



Grade 8 Strategic Reading

Text Selections & Complexity

Unit 1: Roots & Remembrance: Civic Life & Shared Histories | *March: Book One*

Unit 2: Power, Propaganda & the Art of Persuasion | *Animal Farm*

Unit 3: Recovery & Reciprocity: Ecology, Science & Our Natural World | *Braiding Sweetgrass (YRE)*

Unit 4: Stories for the Future: Preserving Memory & Culture | *The Last Cuentista*

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Text Selection Philosophy

Newsela *Threads & Themes* Grade 8 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 8 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: *March: Book One* (Lewis, Aydin & Powell), *Animal Farm* (Orwell), *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Kimmerer), and *The Last Cuentista* (Higuera), span graphic memoir, allegorical novella, narrative nonfiction, and speculative fiction. The program balances literary and informational text across the year, with each unit pairing its anchor with short-form informational texts, poetry, primary sources, propaganda posters, folktales, and multimedia resources.

Path of Text Complexity

Newsela *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. Grade 8 anchors range from GN-level (*March: Book One*) to 950L (*Braiding Sweetgrass YRE*). *Animal Farm* (1170L) falls squarely within the band; *The Last Cuentista* (820L) falls below but compensates with high qualitative demands. Complexity increases across the year through genre and interpretive demand.

Qualitative (QL)

Structural and stylistic complexity, layers of meaning, and knowledge demands. All four anchors rate Middle High to High overall, with different primary drivers: structure and knowledge (*March*), meaning and language (*Animal Farm*), knowledge and meaning (*Braiding Sweetgrass*), and meaning and structure (*The Last Cuentista*). See Appendices A–D for full analyses.

Grade 8 Anchor Text Progression

Grade 8 sequences anchor texts to build cumulative analytical skill across four distinct genres. *March: Book One* provides an accessible graphic memoir entry point while demanding multimodal reading. *Animal Farm* (1170L) is the highest-Lexile anchor in the 6–8 program, with dense allegorical meaning. *Braiding Sweetgrass* (YRE) combines scientific and Indigenous knowledge systems in lyrical prose. *The Last Cuentista* (820L) has lower quantitative complexity but demands sophisticated interpretive work with speculative world-building, cultural symbolism, and narrative theory.

Unit	Anchor Text	Author	Lexile	Qualitative	Genre	Type
1	<i>March: Book One</i>	Lewis, Aydin & Powell	GN	High (Struct/Know)	Graphic Memoir	I
2	<i>Animal Farm</i>	George Orwell	1170L	High (Mean/Lang)	Allegorical Novella	L
3	<i>Braiding Sweetgrass (YRE)</i>	Robin Wall Kimmerer	950L	High (Know/Mean)	Narrative Nonfiction	I
4	<i>The Last Cuentista</i>	Donna Barba Higuera	820L	Mid-High (Mean/Struct)	Speculative Fiction	L

**Animal Farm at 1170L is the highest-Lexile anchor in the three-year program, reflecting its mature political vocabulary and complex sentence structures. The Last Cuentista's lower Lexile belies its substantial qualitative demands in meaning and structure.*

Every anchor text has been evaluated using both quantitative and qualitative measures. *Animal Farm* (1170L) falls within the band and demands sophisticated allegorical interpretation. Where Lexile falls below band (*The Last Cuentista* at 820L) or is format-dependent (*March* as graphic memoir), qualitative complexity compensates. Scaffolding strategies vary by unit: Unit 1 uses Civil Rights history articles and SNCC primary documents; Unit 2 provides Russian Revolution context and propaganda analysis; Unit 3 includes Indigenous teaching videos and ecology resources; Unit 4 offers science articles, folktales, and speculative fiction 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 8 includes 36 short-form texts across the four units spanning nonfiction articles, primary sources, propaganda posters, poetry, folktales, video documentaries, and classic short fiction. Each unit's Short-Form Text Inventory (see unit sections below) details every selection with its genre, 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 8 offers complete works across four genres: a graphic memoir (*March: Book One*, ~128 pages), an allegorical novella (*Animal Farm*, ~112 pages), a narrative nonfiction book (*Braiding Sweetgrass YRE*, ~304 pages), and a speculative novel (*The Last Cuentista*, ~336 pages). Poetry selections appear as complete poems. Each unit's independent reading program offers 10 curated full-length titles at a range of complexity levels.

All four units center diverse voices and relevant themes: Civil Rights activism and civic memory (Unit 1), propaganda, revolution, and ideological critique (Unit 2), Indigenous ecology and reciprocity (Unit 3), and speculative futures rooted in Mexican American heritage (Unit 4). Genres span graphic memoir, political allegory, narrative nonfiction, and speculative fiction—ensuring every student finds entry points that connect to their interests while building cumulative knowledge about systems of power, knowledge, and narrative across the year.

Teacher Background for Text Selections

GRADE 8 · UNIT 8.1 Contemporary Canon, Explanatory Analysis + Multimedia

March: Book One

by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin & Nate Powell

AT A GLANCE

LEXILE	GN (graphic novel; text-leveled per panel)
GENRE / TYPE	Graphic Memoir · Informational (I)
ERA / SETTING	1940s rural Alabama through the 1960 Nashville lunch counter sit-ins; framed by January 20, 2009 (Obama inauguration)
AUTHOR IDENTITY	Lewis: Black / African American (1940–2020, Pike County, AL; longtime U.S. Representative). Aydin: Turkish American (Atlanta). Powell: white American (Little Rock, AR).
MAIN CHARACTERS	John Lewis (Black / African American) and the Black-led Civil Rights Movement; white antagonists, Black and white allies
QT COMPLEXITY	High (Structure/Knowledge)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Robert Lewis (1940–2020) was a civil rights leader and U.S. Representative for Georgia's fifth district from 1987 until his death. He was a founding member and chair of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, one of the original Freedom Riders, a leader of the 1963 March on Washington, and a survivor of Bloody Sunday on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in 1965. He received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011. Andrew Aydin, born in Atlanta in 1983, earned a BA in history at Trinity College and an MA in Public Policy at Georgetown, where his graduate thesis traced the influence of the 1958 comic *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story*. He served as Lewis's Digital Director and Policy Advisor for over a decade. Nate Powell, born in 1978 in Little Rock, Arkansas, is a graphic novelist and Eisner Award winner. *March: Book Three* won the 2016 National Book Award for Young People's Literature, the first time a graphic novel received the prize.

CONTENT OVERVIEW

March: Book One is framed by January 20, 2009, the day of Barack Obama's inauguration, when a mother and her two young sons visit John Lewis's congressional office and ask about the chicken figurines on his shelves. That question opens a graphic memoir that moves between the present-day frame and Lewis's earlier life. A prologue plunges readers into March 7, 1965, Bloody Sunday on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, before the narrative resets to childhood. Part One traces Lewis's boyhood on his family's Pike County, Alabama farm, where he preached to and baptized the chickens, and recounts a transformative 1951 trip North to Buffalo with his Uncle Otis. Part Two covers his political awakening: the *Brown v. Board* ruling, Emmett Till's murder, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and his first encounter with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s voice on a Sunday morning radio broadcast. Part Three follows Lewis to the American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville and his pivotal training in nonviolent resistance under Jim Lawson. Part Four depicts the Nashville lunch counter sit-ins of 1960, the protesters' first mass arrest and choice of jail over fines, the formation of SNCC, the bombing of attorney Z. Alexander Looby's home, and the silent three-thousand-person march on City Hall, where Diane Nash confronts Mayor Ben West.

