambiguity.

Unit	Anchor Text	Author	Lexile	Qualitative	Genre	Type
1	<i>Look Both Ways</i>	Jason Reynolds	750L	Mid-High (Struct: High)	Novel-in-stories	L
2	<i>A Single Shard</i>	Linda Sue Park	920L	Mid-High (Know: M-High)	Historical Fiction	L
3	<i>Hidden Figures (YRE)</i>	M. L. Shetterly	950L	Mid-High (Know: High)	Narrative Nonfiction	I
4	<i>The Lightning Thief</i>	Rick Riordan	680L*	Mid-High (Know: High)	Mythology/Fantasy	L

**The Lightning Thief’s low Lexile belies its substantial qualitative demands: dense mythological allusions, cross-cultural knowledge, and the hero’s journey archetype.*

Every anchor text has been evaluated using both quantitative and qualitative measures. Where Lexile falls below the band (*Look Both Ways* at 750L, *Lightning Thief* at 680L), qualitative complexity compensates. Scaffolding strategies vary by unit: Unit 1 uses accessible contemporary voice; Unit 2 provides historical resources and pottery visuals; Unit 3 includes science/history glossaries and timelines; Unit 4 offers mythology primers and cross-cultural frameworks.

Every student reads the full anchor text without abridgment across all four units. Differentiation occurs through paired texts, graphic organizers, collaborative discussion protocols, and integrated ELD supports—not through text replacement. The program ensures that English learners, students with disabilities, and students reading below grade level encounter the same grade-level texts with structured support.

Grade 6 includes 37 short-form texts across the four units, spanning poetry, short stories, interviews, nonfiction articles, science articles, primary sources, speeches, mythology, folktales, and classical epic excerpts. Each unit’s Short-Form Text Inventory (see unit sections below) details every selection with its genre, Lexile, qualitative complexity rating, close reading purpose, and lesson placement. Short-form texts are sequenced to serve two distinct functions: (1) background knowledge building in the Spark phase and (2) close reading and cross-textual analysis in the Investigation phases.

Grade 6 offers complete novels in all four units: *Look Both Ways* (~200 pages), *A Single Shard* (~152 pages), *Hidden Figures YRE* (~240 pages), and *The Lightning Thief* (~377 pages). Poetry selections appear as complete poems. Each unit’s Independent Reading Selections table (see unit sections below) offers 10–13 curated full-length titles with two-part complexity ratings (QT/QL) at a range of complexity levels, spanning realistic fiction, historical fiction, graphic novels, verse novels, memoirs, fantasy, and mythology. IR complexity increases across units, from predominantly Mid-Low/Mid-High in Unit 1 to High-complexity classical and allegorical texts in Unit 4.

All four units center diverse voices and relevant themes: Black adolescent identity (Unit 1), Korean artisan traditions (Unit 2), African-American women STEM pioneers and civil rights (Unit 3), and cross-cultural mythology (Unit 4). Genres span contemporary realistic fiction, historical fiction, narrative nonfiction, and mythology/fantasy—ensuring every student finds entry points that connect to their interests while building cumulative knowledge across the year.

Teacher Background for Anchor Text Selections

GRADE 6 · UNIT 6.1 Contemporary ELA, Launch Unit

Look Both Ways: A Tale Told in Ten Blocks

by Jason Reynolds

AT A GLANCE

LEXILE	750L
GENRE / TYPE	Novel-in-Stories · Literary (L)
ERA / SETTING	Contemporary urban America (present day), one school neighborhood
AUTHOR IDENTITY	Black / African American (born Washington, D.C.; raised Oxon Hill, MD)
MAIN CHARACTERS	Predominantly Black middle schoolers in a multiracial urban neighborhood
QT COMPLEXITY	Mid-High (Structure: High)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jason Reynolds was born in Washington, D.C. in 1983 and grew up in Oxon Hill, Maryland. He earned his BA in English from the University of Maryland in 2005, and began as a poet with the 2001 collection *Let Me Speak*. His debut novel, *When I Was the Greatest*, came out in 2014, followed by *All American Boys* (with Brendan Kiely), *Long Way Down*, the *Track* series, *Look Both Ways*, and *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* (with Ibram X. Kendi). *Look Both Ways* was a 2019 National Book Award finalist and a 2020 Newbery Honor and Coretta Scott King Author Honor book. Reynolds served as the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature from 2020 to 2022 and was named a MacArthur Fellow in 2024. He has spoken often about being told as a child that he was not a reader, and he writes deliberately for kids who feel that way.

CONTENT OVERVIEW

Look Both Ways unfolds in ten linked vignettes, each tracing a different group of Latimer Middle School students walking home along the same blocks on the same afternoon. The chapters can be read as standalone short stories, though a school bus, the crossing guard Ms. Post, and recurring background characters thread quietly through every block. Chapter 1 opens with best friends Jasmine Jordan and TJ Jumper debating whether humans are boogers or "water bears," a comic conversation laced with Jasmine's sickle cell flares and TJ's foster-care past. Later chapters follow the Low Cuts, a foursome of small-time thieves whose stolen change funds ice cream for one boy's mother undergoing chemotherapy; a skateboarder named Pia and a private-school boy who fail to stop a violent assault; an anxious girl who survives her walk home by documenting it in a notebook; two boys navigating a homophobic rumor with a gesture of solidarity; an inseparable pair whose secret handshake covers the absence of an incarcerated brother; a boy walking past a feared dog; a girl writing comedy routines for her grandfather with dementia; and a love-struck kid sabotaged by his friends' grooming "help." The collection closes with Canton Post, son of the crossing guard, and his "broom dog," a homemade comfort object he has carried through trauma. An epigraph by Garnette Cadogan frames the whole as a meditation on the weight of every walk home.

MAJOR THEMES & BIG IDEAS

Voice and identity, friendship and loyalty, grief and family illness, the inner lives of pre-teens, neighborhood as character, and the way ordinary moments hold extraordinary meaning. The structural conceit, ten blocks and ten voices, supports analytical work on point of view, narrative voice, and how authors layer meaning across linked stories.

WHY THIS TEXT FITS THE UNIT

Unit 6.1 launches the Grade 6 arc on voice, self, and agency. The unit performance task asks students to write a personal narrative about an ordinary moment that reveals something about who they are or how they belong, then share an excerpt in an Author's Chair and Community Circle discussion. *Look Both Ways* gives students a mentor text for exactly that task. Each vignette demonstrates how a small, specific moment can carry the weight of a whole life, and the chorus of distinct narrators supports close work on voice, sensory detail, dialogue, and pacing.

CONTENT NOTES FOR TEACHERS

Preview before teaching: a mother's cancer diagnosis and chemotherapy; a sibling's past addiction; a violent assault on a Black girl skateboarder, with bystander dynamics; a homophobic rumor and a fight that leaves one boy beaten; the offstage death of Pia's sister Santi in a bus incident; a grandfather with dementia; bullying around appearance; and a recurring school-bus motif tied to anxiety and loss. Chapter 5 (covered in Lesson 11) includes LGBTQ+ inclusive and exclusive content. A few mild expletives appear. Plan a structured discussion routine, especially after the Pia chapter and the closing image.

