newsela Threads & Themes

Differentiation Playbook

Responsive differentiation strategies for MTSS-aligned instruction, Grades 6-8

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Introduction: How to Use This Playbook

The **Differentiation Playbook** is organized around the moments in instruction when differentiation happens, before a lesson, during, and after. Every routine in this document is grounded in the existing Newsela *Threads & Themes* lesson architecture. Teachers do not need to build new systems; they need to know where to look.

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Section 1: Differentiation in Lesson Design

Threads & Themes does not treat differentiation as an add-on. Every lesson contains structured access points embedded in the four-phase lesson architecture. Each phase deploys specific instructional routines from the program's Routines Guide as shown below.

Lesson Phase	Purpose	Example Instructional Routines
Launch	Activates prior knowledge and provides low-stakes entry points.	Retell and Paraphrase Partner Check, Quick Write, Annotation Spot Check
Literacy Lab	Builds foundational skills.	Introduce New Words Using Syllables, Introduce New Words Using Morphemes, Word Matrix, Language Study, Sentence Combining, Sentence Expansion
Learning in Action	Provides multiple modalities for text engagement.	Structured Oral Rehearsal, Fluency Practice, Rebuild the Read, Give One Get One, Iterative Conversation, Academic Discussion
Look Back	Consolidates learning and generates formative data.	3-2-1 Summary, Reflection, Checks for Understanding

Additionally, **consistent classroom routines** like Turn and Talk, Think-Pair-Share, Think-Pair-Write-Share, Jigsaw Reading, and Academic Talk Stems thread across all phases and provide the scaffolding infrastructure that makes differentiation possible.

Threads & Themes is built on the conviction that all students—including multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and those requiring intensified literacy support – can engage meaningfully with grade-level texts and high-challenge tasks when provided with appropriate, research-based scaffolds at the appropriate moment of instruction. Teachers are expected to maintain rigorous expectations for every student by providing structured access points to grade-level texts rather than reducing the cognitive demand or complexity of the work.

1.1 The Built-In Architecture of Access

Lesson Architecture & Built-In Differentiation

Phase	Time	Differentiation Embedded
Launch	5 min	Activates prior knowledge; sentence frames introduced; visual/oral entry point for all learners
Literacy Lab	10 min	Explicit vocabulary instruction with morphological analysis; cognate recognition; modeled language
Learning in Action	30 min	If/Then contingent supports; partner work before independent work; graphic organizers; multiple modalities
Look Back	5 min	Self-assessment via Reflection; pulse checks: formative check before next lesson

1.2 If/Then Contingent Supports: The Core Differentiation Engine

Every *Threads & Themes* lesson contains If/Then prompts, decision trees that tell teachers exactly what to say when students respond in different ways. These are responsive supports allowing the teacher to meet students where they are and push them one step further.

Grade 8, Unit 1 examples:

- If students define only → Prompt: Can you give an example?
- If students give examples without vocabulary → Prompt: Which word fits that example—civic, segregation, or discrimination?
- If students jump to interpretation → Prompt: What do you see that makes you think that?
- If students name details only → Prompt: What might this mean about rules or power?

1.3 Formative Look-Fors

Every lesson contains 2–3 explicit Look-Fors (embedded in the Integrated ELD dropdown) or observable student behaviors that tell the teacher whether students are on track. These are the check-for-understanding moments described in the framework.

Examples from Grade 8 lessons:

- Students reference a specific visual detail
- Students attempt an inference using because/suggests
- Students use at least one target word accurately

- Students cite at least one caption/detail
- Students make one connection across two sources

Teachers circulate during partner/group work. If fewer than half the class meets a Look-For, it is a signal to pause and reteach using the If/Then prompt before continuing. The Annotation Spot Check routine, in which students share and explain a specific annotation – articulating their annotation choices, provides an additional formative data point during circulation: it reveals whether students are annotating purposefully (responding to the text) or superficially (restating the text).

1.4 Reflection

> ↗ **See also:** *Section 2.2 (Student Self-Assessment) for full Reflection guidance*

The Reflection routine is a student self-assessment tool embedded in Look Back phases. Students rate their confidence on the lesson's learning objective on a visible scale, then write one sentence explaining their rating. The explanation matters as much as the number. For example: "I understand the main idea but I'm not sure how to apply it" is actionable data; a bare number is not. Teachers review aggregate ratings before the next lesson and use the data to group students or adjust instruction. Set a clear expectation for intellectual honesty by encouraging students to rate themselves on something they are learning, normalizing lower ratings produces more accurate self-reports.

Section 2: Assessment-Driven Instruction

Differentiation without data is guesswork. *Threads & Themes* builds assessment into every lesson and every unit, creating a continuous feedback loop between student performance and teacher decision-making.

2.1 Overview

Threads & Themes uses an intentionally-layered assessment system that provides data at every level of instruction. Pulse Checks and Checks for Understanding give real-time formative data within each lesson. End-of-Investigation Assessments (technology-enhanced) assess standards mastery at the close of each Investigation cycle and directly inform Flex Day grouping. Unit-level Performance Tasks provide summative evidence scored with rubrics and exemplar student responses. Collectively, these assessments provide the evidentiary foundation for the responsive teaching and targeted interventions that drive student growth throughout the year.

2.2 Student Self-Assessment: Reflection

The Reflection routine empowers students to take agency over their own learning while providing teachers with immediate, aggregate data to drive the next day's instructional focus.

- **Purpose:** Develops student ownership of learning and metacognitive awareness
- **When used**: Look Back phase of lessons throughout each unit
- **How it works:**
  - Teacher reviews the learning objective for the lesson
  - Students mark their position on a visible scale (1–5 or drawn continuum) and write one sentence explaining their rating
  - Teacher reviews aggregate ratings before next lesson

Data use: If more than 30% of students rate themselves 1-2 on the Reflection scale, begin the next lesson Launch with targeted reteaching of the learning objective before advancing.

2.3 Formative Data Collection Tools

Effective formative assessment is the cornerstone of responsive teaching, providing the real-time data necessary to tailor instruction to diverse learner needs. The suite of formative assessment tools in *Threads & Themes* offers a comprehensive set of strategies designed to measure student comprehension at various stages of the instructional cycle. From immediate "Pulse Checks" and observable "Look-Fors" to reflective "Quick Writes" and cumulative "End-of-Investigation Assessments," these tools enable educators to monitor progress, identify gaps in mastery, and make informed pedagogical adjustments to support every student's growth.

Formative Assessment Tools

Tool	What It Measures	When Collected	How to Use
Formative Look-Fors	Observable skill performance during class	Every lesson, 2–3 times	Circulate; use If/Then prompts to adjust in-the-moment
Reflection	Student self-assessment of learning objective(s)	Look Back phase	Inform next lesson's launch and Literacy Lab
Quick Writes	Written evidence of learning objective(s)	End of lesson	Sort into 3 categories(Got it / Approaching / Not yet)
3-2-1 Summary	Synthesis of text and learning	End of reading lessons	Check for accuracy and depth of understanding
Personal Dictionary	Vocabulary acquisition over time	Ongoing	Review for morphological accuracy and usage
Pulse Checks (Multiple Choice Questions)	Focal-standard comprehension via auto-scored multiple-choice questions (MCQ); includes “For Additional Student Support” differentiation prompts	Embedded within lessons, after key instructional segments	Review auto-scored results for immediate reteaching; use differentiation prompts to adjust instruction in-the-moment; feed data into Flex Day Huddle groupings
Checks for Understanding	Real-time comprehension and engagement moments during instruction (cold call with wait time, choral response, whiteboards, thumbs up/down, pair-share)	Before, during, and after reading within lessons	Guide pacing decisions; identify when to pause and reteach vs. continue; pair with Pulse Check data for richer picture of student understanding
End-of-Investigation Assessments	Standards-aligned reading, language, and media literacy skills via	End of each Investigation cycle	Results directly inform Flex Day Huddle groupings; identify

	technology-enhanced selected-response items (auto-scored)	(approximately every 10–12 lessons)	students needing reteaching vs. extension; track standards mastery over time

2.4 Adjusting Instruction Based on Data

Threads & Themes ensures differentiation is a responsive, ongoing process rather than a static label. By monitoring the real-time "Data Signals" outlined below, educators can implement immediate pedagogical shifts—including preteaching, targeted reteaching, and extended practice. This systematic approach ensures grade-level content remains accessible to all learners, offering specific phonological and multisensory support for students with dyslexia and flexible pathways for intervention. Use the following tables to translate assessment data into actionable instructional responses that close mastery gaps and sustain student growth.