MAJOR THEMES & BIG IDEAS

Nonviolence as discipline as opposed to passivity, civic courage, the relationship between memory and action, the power of organized youth, the ethics of leadership, and the role of testimony in democratic life. The graphic form itself foregrounds questions of how visual storytelling shapes historical argument.

WHY THIS TEXT FITS THE UNIT

Unit 8.1 anchors the Grade 8 arc on memory and stewardship. The unit performance task asks students to create a multimedia Civic Memory Brief showing how a specific action, episode, or event from the Civil Rights Movement used memory and testimony to inspire action and change systems. The brief includes an explanatory thesis, evidence from *March* and at least one additional source, and a cover page with two visuals, headlines, and captions. *March: Book One* is both primary text and primary source: a living architect of the movement explaining, in panel and prose, how memory becomes movement.

CONTENT NOTES FOR TEACHERS

Preview before teaching: graphic depictions of racist violence, including beatings of nonviolent protesters, police aggression, and references to lynching; period-accurate racial slurs; and emotionally heavy content throughout. Several panels are visually intense even though the violence is rendered in black and white. Plan reading routines that allow students to pause, debrief, and process. Connect explicitly to the practice of nonviolence so the violence does not become the story's only register.

GRADE 8 • UNIT 8.2 Canonical ELA, Argumentative Analysis

Animal Farm

by George Orwell

AT A GLANCE

LEXILE	1170L
GENRE / TYPE	Allegorical Novella · Literary (L)
ERA / SETTING	Setting: rural England (Manor Farm); allegorically maps to 1917–1940s Russia and the Soviet Union
AUTHOR IDENTITY	White English (born British India in 1903; Eric Arthur Blair; democratic socialist)
MAIN CHARACTERS	Anthropomorphic farm animals as allegorical stand-ins for revolutionary leaders, working classes, and intelligentsia
QT COMPLEXITY	High (Meaning/Language)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George Orwell was the pen name of Eric Arthur Blair (1903–1950). Born in Motihari, in British India, he was raised in Henley-on-Thames, England, after his family returned to Britain when he was about a year old. He attended St Cyprian's School and Eton College on a King's Scholarship, then served as an officer in the Indian Imperial Police in Burma from 1922 to 1927. He resigned to write, and lived in voluntary poverty in Paris and London, the basis for *Down and Out in Paris and London*. He fought with the POUM militia in the Spanish Civil War, where he was wounded in the throat. During World War II he produced for the BBC's Eastern Service and served as literary editor of *Tribune*. *Animal Farm* was rejected by multiple British publishers because the Soviet Union was a wartime ally, and was finally published by Secker & Warburg on August 17, 1945. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* followed in 1949. Orwell died of tuberculosis in London at forty-six.

CONTENT OVERVIEW

Animal Farm runs ten chapters tracing the rise, corruption, and consolidation of an animal-led revolution at Manor Farm. Chapter 1 opens with the prize boar Old Major delivering a visionary speech, teaching the animals "Beasts of England" and laying out a philosophy that humans are the common enemy. After Major's death, Chapter 2 sees the pigs (Snowball, Napoleon, and the silver-tongued Squealer) codify his ideas as Animalism and seize the farm, painting the Seven Commandments on the barn wall and renaming it Animal Farm. Chapters 3 and 4 establish the new order: Boxer the carthorse adopts the motto "I will work harder," the pigs reserve milk and apples for themselves, and Snowball repels Mr. Jones's counterattack at the Battle of the Cowshed. Chapter 5 stages the rivalry over Snowball's windmill plan and Snowball's expulsion by the dogs Napoleon has secretly trained. Chapters 6–9 chronicle the regime's escalating betrayals: trade with humans, the pigs moving into the farmhouse, the windmill's destruction blamed on Snowball, forced confessions and mass executions, the rewriting of commandments and history, the banning of "Beasts of England," and the slaughterhouse van that takes the worn-out Boxer away. Chapter 10 closes the cycle: the pigs walk on two legs, all commandments are reduced to "All animals are equal. But some animals are more equal than others," and the watching animals can no longer tell pig from human across the dinner table.

MAJOR THEMES & BIG IDEAS

Power and corruption, language as a tool of control, propaganda and the rewriting of history, class consciousness and class betrayal, revolution and counter-revolution, and the responsibility of citizens to recognize manipulation.

WHY THIS TEXT FITS THE UNIT

Unit 8.2 is a canonical argumentative analysis unit. The unit performance task asks students to write an argument essay explaining how *Animal Farm* shows that revolutions can either protect or corrupt ideals, with a clear claim, key evidence from the novel, an analysis of at least one piece of persuasive messaging and the rhetorical techniques behind it, a

counterclaim, and a rebuttal. Students can track exactly when, why, and how The Seven Commandments shift, building claim-evidence-reasoning structures around real authorial choices.

CONTENT NOTES FOR TEACHERS

Preview before teaching: violent executions of animal characters (graphic for the genre); the death of Boxer (sold to the knacker); alcohol abuse; depictions of state-sponsored cruelty; and an implicit critique of authoritarian regimes. Because the novel is allegory, it maps onto current and historical real-world regimes; plan a careful framing about how to discuss politics in the classroom. The 1170L Lexile and dense vocabulary call for explicit comprehension scaffolds.

GRADE 8 • UNIT 8.3 Research and Literary Nonfiction Core, Research Informational Synthesis

Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults

by Robin Wall Kimmerer (adapted by Monique Gray Smith)

AT A GLANCE

LEXILE	950L
GENRE / TYPE	Narrative Nonfiction · Informational (I)
ERA / SETTING	Contemporary, with retellings of older Indigenous traditional stories; primarily upstate New York and other North American landscapes
AUTHOR IDENTITY	Kimmerer: Citizen Potawatomi Nation (botanist; SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor). Adapter Monique Gray Smith: mixed-heritage Cree, Lakota, and Scottish (Victoria, BC).
MAIN CHARACTERS	First-person Indigenous (Potawatomi) author-narrator; references Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, Mohawk, and other Native nations; cross-cultural and family figures
QT COMPLEXITY	High (Knowledge/Meaning)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robin Wall Kimmerer is an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, a botanist, and SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor of Environmental Biology at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. She earned her BS in botany at SUNY-ESF and her MS and PhD in plant ecology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. She is the founder and director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment at SUNY-ESF, was named a MacArthur Fellow in 2022, was elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 2023, and received the National Humanities Medal in 2024. The adult *Braiding Sweetgrass* was published by Milkweed Editions in 2013. The Young Adult edition was adapted by Monique Gray Smith, a Cree, Lakota, and Scottish writer based in Victoria, British Columbia, whose works include *Tilly: A Story of Hope and Resilience*, *My Heart Fills with Happiness*, and *Speaking Our Truth: A Journey of Reconciliation*. The Young Adult edition received the 2023 American Indian Youth Literature Honor.

CONTENT OVERVIEW

Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults is structured as a braid: six parts named for the life cycle of sweetgrass (Meeting, Planting, Tending, Picking, Braiding, Burning) hold roughly two dozen interconnected essays that weave Indigenous knowledge, scientific botany, and personal memoir. Part 1, "Meeting Sweetgrass," opens with an invitation to remember kinship with the living world, retells the Haudenosaunee/Anishinaabe Skywoman creation story, and introduces sweetgrass (wiingaashk). Part 2, "Planting Sweetgrass," gathers essays on pecan groves, strawberries as gifts rather than commodities, and Kimmerer's freshman botany advisor's dismissal of beauty as a legitimate question. Part 3, "Tending Sweetgrass," includes the maple sugar moon legend, Kimmerer's daughter Larkin's narration of their friendship with elderly neighbor Hazel Barnett, and a comparison of the Pledge of Allegiance with the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address. Part 4, "Picking Sweetgrass," presents the Three Sisters companion planting and a graduate-student experiment showing that traditional harvesting actually stimulates sweetgrass growth. Part 5, "Braiding Sweetgrass," follows Nanabozho the Original Man and restoration work at the Mohawk community of Kanatsiôhareke. Part 6, "Burning Sweetgrass," names the Windigo as the spirit of capitalist consumption, retells the Mayan creation of corn-people, lays out the Anishinaabe Seventh Fire Prophecy, and ends with Kimmerer offering the book itself as a healing braid.