GRADE 6 · UNIT 6.2 Traditional / Social Sciences & Art

A Single Shard

by Linda Sue Park

AT A GLANCE

LEXILE	920L
GENRE / TYPE	Historical Fiction · Literary (L)
ERA / SETTING	12th-century Goryeo-era Korea, the celadon-pottery village of Ch'ulp'o
AUTHOR IDENTITY	Korean American (daughter of Korean immigrants; born Urbana, IL; raised in Illinois)
MAIN CHARACTERS	Korean (orphan boy Tree-ear, his mentor Crane-man, master potter Min and his wife)
QT COMPLEXITY	Mid-High (Knowledge: M-High)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Linda Sue Park was born in 1960 in Urbana, Illinois, the daughter of Korean immigrants. She earned a BA in English from Stanford, a Higher Diploma in Anglo-Irish Literature from Trinity College Dublin, and an MA in Modern British Literature from Birkbeck, University of London. She worked as a journalist, food critic, and ESL teacher before publishing her first novel for young readers in her late thirties. Her published work includes *Seesaw Girl*, *The Kite Fighters*, *A Single Shard*, *When My Name Was Keoko*, and *A Long Walk to Water*. *A Single Shard* won the 2002 Newbery Medal. Park serves on the advisory board of We Need Diverse Books, founded the Korean diaspora children's book database kiBooka, and curates the Allida Books imprint at HarperCollins. Her writing emphasizes meticulous historical research and the dignity of working life.

CONTENT OVERVIEW

A Single Shard unfolds across thirteen chapters set in twelfth-century Korea, in the celadon-pottery village of Ch'ulp'o. Tree-ear is an orphan boy, named for a parentless mushroom, who lives under a bridge with the disabled Crane-man. Crane-man has raised Tree-ear on a strict ethic of honest work. When Tree-ear accidentally damages a piece by the master potter Min, he repays the debt with nine days of labor, then quietly stays on, chopping wood and hauling clay while dreaming of throwing his own vase one day. Min's wife begins refilling Tree-ear's lunch bowl so he can carry food back to Crane-man, and she gives him clothing that once belonged to her dead son. A subplot follows the rival potter Kang, whose new inlay technique threatens to win the coveted royal commission from the visiting emissary Kim. Tree-ear wrestles with the ethics of revealing what he has seen, then helps Min produce two perfect inlaid vases. The novel's climax sends Tree-ear alone on a long, dangerous overland journey to the capital at Songdo. Bandits attack him on the road and shatter both vases on the rocks below the cliff called the Rock of the Falling Flowers. He arrives carrying a single shard, which is enough; Kim writes a commission on the spot. Tree-ear returns to find that Crane-man has died, and Min and his wife (whom he can now call Ajima) accept him as their son and apprentice.

MAJOR THEMES & BIG IDEAS

Apprenticeship and mentorship, the dignity of craft, perseverance through hardship, the ethics of work, found family, and the relationship between artistry and integrity. The novel also opens a window into Goryeo-era Korea, including its social hierarchies, Buddhist undercurrents, and the celadon glaze tradition.

WHY THIS TEXT FITS THE UNIT

Unit 6.2 anchors student work in apprenticeship and mentorship. The unit performance task asks students to write an explanatory essay tracing how a learner moves from beginner to skilled creator through observing, trying, failing, refining, and creating, drawing evidence from *A Single Shard* and at least one additional text. Students also build a

process document for a craft of their own and share it in a Gallery of Learning Presentation. Tree-ear's arc gives students a clear, evidence-rich case to analyze, including the pivotal moments when his teacher's silence becomes its own form of instruction.

CONTENT NOTES FOR TEACHERS

Preview before teaching: orphanhood and homelessness; disability (Crane-man's shortened leg) and period-accurate hierarchy; a robbery scene with mild peril; and the offstage death of Crane-man near the close. Pacing is slower than most contemporary middle grade titles, and students benefit from front-loaded scaffolds on Goryeo-era Korea, celadon pottery, and Buddhist context.

GRADE 6 · UNIT 6.3 Science and ELA Research: Informational Research & Synthesis

Hidden Figures: The Untold True Story (Young Readers' Edition)

by Margot Lee Shetterly (adapted by Winifred Conkling)

AT A GLANCE

LEXILE	950L
GENRE / TYPE	Narrative Nonfiction · Informational (I)
ERA / SETTING	1940s through 1969 (WWII through Apollo era), NACA/NASA Langley in Hampton, Virginia
AUTHOR IDENTITY	Black / African American (born Hampton, VA; daughter of a NASA Langley research scientist)
MAIN CHARACTERS	Black women mathematicians (Dorothy Vaughan, Mary Jackson, Katherine Johnson, Christine Darden) within white-majority NACA/NASA workplaces
QT COMPLEXITY	Mid-High (Knowledge: High)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Margot Lee Shetterly was born in 1969 in Hampton, Virginia, where her father, Robert Lee III, was a research scientist at NASA Langley. She earned her BS at the University of Virginia's McIntire School of Commerce in 1991 and worked in investment banking at JP Morgan and Merrill Lynch before co-founding *Inside Mexico*, an English-language magazine, in 2005. She began the research that became *Hidden Figures* in 2010. The adult book was published in 2016 and adapted that same year for young readers by Winifred Conkling. *Hidden Figures* won the 2017 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work in Non-Fiction and the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award; the film adaptation received three Academy Award nominations. Shetterly founded the Human Computer Project, an archive documenting Black women mathematicians at NACA and NASA, and now lives in Charlottesville, Virginia.

CONTENT OVERVIEW

Hidden Figures (Young Readers' Edition) opens with a personal prologue followed by twenty-three chapters titled with phrases from civil rights and aerospace history. The book braids the lives of four Black women mathematicians at NACA/NASA's Langley Laboratory: Dorothy Vaughan, Mary Jackson, Katherine Johnson, and Christine Darden. Chapters 1–9 establish the wartime hiring of Black "computers" beginning in 1943, follow Dorothy from a Virginia teaching job into the segregated West Area Computing unit, and trace her rise to become Langley's first Black woman supervisor. Chapters 10–14 introduce Mary Jackson, who breaks into engineering training despite needing court permission to attend an all-white high school for the necessary courses. They also bring in Katherine Johnson, a math prodigy who joins the Flight Research Division in 1953 and works through the death of her first husband. Chapters 15–18 introduce Christine Mann (later Darden) as a high school senior watching Sputnik, then trace NASA's formation and Katherine's groundbreaking trajectory work on Project Mercury. Chapters 19–22 weave personal milestones with national events: lunch counter sit-ins, the March on Washington, and John Glenn's request that "the girl" verify his orbital math by hand. The book closes with the 1969 moon landing.

MAJOR THEMES & BIG IDEAS

STEM identity and access, racial and gender barriers in science, perseverance, the civil rights movement as workplace history, the difference between visible and hidden contribution, and the role of evidence in re-writing accepted narratives.

WHY THIS TEXT FITS THE UNIT

Unit 6.3 is a research unit. The unit performance task asks students to research and write an informative essay about a "hidden innovator" whose contribution was important but not widely recognized, integrate at least two curated sources, build an argument for that innovator's recognition, and present their research with a visual. *Hidden Figures (Young Readers' Edition)* is both the mentor text and the proof of concept: it models the move from gap in conventional history to evidence-based recovery of overlooked contribution, and gives students grade-appropriate exemplars of biographical and explanatory writing.