Daily Classroom Assessment Look-Fors

Data Signal	Meaning	Response
>70% meet Look-For	Lesson is working; most on track	Continue; use If/Then prompts to extend for those ready
40–70% meet Look-For	Mixed understanding; re-anchor needed	Pause for brief re-model; use peer support (strong → approaching)
<40% meet Look-For	Lesson goal not yet reached	Do not advance yet; reteach in next lesson's Launch

Reflection Ratings

Data Signal	Meaning	Response
Reflection ratings mostly 3–4	Students confident in objective; self-assessment matches observed performance	Continue; offer extension prompts during the next lesson's Look Back; advance students to independent application
Reflection ratings mixed (a mix of 2–3 with some 1s)	Mixed confidence; some students self-identify as not yet ready	Begin next lesson's Launch by revisiting the objective; pair confident students with

		approaching developing learners during Learning in Action
Reflection ratings mostly 1–2	Students not confident in objective	Begin next lesson with targeted small-group reteaching of the objective; advance confident students to extension

Checks for Understanding

Data Signal	Meaning	Response
Most responses on target	Strong real-time evidence of understanding across the class	Continue at planned pace; cold call to push elaboration and depth for students ready to extend
Mixed responses with consistent gaps for some students	Subgroup of students showing the misconception in real time	Pause for a brief re-model; use pair-share to surface and address the misconception before continuing
Significant “Not yet” scoring	Observable evidence of gaps across the class	Ensure facilitation of a targeted small group session next class; address the specific misconception in next lesson’s Launch or during the Flex Day Huddle

Pulse Check

Data Signal	Meaning	Response
≥85% correct on focal standard	Most students have mastered the focal standard for this lesson segment	Continue at planned pace; assign students at full mastery the embedded extension prompt during Learning in Action
70–85% correct on focal standard	Partial mastery; a subgroup of students is still developing mastery of the standard	Use the embedded “For Additional Student Support” prompt for the subgroup; revisit the skill briefly in the next Launch; flag students for a Flex Day Huddle if the gap persists

<70% correct on focal standard	Most students have yet to master the focal standard for this lesson segment	Use the embedded "For Additional Student Support" prompt immediately; reteach the specific skill in the next lesson's Launch or during the Flex Day Huddle

End-of-Investigation Assessment

Data Signal	Meaning	Response
≥85% mastery on focal standards	Cycle goals met; standards mastery on track for the unit	Continue to the next Investigation; offer extension Flex Day Huddles (e.g., cross-text synthesis or author study) for students at full mastery
70–85% mastery / a few standards-level gaps	Targeted standards-level gaps identified for a subgroup	Form targeted Flex Day Huddles (10–15 min) for the subgroup on specific skill gaps; administer Quick Checks at the end of the Huddle to confirm progress before the next Investigation
Significant gaps on specific standards	Standards-level gaps identified across the Investigation cycle	Use results to form Flex Day Targeted Instruction Huddles (10–15 min) by specific skill gap across multiple Flex Days; administer Quick Checks at the end of each Huddle to confirm progress; revisit gap standards in the next Investigation's reading lessons

↗ **See also:** *Assessment Playbook for tier placement rules and progress monitoring routines.*

Section 3: Students Approaching Grade Level

Threads & Themes uses an accelerative approach: the goal is to bring all students to grade level by ensuring equitable access to core content, rather than providing a separate curriculum for students approaching grade level. Additionally, every differentiation strategy leverages student assets to maintain grade-level content as the rigorous target for every learner. In practice, content and skills build as a progression; therefore, differentiation involves diagnosing and addressing specific prerequisite sub-skills to ensure students can fully access and master the current grade-level standard. Skipping steps in that progression is rarely effective—the goal is to move students forward as efficiently as possible, meeting every learner at their current proficiency level so they can reach their full academic potential.

3.1 Reteaching and Preteaching Protocols

PRETEACHING: Strategic Entry Points

Universal Instructional Moves

The following high-leverage practices are recommended for all students to reduce cognitive load and activate prior knowledge before a lesson begins:

- **Core Vocabulary Frontload**: Preview 2–3 comprehension-critical academic words students will encounter in the lesson. Use a consistent brief routine: pronounce the word, share a student-friendly definition, and show the word in a meaningful sentence that previews how it functions in the text.
- **Building Bridges to Student Knowledge:** Open the lesson with a visual, question, or short prompt that invites students to share experiences, knowledge, or questions from their lives that connect to the lesson's central concept or theme. Connecting new content to what students already know and have lived reduces cognitive load and deepens engagement.

Differentiated Preteaching

For students who need additional support to access the learning objective, preteaching goes a step further by removing linguistic and conceptual barriers before core instruction begins:

- **Identifying "Assumption" Words**: Beyond the core vocabulary, identify 2–3 additional words that the lesson assumes students already know, but which may be unfamiliar to some.
- **Targeted Vocabulary Frontload**: Use the same "pronounce, define, show" routine to preview these additional words with specific student groups. This targeted preteach is

the **differentiation**, ensuring students can access the language of directions and the anchor text without that language becoming the barrier to the learning.

- **Categories of Support**:
    - **Instructional Connectors**: Transition words and academic markers used in lesson directions.
    - **Contextual Terms**: Proper nouns or specific background-knowledge terms found in the anchor text.
- **Multilingual Learner (ML) Support**: Whenever possible, preview both core and additional vocabulary in the student's home language. Leverage cross-linguistic transfer by identifying cognates that bridge the student's native language and English.

RETEACHING: Evidence-Based Response

Reteaching is a targeted instructional response used when formative data indicates that students have not yet mastered a specific objective.

Phase 1: Diagnosis Before Response

Effective reteaching begins with identifying the precise barrier to mastery:

- **Isolate the Sub-skill**: Move beyond general statements like "they didn't understand the text" to identify the specific sub-skill gap (e.g., specific vocabulary, a particular inference type, or a sentence structure).
- **Investigate the Barrier**: Determine if the challenge is a missing prerequisite skill, a task demand that outpaces current proficiency, or a language access issue.
- **Assess Frequency**: Consider if the student simply requires more practice with the current high-quality, evidence-based instruction before changing the approach. Often, additional repetitions with feedback are the most effective first response.

Phase 2: Targeted Instructional Moves

Once a diagnosis is established, the instructional response should be driven by the skill gap:

- **Temporary Complexity Reduction**: Use a shorter or less complex text to practice the targeted skill in isolation.
- **Isolate and Practice**: Focus exclusively on the identified sub-skill with a targeted practice task before re-integrating it into the full lesson context.
- **Return to Grade-Level Rigor**: Immediately return students to grade-level texts and tasks once the specific sub-skill is secure.

Core Principle: Content over "Learning Styles"
Reteaching decisions must be grounded in the demands of the content and the evidence of student need.

- **Reject Learning Styles**: The research base does not support matching instruction to individual learning modalities (visual, auditory, kinesthetic).
- **Prioritize Skill Alignment**: Effective reteaching uses the instructional approach best suited to the specific skill being taught.

3.2 Additional Time and Differentiated Materials

In addition to strategic preteaching and reteaching, teachers should deploy responsive scaffolding to ensure students can meet rigorous standards without reducing task complexity. These scaffolds are calibrated to formative evidence and are designed for systematic release as student independence grows.

Strategic Task Adjustments

These structural supports maintain the same learning objective while providing the necessary runway for student success:

- **Flexible Pacing**: Extend the window for completion when the task demands more processing, drafting, or revision time than the standard window allows. The assignment and expectations remain identical to peers'; only the timeline shifts.
- **Cognitive Load Reduction**:
    - **Strategic Textual Chunking**: Guide students to annotate a single paragraph before engaging in discussion, ensuring deep comprehension of specific segments before processing a full page at once.
    - **Focused Annotation Cycles:** Use the Annotation Spot Check routine on a single paragraph to confirm purposeful annotation before students take on a full page, preventing the cognitive cost of re-reading or re-doing work that wasn't anchored the first time.
    - **Guided Note-Taking**: Provide partially-completed notes for students who find open-ended note-taking a barrier to content retention.
- **Structural Scaffolding**:
    - **Sentence-Level Frames**: Deploy sentence-level scaffolds for students who are developing the stamina for paragraph-level writing.
    - **Labeled Graphic Organizers**: Use pre-structured graphic organizers with labeled sections to guide students through complex analysis.

Instructional Differentiation via Literacy Lab

The Literacy Lab routines serve as a powerful inventory of foundational tools that can be deployed during core instruction, intervention sessions, or Flex Day Huddles:

- **Vocabulary & Word Analysis**: Utilize routines such as *Introduce New Words Using Syllables*, *Word Matrices*, and *Word Associations* to target specific word-analysis gaps.
- **Syntactic Support**: Use *Sentence Combining* and *Sentence Expansion* routines, which are particularly effective for students whose oral language sophistication currently outpaces their written production.
- **Metalinguistic Awareness**: In D-ELD, use *Language Objective Launch*, *Sentence Study*, and *Multimodal Vocabulary Support* to make language itself the object of attention so students can notice, borrow, and deliberately use the target language in their own speaking and writing.

These routines are designed to develop a lasting command of Tier 2 academic vocabulary. Teachers should maintain high expectations for every student's acquisition of this language, as it forms the essential foundation for the academic demands of high school and beyond.

Together, these adjustments give students the architecture they need to engage fully in Literacy Lab routines, Learning in Action tasks, and high-stakes academic discussion.

3.3 Small-Group Reading Differentiated Instruction

Classroom Differentiation

Small-group instruction in *Threads & Themes* is a classroom differentiation tool—rather than a formal intervention program. Teachers form flexible, temporary groups based on formative assessment data – such as Look-Fors, Pulse Checks, and Reflection results– to address specific skill gaps observed in a lesson or unit.

During Flex Days in ELA, these groups take the form of Targeted Instruction Huddles. These are focused, 10–15 minute sessions where the teacher reteaches a specific skill, provides guided practice, and administers a Quick Check to confirm progress before students return to independent work. These groups are short-term and responsive, formed around a specific need and concluded once that need is addressed.

Small-group differentiated instruction may target any skill area where data shows a group of students has not yet reached mastery—including, but not limited to:

- **Morphological awareness:** Prefixes, suffixes, roots, and their meanings
- **Multisyllabic word decoding:** Chunking strategies for long words
- **Reading fluency:** Phrase-level fluency practice with connected text
- **Vocabulary:** High-frequency academic word instruction
- **Reading comprehension**: Main idea identification, text structure, inference, and evidence-based response
- **Written language:** Sentence construction, paragraph organization, and argument structure
- **Oral language**: Structured response, academic discussion participation, and discourse organization

The skill focus is driven by formative evidence rather than fixed assumptions. Small-group time is most effective when there is a specific, observable skill target and a clear plan to return students to whole-class instruction once that target is met.

Tier 2 and Tier 3 Coordination

For students whose needs extend beyond the scope of classroom-based responsive scaffolding, teachers collaborate with the school's MTSS team to determine the appropriate level of intensified support. Formal Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention is coordinated through this team to ensure that intensive support is not a separate educational path, but a high-dosage extension of core instruction.

To maintain procedural consistency across all tiers, intervention sessions should utilize the same evidence-based Literacy Lab routines that students encounter in their daily Tier 1 ELA block. This includes routines such as *Tap–Map–Graph*, *Word Matrix*, *Introduce New Words Using Syllables*, and *Introduce New Words Using Morphemes*.