MAJOR THEMES & BIG IDEAS

Reciprocity and the gift economy, Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge as science, environmental stewardship and grief, decolonization, gratitude as a civic and ecological practice, and the linguistic relationship between English and Potawatomi (Bodewadmimwen).

WHY THIS TEXT FITS THE UNIT

Unit 8.3 is a research-and-synthesis unit. The unit performance task asks students to develop a research question about reciprocity or balance in human or natural systems, gather at least three credible sources (including two with differing interpretations), and build a multimedia presentation that synthesizes evidence and explains how knowledge can restore balance. *Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults* models the synthesis itself: it weaves botany, memoir, history, and Indigenous philosophy into essay-length nonfiction that argues without polemic, giving students sustained mentor-text exposure to the move the unit asks of them.

CONTENT NOTES FOR TEACHERS

Preview before teaching: the U.S. boarding-school system and the violence of forced assimilation; environmental loss and grief; and Indigenous spiritual content rooted in Potawatomi worldview that some families may interpret through a religious lens. Treat Indigenous cultural and ceremonial references with respect; resist asking students to "evaluate" them through a Western-science-only frame. Plan front-loading on Indigenous nations of the United States and on the difference between Indigenous knowledge systems and folklore.

The Last Cuentista

by Donna Barba Higuera

AT A GLANCE

LEXILE	820L
GENRE / TYPE	Speculative Fiction · Literary (L)
ERA / SETTING	Two timelines: 2061 (Earth, just before a comet strike) and 2432 (the colony planet Sagan)
AUTHOR IDENTITY	Mexican American (bi-racial: half Mexican American, half white; born and raised in California's Central Valley; optometrist)
MAIN CHARACTERS	Mexican American protagonist (Petra) and family; pod mates of varied heritage; Collective members engineered to look alike
QT COMPLEXITY	Mid-High (Mean/Struct)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Donna Barba Higuera grew up in Taft, California, a small desert and oil-field town in the state's Central Valley, listening to her grandmother's cuentos. She is half Mexican American and half white, and describes herself as the descendant of a long line of cuentistas (storytellers). She earned her Doctor of Optometry and has practiced for more than twenty-five years, currently in Issaquah, Washington. She began writing fiction in her forties. Her published work includes *Lupe Wong Won't Dance*, *The Last Cuentista*, *El Cucuy Is Scared, Too!*, *Alebrijes*, and *The Yellow Handkerchief*. *The Last Cuentista* won the 2022 John Newbery Medal, the 2022 Pura Belpré Youth Author Award, and the 2022 Cybils Award for Speculative Fiction. It was the first book to win both the Newbery Medal and the Pura Belpré in the same year. Higuera speaks publicly about Latine representation in middle grade and about preserving cultural stories.

CONTENT OVERVIEW

The Last Cuentista unfolds across thirty chapters grouped into short clusters that move between two timelines. The opening cluster (chapters 1–4) is set in the summer of 2061, as twelve-year-old Petra Peña spends a final evening with her grandmother Lita, a traditional cuentista, before Petra's family boards one of two surviving spacecraft fleeing Earth ahead of Halley's Comet's collision. Lita gives Petra the charge that grounds the entire novel: stories are living things that must be retold and remade. Chapters 5–8 follow Petra's botched entry into stasis, leaving her semi-conscious for the 380-year voyage; she overhears the rise of "the Collective," a movement bent on erasing all human difference, and the kindly Monitor Ben secretly uploads world mythology into her brain before he is purged. Chapters 9–16 cover Petra's awakening on the planet Sagan in 2432, where the Collective's engineered, lookalike inhabitants now control the ship. She learns her parents have been killed, hides her real memories, and begins quietly telling cuentos to her three pod mates. Chapters 17–25 follow exploratory missions to Sagan's surface, Petra's discovery of the seed vault and her grandmother's obsidian necklace, and her recognition that the elderly servant Epsilon-5 is her brother Javier, aged decades and reprogrammed. Chapters 26–30 stage the escape: Javier sacrifices himself to neutralize the Collective's toxin and launch the Zetas to the surface, where Petra greets the surviving First Arrivers as the last cuentista, and the first.

MAJOR THEMES & BIG IDEAS

Cultural memory and erasure, storytelling as resistance, identity across generations, the ethics of utopia, grief and survival, and the relationship between language and self. The structure (each chapter braided with a cuento) is itself a model of narrative synthesis.

WHY THIS TEXT FITS THE UNIT

Unit 8.4 is the capstone narrative unit. The unit performance task asks students to write a forward-looking narrative about how memory and identity help people find their way, choosing one of four pathways: a speculative story, a memoir of becoming, a reimagined cuento or myth, or a continuation set in *The Last Cuentista's* world. Higuera's novel is a clear mentor for every pathway. Petra's refusal to forget directly models the unit's culminating question about how memory and imagination shape the future, and the braided cuento-and-chapter structure gives students a working pattern for synthesis writing.

CONTENT NOTES FOR TEACHERS

Preview before teaching: the offstage death of Petra's parents; the broader trauma of Earth's end; the Collective's ideology, which echoes real-world eugenics and forced assimilation; the executions of the original ship adults; and dystopian content that may be intense for some readers. The emotional climax is heavy but ultimately hopeful. Plan space for student processing, especially around the chapters set immediately after Petra's waking.

Unit 1: Roots & Remembrance: Civic Life & Shared Histories

Anchor Text: *March: Book One* by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin & Nate Powell | GN

Essential Questions:

“How does storytelling become a tool for civic change?”

“What is civic memory, and how does testimony help us remember and learn?”

Short-Form Close-Reading Schedule

#	Title / Author	Genre	QT (Lexile)	Type	QL	Close Reading Purpose	Lesson
1	“Segregation Story, 1956” <i>Gordon Parks Foundation</i>	Visual	Visual	I	Mid-High	Visual primary source analysis; establishing the segregated world before the movement	L1
2	SNCC Brochure <i>The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee</i>	Archival Doc	N/A	I	High	Primary source analysis; student organizing; connecting grassroots activism to anchor’s narrative	L1
3	“Congressman John R. Lewis” <i>Academy of American Achievement</i>	Biography	1360L	I	Mid-High	Author biography and civic legacy; building context for the memoir’s perspective	L1
4	“The Boy From Troy...” <i>Alabama Heritage</i>	Biography	1130L	I	Mid-High	Lewis’s childhood and the roots of his activism; connecting personal narrative to civic action	L2
5	“Rep. John Lewis: An Oral History of Selma...” <i>John Lewis, Time</i>	Oral History	1020L	I	High	First-person testimony analysis; Selma context; comparing oral and graphic memoir forms of witness	L2
6	“Standing Up by Sitting Down” <i>National Civil Rights Museum</i>	Visual		I	Mid	Sit-in movement history and nonviolent strategy; connecting to overall nonviolent protest and specifically Nashville sit-ins	L3
7	“The Civil Rights Act of 1964” <i>Library of Congress</i>	Nonfiction (Timeline)	1520L	I	Mid-High	Legislative history as culmination of grassroots activism; tracing cause and effect across decades	L3
8	“Brown v. Board of Education” <i>National Park Service, adapted by Newsela</i>	Nonfiction	≈1300L	I	Mid-High	Legal history of school desegregation; connecting judicial action to movement strategy	L3
9	“A look back at Bloody Sunday in Selma, Alabama” <i>Newsela</i>	Visual	Visual	I	Mid-High	Historical photographs of Bloody Sunday in Selma, Alabama; building knowledge of the events Lewis describes in the opening of his memoir	L5-L6