CONTENT NOTES FOR TEACHERS

Preview before teaching: explicit discussion of segregation, Jim Crow laws, and workplace racism and sexism, including period-accurate language and policies. Some sections discuss the Cold War, the human cost of test flights, and early space mission accidents. Plan front-loaded vocabulary and timeline scaffolds, including a primer on NACA, NASA, and the Cold War context.

GRADE 6 · UNIT 6.4 Traditional and Canonical ELA, Comparative Explanatory Analysis

The Lightning Thief (Percy Jackson and the Olympians, Book 1)

by Rick Riordan

AT A GLANCE

LEXILE	680L
GENRE / TYPE	Mythology / Fantasy · Literary (L)
ERA / SETTING	Contemporary America (early 2000s), New York to Los Angeles, with Greek mythological overlay
AUTHOR IDENTITY	White American (Irish American descent; born San Antonio, TX)
MAIN CHARACTERS	Mostly white American demigods (Percy, Annabeth); diverse pantheon and camp ensemble
QT COMPLEXITY	Mid-High (Knowledge: High)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Russell Riordan Jr. was born in 1964 in San Antonio, Texas. He attended the University of Texas at Austin, where he earned a BA in English and history, and the University of Texas at San Antonio for his teaching certification. Riordan taught middle school English and history for fifteen years in Texas and California, including at Saint Mary's Hall in San Antonio and Presidio Hill School in San Francisco. He began as an adult mystery novelist with the *Tres Navarre* series before writing *The Lightning Thief*, which grew out of bedtime stories he told his son Haley, who has ADHD and dyslexia. He went on to write the full *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, *Heroes of Olympus*, *Kane Chronicles*, and *Magnus Chase* series. In 2018 he launched Rick Riordan Presents, a Disney-Hyperion imprint dedicated to mythology-based fiction by authors from underrepresented cultures. He now lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

CONTENT OVERVIEW

The Lightning Thief runs twenty-two chapters narrated by twelve-year-old Percy Jackson in a wry, present-day voice. The structure follows a quest arc: Percy discovers his identity, undertakes a mission, and returns transformed. Chapters 1–6 introduce Percy at Yancy Academy, where his pre-algebra teacher reveals herself as a Fury, his Latin teacher Mr. Brunner turns out to be the centaur Chiron, and his friend Grover is a satyr assigned to protect him. After the Minotaur attacks Percy's mother, Sally, Percy reaches Camp Half-Blood and meets Annabeth, daughter of Athena, and Luke, the welcoming Hermes-cabin counselor. Chapters 7–9 establish camp life, claim Percy as a son of Poseidon, and assign him a quest: recover Zeus's stolen master bolt by the summer solstice or face an Olympian war. Chapters 10–19 follow Percy, Annabeth, and Grover from New York to Los Angeles through a series of mythological encounters, including the Furies on a Greyhound, Medusa's roadside emporium, the chimera atop the Gateway Arch, Ares at a Denver diner, Procrustes's water-bed shop, and finally the Underworld itself. Chapters 20–22 reveal that Ares planted the bolt, manipulated by the resurgent Titan Kronos. Percy returns the bolt to Olympus, reunites with Sally, and learns that his friend Luke has been the true traitor.

MAJOR THEMES & BIG IDEAS

Identity and self-discovery, parents and absent fathers, friendship and trust, the modern uses of ancient mythology, neurodivergence as power, the hero's journey, and questions of fate versus choice. The structure invites comparative thinking across mythological traditions and supports explanatory analysis of how authors adapt source material.

WHY THIS TEXT FITS THE UNIT

Unit 6.4 centers comparative explanatory analysis. The unit performance task asks students to write a comparative essay analyzing a shared idea (courage, danger, identity, or the unknown) across *The Lightning Thief* and at least one myth, build a visual that maps the comparison, and present in a seminar or podcast discussion. Riordan's episodic monster encounters map cleanly onto Greek source myths, giving students many entry points for analytical comparison and the chance to see how a contemporary author adapts canonical material for new audiences.

CONTENT NOTES FOR TEACHERS

Preview before teaching: stylized fantasy violence and monster combat; a verbally and emotionally abusive stepfather (Gabe); references to Percy's dyslexia and ADHD as plot mechanics; parental abandonment and the journey to the Underworld. Greek mythology contains adult source material that the novel softens but does not erase. Some families may have religious sensitivities around polytheistic content. Framing mythology as cultural literature, alongside other world traditions, supports thoughtful engagement.

Unit 1: Setting Out: Voice, Self & Agency

Anchor Text: *Look Both Ways* by Jason Reynolds | 750L

Essential Questions:

“How do ordinary moments reveal who we are and how we belong?”

“How does sharing stories help people understand one another?”

Short-Form Close-Reading Schedule

#	Title / Author	Genre	QT (Lexile)	Type	QL	Close Reading Purpose	Lesson
1	“Love Your Stories: YA Authors on Championing Your Voice” Sasha Dowdy, Library of Congress	Blog post	900L	I	Mid- High	YA author perspectives on voice and agency; close reading of multi-author advocacy for student storytelling	L1
2	“Jason Reynolds: Writing What’s Real” Standards News Bureau	Interview	870L	I	Mid- High	Author craft and community; connecting author intent to vignette structure and voice	L2
3	“Middle School Is More Than You Think: Why These Years Are Actually a Time of Growth, Creativity and Possibility” Standards News Bureau	Nonfiction	880L	I	Mid- High	Science-informed identity formation; adolescent growth and creativity as cross-disciplinary reading	L22, L30
4	“Hanging Fire” Audre Lorde	Poetry	N/A	L	High	Figurative density and adolescent interiority; extended close reading with annotation	L28
5	“Thank You M’am” Langston Hughes	Short Story	810L	L	High	Close reading of character, compassion, and moral reasoning; classic literary voice and dialogue craft	L31, L32

Sequencing rationale: Short-form texts are strategically placed across the unit: the Jason Reynolds interview (L2) builds author context before students encounter the anchor’s distinctive voice. Mid-unit, “Thank You M’am” (L10) provides independent close reading practice with a classic literary text that mirrors the anchor’s themes of compassion and community. Late-unit texts (L23–L24) deepen thematic connections to identity and adolescence—the nonfiction article provides a science-informed perspective on middle school growth, while “Hanging Fire” offers the year’s most figuratively dense poetry close reading.

Independent Reading Selections

#	Title / Author	Lexile	Genre	Complexity (QT / QL)
1	Front Desk Kelly Yang	640L	Realistic Fiction	QT: Below band QL: Mid-Low
2	New Kid Jerry Craft	GN: 320L	Graphic Novel	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
3	The First Rule of Punk Celia C. Pérez	670L	Realistic Fiction	QT: Below band QL: Mid-Low
4	Seedfolks Paul Fleischman	710L	Realistic Fiction	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
5	Because of Mr. Terupt	560L	Realistic Fiction	QT: Below band QL: Mid-Low

	<i>Rob Buyea</i>			
6	Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus <i>Dusti Bowling</i>	700L	Realistic Fiction	QT: Below band QL: Mid-Low
7	Merci Suárez Changes Gears <i>Meg Medina</i>	700L	Realistic Fiction	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
8	The Stars Beneath Our Feet <i>David Barclay Moore</i>	650L	Realistic Fiction	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
9	Amina's Voice <i>Hena Khan</i>	800L	Realistic Fiction	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
10	Wonder <i>R.J. Palacio</i>	780L	Realistic Fiction	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High

Best for Home / Independent	Best for Classroom (Teacher-Supported)
Independent reading selections (<i>Front Desk</i> , <i>New Kid</i> , <i>Wonder</i> , etc.); informational article; interview; texts with moderate qualitative demands	Anchor novel vignettes with teacher modeling; poetry close reading; “Thank You M’am” literary analysis; collaborative discussion on essential questions

Unit 2: The Art of Learning: Craft, Mentorship & Tradition

Anchor Text: *A Single Shard* by Linda Sue Park | 920L

Essential Questions:

“What does it take to learn something difficult?”