Example Intervention Session Structure (20–30 minutes, 3–5x per week)

Component	Time	What Happens	
Literacy Lab Routine (Word Matrix, or Morpheme Analysis)	5 min	Review 5–8 morphemes or syllable patterns using core program routines for consistency.	

New Skill Introduction	8 min	Introduce one new morpheme, word family, or fluency strategy with modeled examples.	
Guided Practice	10 min	Students apply skills with immediate corrective feedback.	
Connected Text Practice	5 min	Apply the skill in a short, controlled text passage.	
Wrap-Up	2 min	Student records new learning in their Personal Dictionary.	

3.4 Why Students Struggle: A Diagnostic Guide

Students may demonstrate the same surface-level challenge for different underlying reasons. This guide names common reasons behind specific struggles and pairs each with a targeted response that addresses the underlying cause, not just the symptom.

↗ **See also:** *Universal Access Handbook, Section 1 (MTSS Framework) for tier placement and progress monitoring guidance*

Reading Comprehension

What You Observe	Likely Reason(s)	Response
Can't identify central idea	Surface-level reading without comprehension monitoring; weak text-structure awareness; vocabulary load too high	Model annotation; teach "so what?" prompt after every paragraph
Accurate details but can't connect them	Synthesis skill not yet developed; weak inferencing; difficulty with abstraction	Use "This matters because..." frame; practice with simple texts
Reads fluently but can't summarize	Fluency without comprehension; processing surface-level only	Reread for meaning; teach summarization protocols ("Someone wanted but so")
Asks about every word in a passage	Vocabulary load too high; comprehension monitoring gap	Pre-teach 3 to 5 key words; teach "skip and predict" strategy
Quotes evidence, but doesn't analyze	Evidence-as-end vs. evidence-as-support; weak interpretation language	RACE Strategy; "This shows that..." sentence frames

Writing

What You Observe	Likely Reason(s)	Response
Writing is accurate, but one sentence in length	Sentence-fluency lag relative to ideation; transcription bottleneck	Use sentence combining; model expanding a simple sentence step by step
Correct in speech, but poor in writing	Oral-to-print gap; spelling/handwriting load distracting from composition	Have student speak first, then write; use turn-and-talk before writing
Strong oral language, but weak written response	Composing-while-encoding cognitive load	Dictation-then-revise; use audio recording before writing
Single-source response strong, but can't compare across sources	Synthesis skill not yet developed; working memory load	Use Venn diagrams; explicit teaching of comparison transitions

Discussion and Speaking

What You Observe	Likely Reason(s)	Response
Stops engaging during discussion	Confidence; academic register unfamiliarity; partner mismatch	Pair with patient peer; provide sentence stems; rehearse before whole group
Avoids participating	Anxiety; language production demand exceeds proficiency; novel content	Quiet think time; partner share before whole group; sentence stems
Strong informal speech, but struggles in formal contexts	Register-switching skill not developed; dialect-to-academic-English transfer	Sentence Study with formal/informal comparison; explicit register-switching practice

Foundational Skills

What You Observe	Likely Reason(s)	Response
Cannot decode multisyllabic words	Syllable-segmentation skills not automated	Tap-Map-Graph routine; Introduce New Words Using Syllables routine
Can decode, but reads in monotone	Prosody not internalized; not yet processing punctuation as cues	Fluency Practice routine with Modeled Reading; punctuation cue work
Forgets vocabulary a week later	Spaced retrieval needed; depth-of-processing too shallow	Word Matrix routine; multiple-exposure across contexts
Knows vocabulary in isolation, but not in context	Word-meaning depth gap; limited semantic flexibility	Word Relationship routine; multiple-context exposure
Misuses cognates	False cognate confusion; cross-linguistic interference	Explicit cognate vs. false-cognate teaching moves

Cross-Cutting Patterns

What You Observe	Likely Reason(s)	Response
Participates verbally, but writing far below	Possible phonological/orthographic difficulty; dialect-to-academic-English transfer gap	Observe consistency; assess phonological awareness; see Section 6 (AAE)
Appears to understand, but scores poorly on assessments	Test-taking strategy gap; processing speed; possible learning disability	See UA Handbook §1 (MTSS) and §5 (AAE) for diagnostic guidance

Engagement and Motivation

What You Observe	Likely Reason(s)	Response
Capable, but disengaged	Content disconnect; no entry point; lacking purpose or relevancy	Connect to lived experience; offer choice within structure; explicit "why this matters" framing

Section 4: Multilingual Learner Differentiation

Multilingual Learners in *Threads & Themes* are supported through a layered system: Integrated ELD embedded in every ELA lesson, EL-adjacent routines with proficiency-level scaffolding, and Designated ELD as a separate, protected period for explicit academic English language development. This section provides differentiation tools for the first two layers—the ML differentiation that lives inside the ELA block.

Integrated ELD: Access without Reduction

Within Integrated ELD, scaffolds are calibrated to students' English proficiency levels (Emerging, Expanding, Bridging).

- **Goal:** To give every student access to the same grade-level text, task, and thinking.
- **Form of the Scaffold:** Proficiency level shapes the *form*—the amount of linguistic support, the type of sentence frame, or the level of oral rehearsal.
- **Rigor:** Scaffolding affects the delivery method, not the rigor of the content.

Designated ELD: Purpose and Structure

Designated ELD is not a form of ELA differentiation.

- **Governing Standards:** It is governed by its own standards and planning cycle.
- **Objective:** Every D-ELD lesson must move students forward in their ability to comprehend and produce academic English.
- **Exclusions:** It is not an ELA review period, not a re-teach or differentiated version of the ELA class, and not a homework support block.

Broad Applicability of ML Strategies

While designed for Multilingual Learners, these strategies—sentence frames, structured oral rehearsal, graphic organizers, vocabulary previewing, and discussion entry points—are also effective for any student not yet at grade level in academic language or literacy.

Strategies should be deployed based on individual student need and formative evidence, rather than being reserved exclusively for students with an EL designation.

> **Guiding Principles for Equitable Access**
>
> All scaffolding in this section follows the ELSF principle: amplify access to grade-level content and language complexity; do not reduce it. Scaffolds are designed for systematic release on formative data, and are not fixed to a proficiency label.

4.1 EL-Adjacent Core Routines: Differentiation by ELD Level

In accordance with the California ELA/ELD Framework, these high-leverage routines are designed to provide Multilingual Learners with the "just right" level of scaffolding required to access complex, grade-level inquiry tasks alongside their peers . The following routines appear in Learning in Action paired-reading contexts across units. Each table shows differentiation at three CA ELD proficiency levels: Emerging, Expanding, and Bridging.

Understanding the California ELD Proficiency Levels

To effectively differentiate instruction, educators must understand the distinct linguistic characteristics and instructional needs of students at each stage of English language development:

> - ***Emerging:*** *Students at this level typically progress very quickly, learning to use English for immediate needs as well as beginning to understand and use academic vocabulary and other features of academic language.*
> - ***Expanding:*** *Students at this level are challenged to increase their English skills in more contexts and learn a greater variety of vocabulary and linguistic structures, applying their growing language skills in more sophisticated ways that are appropriate to their age and grade level.*
> - ***Bridging:*** *Students at this level continue to learn and apply a range of high-level English language skills in a wide variety of contexts, including comprehension and production of highly technical texts. The "bridge" alluded to is the transition to full engagement in grade-level academic tasks and activities in a variety of content areas without the need for specialized ELD instruction. However, ELs at all levels of English language proficiency fully participate in grade-level tasks in all content areas with varying degrees of scaffolding in order to develop both content knowledge and English.*

Source: *California English Language Development Standards, p. 19*

Give One, Get One

Students record one idea from a text in their own words, then circulate to exchange ideas with classmates—giving one and getting one. The goal is to commit to an independent interpretation before peer thinking enters, then revise based on what they hear.

ELD Level	Scaffold	Teacher Move
Emerging	Pre-printed idea card with the frame "My idea is ___ because the text says ___." Students may compose in their home language first, then prepare an English	During the rehearsal exchange, voice the student's contribution back in clear English so the partner has academic language to respond to. After exchange:

	phrase. One rehearsal exchange with a supportive partner before broader circulation.	"Tell me one new idea you got—point to it on your card if that's easier."
Expanding	Open prompt with a posted academic frame bank ("My idea is ___ because ___" / "I see this differently—I think ___ because ___"). Students paraphrase rather than copy the partner's idea, and complete at least one exchange that produces a revised position.	Prompt for paraphrase, not copying: "How would you say your partner's idea in your own words?" If a student is stuck, ask: "What word from their sentence stood out—start there."
Bridging	No frame. Encourage spontaneous elaboration during exchange, including respectful disagreement. Bridging students take a synthesizer role during whole-class debrief, naming patterns or tensions across the ideas they collected.	Invite Bridging students to identify a pattern or tension across the ideas they received: "What did most of your partners notice? What did one say that surprised you, and how does it complicate the rest?"

Graffiti / Table Talk

Students collaboratively respond to text-dependent prompts posted around the room (or on a shared digital board), rotating through stations and adding ideas, questions, or evidence. The goal is to surface a wide range of interpretations and externalize collective thinking before whole-class discussion narrows thinking.

ELD Level	Scaffold	Teacher Move
Emerging	Each station includes a posted sentence frame ("The text suggests ___ because ___" or "I notice ___, which makes me think ___") plus a small visual cue tied to the prompt. Students may write contributions in their home language on a sticky note, then transfer the key word or phrase to the chart.	At each station, read the prompt aloud and gesture-code key vocabulary. Acknowledge home-language contributions publicly: "I see you wrote ___—that connects to the word ___ on our anchor chart."
Expanding	Open prompts with a connector bank visible at each station ("for example," "in contrast," "this connects to"). Students write at least one phrase or sentence per station, and on rotations 2 and 3 must respond to or build on what a previous group wrote.	Prompt for connector use: "Can you add to that idea using 'for example' or 'in contrast'?" Note where students cluster around an idea—that becomes data for the debrief.