10	“Confrontations for Justice” <i>National Archives</i>	Legal Testimony	1150L	I	Mid-High	Excerpted legal testimony of John Lewis about Bloody Sunday; provides context for the events and Lewis’s experience of Bloody Sunday	L5-L6
11	“Separate and Unequal: Jim Crow and the Road to Civil Rights” <i>Newsela</i>	Nonfiction	≈1160L	I	Mid-High	Pre-movement legal and organizing history; tracing how decades of resistance, testimony, and NAACP strategy built the conditions for the birth of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950’s.	L8-L10
12	“Mayor Stops Boycott Talk” <i>The Montgomery Advertiser</i>	Nonfiction	1290L	I	Mid-High	1956 article about the Montgomery Bus Boycott; features Mayor Gayle’s perspective in comparison with that of Dr. King and other boycott organizers	L15-L17
13	“Jim Lawson Conducts Nonviolence Workshops in Nashville” <i>SNCC Digital Gateway, SNCC Legacy Project</i>	Nonfiction	1220L	I	Mid-High	Article about Jim Lawson and the training of nonviolence principles and practices; deeper understanding and analysis of nonviolence philosophy in action	L27-29
14	SNCC Statement of Purpose <i>Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee</i>	Archival Doc	830L	I	Mid-High	Primary source analysis; student organizing principles; making connections between Lewis’ personal testimony and actions and SNCC’s philosophy	L31
15	Eric Reid: Why Colin Kaepernick and I Decided to Take a Knee <i>Eric Reid, New York Times</i>	Op-Ed	1150L	I	Mid-High	Modern civil rights protest; comparing Reid’s point of view to Lewis’ point of view	L36-L37

Sequencing rationale: The first eight short-form texts are concentrated in the Spark phase (L1–L3) of the unit to build the extensive Civil Rights historical context students need before encountering the graphic memoir. Texts move from visual primary sources and biography (L1) through oral testimony (L2) to legislative and legal history (L3), mirroring the movement’s own arc from personal witness to systemic change. The latter half of the short-form texts, integrated throughout Investigations 1 and 2, build deeper knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement through primary and secondary sources, engaging students in targeted reading analysis and evaluation of source mediums, authorial point of view/purpose, and topical interpretation.

Independent Reading Selections

#	Title / Author	Lexile	Genre	Complexity (QT / QL)
1	One Crazy Summer <i>Rita Williams-Garcia</i>	750L	Novel	QT: Below band (750L) QL: Mid-High
2	The Poet Slave of Cuba: A Biography of Juan Francisco Manzano <i>Margarita Engle</i>	NP	Biography	QT: N/A (non-prose / visual) QL: Mid-High

3	All the Stars Denied <i>Guadalupe Garcia McCall</i>	790L	Novel	QT: Below band (790L) QL: Mid-High
4	Long Way Down <i>Jason Reynolds</i>	HL720L	Verse Novel	QT: Below band (HL720L, high-low format) QL: High
5	Internment <i>Samira Ahmed</i>	HL660L	Fiction	QT: Below band (HL660L, high-low format) QL: Mid-High
6	Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom: My Story of the 1965 Selma Voting Rights March <i>Lynda Lowery</i>	780L	Fiction	QT: Below band (780L) QL: Mid-High
7	Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You <i>Jason Reynolds & Ibram X. Kendi</i>	1000L	Fiction	QT: In band (1000L) QL: Mid-High
8	March: Book Two (GN) <i>John Lewis, Andrew Aydin & Nate Powell</i>	GN850L	Fiction	QT: Below band (GN850L, graphic format) QL: Mid-High
9	March: Book Three (GN) <i>John Lewis, Andrew Aydin & Nate Powell</i>	GN980L	Memoir	QT: Below band (GN980L, graphic format) QL: Mid-High
10	The Port Chicago 50: Disaster, Mutiny, and the Fight for Civil Rights <i>Steve Sheinkin</i>	950L	Fiction	QT: In band (950L) QL: Mid-High
11	Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice <i>Phillip Hoose</i>	1000L	Fiction	QT: In band (1000L) QL: Mid-High

Best for Home / Independent	Best for Classroom (Teacher-Supported)
Full graphic memoir; Newsela biography and history articles; IR selections (Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom, Claudette Colvin)	Anchor with guided visual-verbal analysis; SNCC primary source close reading; oral history analysis; Segregation Story photo essay

Unit 2: Power, Propaganda & the Art of Persuasion

Anchor Text: *Animal Farm* by George Orwell | 1170L

Essential Questions:

“How do propaganda and rhetorical techniques influence what people believe and how they act?”

“Why do revolutions rise, and why do some end up betraying their own ideals?”

Short-Form Close-Reading Schedule

#	Title / Author	Genre	QT (Lexile)	Type	QL	Close Reading Purpose	Lesson
1	Photographs of Pre-Revolution Russian Empire <i>Library of Congress, adapted by Newsela</i>	Visual	Visual	I	Mid-High	Visual analysis of Tsarist Russia; establishing the social conditions that led to revolution	L1
2	Soviet Propaganda Posters and Their Purposes <i>Newsela</i>	Visual	Visual	I	High	Propaganda technique analysis; visual rhetoric; connecting to Squealer’s role in the novella	L2, L17-L18
3	“The Fox & The Crow” <i>The Aesop for Children</i>	Fiction	910L	L	Mid-High	Read and analyze allegorical fables to identify symbolism that develops a theme about human behavior or society.	L3
4	“The Hare & The Tortoise” <i>The Aesop for Children</i>	Fiction	930L	L	Mid-High	Read and analyze allegorical fables to identify symbolism that develops a theme about human behavior or society.	L3
5	“The Russian Revolution: A New Kind of Power” <i>Newsela</i>	Nonfiction	≈1130L	I	Mid-High	Historical context for allegory; February and October Revolutions and rise of Bolsheviks; mapping events to <i>Animal Farm</i> plot; connecting Lenin/Stalin to Old Major/Napoleon	L11-L13, L23-26
6	“Famous Speeches: Patrick Henry’s ‘Give Me Liberty Or Give Me Death’” <i>Newsela</i>	Nonfiction	≈1010L	I	Mid-High	What the revolution was fighting for (its main ideals or goals) and what the revolution achieved or failed to achieve (outcome); drawing allegorical comparisons to <i>Animal Farm</i>	L23-L26
7	“Independence and the Articles of Confederation” <i>USHistory.org</i>	Nonfiction	1160L	I	Mid-High	What the revolution was fighting for (its main ideals or goals) and what the revolution achieved or failed to	L23-26

						achieve (outcome); drawing allegorical comparisons to <i>Animal Farm</i>	
8	“Revolution, Civil War and Terror: The Birth of the Soviet Union” <i>Newsela</i>	Nonfiction	≈1030L	I	Mid-High	What the revolution was fighting for (its main ideals or goals) and what the revolution achieved or failed to achieve (outcome); drawing allegorical comparisons to <i>Animal Farm</i>	L23-26
9	“Famous Speeches: The Four Freedoms Speech” <i>Franklin Delano Roosevelt</i>	Nonfiction	1260L	I	High	How a leader builds an argument to influence belief and inspire action	L33-L35

Sequencing rationale: Visual primary sources (L1–L2) establish the historical and visual context for propaganda analysis before students encounter the novella. The Russian Revolution article series is strategically distributed across two phases: Part 1–3 (L11–13) arrives mid-unit as students read the novella’s middle chapters, enabling real-time allegorical connections. Parts 4–7 (L23–26) arrive during synthesis as students trace the full arc from revolution to totalitarianism. Roosevelt’s speech culminates Investigation 2, as a mentor argument for student’s own argument writing during the Performance Task.