“How does art connect people to their history and community?”

Short-Form Close-Reading Schedule

#	Title / Author	Genre	QT (Lexile)	Type	QL	Close Reading Purpose	Lesson
1	“South Korea: A Land of Mountains, History and Culture” <i>Standards News Bureau</i>	Nonfiction	1030L	I	Mid-High	Geographic and cultural context for anchor’s Korean setting; building foundational knowledge	L1, L21, L26
2	“How Geography Shaped Korea: Land of Mountains, Rivers, and Big Neighbors” <i>Standards News Bureau</i>	Nonfiction	980L	I	Mid-High	Geographic determinism; understanding how landscape shapes culture and the pottery tradition	L1, L26
3	“From Ancient Beginnings to the Kingdom of Goryeo” <i>Standards News Bureau</i>	Nonfiction	1000L	I	Mid-High	Goryeo dynasty history; establishing the historical period of the anchor novel	L1, L26

4	“Korean Ceramics of the Goryeo Period” <i>Standards News Bureau</i>	Nonfiction	1210L	I	Mid-High	Celadon pottery tradition; art history directly connected to the anchor’s central craft	L2, L 21, L22
5	“Cracking the Science Behind Pottery with Mudfire Pottery Studio” <i>Science ATL / MudFire</i>	Science Article	1130L	I	High	Cross-disciplinary STEM reading; chemistry of glazing connected to anchor craft descriptions	L8, L9, L40
6	“Craftsmen” <i>V. Sackville-West</i>	Poetry	N/A	L	Mid-High	Close reading of craft and labor; poetic rendering of artisanship as philosophical practice	L16, L33, L36, L37, L38, L39
7	“The Craftsman” <i>Marcus B. Christian</i>	Poetry	N/A	L	Mid-High	Close reading of craft, dignity, and artistic creation; comparison with Sackville-West’s perspective	L16, L33, L36, L37, L38, L39
8	“The Youngsters Keeping Traditional Trades Alive” <i>BBC News / Riyadh Collins</i>	Profile	1050L	I	Mid-High	Contemporary apprenticeship; real-world connection to anchor themes of mentorship and tradition	L17, L18, L33, L36, L37, L38, L39
9	“Hands That Remember: Artists Who Make Things by Hand” <i>Standards News Bureau</i>	Nonfiction	1100L	I	Mid-High	Artisanship and cultural memory; synthesizing across texts about why handcraft endures	L31, L36, L37, L38, L39, L40

Sequencing rationale: Spark-phase texts (L1–L2) build essential geographic, historical, and cultural knowledge about Korea and the Goryeo dynasty before students encounter the anchor. The pottery-specific article bridges cultural context to the novel’s central craft. Investigation-phase texts extend into cross-disciplinary STEM reading and paired poetry close reading comparing two poems about craftwork. Synthesis-phase texts connect the anchor’s themes to contemporary apprenticeship and the enduring value of handcraft.

Independent Reading Selections

#	Title / Author	Lexile	Genre	Complexity (QT / QL)
1	The Kite Fighters <i>Linda Sue Park</i>	880L	Historical Fiction	QT: Within band QL: Mid-High
2	The Seventh Most Important Thing <i>Shelley Pearsall</i>	760L	Realistic Fiction	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
3	The Invention of Hugo Cabret <i>Brian Selznick</i>	820L	Historical Fiction	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
4	Inside Out & Back Again <i>Thanhà Lai</i>	820L	Verse Novel	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
5	El Deafo <i>Cece Bell</i>	GN: 420L	Graphic Memoir	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
6	The Crossover <i>Kwame Alexander</i>	750L	Verse Novel	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
7	The Wild Robot	740L	Science Fiction	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High

	<i>Peter Brown</i>			
8	Hatchet <i>Gary Paulsen</i>	1020L	Survival Fiction	QT: Within band QL: Mid-High
9	It's Trevor Noah: Born a Crime (YA) <i>Trevor Noah</i>	780L	Memoir	QT: Below band QL: High

Best for Home / Independent	Best for Classroom (Teacher-Supported)
Full novel; informational articles; craft-focused IR selections (The Seventh Most Important Thing, Inside Out & Back Again, The Wild Robot)	History jigsaw reading; pottery science article with guided analysis; paired poetry close reading; contemporary apprenticeship profiles

Unit 3: Curiosity, Evidence & Discovery: Hidden Figures

Anchor Text: *Hidden Figures (Young Readers' Edition)* by Margot Lee Shetterly | 950L

Essential Questions:

"How do curiosity, evidence, and collaboration lead to discovery?"

"Why were some contributions overlooked, and how can research help us build a fuller record?"

Short-Form Close-Reading Schedule

#	Title / Author	Genre	QT (Lexile)	Type	QL	Close Reading Purpose	Lesson
1	"We Choose to Go to the Moon" (JFK Speech) <i>Public Domain / Newsela</i>	Speech	1060L	I	High	Presidential rhetoric; tracing central claim and evidence; speech analysis with annotation	L1
2	"The Space Race: America Reaches for the Moon" <i>NASA / NPS / Newsela</i>	Nonfiction	1030L	I	Mid-High	Space Race context; synthesizing across multiple informational texts	L1
3	"The 1960s; From Dream to Reality in 10 Years" <i>Cheryl L Mansfield, NASA Kennedy Space Center</i>	Nonfiction Photo Essay	1470L	I	High	Space race and the rise of NASA's Kennedy Space Center; tracing the path from Project Mercury to Apollo 11's historic moon landing.	L1
4	"Jim Crow Laws: A Dark Chapter in American History" <i>Library of Congress / Newsela</i>	Nonfiction	1090L	I	Mid-High	Systemic racism and legal history as context for anchor's setting; text feature analysis	L2
5	"Tuskegee (1921)" <i>Leslie Pinckney Hill</i>	Poetry	N/A	L	High	Poetry as historical witness; close reading of voice, memory, and institutional racism	L7, L8
6	"Greensboro Lunch Counter" <i>Primary Source</i>	Visual Primary Source	N/A	I	Mid-High	Visual primary source analysis; protest and resistance; connecting image to historical narrative	L17
7	"February 1960: Sit-ins in Greensboro" <i>SNCC Legacy Project</i>	Nonfiction	1310L	I	High	Sit-in movement and direct action; high-complexity informational reading; civil rights activism context	L17
8	"Glenn Orbits the Earth" <i>Nikki Welch / NASA</i>	Nonfiction	1150L	I	Mid-High	Comparison with anchor events; tracing how different texts construct the same historical moment	L18

9	“Sputnik” <i>NASA / Newsela</i>	Nonfiction	1010L	I	Mid-High	Space Race catalyst and Cold War technology; integrating information across text and multimedia	L14
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Sequencing rationale: Spark-phase texts (L1–L2) build the dual historical context students need (the Space Race AND Jim Crow) before encountering the anchor’s intertwined narratives. The 1960s overview and JFK speech provide the highest-complexity informational reading in the unit. Investigation-phase texts deepen both strands: poetry and the Greensboro visual source add emotional and visual dimensions to the civil rights context, while the sit-in article is among the most demanding texts in the Grade 6 program. Synthesis-phase texts provide scientific and historical comparison points.