Bridging	Open prompts with no scaffold. On the final rotation, Bridging students take a synthesizer role: rather than adding new ideas, they identify the dominant patterns, tensions, or unanswered questions on each chart and note them in writing for the whole-class debrief.	During whole-class debrief, invite Bridging students to share their synthesis of a chart. Push: "Where do these ideas disagree? What is the chart not yet saying that the text invites?"

Iterative Conversation

Students revisit the same open, text-dependent question across multiple readings, revising their thinking as they gather new evidence. The goal is to develop sustained academic discourse and the disposition that changing one's mind in light of new evidence is an intellectual strength.

ELD Level	Scaffold	Teacher Move
Emerging	Provide a written response option before each oral pass. Students compose a brief response in home language and/or English using the frame "First I thought ___ because ___. Now I think ___ because the text says ___." Pre-rehearse with a supportive partner.	After the first pass, voice each Emerging student's written thinking back in clear, complete English so they hear the academic version of their own idea. After the second pass, ask: "Did your idea change? Show me where in the text."
Expanding	Provide the revision frame on a visible anchor chart. After the second reading, students must use the frame in writing before discussing aloud, naming the specific evidence that pushed their thinking from the first pass to the second.	Push for evidence specificity: "You said your thinking changed—what was the exact line or word that pushed it?" Invite one Expanding student per discussion to model the shift aloud for the class.
Bridging	No frame. Bridging students may serve as discussion stewards on the second pass—tracking how the group's thinking is evolving and feeding observations back. May be invited to introduce a complicating piece of evidence the class has not yet engaged with.	Position Bridging students as discussion leaders: "What pattern are you seeing in how the group is changing its mind? What is the group not yet considering that the text raises?"

Group Accountability Share

After a collaborative reading, discussion, or analysis task, one group member shares the group's collective thinking with the class—while other members are prepared to add evidence, nuance, or clarification. The goal is to ensure equitable participation and surface group-level reasoning with academic precision.

ELD Level	Scaffold	Teacher Move
Emerging	Pre-share preparation time (2–3 minutes) with the whole group rehearsing the share aloud and supplying the Emerging student with a prepared frame: "Our group thinks ___ because the text says ___." Co-present option permitted: a peer joins to fill in if needed.	Before calling on the group, signal: "I'll come back to your group in two minutes—get ready together." During the share, invite group members to add: "Who from this group can give the example from the text?"
Expanding	Group rehearsal is still expected, but the student shares independently using the frame from memory rather than reading. Group members must be prepared to add at least one piece of evidence or clarification when the teacher prompts the group, not the individual.	After the share out, prompt the group: "Can someone from this group add the textual evidence that supports that?" Affirm collective thinking, not individual performance—"Your group's idea" rather than "Your answer."
Bridging	No frame. Bridging students may be asked to share without preparation, and to synthesize disagreement within the group as part of the share ("Our group mostly thought ___, but one member argued ___ because ___"). May also serve as the prompter who calls on group members during the share.	After the share out, push for academic register: "Can you say that again using the language of the text?" Use Bridging students' shares as exemplars when modeling the routine for the class.

Fluency Practice

Students read aloud a designated passage for accuracy, prosody, and automaticity. The goal is to build decoding fluency and oral language phrasing with grade-level texts.

ELD Level	Scaffold	Teacher Move
Emerging	Passage pre-chunked into 2–3 sentence segments with phrase boundaries marked using slash notation. Echo-read with partner allowed before independent read. 2–3 Tier 2 vocabulary pre-taught.	Note decoding vs. fluency errors separately, do not interrupt. After reading: "Let's say that phrase together." Use choral repetition for 1–2 key phrases.
Expanding	Unmarked passage. Partner roles assigned: one reads, one tracks. Second read allowed after discussion. Prosody model provided if available.	After one read: "What is the main idea of that section?" If fluency is strong, shift focus to meaning: "Which phrase told you the most about [concept]?"
Bridging	Unscaffolded passage read. Students select one sentence or phrase of linguistic interest and prepare to explain their choice (word choice, sentence structure, meaning effect).	Invite bridging students to share their selected sentence. Ask: "What is the author doing with language here?" Bridge into whole-group discussion of author's craft.

Teacher Tip: Building Agency Through Scaffolding

To foster genuine agency for Multilingual Learners, scaffolds must be viewed as temporary bridges rather than permanent fixtures. As students advance along the English proficiency continuum—moving from Emerging toward Bridging—teachers should systematically fade pre-printed sentence frames and rehearsal supports. By tracking students' spontaneous use of academic language, teachers can determine the precise moment to release responsibility, ensuring that ML student voice, rather than just linguistic compliance, drives classroom impact.

4.2 Academic Discussion Routine Differentiation

Academic discussion routines in *Threads & Themes* increase in complexity across grades and units. Each routine requires different language demands, and ML differentiation must address both the content (what students discuss) and the language (how they participate).

In addition to the structured routines below, two routines provide lower-stakes entry points for ML students: Give One, Get One (students exchange one idea each with a partner, using the frame “My idea is ___ because the text says ___”) and Iterative Conversation (students revisit

the same discussion question across multiple readings, with the explicit norm that changing your mind in light of new evidence is the goal). Both routines build academic language production in low-risk contexts before students engage in more complex routines. The table below aligns each routine to ELD-level entry points.

Routine	Emerging	Expanding	Bridging	Key Language Demand
Reflect & Response Dialogue	Pre-written sentence frame + rehearsal with partner. Teacher validates home-language thinking before English output.	Partial frame + sentence starter bank. Students choose connectors for elaboration.	Open prompt. Encourage elaboration and building on a partner's response using academic discourse moves.	Citing evidence; agreeing and extending; polite disagreement
Fishbowl Conversations	Outer circle role: record one key phrase or idea said by an inner circle speaker. Use a sentence frame to share during debrief.	Outer circle role: identify one thing they agree with and one thing they want to add. Prepare to speak in an inner circle using a connector.	Inner and outer circle roles are both accessible. Encourage initiating a new point, not just responding.	Active listening; elaborating; initiating discourse
Socratic Seminar	Pre-seminar preparation: annotate 2–3 sentences using provided language stems. May pass or echo a peer's comment with a frame.	Prepare 2 discussion entries in writing before the seminar. Contribute using the provided academic discussion moves list.	Full participation. Encourage using metalinguistic language: "What the author is doing here is ___"	Constructing arguments; connecting to text; metalinguistic awareness
Debate Protocol	Assigned role on one side with pre-written argument stems. Partner rehearsal before speaking.	Prepare a position argument independently with minimal sentence stem support. Attempt one unrehearsed	Full debate participation. Encourage spontaneous language, precision, and use of hedging	Persuasive language; hedging; rebuttal; formal register

	Sentence frame for rebuttal.	rebuttal using a connector.	language ("While it is true that ___, the evidence suggests ___").	
Graffiti / Table Talk	Participate by writing a word or drawing a connection. The teacher or a peer reads contributions aloud and invites the student to say one sentence about their idea.	Write a phrase or sentence. Connect ideas to at least one other response on the table using a connector ("This connects to ___ because ___").	Generate written ideas and facilitate the group's synthesis of the table content into 2–3 shared ideas.	Synthesis language; visual-to-verbal transfer; academic vocabulary in writing

4.3 Sentence Frame Principles

Sentence frames are one of the most frequently misused scaffolds. The program's Academic Talk Stems—a set of posted sentence starters organized by function (agreeing, building on, disagreeing, citing evidence)—provide the infrastructure for academic language production across all discussion routines. These stems should be posted visibly, referenced explicitly during instruction, and systematically removed as structures are internalized. The following principles govern the use of sentence frames in *Threads & Themes*, grounded in the latest research and the CA ELA/ELD Framework.

- Frames should be content-specific, not generic. "I think ___ because ___" is less powerful than "The character's decision to ___ reveals that ___."
- Frames should model the target language structure, not just provide fill-in-the-blank slots. The structure itself teaches language.
- Bridging students should be using frames as models only—generating language independently with the frame as a reference, not a crutch.
- Frames should be strategically released over time. Track which students no longer need the frame for a given structure. When a student can use the structure spontaneously, remove the frame for that structure.
- Frames are not a replacement for feedback. If a student uses a frame correctly but their meaning is unclear, address the meaning—don't accept the syntactic compliance.

> ↗ **See also:** *Universal Access Handbook, Section 2.5 (Proficiency Level Differentiation) for frame examples at each ELD level*

> ↗ **See also:** *Universal Access Handbook, Section 2.4 (Designated ELD: Purpose and Structure) and Section 2.6 (ML-Specific Lesson Routines)*

Section 5: Advanced Learners

Advanced learners in *Threads & Themes* are students who demonstrate consistent mastery of grade-level ELA standards before or early in instruction. These learners require responsive instructional pathways —that extend the depth and complexity of their thinking, rather than simply accelerating into the next grade level's content. The program's inquiry-based architecture ensures that anchor texts are rich enough to sustain simultaneous levels of analysis, providing built-in extension opportunities within every lesson and on designated Flex Days.

> **Core principle: Extension, not just acceleration.**
> *The goal is to develop the habits of mind – such as analyzing author's craft and cross-text synthesis – that make advanced learners stronger readers, more precise writers, and more rigorous thinkers within their current grade-level standards.*

5.1 Identifying Advanced Learners: A Formative-First Approach

Advanced learner identification in *Threads & Themes* is a dynamic and ongoing formative process rather than a static designation established at the start of the year. Because student proficiency can vary significantly across literacy domains, a learner may demonstrate exceptional performance in literary analysis while working toward mastery in argument writing.

Teachers can use the following multiple measures of formative evidence to responsibly identify students ready to engage with increased depth and complexity through extension tasks.