Independent Reading Selections

#	Title / Author	Lexile	Genre	Complexity (QT / QL)
1	The Giver <i>Lois Lowry</i>	760L	Novel	QT: Below band (760L) QL: Mid-High
2	Fahrenheit 451 <i>Ray Bradbury</i>	890L	Novel	QT: Approaching band (890L) QL: Mid-High
3	Lord of the Flies <i>William Golding</i>	770L	Fiction	QT: Below band (770L) QL: Mid-High
4	The City of Ember <i>Jeanne DuPrau</i>	680L	Fiction	QT: Below band (680L) QL: Mid-High
5	Uprising <i>Margaret Peterson Haddix</i>	800L	Novel	QT: Below band (800L) QL: Mid-High
6	Revolution <i>Jennifer Donnelly</i>	560L	Fiction	QT: Below band (560L) QL: Mid-High
7	The Time Machine <i>H.G. Wells</i>	1010L	Science Fiction	QT: In band (1010L) QL: Mid-High
8	Persepolis (GN) <i>Marjane Satrapi</i>	GN: 380L	Graphic Memoir	QT: Below band (GN: 380L, graphic format) QL: Mid-High

9	Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution <i>Ji-Li Jiang</i>	780L	Memoir	QT: Below band (780L) QL: Mid-High
10	Night <i>Elie Wiesel</i>	590L	Memoir	QT: Below band (590L) QL: Mid-High
11	Maus I & II (GN) <i>Art Spiegelman</i>	NP	Graphic Memoir	QT: N/A (non-prose / visual) QL: Mid-High
12	The Boys Who Challenged Hitler: Knud Pedersen and the Churchill Club <i>Phillip Hoose</i>	970L	Fiction	QT: In band (970L) QL: Mid-High
13	The Rise and Fall of Senator Joe McCarthy <i>James Cross Giblin</i>	1190L	Fiction	QT: Above band (1190L) QL: Mid-High
14	Give Me Liberty: The Story of the Declaration of Independence <i>Russel Freedman</i>	1070L	Fiction	QT: In band (1070L) QL: Mid-High

Best for Home / Independent	Best for Classroom (Teacher-Supported)
Full novella; Newsela articles; IR selections (<i>The Giver</i> , <i>Fahrenheit 451</i> , <i>Lord of the Flies</i>)	Anchor with guided allegory mapping; propaganda poster analysis; Russian Revolution articles; rhetoric and persuasion close reading

Unit 3: Recovery & Reciprocity: Ecology, Science & Our Natural World

Anchor Text: *Braiding Sweetgrass (Young Readers’ Edition)* by Robin Wall Kimmerer | 950L

Essential Questions:

“What does it mean to live responsibly within natural systems?”

How do different disciplines and traditions, including scientific inquiry and cultural knowledge, help us understand our relationship to the natural world?”

Short-Form Close-Reading Schedule

#	Title / Author	Genre	QT (Lexile)	Type	QL	Close Reading Purpose	Lesson
1	“Indian Treaties and the Removal Act of 1830” <i>Office of the Historian, U.S. State Department, adapted by Newsela</i>	Text	1140L	I	High	Historical events that led to and included Native American removal; builds background of ideas, concepts, and history that Kimmerer includes in <i>Braiding Sweetgrass</i> .	L2
2	“Perhaps the World Ends Here” <i>Joy Harjo</i>	Poetry	N/A	L	High	Close reading of gathering, reciprocity, and gratitude; the kitchen table as site of human connection to the earth; drawing connections to Kimmerer’s ideas	L7
3	“Don’t Bother the Earth Spirit” <i>Joy Harjo</i>	Poetry	N/A	L	High	Ecological ethics in poetic form; Indigenous voice on reciprocity with the natural world; drawing connections to Kimmerer’s ideas	L7
4	“Jane Goodall Taught Us to See the Natural World. Now It’s Our Turn to Act.” <i>Jeff Corwin, USA Today</i>	Op-Ed	1060L	I	Mid-High	How an author builds an argument through an opinion editorial; how Goodall’s work represents Kimmerer’s ideas about reciprocity and gratitude	L21-L23

Sequencing rationale: Short-form texts open with video and cultural context (L1–L2) that grounds students in Indigenous knowledge systems and the historical erasure Kimmerer writes against. Mid-unit poetry (L7) provides an emotional and literary complement to the prose. Students explore argument writing through an op-ed about Goodall, who represents Kimmerer’s ideas about reciprocity. This unit emphasizes multimedia and cultural texts over traditional articles, reflecting the knowledge systems it explores.

Independent Reading Selections

#	Title / Author	Lexile	Genre	Complexity (QT / QL)
1	Hoot <i>Carl Hiaasen</i>	760L	Fiction	QT: Below band (760L) QL: Mid-High
2	The One and Only Ivan <i>Katherine Applegate</i>	570L	Novel	QT: Below band (570L) QL: Mid-High
3	Rez Dogs <i>Joseph Bruchac</i>	830L	Verse Novel	QT: Approaching band (830L) QL: High

4	If I Ever Get Out of Here <i>Eric Gansworth</i>	870L	Novel	QT: Approaching band (870L) QL: Mid-High
5	Wilder Girls <i>Rory Power</i>	HL730 L	Fiction	QT: Below band (HL730L, high-low format) QL: Mid-High
6	The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate <i>Jacqueline Kelly</i>	830L	Fiction	QT: Approaching band (830L) QL: Mid-High
7	The Story of More: How We Got to Climate Change and Where to Go from Here (Adapted for Young Adults) <i>Hope Jahren</i>	1240L	Fiction	QT: Above band (1240L) QL: Mid-High
8	How to Be a Good Creature: A Memoir in Thirteen Animals <i>Sy Montgomery</i>	1000L	Memoir	QT: In band (1000L) QL: Mid-High
9	The Brilliant Deep: Rebuilding the World's Coral Reefs <i>Kate Messner</i>	830L	Fiction	QT: Approaching band (830L) QL: Mid-High
10	An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States for Young People <i>Debbie Reese</i>	1220L	Fiction	QT: Above band (1220L) QL: Mid-High
11	Eyes Wide Open: Going Behind the Environmental Headlines <i>Paul Fleischman</i>	1080L	Fiction	QT: In band (1080L) QL: Mid-High

Best for Home / Independent	Best for Classroom (Teacher-Supported)
Full YRE; ecology articles; IR selections (The Story of More, Hoot, How to Be a Good Creature)	Anchor with guided annotation; Harjo poetry close reading; video analysis; Indigenous knowledge discussions; ecological systems mapping

Unit 4: Stories for the Future: Preserving Memory & Culture

Anchor Text: *The Last Cuentista* by Donna Barba Higuera | 820L

Essential Questions:

“How does memory help us understand who we are, and what is lost when memory disappears?”