Independent Reading Selections

#	Title / Author	Lexile	Genre	Complexity (QT / QL)
1	Flipped <i>Wendelin Van Draanen</i>	720L	Realistic Fiction	QT: Below band QL: Mid-Low
2	Orbiting Jupiter <i>Gary D. Schmidt</i>	740L	Realistic Fiction	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
3	The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963 <i>Christopher Paul Curtis</i>	920L	Historical Fiction	QT: Within band QL: Mid-High
4	Iqbal <i>Francesco D’Adamo</i>	750L	Historical Fiction	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
5	A Wrinkle in Time <i>Madeleine L’Engle</i>	740L	Science Fiction	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
6	The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind <i>William Kamkwamba & Bryan Mealer</i>	960L	Memoir/Nonfiction	QT: Within band QL: Mid-High
7	Mae Among the Stars <i>Roda Ahmed</i>	580L	Biography	QT: Below band QL: Mid-Low
8	Counting on Katherine <i>Helaine Becker</i>	710L	Biography	QT: Below band QL: Mid-Low
9	Women in Science <i>Rachel Ignotofsky</i>	990L	Nonfiction	QT: Within band QL: Mid-High
10	I Am Malala: Young Readers’ Edition <i>Malala Yousafzai</i>	830L	Memoir	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High

Best for Home / Independent	Best for Classroom (Teacher-Supported)
Full YRE; Newsela articles; STEM-focused IR selections (The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind, Women in Science, I Am Malala)	Key chapters with annotation; JFK speech analysis; Jim Crow and sit-in close reading; poetry comparison; timeline construction

Unit 4: Myths, Monsters & Modern Stories

Anchor Text: *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan | 680L

Essential Questions:

“Why do cultures tell stories about gods, monsters, and journeys?”

“How do stories explore danger, courage, or the unknown?”

Short-Form Close-Reading Schedule

#	Title / Author	Genre	QT (Lexile)	Type	QL	Close Reading Purpose	Lesson
1	“What Are Myths?” <i>Tanu Wakefield / Newsela</i>	Nonfiction	960L	I	Mid-High	Genre definition and cultural purpose of myth; establishing analytical framework for the unit	L1
2	“Ancient Greeks” <i>UShistory.org</i>	Nonfiction	1090L	I	Mid-High	Greek civilization context; city-states, culture, and the role of mythology in daily life	L2
3	“Ancient Greeks: Gods, Goddesses, and Heroes” <i>UShistory.org</i>	Nonfiction	1050L	I	High	Greek pantheon and religious practices; building mythological knowledge base for anchor reading	L2
4	“Ancient Greeks: Truthseekers” <i>UShistory.org</i>	Nonfiction	1080L	I	High	Greek intellectual traditions; connecting philosophy and reason to mythological world-building	L2
5	“Percy Jackson and Mythology” <i>Library of Congress</i>	Nonfiction	930L	I	Mid-High	How Riordan adapts mythology; bridging classical source material to modern anchor text	L3
6	“The Hare and the Lion” <i>Zanzibar Tales / Bateman</i>	Folktale	860L	L	Mid-High	East African trickster tradition; cross-cultural comparison with Greek myth structures	L4, L5, L19
7	“The Raven Myth” <i>Myths and Legends of Alaska</i>	Mythology	780L	L	Mid-High	Indigenous North American creation tradition; comparing purpose and form across cultures	L10, L11, L19
8	“The Popol Vuh: The Mythic and Heroic Sagas of the K’iche’ People of Central America” <i>K’iche’ Maya / Spence</i>	Mythology	1430L	L	High	Mesoamerican cosmology and hero twins; the highest-Lexile text in the Grade 6 program; culturally specific close reading Mesoamerican cosmology and hero twins; the highest-Lexile literary text in the Grade 6 program; culturally specific close reading	L15, L19
9	“The Oracle of Delphi” <i>Standards News Bureau</i>	Nonfiction	1080L	I	Mid-High	Greek religious practice and prophecy; connecting cultural context to anchor plot events	L16, L19
10	“The Quest of Medusa’s Head” <i>James Baldwin</i>	Mythology	990L	L	High	Greek hero quest and classical retelling; close reading of quest structure and monster-slaying archetype	L18, L19

11	“The Song of Ares and Aphrodite” <i>Homer / Odyssey</i>	Classical Epic	840L	L	High	Divine narrative within epic; gods, love, and trickery; transitioning from myth to epic form	L25
12	“Virgil’s Aeneid Book 6 Excerpt” <i>Virgil</i>	Classical Epic	1170L	L	High	Roman underworld journey; close reading with translation support; comparison with anchor quest	L29, L36
13	“Homer’s Iliad Book 1” <i>Homer / Samuel Butler</i>	Classical Epic	1180L	L	High	Epic conventions and divine intervention; close reading of invocation, register, and wrath theme	L32, L36
14	“Homer’s Odyssey Book 13 Excerpt” <i>Homer</i>	Classical Epic	1030L	L	High	Homecoming and quest closure; completing the classical arc alongside anchor’s resolution	L35, L36, L39

Sequencing rationale: Unit 4 offers the year’s richest short-text experience, with 14 short-form texts representing seven cultural traditions (Greek, Roman, East African, Indigenous North American, Mesoamerican, and contemporary informational). Lower-complexity informational texts arrive first (Spark L1–L2) to build mythological vocabulary and context, including the Percy Jackson–mythology bridge article. Investigation-phase texts introduce cross-cultural mythology for comparative analysis, culminating in the Popol Vuh, the highest-Lexile text in the entire Grade 6 program. Synthesis-phase classical excerpts represent the most demanding literary close reading of the year, preparing students for cross-textual analysis across epic traditions.

Independent Reading Selections

#	Title / Author	Lexile	Genre	Complexity (QT / QL)
1	Aru Shah and the End of Time <i>Roshani Chokshi</i>	630L	Fantasy / Mythology	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
2	The Storm Runner <i>J.C. Cervantes</i>	620L	Fantasy / Mythology	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
3	Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky <i>Kwame Mbalia</i>	700L	Fantasy / Mythology	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
4	Paola Santiago and the River of Tears <i>Tehlor Kay Mejia</i>	650L	Fantasy / Mythology	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
5	The Serpent’s Secret <i>Sayantani DasGupta</i>	640L	Fantasy / Mythology	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
6	Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard <i>Rick Riordan</i>	590L	Fantasy / Mythology	QT: Below band QL: Mid-High
7	D’Aulaires’ Book of Greek Myths <i>Ingri & Edgar d’Aulaire</i>	930L	Mythology	QT: In band QL: High