Evidence Source	What to Look For	Program Context
Written Look Back responses (Quick Writes, 3-2-1 Summary)	Responses that go beyond the prompt—analyzing craft, connecting to broader themes, or questioning the author's framing unprompted	Look Back (end of lesson); annotation tasks during reading
Oral discussion contributions	Unprompted synthesis across texts or units; building on peers' ideas with original elaboration; asking inferential or evaluative questions rather than answering them	Reflect & Response Dialogue; Fishbowl; Socratic Seminar
Fluency and annotation	Rapid, accurate decoding with annotation that goes beyond identification (e.g., noting irony, analyzing syntax, questioning word choice)	Paired reading; independent annotation during Learning in Action

Vocabulary acquisition	Rapid uptake and spontaneous use of Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary in new contexts within the same lesson	Vocabulary work; class discussion; written responses
Task completion pace	Consistent early completion of core tasks at high quality—not just speed, but accuracy and conceptual depth	Any independent work time; Learning in Action Part B; Look Back

Responsive Extension Identification

Advanced performance in one area does not indicate advanced performance in all areas. Teachers should identify extension opportunities at the task level, rather than as a wholesale student label that applies to every lesson.

5.2 Curriculum Compacting: Expanding the Inquiry Pathway

Curriculum compacting is a responsive instructional move that allows students who have already demonstrated mastery of a skill to bypass redundant core instruction and engage immediately with advanced extension work. In *Threads & Themes*, this optimization is applied at the skill level within individual lessons rather than at the unit level. This ensures that while students are not excused from high-value anchor text engagement or collaborative discussion, they are provided with sophisticated alternatives to explicit skill instruction and guided review that they no longer require

If the student already demonstrates…	What can be compacted	What replaces it
Fluent decoding and prosody (Fluency Practice)	Echo-read scaffolds and first read with tracking support	Independent first read followed by author's craft analysis of one selected sentence
Strong literal comprehension of anchor text	Graphic organizer completion and main-idea identification tasks	Inferential annotation focusing on what the author implies or intentionally omits
Mastery of target vocabulary (via pre-assessment or early evidence)	Vocabulary matching, definition work, and Tier 2 word study activities	Cross-text vocabulary analysis: tracing how the word is used differently across two unit texts

Proficiency with argument structure in writing	Sentence frame scaffolds and paragraph structure modeling	Multi-paragraph argument with a counter-claim or analysis of a published argument's rhetorical moves
Grade-level discussion skill (citing evidence, elaborating)	Reflect & Response with full sentence frame support	Self-selected discussion roles (facilitator, synthesizer, or devil's advocate) to lead peer inquiry

5.3 Extension Types: A Depth-of-Knowledge Framework

Extension in *Threads & Themes* is available at two points: within every lesson through the Advanced Learner guidance in teacher notes, and on Flex Days—dedicated instructional time built into the unit structure for enrichment and independent exploration. The following types of extension are available:

Extension Type	Description	Delivery Point
Author's craft analysis	Students move from comprehending what a text says to analyzing why the author made specific language, structure, or form decisions—and how those choices might shape reader perception and engagement	Within-lesson (teacher notes); Flex Day deep dive
Counterclaim and complication	After forming a claim or analysis, students identify the strongest possible counter-argument and address it—developing nuanced argument characteristic of 9th–10th grade writing standards	Within-lesson writing extension; Look Back extension prompt
Cross-text synthesis	Students connect the current anchor text to a previous unit text, a self-selected text, or a historical or contemporary source—identifying thematic, structural, or rhetorical connections	Flex Day; teacher notes extension during Learning in Action
Author study	Students research the author of the anchor text—their biography, other works, stated intentions, reception—and bring that context back to the text to deepen analysis	Flex Day; independent research framework (see 5.4)
Original inquiry project	Student-generated inquiry question connected to the unit's essential question; student designs and carries out their own research or creative response	Flex Day; multi-day independent project

Mentor text writing	Students write an original piece in the style of the anchor text author—using the same structural moves, register, or argument strategy—as a way of inhabiting the craft	Flex Day; within-lesson if time permits after compacting

5.4 Independent Inquiry Protocol: The Four-Phase Cycle

Flex Days are the primary window for sustained independent inquiry. The framework below gives advanced learners a structured self-direction cycle that keeps their work connected to the unit's essential question while allowing genuine choice in topic, approach, and form of response. The cycle spans multiple Flex Days within a single unit—it is not a one-session activity.

Cycle Phase	Student Action	Teacher Role
Question (Flex Day 1)	Generate an inquiry question connected to the unit essential question. Questions should be specific, arguable, and genuinely unknown to the student. Example Frame: "I'm wondering whether ___, because ___"	Confer briefly to sharpen the question. Ask: "Is that a question you could answer by looking it up, or does it require you to think it through?" Push for the latter.
Gather (Flex Days 1–2)	Locate and read at least two sources beyond the anchor text. Take annotated notes. Students may use the school library, Newsela text sets, or teacher-curated source banks assembled for each unit.	Identify a curated source bank for each unit in advance. Students with access to school databases should be directed there; others may need teacher-provided texts.
Synthesize (Flex Days 2–3)	Write a synthesis: what do your sources say, what do they disagree about, and what is your own position? This is the intellectual core of the project.	Check in on synthesis writing. Ask: "Where do your sources disagree? Which one do you find most convincing, and why?"
Share (Flex Day 3 or beyond)	Present findings in a form of their choice: a written argument, a short talk to a small group, an annotated bibliography with commentary, or a creative response. The form should match the content.	Facilitate sharing so independent inquiry feeds back into the class—a brief share out at the next whole-class lesson brings independent inquiry back to the whole group.

Teacher Tip: Metacognitive Research Prompts

Teachers can post these prompts during independent research time to foster student self-direction and critical thinking:

- "What do I know so far, and what am I still unsure of?"
- "Which source am I finding most convincing, and why?"
- "What would someone who disagrees with me say?"
- "Am I answering my own question, or have I found a better question?"

5.5 Cross-Unit Synthesis Tasks

The three-year vertical alignment of *Threads & Themes* creates a powerful opportunity for cross-unit synthesis—connecting themes, texts, and ideas across grades and units. Advanced learners benefit from tasks that make this architecture visible and require original thinking across it.

- **Theme tracing:** "The theme of [power/identity/justice] appeared in Unit 1 text X and Unit 2 text Y. How does each author construct this theme differently, and what accounts for the difference?"
- **Form analysis:** "Compare how a poem and an informational text from different units approach the same essential question. What can each form do that the other cannot?"
- **Author positioning:** "Based on what you've read this year, where would [Author A] and [Author B] agree and disagree on [unit essential question]? Write an example conversation they might have."
- **Rhetorical genealogy:** "Find two texts from different units that use the same rhetorical move (anaphora, appeal to shared values, counterargument followed by concession). What effect does the move create in each?"

5.6 In-Depth Study: Authors, Themes, and Concepts

The unit structure of *Threads & Themes* is well-suited to in-depth study since each unit was intentionally organized around a sustained inquiry question and a set of thematically-connected texts. Advanced learners can go deeper into any of three dimensions:

- **Author study:** Move from comprehending what a text says → analyzing what decisions the author consistently makes → examining reception (how the work has been read over time and what that tells us about the moment it was written in). Anchor questions: What are this author's recurring preoccupations? What formal or structural choices do they make consistently?

- **Theme study:** Move from identification ("This text is about identity") → analysis ("Identity in this text is constructed through contrast with 'the other'") → synthesis ("Three of the texts we've read this unit construct identity the same way—but this one complicates it by..."). Can culminate in a student-facilitated small-group discussion.
- **Conceptual depth:** The historical, scientific, social, or philosophical backdrop of each unit can be explored at greater depth through self-directed research. The key is keeping inquiry tethered to the unit essential question so that the student's independent work connects back to the collective learning of the class.

↗ **See also:** *Universal Access Handbook, Section 4 (Advanced Learners) for program-level guidance on advanced learner identification, CA CCSS 9–10 extension standards, and the Teacher Notes structure.*

Section 6: African American English & Language Variation

African American English (AAE) is a fully rule-governed linguistic system with consistent phonological, morphosyntactic, and pragmatic features. Students who use AAE are not making errors—they are demonstrating fluency in a complete language variety. Effective differentiation should affirm linguistic identity while building fluency in the language of academic power.

> **Key Principle: Code-Mashing as Rhetorical Power**
> The goal is not to replace AAE with Standard American English (SAE), but to affirm linguistic identity while adding academic register as a tool for code-meshing. Framing matters: Presenting "code-switching" as a survival skill is less powerful than presenting "code-meshing" as a strategic rhetorical choice that students deploy based on context and purpose – elevating them as an "author" who possesses agency over their own voice.

6.1 Common AAE Features: A Reference for Teachers

The tables below identify frequently observed AAE phonological and morphosyntactic features to provide teachers with linguistic context. These are not checklists for correction; rather they are tools to help teachers recognize consistent, rule-governed patterns of language variety. Teachers should use this knowledge to inform responsive feedback that focuses on rhetorical purpose rather than deficit-based editing. Phonological Features

Phonological Features

Phonological features represent the systematic sound patterns of AAE. Understanding these shifts allows teachers to provide targeted, responsive support in phonics and spelling instruction. By recognizing that these variations are linguistic markers rather than decoding deficits, teachers can help students bridge their primary phonological patterns with the orthographic expectations of the academic register.

Feature	Description	Example
Consonant Cluster Reduction	Multiple consonants at end of word realized as a single sound	"desk" → "des"
-G Reduction	The 'g' in '-ing' sometimes dropped	"jumping" → "jumpin"
Th- Replacement	Initial 'th' → 'd'; medial/final 'th' → 'f', 'v', or 't'	"this" → "dis"; "with" → "wit"
Dropped R	'r' in middle or end of word dropped	"four" → "foe"

Consonant Cluster Movement	'sk' transposed to 'ks'	"ask" → "aks"

Morphosyntactic Features

Morphosyntactic features represent the systematic grammar of AAE. Recognizing these structures allows teachers to engage students in code-meshing dialogues, helping them choose when to deploy home-language markers for narrative voice and when to use academic markers for formal argumentation.