“How do stories help communities survive change and imagine a future worth building?”

Short-Form Close-Reading Schedule

#	Title / Author	Genre	QT (Lexile)	Type	QL	Close Reading Purpose	Lesson
1	“How We Have Turned Memories and Stories into Histories” <i>Big History Project, adapted by Newsela</i>	Nonfiction	= 1110L	I	Mid-High	why humans turn experience into story; provides framing around the intersection of memory and story	L1
2	“How Wisdom Became the Property of the Human Race” <i>Compiled by W. H. Barker, Cecilia Sinclair, in the book West African Folk-Tales</i>	Folktale	780L	F	Mid	Unit Launch; Introduces themes of storytelling, memory, history, and oral and cultural traditions	L1
3	“These Sci-Fi Visions for Interstellar Travel Just Might Work” Ramin Skibba and Les Johnson, <i>Wired Magazine</i>	Nonfiction	1090L	I	Mid-High	Provides context and background for interstellar travel premise of Higuera’s novel	L2
4	“10 Things: Going Interstellar” <i>NASA</i>	Science Article	1190L	I	Mid-High	Space science and interstellar travel; building speculative context before the anchor’s premise	L2
5	“Your Brain Forms Memories Differently Based on How Stories Are Told” <i>Newsela</i>	Science/ Psych	1110L	I	Mid-High	Neuroscience of memory formation; why narrative structure matters; connecting to <i>The Last Cuentista</i> and memory erasure	L3
6	“The Fox and the Crow” <i>Aesop</i>	Fable	910L	L	Mid	classic fable as cuento; how Higuera uses the fable to	L11

						contextualize the characters situations and development	
7	“Blancaflor” <i>Traditional Story (Public Domain)</i>	Folktales	970L Eng. 1220L Span.	L	Mid-High	Latinx oral tradition; cultural heritage and memory preservation; connecting to Petra’s cuentos	L13-L14
8	“El Conejo en La Luna: The Rabbit in the Moon” <i>Traditional Mesoamerican Story, adapted by Newsela</i>	Mythology	1000L	L	High	Indigenous Mesoamerican cosmology; cultural survival through story; how Petra continues to honor and disseminate memory through storytelling	L18-L19
9	“The Comet” <i>W.E.B. Du Bois</i>	Short Story	800L	L	High	speculative fiction; systems of racism synthesizing how stories imagine futures across cultures; drawing connections between Higuera and DuBois’ text structure	L30–33

Sequencing rationale: The unit opens with informational context (L1–L3) about memory, storytelling, and space science to establish the conceptual and scientific framework for the dystopian fiction of *The Last Cuentista*. Mid-unit texts (L11–L19) introduce progressively complex cultural narratives—from Aesop’s fable through Latinx folktale to Mesoamerican mythology—mirroring the novel’s deepening engagement with how stories preserve culture. Du Bois’s “The Comet” (L30–33) arrives as a synthesis text, connecting speculative fiction to race, imagination, and the question of whose futures get imagined while also providing another narrative text for students to analyze writing craft.

Independent Reading Selections

#	Title / Author	Lexile	Genre	Complexity (QT / QL)
1	Scythe <i>Neal Shusterman</i>	830L	Fiction	QT: Approaching band (830L) QL: Mid-High
2	Among the Hidden <i>Margaret Peterson Haddix</i>	800L	Novel	QT: Below band (800L) QL: Mid-High
3	Ender’s Game <i>Orson Scott Card</i>	780L	Science Fiction	QT: Below band (780L) QL: Mid-High
4	Children of Blood and Bone <i>Tomi Adeyemi</i>	HL670 L	Fantasy	QT: Below band (HL670L, high-low format) QL: Mid-High
5	The House of the Scorpion <i>Nancy Farmer</i>	660L	Novel	QT: Below band (660L) QL: Mid-High
6	Akata Witch <i>Nnedi Okofor</i>	HL590 L	Fantasy	QT: Below band (HL590L, high-low format) QL: Mid-High
7	Tuck Everlasting <i>Natalie Babbitt</i>	770L	Fiction	QT: Below band (770L) QL: Mid-High
8	Ship Breaker <i>Paolo Bacigalupi</i>	HL690 L	Speculative Fiction	QT: Below band (HL690L, high-low format) QL: High
9	The Marrow Thieves <i>Cherie Dimaline</i>	HL810 L	Novel	QT: Below band (HL810L, high-low format) QL: Mid-High

10	Horizon <i>Scott Westerfeld</i>	690L	Fiction	QT: Below band (690L) QL: Mid-High
11	Feathered Serpent, Dark Heart of Sky: Myths of Mexico <i>David Bowles</i>	1010L	Fiction	QT: In band (1010L) QL: Mid-High
12	Endurance: My Year in Space and How I Got There (Young Readers Edition) <i>Scott Kelly</i>	1070L	Fiction	QT: In band (1070L) QL: Mid-High

Best for Home / Independent	Best for Classroom (Teacher-Supported)
Full novel; Newsela articles; IR selections (Scythe, Among the Hidden, Ender’s Game, A Wrinkle in Time)	Anchor with guided speculative analysis; Aesop fable close reading; Blancaflor and El Conejo cultural texts; Du Bois short story analysis; science article synthesis

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy & Text Selection

Text selections across all four Grade 8 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. March develops primary source analysis and graphic memoir literacy; <i>Animal Farm</i> cultivates allegorical interpretation and rhetorical analysis; <i>Braiding Sweetgrass</i> integrates Indigenous science with ecological reasoning; <i>The Last Cuentista</i> builds speculative literary analysis and narrative theory.	Selections represent diverse identities across all units: Black civil rights leaders and activists (Unit 1); Soviet and global political histories exploring universal patterns of power (Unit 2); Potawatomi, Anishinaabe, and broader Indigenous knowledge systems (Unit 3); Mexican American cultural heritage, Mesoamerican mythology, and Aesopian tradition (Unit 4). Texts serve as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990).	Texts explore power, equity, and justice: Unit 1 examines nonviolent resistance, civic memory, and whose testimony shapes historical record; Unit 2 interrogates how propaganda and ideological systems manufacture consent; Unit 3 confronts the erasure of Indigenous knowledge and the consequences of extractive ecological relationships; Unit 4 asks who controls narrative and what is lost when cultural memory is deliberately destroyed.

Appendix A: Informational Text Qualitative Analysis

March: Book One by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin & Nate Powell (2013) | Graphic Memoir | Informational

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 levels: a personal memoir of John Lewis’s journey from rural Alabama to the Nashville sit-ins, a political history of the early Civil Rights movement, and a meditation on how testimony becomes civic action. The framing device—Lewis narrating to a young boy on Inauguration Day 2009—connects past struggle to present responsibility. The title “March” carries dual meaning: the physical act of marching in protest and the forward march of justice. Lewis’s transformation from farm boy to activist models how ordinary people create extraordinary change.</p>			
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Analyze the dual meaning of “march”; trace Lewis’s transformation; discuss how the framing device connects past to present; examine what “good trouble” means as civic philosophy</p>		<p>Cautions & Support Needed</p> <p>Students may need support connecting 1950s events to contemporary civic life; the framing device’s significance may be missed without explicit instruction; the emotional weight of racial violence requires sensitive handling</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 complex multimodal structure integrating Powell’s black-and-white illustrations with Lewis and Aydin’s prose narrative. The visual and verbal tracks operate in counterpoint—splash pages carry emotional weight while panel sequences drive narrative pacing. A sophisticated dual timeline alternates between Inauguration Day 2009 and Lewis’s childhood/early activism in the 1950s–60s. The graphic memoir format demands simultaneous visual and verbal processing. Page layouts vary from conventional grids to full-page compositions.</p>			
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Model graphic memoir reading strategies; analyze how Powell uses visual pacing and composition; trace the dual timeline structure; discuss how illustrations add meaning beyond the text</p>		<p>Cautions & Support Needed</p> <p>Students unfamiliar with graphic memoir need explicit instruction in multimodal reading; the dual timeline can be confusing without scaffolding; visual storytelling conventions need teaching</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>Lewis’s prose is direct, clear, and measured—reflecting his speaking voice and oratorical tradition. Dialogue is naturalistic and historically grounded. Civil rights terminology (sit-in, nonviolent resistance, desegregation) appears throughout. Powell’s visual</p>			

language—heavy shadows, dynamic compositions, expressive faces—operates as a parallel communicative system. The restrained prose contrasts with the dramatic visual language, creating emotional tension.