8	Treasury of Egyptian Mythology <i>Donna Jo Napoli</i>	≈940L	Mythology	QT: In band QL: High
9	Melissa (formerly George) <i>Alex Gino</i>	550L	Realistic Fiction	QT: Below band QL: Mid-Low
10	The Hero's Guide to Saving Your Kingdom <i>Christopher Healy</i>	640L	Fantasy / Humor	QT: Below band QL: Mid-Low
11	The Odyssey <i>Homer / Samuel Butler</i>	1080L	Classical Epic	QT: In band QL: High
12	The Phantom Tollbooth <i>Norton Juster</i>	1000L	Fantasy / Allegory	QT: In band QL: High
13	George's Secret Key to the Universe <i>Lucy & Stephen Hawking</i>	N/A*	Science Fiction	QT: N/A (est. 700–800L) QL: Mid-High

Best for Home / Independent	Best for Classroom (Teacher-Supported)
Full novel; Newsela myth articles; mythology IR selections (Aru Shah, The Storm Runner, Magnus Chase, D'Aulaires' Greek Myths)	Classical excerpts with translation support; myth primers; cross-cultural comparison activities; Popol Vuh and Medusa close reading; glossary building

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy & Text Selection

Text selections across all four Grade 6 units are grounded in Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings' three pillars of culturally relevant pedagogy, operationalized through the Student Achievement Partners text analysis toolkit:

Academic Success	Cultural Competence	Critical Consciousness
Every unit builds academic language, analytical reading, and content knowledge through rigorous grade-level texts with structured scaffolding. <i>Look Both Ways</i> develops narrative analysis; <i>A Single Shard</i> builds historical and descriptive vocabulary; <i>Hidden Figures</i> integrates scientific and mathematical reasoning; <i>The Lightning Thief</i> cultivates cross-cultural literary analysis.	Selections represent diverse identities across all units: Black, Chinese, Cuban, Korean, Pakistani, and Korean American voices (Unit 1); Korean artisan traditions (Unit 2); Black women in STEM and civil rights history (Unit 3); Greek, Maya, West African, East African, and Norse mythological traditions (Unit 4). Texts serve as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990).	Texts explore power, equity, and justice: Unit 1 examines code-switching, microaggressions, and identity through adolescent lens; Unit 2 interrogates social hierarchy through feudal apprenticeship; Unit 3 confronts systemic racism and sexism in American institutions; Unit 4 compares whose mythologies are canonized and whose are marginalized.

The qualitative analyses in Appendices A–D were conducted using the Student Achievement Partners text analysis toolkit, including the Know Yourself, Know Your Students reflection protocol, the Initial Considerations for Complexity and Cultural Relevance analysis tool, and the Qualitative Analysis Tools for literary and informational texts (achievethecore.org).

Appendix A: Literary Text Qualitative Analysis

Look Both Ways: A Tale Told in Ten Blocks by Jason Reynolds (2019) | Lexile: 750L Novel-in-Stories | Literary

Rubric format: Student Achievement Partners (achievethecore.org). **Ratings and text-based evidence:** Newsela

MEANING			
HIGH Multiple levels/layers of complex meaning	MIDDLE HIGH ✓ Multiple levels/layers of meaning	MIDDLE LOW Single level of complex meaning	LOW Single level of simple meaning
<p>Text-Based Evidence:</p> <p>Operates on multiple semantic levels. The title itself carries dual meaning: traffic safety AND an imperative to examine life from multiple perspectives. Each vignette layers humor over deeper emotional terrain: “Water Booger Bears” uses an absurd booger metaphor to process Jasmine’s sickle cell crisis and parents’ separation; “Skunk Catcher” masks grief beneath physical comedy; “How to Look Both Ways” transforms the literal act of crossing the street into a meditation on perspective-taking. The “ten blocks” are both city blocks and building blocks of identity.</p>			
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Annotate metaphor and symbol; compare surface plot to thematic significance; examine how stories comment on each other across the collection; trace the title’s meaning across vignettes</p>		<p>Cautions & Support Needed</p> <p>Some readers need support recognizing layered meaning beneath humor; sickle cell context may require background; AAVE dialogue and cultural references need contextualization</p>	

STRUCTURE			
HIGH ✓ Complex, implicit, unconventional structure	MIDDLE HIGH Some complexities; occasional shifts	MIDDLE LOW Largely simple, conventional	LOW Simple, explicit, chronological
<p>Text-Based Evidence:</p> <p>Ten independent yet interconnected short stories, each with its own protagonist, conflict, and resolution. Non-chronological ordering within narratives requires tracking multiple threads. Reynolds manipulates time freely: “Water Booger Bears” begins in the present, flashes back to a locker scene, then further back to hospitalization, then returns. Characters thread across stories in ways the reader must track. The metafictional opening signals the unconventional approach throughout.</p>			
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Create timeline of character appearances across stories; trace how story order affects cumulative meaning; analyze the vignette as a literary form distinct from the traditional novel</p>		<p>Cautions & Support Needed</p> <p>Unconventional structure requires explicit instruction early; students benefit from graphic organizers tracking characters across vignettes</p>	

LANGUAGE			
HIGH Heavy figurative; unfamiliar, archaic, domain-specific	MIDDLE HIGH ✓ Contains figurative language; somewhat complex	MIDDLE LOW Subtle figurative; conversational	LOW Little figurative; literal
<p>Text-Based Evidence:</p> <p>Rich figurative language woven throughout all ten stories. Metaphors emerge organically from urban environments: homes are “like a choir of homes dressed in the same robes”; the crosswalk is “a bridge leading them over the tar-water.” Incorporates African</p>			

American Vernacular English authentically, reflecting how language carries cultural identity. Sentence structure varies from short, punchy dialogue to longer lyrical passages. Irony and humor operate as both comedy and philosophical argument.

Opportunities

Close read passages for figurative language across multiple stories; compare Reynolds’ voice across narrators; discuss why AAVE is an intentional craft choice; use as mentor text for students’ own writing

Cautions & Support Needed

AAVE dialogue requires framing as legitimate linguistic system, not “incorrect” English; metaphorical language requires explicit teaching; informality masks linguistic sophistication

KNOWLEDGE

HIGH

Multiple complex themes; distinctly different experiences

MIDDLE HIGH

Multiple themes; uncommon experiences

MIDDLE LOW ✓

Single complex theme; common experiences

LOW

Single simple theme; everyday

Text-Based Evidence:

Core experiences—walking home from school, friendship, family change, dealing with illness—are common to many middle schoolers. Sickle cell anemia requires brief science context (provided through the text itself). Urban neighborhood setting, church culture, and specific social dynamics may be familiar to some students and new to others. The constellation of themes (chronic illness, family separation, racial/gender identity, urban community) is more complex than a single everyday experience.

Opportunities

Centers historically marginalized identities with joy, agency, and resilience; builds knowledge about urban community life, sickle cell disease, and family change; directly supports both essential questions

Cautions & Support Needed

Students from rural/non-urban backgrounds need geographic and cultural context; discussion of grief and family trauma requires sensitivity and preparation

Qualitative Complexity Summary

Meaning: Middle High — Multiple layers beneath accessible surface humor

Structure: High — Unconventional vignette form; ten narrators; non-chronological within stories

Language: Middle High — Rich figurative language; authentic AAVE dialogue; irony and humor

Knowledge: Middle Low — Relatable experiences; some science/cultural context needed

Overall Qualitative Rating: Middle High (3 on a 0–5 scale)

While the Lexile (750L) falls below the Grade 6–8 quantitative band, the qualitative complexity—particularly in structure and language—places this text firmly at grade level. The combination of accessible vocabulary with demanding structural and interpretive work makes it an ideal anchor for the start of sixth grade.