Feature	Description	Example
Variable -s Marking	Final 's' dropped from plurals, verbs, possessives	"three cat_"; "my uncle_ car"
-Ed Dropping	'-ed' dropped from past tense	"He fix_ the car"
Variable Subject-Verb Agreement	Subjects and verbs don't always match	"They was eating"
Habitual Be	'be' marks recurring or habitual action	"He be eating cookies" (ongoing habit, not right now)
BIN-Stressed (Stressed Been)	Stressed "been" = distant past, possibly ongoing	"I been knowing how to read"
Variable Use of "To Be"	Some forms of 'to be' dropped	"This __ my red car"

6.2 Contrastive Analysis Frames for Writing Instruction

Contrastive analysis is the practice of placing AAE and SAE structures side by side, explaining the rules of each without ranking one as superior. The goal is to expand students' repertoire through **code-meshing**—a rhetorical choice where students learn to knowledgeably switch or blend registers based on audience and purpose.

It is important to underscore that the key framing for students is audience and purpose, not "formal vs. informal" or "correct vs. incorrect." AAE is used widely and appropriately in many contexts—family and community communication, creative writing, personal narrative, oral storytelling, and cultural expression. SAE is the convention expected in academic writing, standardized testing, many professional contexts. Neither is superior; they serve different contexts.

AAE Feature	SAE Academic Equivalent	Classroom Approach
Habitual Be: "She be talking in class."	"She often talks in class." or "She frequently talks in class."	**Name the context:** "In community and creative writing, habitual 'be' carries a meaning SAE can't replicate in a single word—it marks ongoing habit specifically. In academic writing for a school audience, we use frequency adverbs to show the same idea." Display side by side. Never mark the AAE version as wrong—explain it as a different valid system for a different context.
Variable -s: "The student_ need help."	"The students need help." (plural) or "The student needs help." (singular)	**Name the context:** "In academic writing for a school or professional audience, -s marks singular verbs and plural nouns as a convention of that setting. " Treat as an audience-awareness skill, not a grammar failure.
-Ed Dropping: "She walk_ to school yesterday."	"She walked to school yesterday."	**Name the context:** "In many everyday and contexts, past tense is clear from context. In academic writing for a school audience, -ed is the expected convention. We add it because it's what the audience expects, not because it's 'more correct.'"
Copula Omission: "They tired."	"They are tired."	**Name the context:** "In AAE, this is a grammatical rule—the copula is optionally deleted. In academic writing, the convention is to include it." Use sentence frames that build it in: 'They ___ tired because ___.' "

Teacher Tip: Protecting Student Voice

Contrastive analysis is a tool for writing instruction, not a method for mid-sentence oral correction. Never correct a student's spoken AAE during class discussions or oral participation. Correcting oral language in the moment silences students and signals that their linguistic identity is unwelcome in your classroom.

6.3 Protocols for Responding to AAE in Student Writing

How a teacher responds to AAE features in student writing depends entirely on the learning objective—and that objective must be made explicit to students before they write, not applied after the fact.

Before assigning any writing task, clarify the objective:

- If the objective is **argumentation, comprehension, or reasoning** (e.g., "write an evidence-based argument"), AAE is an acceptable and valid vehicle for demonstrating that learning. A student who constructs a well-reasoned argument in AAE has met the objective. Dialect-related features are not relevant to the feedback.
- If the objective includes **SAE writing conventions** (e.g., "write an argument in academic SAE style for a school audience"), that must be stated explicitly to students as part of the task. Students need to know in advance that SAE conventions are part of what they are being asked to demonstrate—not discover it when their writing comes back marked.
- If **both objectives are present** (e.g., both argumentation quality and language conventions), both must be named clearly in the task directions and in any rubric or feedback tool used. Students cannot be held accountable for an objective they were not told was being assessed.

Once the objective is clear, the feedback routine follows from it:

- **Step 1: Identify what you are reading for.** Before marking anything, return to the learning objective. What was the student asked to demonstrate? Read only for that. If the objective is argumentation, read for argument quality. If the objective includes SAE conventions, read for both. Do not introduce a second standard that was not part of the original task.
- **Step 2: Separate feedback by objective.** If two objectives are present, separate your feedback clearly: (a) argument and evidence feedback and (b) language convention feedback. Address argument quality first—this is the higher-order skill and the one most likely to be obscured if convention feedback dominates. Make clear to the student which feedback addresses which objective.
- **Step 3: Use audience-and-purpose framing when giving language convention feedback.** When SAE conventions are part of the objective, frame feedback in terms of audience and purpose rather than correctness. Instead of: *"This is incorrect—it should be 'walked,' not 'walk.'"* say: *"For this audience and purpose, past tense is marked with -ed. Let's revise this sentence for that reader."*

- **Step 4: Target one or two specific features per draft.** Do not mark every AAE feature in a draft at once. Choose one or two that the student is ready to address. Marking everything simultaneously signals that the writing is fundamentally wrong, not that one register feature needs attention.
- **Step 5: Never use "fix," "correct," or "wrong" language for dialect features in writing.** Use audience-and-purpose framing consistently: "For this audience and purpose, we..." / "In writing for a school audience, the convention is..." / "For this reader, ..." / "When the task calls for SAE conventions, ..."

Equitable Assessment: Using Multi-Trait Rubrics

To ensure fair and transparent grading, utilize multi-trait rubrics where the score for "Reasoning & Evidence" is distinct from the score for "Language Conventions." This ensures that a student's brilliance in analysis and depth of thought are not mathematically "punished" by their use of a different linguistic register. By decoupling these scores, you provide a more accurate picture of a student's diverse competencies.

6.4 Lesson-Level Moves for Honoring Linguistic Identity

Effective differentiation isn't just about how we grade writing; it's about the environment we build during daily instruction. Use these moves to shift from a "correction" mindset to an expansion mindset.

Build Metalinguistic Awareness

- **Use Side-by-Side Modeling**: When introducing new language structures, include AAE as a primary reference point. "In AAE, habitual 'be' marks an ongoing action. In academic writing, we use frequency adverbs like 'frequently' or 'often.' Both describe the same concept—let's look at how both systems work."
- **Explicitly Name the Skill**: Many students already navigate multiple registers. Validate this as a cognitive strength. "You're already doing something sophisticated—you are identifying a change in context and adjusting your tools. That is called code-meshing, and it is a high-level communication skill."

Create Space for Authentic Voice

- **Define Register by Genre**: Ensure students know that the academic register is a tool for specific tasks, not the "gold standard" for all expression.
    - **In Creative & Personal Writing**: Honor the student's linguistic voice.

    - **In Formal Argumentation**: Use the academic register as a convention of the genre.
- **Analyze Professional Code-Meshing**: Study anchor texts or extension pieces by authors like Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, or August Wilson. Show students how these authors expertly use AAE and academic English simultaneously for rhetorical effect, proving that code-meshing is a professional choice rather than a lack of "correctness."

Maintain a Safe Discussion Space

- **Prioritize Content Over Register**: Never label oral AAE as a "distraction." If a student contributes a valuable idea in oral discussion, affirm the content of the idea.
- **The "No-Interrupt" Rule**: Do not interrupt a student to address register during a discussion. Interrupting to "fix" language shuts down the cognitive flow and signals that the student's identity is a barrier to their participation.

6.5 Distinguishing AAE from Decoding and Fluency Difficulties

The features of African American English are systematic and rule-governed. In contrast, literacy-based difficulties —such as dyslexia or phonological processing deficits– are typically characterized by inconsistency and are not specific to any one dialect.

The goal of the following comparison is to provide teachers with a "linguistic lens" for observation. This ensures that students are neither penalized for their natural speech patterns nor overlooked if they require legitimate intervention.

What you observe	Likely AAE feature	Possible processing difficulty—investigate further
Reads "ask" as "aks"	Yes;—AAE consonant cluster movement (consistent, rule-governed)	If the student also cannot identify the initial sound as /ă/ or segment the word into its individual sounds, investigate phonological awareness.
Omits final consonants or clusters consistently	Yes;—consonant cluster reduction (consistent pattern)	If omissions are inconsistent across words with the same structure, consider phonological processing support.
Says "dis" for "this"	Yes;—th- replacement (consistent and rule-governed)	Not an additional support indicator on its own.

Cannot rhyme words consistently	No;—rhyming is intact in AAE (with AAE phonology)	Difficulty with rhyming in any dialect may indicate a need for additional phonological awareness support.—Consult your MTSS coordinator for next steps.
Reading errors are unpredictable—vary from day to day on the same words	No;—AAE features are consistent	Inconsistency across tasks is a pattern worth investigating.—Consult your MTSS coordinator for next steps.

MTSS Guidance: Data-Informed Next Steps

"Additional support" may include targeted classroom intervention, consultation with an MTSS team, or further diagnostic assessment. Identifying a processing difficulty is the first step in providing tiered support; it does not automatically necessitate a referral for special education evaluation. Always follow your school's established MTSS process to determine the appropriate evidence-based intervention.

6.6 Multilingual Students Who Also Use AAE

Some students are both emergent bilinguals (learning English as an additional language) and AAE speakers. For these students, the contrastive analysis framework applies in multiple directions: their home language (L1) transfers, and AAE features also appear in their English production.

Key Instructional Considerations

- **Distinguish L1 Transfers from AAE Features:** Do not assume that all non-standard features are L1 transfer errors. Some features—particularly final consonant omission and variable -s marking—may be AAE-influenced rather than L1-influenced. Precision in identification allows for more targeted and respectful coaching.
- **Acknowledge the Cognitive Demand:** A student who is managing three language systems simultaneously – their home language (L1), AAE, and formal academic English – is performing incredibly sophisticated cognitive work. Affirm these as legitimate linguistic resources.
- **Scaffold One Register at a Time:** Multilingual AAE speakers face the highest written register demand because they are often bridging two non-SAE systems simultaneously. To manage cognitive load, prioritize feedback in specific order:
    1. Content clarity (Is the idea there?)
    2. Argument structure (Is the reasoning sound?)
    3. Register Features (Target one specific convention at a time.)