Opportunities

Analyze how Lewis’s measured tone contrasts with dramatic events; discuss how visual language amplifies or complicates the prose; create glossary of Civil Rights terms; examine the rhetoric of nonviolence

Cautions & Support Needed

The apparent simplicity of the prose may lead students to underestimate the text; visual language is a new analytical mode for many; Civil Rights vocabulary requires ongoing support

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: Jim Crow laws and segregation, the Nashville student movement, the philosophy of nonviolent resistance, the SNCC and its role, the broader Civil Rights movement timeline, the significance of Obama’s inauguration as framing device, and the specific social geography of the American South. Understanding the political and legal dimensions of the movement requires knowledge beyond typical eighth-grade experience.

Opportunities

Pre-reading: study Jim Crow, segregation, early Civil Rights movement; examine SNCC documents; discuss nonviolent philosophy and its origins; connect 2009 framing to historical arc

Cautions & Support Needed

Heavy scaffolding through articles, primary documents, and photographs is necessary; students need frameworks for understanding systemic racism and nonviolent resistance; the historical context spans decades and requires timeline support

Qualitative Complexity Summary

Meaning: Middle High — Personal memoir layered with political history and civic philosophy

Structure: High — Multimodal graphic memoir; dual timeline; visual-verbal counterpoint

Language: Middle Low — Direct, measured prose; visual language carries complexity

Knowledge: High — Civil Rights movement, Jim Crow, SNCC, nonviolent philosophy

Overall Qualitative Rating: High (4 on a 0–5 scale)

March: Book One combines accessible prose with demanding structural and knowledge complexity. The graphic memoir format requires sophisticated multimodal reading, while the historical content demands extensive background building. An ideal opening anchor for eighth grade: visually engaging, emotionally powerful, and intellectually demanding.

Appendix B: Literary Text Qualitative Analysis

Animal Farm by George Orwell (1945) | Lexile: 1170L | Allegorical Novella | Literary

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: Operates on multiple complex levels simultaneously. The surface narrative—animals revolt against a farmer and establish their own society—is a complete, engaging story. Beneath lies a precise allegorical mapping of the Russian Revolution: Old Major as Marx/Lenin, Napoleon as Stalin, Snowball as Trotsky, Squealer as state propaganda. Beyond the specific allegory lies a universal critique of how revolutionary ideals are corrupted by power. The final scene—pigs and humans indistinguishable—is one of literature’s most devastating images of ideological betrayal.			
Opportunities Map allegory to Russian Revolution; trace the corruption of each commandment; analyze Squealer’s propaganda techniques; discuss why the ending is devastating; examine universal vs. specific meaning		Cautions & Support Needed Students must hold two levels of meaning simultaneously; allegorical reading is a sophisticated skill; the political content requires historical knowledge; the ending’s pessimism requires mature discussion	

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 a deceptively simple chronological narrative structure: revolution, establishment of new order, gradual corruption, and final betrayal. Third-person omniscient narration with particular attention to the animals’ limited perspective. The repetition-with-variation structure—the Seven Commandments being altered one by one—is the novella’s central structural device. Chapters map to historical events in sequence. The fable/allegory form itself is a structural choice that demands interpretive work.			
Opportunities Track the Seven Commandments’ changes; map chapters to historical events; analyze how Orwell uses the animals’ limited perspective; discuss the fable form as political tool		Cautions & Support Needed The structural simplicity masks interpretive complexity; students may not notice the commandments changing without prompting; the allegory form requires explicit instruction	

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: Orwell’s prose is deliberately plain and precise—a stylistic choice that mirrors the propaganda he critiques. The contrast between simple surface language and devastating political meaning creates irony throughout. Squealer’s speeches employ recognizable propaganda techniques: euphemism, statistical manipulation, appeal to fear, and manufactured complexity. The Seven			

Commandments are written in mock-simplicity that becomes increasingly sinister. Political vocabulary (revolution, comrades, equality) accumulates layered meaning.

Opportunities

Analyze Squealer’s rhetorical techniques; trace how words like ‘equality’ and ‘comrade’ change meaning; discuss why Orwell chose simple prose for political critique; identify propaganda techniques in contemporary media

Cautions & Support Needed

The plain style may lead students to underestimate linguistic sophistication; propaganda analysis requires critical literacy skills; political vocabulary needs ongoing definition and discussion

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 Russian Revolution (February and October), Marxist ideology and its promises, the rise of Stalin and Soviet totalitarianism, propaganda as a tool of state control, the specific historical figures each character represents, and the broader patterns of revolutionary betrayal. Understanding the Cold War context of Orwell’s writing adds another knowledge layer.

Opportunities

Pre-reading: study Russian Revolution overview, key figures, and timeline; introduce propaganda techniques; discuss what allegory is and how it works; create character-to-historical-figure mapping chart

Cautions & Support Needed

Heavy historical scaffolding is necessary; students need frameworks for understanding political ideology; the allegorical mapping requires sustained attention; Cold War context adds complexity

Qualitative Complexity Summary

Meaning: High — Multi-layered allegory; specific Russian Revolution mapping plus universal political critique

Structure: Middle Low — Chronological; deceptively simple fable form; repetition-with-variation

Language: High — Deliberately plain prose masking devastating irony; propaganda rhetoric; political vocabulary

Knowledge: High — Russian Revolution, Marxism, Stalinism, propaganda, allegorical interpretation

Overall Qualitative Rating: High (4 on a 0–5 scale)

Animal Farm is the most quantitatively complex anchor in the three-year program (1170L) and among the most qualitatively demanding. Its deceptively simple surface conceals multiple layers of political meaning. The novella requires students to sustain allegorical reading while developing critical propaganda analysis skills—essential preparation for high school literary and political literacy.