Appendix B: Literary Text Qualitative Analysis

A Single Shard by Linda Sue Park (2001) | Lexile: 920L | Historical Fiction | Literary

Rubric format: Student Achievement Partners (achievethecore.org). **Ratings and text-based evidence:** Newsela

MEANING			
HIGH Multiple levels/layers of complex meaning	MIDDLE HIGH ✓ Multiple levels/layers of meaning	MIDDLE LOW Single level of complex meaning	LOW Single level of simple meaning
<p>Text-Based Evidence:</p> <p>Surface narrative is clear: a homeless orphan seeks to become a potter in 12th-century Korea. Beneath lies deeper questions about becoming an artist, earning belonging, and claiming identity within rigid social structures. The “single shard” metaphor represents the culmination of effort, sacrifice, and the chance that one small act of excellence can change fate. Tree-ear’s journey from observer to apprentice to artist mirrors the unit’s essential question about what it takes to learn something difficult.</p>			
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Discuss what Tree-ear’s goal represents beyond pottery; analyze symbolism of cracked celadon and the perfect shard; examine how identity evolves through apprenticeship</p>		<p>Cautions & Support Needed</p> <p>Apprenticeship and social hierarchy in feudal Korea require contextualization; understanding celadon’s cultural significance is necessary for full appreciation</p>	

STRUCTURE			
HIGH Complex, implicit, unconventional structure	MIDDLE HIGH Some complexities; occasional shifts	MIDDLE LOW ✓ Largely simple, conventional	LOW Simple, explicit, chronological
<p>Text-Based Evidence:</p> <p>Employs conventional linear chronological narrative with single third-person-limited POV (Tree-ear). Chapters follow logical progression from meeting Master Min through apprenticeship and the dangerous journey to the capital. Straightforward narrative structure places complexity in thematic and linguistic dimensions rather than narrative form. The meditative pacing mirrors the patience required of the craft itself.</p>			
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Trace plot arc and identify turning points; discuss how pacing choices reflect theme; analyze the relationship between each chapter and Tree-ear’s character growth</p>		<p>Cautions & Support Needed</p> <p>Slow, meditative pacing challenges readers accustomed to fast-moving contemporary fiction; conventional structure may lead students to underestimate thematic complexity</p>	

LANGUAGE			
HIGH Heavy figurative; unfamiliar, archaic, domain-specific	MIDDLE HIGH ✓ Contains figurative language; somewhat complex	MIDDLE LOW Subtle figurative; conversational	LOW Little figurative; literal
<p>Text-Based Evidence:</p> <p>Lyrical and descriptive prose, particularly in passages about pottery-making. Employs specialized vocabulary (celadon, glaze, kiln, throwing) woven naturally into narrative. Period-appropriate formal language creates temporal distance, establishing the story’s historical setting. Simile and metaphor appear frequently, especially in descriptions of the natural world and the craft process. Dialogue is spare but meaningful—each conversation carries weight.</p>			

<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Create pottery term glossary while reading; analyze descriptive passages for craft and meaning; discuss how Park’s language establishes historical setting and tone</p>	<p>Cautions & Support Needed</p> <p>Specialized pottery vocabulary requires glossary support; formal register may feel distant to some contemporary readers; Korean names and terms need pronunciation guidance</p>
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KNOWLEDGE

HIGH Multiple complex themes; distinctly different experiences	MIDDLE HIGH ✓ Multiple themes; uncommon experiences	MIDDLE LOW Single complex theme; common experiences	LOW Single simple theme; everyday
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Text-Based Evidence:

Requires significant background knowledge: 12th-century Korea during the Goryeo dynasty, social hierarchy and class structure, Buddhism’s role in Korean society, celadon pottery’s significance as a valued art form, and geographic knowledge of Korea and travel routes. Understanding feudalism contextualizes Tree-ear’s status as an orphan and his hopes for social mobility through craft mastery.

<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Pre-reading: overview of 12th-century Korea, celadon pottery history, feudal social structure; view Goryeo celadon images from museum archives; create map of Tree-ear’s journey</p>	<p>Cautions & Support Needed</p> <p>Historical and cultural context not intuitive for American sixth graders; extensive scaffolding through jigsaw articles, video, and visual resources is necessary</p>
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Qualitative Complexity Summary

Meaning: Middle High — Apprenticeship as identity; the shard as metaphor for excellence and fate

Structure: Middle Low — Linear chronological; single POV; conventional but effective

Language: Middle High — Lyrical prose; specialized pottery vocabulary; formal register

Knowledge: Middle High — 12th-century Korea; Goryeo dynasty; celadon traditions; feudalism

Overall Qualitative Rating: Middle High (3 on a 0–5 scale)

A Single Shard combines accessible narrative structure with sophisticated thematic depth and significant historical-cultural knowledge demands. Park’s clear, lyrical prose and compelling protagonist make the novel engaging, while deeper layers reward close reading and historical inquiry.

Appendix C: Informational Text Qualitative Analysis

Hidden Figures: Young Readers' Edition by Margot Lee Shetterly (2018) | Lexile: 950L Narrative Nonfiction | Informational

Rubric format: Student Achievement Partners (achievethecore.org). **Ratings and text-based evidence:** Newsela

MEANING			
HIGH Multiple levels/layers of complex meaning	MIDDLE HIGH ✓ Multiple levels/layers of meaning	MIDDLE LOW Single level of complex meaning	LOW Single level of simple meaning
Text-Based Evidence: Surface narrative traces the lives of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, Mary Jackson, and Christine Darden: brilliant African-American mathematicians and engineers whose contributions were essential to NASA yet invisible in popular history. Dorothy Vaughan's self-taught mastery of FORTRAN programming and Katherine Johnson's insistence on attending editorial meetings both illustrate how individual persistence confronts institutional barriers. The deeper question: Why were these contributions overlooked? What does society lose by erasing entire groups from its record?			
Opportunities Discuss why these women's stories were hidden; analyze how each woman navigated discrimination differently; examine what "hidden figures" means as both literal and figurative concept		Cautions & Support Needed Historical racial violence and segregation content requires sensitive, age-appropriate discussion; students need support understanding systemic vs. individual racism	

STRUCTURE			
HIGH Complex, implicit, unconventional structure	MIDDLE HIGH Some complexities; occasional shifts	MIDDLE LOW ✓ Largely simple, conventional	LOW Simple, explicit, chronological
Text-Based Evidence: Employs largely chronological narrative nonfiction structure moving from the 1940s through the 1960s. The YRE organizes content following the three primary women across decades. Chapters alternate focus between subjects, building an ensemble narrative. Structure is straightforward and conventional, favoring clarity and accessibility over narrative complexity.			
Opportunities Create timeline of major events; track each woman's career chronologically; identify how chapters shift focus between characters; compare with fictional narrative structures		Cautions & Support Needed Alternating focus between multiple women across time periods requires careful reading and note-taking; students benefit from character tracking charts	

LANGUAGE			
HIGH Heavy figurative; unfamiliar, archaic, domain-specific	MIDDLE HIGH ✓ Contains figurative language; somewhat complex	MIDDLE LOW Subtle figurative; conversational	LOW Little figurative; literal
Text-Based Evidence:			

Clear, accessible register appropriate for the Young Readers’ Edition without sacrificing sophistication. Scientific and mathematical terminology (trajectories, orbital mechanics, NACA) appears naturally. The writing combines narrative storytelling with expository explanation. Civil rights terminology and historical language add another vocabulary layer. Sentence structure is generally direct, supporting comprehension of dense historical content.