Section 7: Newcomer Students

Newcomer students—those who have been in U.S. schools for fewer than two years and may have limited or interrupted formal schooling (SLIFE)—require differentiation that addresses language acquisition and content access simultaneously. Because their needs often exceed standard ML scaffolds, Newcomers require a distinct instructional layer of Integrated ELD.

Key Principle: Funds of Knowledge & Asset-Based Differentiation

Newcomers bring significant cultural resources, multilingual literacy, and "funds of knowledge" from their home communities. Differentiation should build upon these existing assets rather than treating students as "blank slates." During the initial BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) stage, the priority is ensuring that students can participate in the intellectual life of the classroom through non-verbal, native language, or scaffolded pathways –even while their oral English is still developing.

7.1 Visual and Nonlinguistic Scaffolds for Content Access

During the first weeks and months, Newcomers need scaffolds that allow full content participation before English production is required. These supports are not simplifications—they maintain the complexity of the grade-level content while providing an alternative access pathway.

Scaffold Type	What It Looks Like	Implementation Note
Visual vocabulary cards	Key lesson vocabulary displayed with image, definition in English, and definition in home language. Reusable across lessons within a unit.	Create a set for each unit. Students keep cards at their desk during reading and discussion.
Concept maps with images	Graphic organizers that use images and symbols alongside (or instead of) words to represent key ideas and relationships.	Adapt the lesson's existing graphic organizer—add image prompts or pre-fill key terms. Do not create a separate simpler task.
Photo / illustration access	Pre-teaching using visual representations of anchor text topics—before the lesson, not during.	A 3–5 minute visual preview at the start of the lesson substantially reduces cognitive load during reading.
Bilingual anchor charts	Core unit concepts (essential question, key themes, vocabulary)	Enlist bilingual staff or translation tools for the home-language

	displayed in both English and home language where possible.	portion. Display prominently and reference explicitly.
Gesture and movement coding	Assigning physical gestures to key concepts (e.g., crossing arms = conflict; fingers spread = expansion) for text-level annotation or class discussion.	Introduce in the first week,and maintain consistently. This allows full participation in discussion activities before oral production is available.
Illustrated Personal Dictionary	Students draw and label vocabulary entries rather than writing definitions only.	The standard *Threads & Themes* Personal Dictionary can be adapted with an illustration column for newcomers.

7.2 Home Language Affirmation and Bilingual Resource Integration

Research consistently shows that robust home language literacy predicts stronger English academic language development. Instruction that actively draws on students' home language is not remedial—it is the highest-leverage investment for Newcomers.

- **Accept home-language responses as valid evidence of comprehension.** If a Newcomer student answers a comprehension question in their home language, they have demonstrated comprehension. Accept the response, rephrase the content in English, and invite the student to repeat the English version.
- **Provide home-language access to anchor text concepts when available.** Multilingual Home Connections materials (provided in Program Resources) give families and students access to unit themes, essential questions, and vocabulary in home languages.
- **Encourage home-language annotation of anchor texts.** Students who can annotate in their home language are thinking analytically about the text—the annotation is cognitively rich even if the language is not yet English. This work counts as participation and evidence of learning.
- **Use bilingual peers strategically.** When a bilingual peer can clarify a concept in a Newcomer's home language, this is a powerful instructional move—not a shortcut. Peer clarification in home language followed by an English-language response builds both relationship and language simultaneously.
- **Coordinate with ELD teachers regarding home-language literacy levels.** BICS and CALP develop along different timelines, and home-language academic literacy significantly affects the CALP development trajectory.

7.3 Structured Interaction Protocols That Do Not Require English Production

Newcomers can participate fully in discussion activities even before they produce oral English. The following routines allow substantive intellectual participation at every stage of language acquisition.

Protocol	Newcomer Entry Point	Teacher Move
Reflect & Response Dialogue	Student points to an image, word, or sentence on their visual vocabulary card or graphic organizer. Their partner voices the connection using a sentence frame.	Validate the point response as a full turn. In the debrief: "My partner pointed to [image]—that shows they understood [concept]."
Fishbowl	Outer circle role only. Student uses a tracking sheet with checkboxes and image codes to record ideas they hear. They then share one idea in written or drawn form during the debrief.	During the debrief, hold and read aloud (or invite students to show) their tracking record. Treat it as full participation.
Graffiti / Table Talk	Contribute by drawing a response or writing a word in the Newcomer's home language. Have a partner (or their teacher) read their contribution aloud and invite a gesture-coded response.	Actively read and acknowledge every contribution. "I see you drew [image]—that connects to our word [vocabulary term]."
Partner annotation	Act as the "thinker" while a bilingual partner acts as the "writer." Have the student point to text locations and the partner write the shared annotation.	Assign partner pairs intentionally. Ensure Newcomers are contributing intellectually even if their language output is provided by a partner.

7.4 Technology Tools for Real-Time Language Support

The following tools support Newcomers during instruction. They are not substitutes for teacher instruction—they reduce the friction between language production demands and content engagement.

Tool	Primary Use	Implementation Guidance
Google Translate (app)	Real-time translation of unfamiliar words or sentences during reading; student-directed	Teach students to use for comprehension checking, not for translating their writing. Set the expectation: "Translate to understand; write in your own English."
Text-to-speech (Read Aloud)	Oral rendering of anchor text for students with limited English reading fluency	Available in most digital text platforms. Combine with visual vocabulary to maximize comprehension.
Bilingual digital dictionaries	Word-level vocabulary lookup with images and audio pronunciation in home language and English	Wordreference.com for Spanish/English; Google Dictionary for multiple languages. Bookmark for student access.
Formative.com practice sets	Spaced repetition vocabulary practice with images, available in multiple languages	Build unit vocabulary sets. Newcomers can begin with image-matching before definition work.

7.5 Distinguishing Language Acquisition Stages from Learning Disabilities

Over-referral of Multilingual Learners to special education is a persistent and documented problem. Before initiating any MTSS referral for a Newcomer, the following questions must be addressed:

- **Has the student had sufficient time to acquire English?** The academic language (CALP) dimension of English acquisition typically requires 5–7 years of quality instruction. A student in their first two years should not be compared to native-English-speaking peers for most academic tasks.
- **Is the error pattern consistent or inconsistent?** Consistent, predictable errors that align with home-language transfer or stages of second language acquisition are normal and expected. Inconsistent, unpredictable errors across tasks—especially in the student's home language—warrant further investigation.
- **Does the difficulty persist in the home language?** If a student struggles with the same skill (e.g., phonological awareness, working memory, reading fluency) in their home

language as well as in English, a learning disability referral may be appropriate. Difficulty only in English is more likely a reflection of the acquisition stage.

- **Has the student received high-quality, systematic ELD instruction?** The quality and consistency of prior ELD instruction is an important factor in understanding a student's current profile—but it does not determine whether a student can access MTSS resources. MTSS is a system of tiered support available to all students based on need, regardless of EL status or instructional history. If a student needs additional support, they should not be denied access to MTSS because their prior instruction was insufficient. Insufficient instruction is a factor considered during a special education evaluation—where IDEA requires that a learning disability not be primarily the result of lack of appropriate instruction—but it is not a barrier to MTSS. When in doubt, consult your MTSS coordinator.
- **Is the concern about language development or content knowledge?** A Newcomer who cannot yet produce academic English writing has a language acquisition profile, not necessarily a learning disability. A Newcomer who also shows extreme difficulty with nonlinguistic tasks – like visual processing or mathematical reasoning-- may have a different profile warranting investigation.

↗ **See also:** *Universal Access Handbook, Section 2.7 (Newcomer Support) for program-level pathway, 120-day plan framework, BICS/CALP distinction*

Section 8: Combination Classes

Threads & Themes provides a rigorous, sustainable model for combination classes. By utilizing a shared anchor text and essential question, the program enables cross-grade inquiry while maintaining grade-level standards alignment —through the calibrated cognitive demand of student tasks.

Developmental Readiness and Vertical Progression

The program was built with developmental readiness in mind. Anchor texts, essential questions, and performance tasks are precisely calibrated to meet students where they are emotionally and intellectually:

- **Grade 6 (Self & Story), Grade 7 (Belonging & Witness), and Grade 8 (Systems & Stewardship)** form a vertical progression that meets students where they are developmentally and stretches them into the next stage of inquiry.
- This design engages complex social topics through developmentally aligned framing, ensuring that content remains age-appropriate even in a shared-classroom setting.

The Grade-Band Strength

This developmental design is a strength for combination classes, not a barrier. The CA CCSS ELA standards are organized around grade bands and are explicitly engineered to progress students through cognitive-demand calibration.

- The program's themes operate as developmental lenses applied to texts.
- A strong, complex anchor text accommodates multiple standard levels simultaneously, enabling cross-grade inquiry that standards were built to support.

The Core Instructional Move

Choose one grade's anchor text and essential question as the shared inquiry frame for the unit. Both grades engage that inquiry through the same daily lessons,while the cognitive demand of tasks is calibrated using the CA CCSS strand structure. The program's Flex Day architecture handles non-transferable work—Designated ELD, performance task development, and grade-specific extension – ensuring a model that is grade-aligned, on-standard, and sustainable across a school year.

8.1 The Standards Architecture: How a Single Anchor Text Serves Two Grades

The CA CCSS ELA standards are built as vertical strands designed to escalate cognitive demand on the same fundamental skills, grade by grade. This architecture is the foundation of combination class instruction in *Threads & Themes*—the same complex text supports legitimately different work at adjacent grades because the standards themselves are built around that escalation.

The strand examples below cover all four ELA standards domains (Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Language) and illustrate the calibration logic. (Note: Teachers should consult the full CA CCSS ELA standards document for the complete strand progressions when planning unit-level tasks.)