Appendix C: Informational Text Qualitative Analysis

Braiding Sweetgrass: Young Readers' Edition by Robin Wall Kimmerer (2022) | Lexile: 950L | Narrative Nonfiction | Informational

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: Operates on multiple complex levels: personal memoir, scientific exposition, Indigenous philosophy, and ecological argument. The central metaphor—braiding sweetgrass—represents the interweaving of Indigenous knowledge, Western science, and personal experience. Kimmerer argues that plants are teachers, that reciprocity is a moral obligation, and that the separation of knowledge from gratitude has created ecological crises. Each essay layers personal story over scientific observation over cultural teaching, requiring readers to synthesize across epistemological frameworks.			
Opportunities Analyze the braiding metaphor; trace how Kimmerer integrates personal, scientific, and Indigenous knowledge; discuss what reciprocity means in ecological and cultural contexts; examine how the text challenges Western assumptions		Cautions & Support Needed Students may struggle with the epistemological complexity—the idea that there are multiple valid ways of knowing; the spiritual dimensions of Indigenous knowledge require respectful engagement; ecological arguments demand systems thinking	

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 a collection-of-essays structure organized into thematic sections. Each essay braids together personal narrative, scientific explanation, and Indigenous teaching—mirroring the book's central metaphor. The structure is non-chronological and non-linear; essays can be read independently but accumulate meaning across the collection. The YRE reorganizes and condenses the adult edition while maintaining the braided essay form. This structure demands patience and tolerance for non-linear, recursive meaning-making.			
Opportunities Analyze how individual essays braid three strands; discuss how essay order creates cumulative meaning; compare the collection structure with linear narrative; identify how the structure mirrors the content		Cautions & Support Needed The non-linear, recursive structure challenges students accustomed to chronological narrative; the braided form requires explicit instruction; essay collections demand sustained attention across independent pieces	

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:			

Kimmerer writes in lyrical, precise prose that moves fluidly between registers: poetic nature description, scientific terminology, conversational memoir, and formal Indigenous teaching. Botanical and ecological vocabulary (mutualism, symbiosis, phenology) appears alongside Potawatomi and Anishinaabe terms. The writing’s beauty is itself an argument—that attentive, grateful language reflects an attentive, grateful relationship with the natural world. Sentence structures vary from short, declarative observations to long, flowing meditations.

Opportunities

Analyze how Kimmerer shifts register and why; create glossary of botanical, ecological, and Indigenous terms; discuss how her prose style embodies her argument; examine specific passages for craft and meaning

Cautions & Support Needed

Multi-register prose requires tracking; scientific vocabulary needs ongoing support; Indigenous language terms need pronunciation and respectful contextualization; the lyrical style may feel unfamiliar to some readers

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 the most diverse knowledge of any Grade 8 anchor: ecology and environmental science (mutualism, photosynthesis, ecological succession), Indigenous Potawatomi and Anishinaabe knowledge systems (Thanksgiving Address, creation stories, plant teachings), the history of Indigenous removal and cultural erasure, Western scientific methodology and its limitations, and basic agricultural and botanical knowledge. The text also requires epistemological flexibility—the willingness to consider non-Western ways of knowing as valid.

Opportunities

Pre-reading: introduce basic ecology concepts; study Indigenous knowledge systems and the Thanksgiving Address; discuss multiple ways of knowing; build botanical vocabulary; examine the history of Indigenous land removal

Cautions & Support Needed

Knowledge demands are the broadest of any anchor in the program; students need scaffolding across science, culture, history, and philosophy; the epistemological challenge—valuing Indigenous knowledge alongside Western science—requires careful facilitation

Qualitative Complexity Summary

Meaning: High — Multi-epistemological; reciprocity as ecological and moral framework

Structure: Middle High — Braided essay collection; non-linear; recursive meaning-making

Language: Middle High — Lyrical multi-register prose; scientific and Indigenous vocabulary

Knowledge: High — Ecology, Indigenous knowledge systems, botanical science, cultural history

Overall Qualitative Rating: High (4 on a 0–5 scale)

Braiding Sweetgrass (YRE) is unique in the three-year program for its epistemological demands—it asks students not just to learn new content but to reconsider how knowledge itself is constructed. The combination of scientific rigor, Indigenous wisdom, and lyrical prose makes it the most intellectually ambitious anchor in the Grade 8 sequence, ideally placed third after students have developed analytical skills through graphic memoir and political allegory.

Appendix D: Literary Text Qualitative Analysis

The Last Cuentista by Donna Barba Higuera (2021) | Lexile: 820L | Speculative Fiction | Literary

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: Operates on multiple complex levels. The surface narrative—a girl who retains her memories when everyone else’s are erased during interstellar colonization—is a compelling adventure. Beneath lies a profound meditation on cultural memory, storytelling as resistance, and what makes us human. Petra’s grandmother’s cuentos (traditional Mexican folktales) are not just entertainment but cultural survival tools. The Collective’s memory erasure is an allegory for cultural genocide. The title—“The Last Cuentista” (the last storyteller)—asks what happens when the chain of cultural transmission breaks.			
Opportunities Analyze what memory erasure represents beyond the sci-fi premise; trace how cuentos function as resistance; discuss why Petra is “the last” and what that means culturally; connect to real histories of cultural erasure		Cautions & Support Needed Students need support seeing the cultural genocide allegory; the interweaving of Mexican folklore with science fiction requires dual literacy; the emotional weight of cultural loss needs sensitive handling	

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 a dual-timeline structure: pre-departure Earth scenes intercut with the post-awakening spaceship narrative. Embedded cuentos (folktales told by Petra’s grandmother) function as stories-within-the-story, creating a layered narrative architecture. The speculative world-building requires sustained attention to an unfamiliar social system (the Collective). Pacing shifts between meditative memory sequences and fast-paced action. The structure mirrors the theme: memory persists within and disrupts linear progression.			
Opportunities Map the dual timeline; analyze how embedded cuentos comment on the main narrative; discuss how the structure mirrors the theme of memory persistence; compare with other speculative fiction structures		Cautions & Support Needed The dual timeline can be disorienting without scaffolding; embedded stories require understanding of metanarrative; the speculative world-building demands tracking unfamiliar social systems	

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: Higuera writes in accessible, emotionally immediate prose with a first-person narrator (Petra). Spanish words and phrases appear throughout, reflecting Petra’s bicultural identity—most are contextually defined. The cuentos are rendered in a distinct storytelling			

register that contrasts with the modern narrative voice. Scientific and speculative vocabulary (cryogenic, terraforming) appears in context. The prose is deliberately accessible to prioritize reader engagement with complex thematic content.

Opportunities

Analyze how Spanish integrates into the prose and what it communicates; compare the cuento register with Petra’s modern voice; create glossary of speculative vocabulary; discuss how accessible prose serves complex themes

Cautions & Support Needed

Spanish vocabulary needs pronunciation support for non-Spanish speakers; the register shift between cuento and modern narrative needs highlighting; speculative terminology accumulates quickly

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:

Requires knowledge of Mexican American cultural heritage and oral tradition (cuentos, Mesoamerican mythology), basic astronomy and space science (Halley’s Comet, interstellar travel, terraforming), the concept of cultural genocide and forced assimilation, and speculative fiction conventions. The cultural content is specific but accessibly presented; the scientific content provides cross-disciplinary connections. Understanding colonialism and its relationship to cultural erasure deepens interpretation.

Opportunities

Pre-reading: introduce cuento tradition and Mexican folktales; study basic space science concepts; discuss cultural genocide and forced assimilation; build speculative fiction vocabulary

Cautions & Support Needed

Mexican cultural traditions need respectful contextualization; scientific concepts require some scaffolding; the colonialism/cultural erasure theme needs historical grounding; students new to speculative fiction need genre conventions

Qualitative Complexity Summary

Meaning: High — Memory as cultural survival; storytelling as resistance; cultural genocide allegory

Structure: Middle High — Dual timeline; embedded cuentos; speculative world-building

Language: Middle Low — Accessible bilingual prose; register shifts between cuento and modern voice

Knowledge: Middle High — Mexican heritage, cuento tradition, space science, cultural erasure

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

The Last Cuentista places its primary complexity in meaning and structure rather than language or quantitative difficulty. Its accessible prose invites all readers while its thematic depth rewards close analysis. As the year’s capstone, it synthesizes the program’s exploration of systems—civic (U1), ideological (U2), ecological (U3)—through the lens of narrative systems: how stories preserve identity, resist erasure, and imagine futures.