Opportunities

Create glossary of scientific, mathematical, and historical terms; analyze how Shetterly balances narrative and exposition; examine how dialogue humanizes historical figures

Cautions & Support Needed

Scientific and historical vocabulary requires ongoing glossary support; formal register is more demanding than contemporary fiction; legal and political terminology needs contextualization

KNOWLEDGE

HIGH ✓

Multiple complex themes; distinctly different experiences

MIDDLE HIGH

Multiple themes; uncommon experiences

MIDDLE LOW

Single complex theme; common experiences

LOW

Single simple theme; everyday

Text-Based Evidence:

Demands substantial background knowledge: the Civil Rights movement and Jim Crow laws, systemic racism in American institutions, the Cold War and US-Soviet ideological competition, the Space Race and its political significance, basic aerospace and mathematical concepts, women’s history in STEM, and the specific historical context of the 1940s–1960s. Knowledge demand is the primary complexity driver for this text.

Opportunities

Pre-reading: study Jim Crow, Civil Rights, segregation, Cold War, Space Race; create Space Race milestone timeline; research Johnson, Vaughan, Jackson, and Darden

Cautions & Support Needed

Heavy scaffolding through jigsaw articles, timelines, and glossaries is necessary; students may lack frameworks for understanding systemic oppression; connections to contemporary equity issues help bridge the gap

Qualitative Complexity Summary

Meaning: Middle High — Systemic erasure; individual persistence against institutional barriers

Structure: Middle Low — Chronological nonfiction; alternating character focus; clear organization

Language: Middle High — Scientific and historical vocabulary; narrative-expository blend

Knowledge: High — Civil Rights, Cold War, Space Race, STEM concepts; extensive background needed

Overall Qualitative Rating: Middle High (3 on a 0–5 scale)

Hidden Figures (YRE) is a text whose primary complexity driver is knowledge demand rather than narrative or linguistic difficulty. The Young Readers’ Edition makes sophisticated nonfiction accessible through clear writing and age-appropriate handling of difficult historical content. Extensive pre-reading and ongoing scaffolding are essential.

Appendix D: Literary Text Qualitative Analysis

The Lightning Thief by Rick Riordan (2005) | Lexile: 680L | Mythology/Fantasy Literary

Rubric format: Student Achievement Partners (achievethecore.org). **Ratings and text-based evidence:** Newsela

MEANING			
HIGH Multiple levels/layers of complex meaning	MIDDLE HIGH Multiple levels/layers of meaning	MIDDLE LOW ✓ Single level of complex meaning	LOW Single level of simple meaning
<p>Text-Based Evidence:</p> <p>Presents a deceptively simple surface narrative: a sixth grader discovers he is the son of a Greek god and must quest to prevent war among the Olympians. Beneath lies deeper meaning about identity, belonging, and agency. Percy's ADHD and dyslexia are reframed as demigod powers, validating students' own differences. The novel operates as a modern hero's journey paralleling classical mythology with contemporary adolescent experience.</p>			
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Analyze why Percy's learning differences are treated as powers; discuss what the quest represents in personal terms; identify classical allusions and their significance</p>		<p>Cautions & Support Needed</p> <p>Surface meaning is immediately accessible and engaging; deeper layers require mythology knowledge but are not essential for basic comprehension</p>	

STRUCTURE			
HIGH Complex, implicit, unconventional structure	MIDDLE HIGH Some complexities; occasional shifts	MIDDLE LOW ✓ Largely simple, conventional	LOW Simple, explicit, chronological
<p>Text-Based Evidence:</p> <p>Employs conventional linear narrative structure with a single first-person narrator (Percy Jackson). The novel follows the classical hero's journey: call to adventure, meeting mentors, crossing the threshold, trials and tests, the ordeal, and return. Pacing is swift, with action propelling the narrative forward. Chapter endings create consistent suspense. Structure is highly familiar and accessible to sixth graders.</p>			
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Map the hero's journey structure onto the plot; identify turning points; compare structure with other quest narratives from the unit's paired mythology texts</p>		<p>Cautions & Support Needed</p> <p>Conventional, fast-paced structure may lead students to underestimate the text's complexity; the familiarity of the quest pattern is a scaffold, not a limitation</p>	

LANGUAGE			
HIGH Heavy figurative; unfamiliar, archaic, domain-specific	MIDDLE HIGH Contains figurative language; somewhat complex	MIDDLE LOW ✓ Subtle figurative; conversational	LOW Little figurative; literal
<p>Text-Based Evidence:</p> <p>Written in contemporary, highly accessible first-person voice. Percy's narration is informal, humorous, self-aware, and often irreverent. Simile and metaphor abound, emerging naturally from Percy's modern perspective. Employs extensive mythological vocabulary but defines terms within context. Dialogue is naturalistic and character-specific. The prose is deliberately light and engaging, prioritizing reader engagement.</p>			

<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Analyze Percy’s voice and how it differs from adult characters’ speech; identify metaphors and why Riordan chose them; create mythology term glossary as reading tool</p>	<p>Cautions & Support Needed</p> <p>Prose accessibility might lead readers to underestimate the text; mythological terms accumulate rapidly and require active tracking; some readers may need support with Greek names</p>
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KNOWLEDGE

<p>HIGH ✓</p> <p>Multiple complex themes; distinctly different experiences</p>	<p>MIDDLE HIGH</p> <p>Multiple themes; uncommon experiences</p>	<p>MIDDLE LOW</p> <p>Single complex theme; common experiences</p>	<p>LOW</p> <p>Single simple theme; everyday</p>
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Text-Based Evidence:

Demands significant knowledge of Greek mythology: the Olympian pantheon, famous monsters, mythological concepts, and the significance of divine lineage. The novel assumes familiarity with classical allusions—the Oracle, the Furies, the Underworld—that Riordan contextualizes but does not fully explain. Cross-cultural myth comparison with the unit’s paired texts (Maya, West African, East African, Norse) demands even more background knowledge. This is the primary complexity driver.

<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Pre-reading: study Greek pantheon basics, major gods and domains, famous monsters, hero’s journey archetype; create visual mythology reference; compare with non-Greek traditions in paired texts</p>	<p>Cautions & Support Needed</p> <p>Students with no mythology background need substantial scaffolding; cumulative mythology terms require active tracking; cross-cultural comparison demands knowledge across multiple traditions</p>
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Qualitative Complexity Summary

Meaning: Middle Low — Clear quest narrative; identity themes accessible through close reading

Structure: Middle Low — Linear hero’s journey; single narrator; conventional and engaging

Language: Middle Low — Contemporary, conversational; mythology terms defined in context

Knowledge: High — Dense Greek mythology; cross-cultural comparison demands extensive background

Overall Qualitative Rating: Middle High (3 on a 0–5 scale)

The Lightning Thief presents a productive paradox: its Lexile (680L) is the lowest of the four anchors, yet its qualitative complexity is substantial due to knowledge demand. Riordan makes classical mythology accessible and engaging through contemporary voice and humor. The novel functions as an entry point to classical literature and cross-cultural mythology study, with paired texts extending the challenge significantly.