Example: Reading Literature/Informational Text—Strand 1 (Evidence and Inference)

- **Grade 6:** Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- **Grade 7**: Cite *several pieces* of textual evidence to support analysis…
- **Grade 8:** Cite the textual evidence that *most strongly supports* an analysis...

The Calibration Logic in Action

In this strand, the core skill remains the same (citing evidence to support analysis), but the cognitive demand escalates based on the grade-level standard:

One piece of evidence → Several pieces → Evaluation of the "strongest" evidence among multiple options.

A combination class teacher uses these vertical strands to calibrate task demand. While the anchor text remains the same, the cognitive work shifts. For example:

- **Grade 7 Task:** Focus on analyzing theme development and citing several pieces of evidence.
- **Grade 8 Task:** Focus on theme-character-setting relationships and selecting the most persuasive supporting evidence.

The text doesn't change, but the depth of inquiry does. This is the structural logic the CA standards were designed to support.

8.2 The Anchor Decision: Choosing Which Curriculum Hosts Each Unit

In a combination class, one grade's curriculum serves as the "host" for each unit's inquiry. The host grade's anchor text and essential question become the shared inquiry frame for the whole

class, with both grades engaging that frame through grade-calibrated tasks. This model is fully supported by the *Threads & Themes* lesson architecture and the CA CCSS ELA standards.

Teachers should choose the hosting approach that best fits their school's context and scheduling needs. All three models are equally standards-legitimate.

Model	Rotation Style	Primary Benefit	Best For
Alternate by Unit	**Hybrid:** Unit 1 (G6), Unit 2 (G7); Unit 3 returns to Grade 6, and so on	Students engage with their own grade's vertical themes at multiple points in the year (every other unit).	**Schools prioritizing thematic identity.** For example, Grade 6 students get Self & Story texts in their host units; Grade 7 students get Belonging & Witness texts in theirs.
Two-Year Rotation	**Full Year:** Year A (G7), Year B (G6)	Simplifies week-to-week planning and works well when the school can build a predictable two-year cycle.	**Schools with a consistent combination class structure.** The rotation is planned at the school level so a student doesn't see the same curriculum twice or miss a year's worth entirely.
Theme-Aligned Pairing	**Thematic:** Paired by conceptual connection	Maximizes the connection between the program's vertical themes and the shared classroom inquiry**.**	**Teachers focusing on cross-grade conceptual alignment.** For example, where a Grade 7 unit's Belonging & Witness focus pairs naturally with a related Grade 6 self and story text; teachers may host on one grade's text but pull the other grade's essential question into Flex Day work.

Maintaining Grade-Level Integrity

Regardless of the hosting model, the thematic spine is shared while the cognitive demand remains grade-specific. The “Off-Grade maintains standards-integrity through two key levers:

- **Calibrated Daily Tasks:** Differentiated assignments during "Learning in Action" that meet specific grade-level benchmarks using the same anchor text.
- **Grade-Specific Flex Day Huddles:** Dedicated time every 5–7 lessons for targeted standards instruction, performance task prep, and Designated ELD tailored to that grade’s unique progression.

8.3 Calibrating the Lesson: Cognitive Demand and Content Supports

When a single anchor text supports two grades, the core instructional goal is to provide equitable access to complex texts while maintaining grade-specific cognitive demand. Teachers achieve this by designing parallel tasks that allow students to meet their specific grade-level benchmarks through the same shared reading experience.

The following table shows how to calibrate each component of the program’s 50-minute lesson architecture. This approach preserves the lesson rhythm—Launch, Literacy Lab, Learning in Action, and Look Back—while focusing differentiation at the task and support level.

Lesson Component	Calibration Approach
Launch / Hook	**Shared.** The host unit’s essential question is the inquiry frame for the whole class.
Literacy Lab—vocabulary	**Shared core; differentiated task.** Both grades receive the same Tier 2/Tier 3 vocabulary instruction. Grade 6 students complete definition and example work; Grade 7 students complete morphological analysis (Greek/Latin roots and affixes); Grade 8 students complete reference-verified meaning analysis and cross-text usage.
Literacy Lab—sentence work	**Shared frame; differentiated complexity.** Grade 6 sentence combining with simple connectors; Grade 7/8 sentence expansion with embedded clauses, subordinating conjunctions, and academic connectors.
Anchor text reading	**Shared close reading.** The text is the same for both grades. Adjust *supports*, not the text: pre-teach additional vocabulary for the off-grade if the text contains words that grade hasn’t yet encountered; provide a graphic organizer or

	pre-reading discussion to surface prior knowledge that the host grade may have built and the off-grade may not have.
Annotation tasks	**Grade-calibrated.** Grade 6 annotates for evidence supporting the central idea; Grade 7 for evidence supporting how the central idea develops; Grade 8 for the strongest evidence and the relationships among textual elements.
Discussion routines	**Cross-grade groupings; standards-calibrated roles.** Grade 6 cites evidence; Grade 7 elaborates and responds with new questions; Grade 8 synthesizes across speakers and modifies their own views when warranted.
Writing tasks	**Grade-specific.** Grade 6 writes claim + evidence; Grade 7 adds counterclaim acknowledgment; Grade 8 distinguishes claim from opposing claims. Use grade-specific frames and rubrics. Informative writing follows the same calibration: organizing strategies in Grade 6 → strategies plus formatting and graphics in Grade 7 → strategies plus formatting and graphics deployed *to aid comprehension* in Grade 8.
Look Back	**Grade-specific exit prompts** aligned to each grade's lesson objective.

Teacher Tip: Designing for Parallel Success

In a combination class, use the host grade's teacher edition to set the inquiry frame and the off-grade's teacher edition as a reference for calibrating parallel tasks. This ensures that even when students are working on grade-specific benchmarks, they are contributing to a single, cohesive classroom conversation centered on the same essential question.

Adapting Content Supports

Beyond task calibration, teachers ensure equitable access to the host text through these specific content adaptations:

- **Vocabulary Depth:** Pre-teach high-leverage terms from the host text that may be outside the off-grade's current curricular progression.
- **Knowledge Primers:** When a host unit assumes prior knowledge for an earlier grade-level unit, provide a brief background primer (5–7 minutes during) during the Launch or Literacy Lab to provide thematic continuity.
- **Reading Volume Adjustments:** Maintain text complexity while varying the reading volume. For example, the host grade might read a full passage independently, while the off-grade focuses on a critical excerpt or engages in a partner-reading routine.

- **Multimodal Entry Points:** Use audio versions of the text, visual previews, and interactive pre-reading routines to provide multiple pathways into the complex host text (UDL Engagement & Representation).

8.4 Daily Management Strategies for Differentiated Instruction

Effective classroom management in a combination class requires explicit routines that handle two grades simultaneously. The following strategies integrate with the *Threads & Themes* lesson architecture to ensure both grades receive targeted, high-quality instruction.

The Circulation Routine

During the 30-minute Learning in Action block, use a structured circulation pattern to ensure equitable support. A practical pattern might include:

- **Minutes 1–3:** Rapid scan of both grades for immediate engagement.
- **Minutes 4–10:** Targeted support for the grade tackling the more complex task of the day.
- **Minutes 11–20:** Check in with the alternate grade to assess progress.
- **Minutes 21–30:** Conferences with individual students or small-group pulls based on observed need.

> **Teacher Tip: Standards-Aligned Observation**
>
> Keep a clipboard or digital tracker with grade-specific "Look-Fors." This ensures real-time observations and feedback remain strictly aligned to each grade's standards rather than a general sense of "completion."

Grade-Calibrated "If/Then" Prompts

Threads & Themes includes If/Then prompts for a single grade's standards. In a combination class, prepare two versions of high-leverage prompts before the lesson to ensure real-time coaching is accurate. For example:

- **Grade 6 Prompt:** "Show me where in the text this came from."
- **Grade 7 Prompt:** "Show me which two pieces of textual evidence support that interpretation."
- **Grade 8 Prompt:** "Of all the evidence in the text, which most strongly supports your interpretation, and why?"

Pacing and Extensions

Grade-calibrated tasks are designed to take different amounts of time. If one grade finishes early, do not rush the other. Instead, have grade-specific extension tasks ready:

- Advanced annotation or independent reading
- Cross-text vocabulary analysis
- Peer feedback cycles on current writing projects

Preserving Data Clarity

Teachers should track all formative data – Pulse Checks, Reflections, and Checks for Understanding – separately by grade. Mixing the results obscures grade-specific mastery patterns and undermines the ability to plan responsive Flex Day Huddles.

Orchestrating Cross-Grade Discussion

To keep shared discussions (Reflect & Response, Fishbowl, Socratic Seminar) standards-aligned, pre-assign discussion roles based on the CA CCSS Speaking and Listening strands:

- **Grade 6:** Focus on citing evidence to support a claim.
- **Grade 7:** Focus on elaborating and responding to new questions.
- **Grade 8:** Focus on synthesizing multiple views and revising perspectives. This strategy allows students to interact naturally while practicing the specific cognitive moves required by their own grade's standards.

Logistics and Planning

- **Grade-Coded Materials:** Color code or fold graphic organizers and rubrics by grade. Establish a routine where students collect their specific materials at the start of each lesson to avoid mid-lesson distribution delays.
- **Substitute Readiness:**Build a brief grade-by-grade lesson summary into daily plans. The shared anchor text simplifies the substitute's job—they read the text with the whole class, then assign grade-coded tasks you've pre-prepared.

8.5 Designated ELD in a Combination Class

D-ELD instruction is grade-specific by design—the 180-day progression builds language acquisition along developmentally calibrated steps, and that grade-by-grade progression is essential for Multilingual Learners. The program supports several D-ELD configurations in a combination class that protect the integrity of each grade's progression while fitting a sustainable schedule.

Staggered D-ELD Blocks

Grade 6 students receive D-ELD on Monday and Wednesday; Grade 7 students on Tuesday and Thursday. Each grade's progression continues at its own pace. The teacher uses the off-day to provide enrichment, independent reading, or self-directed language practice for the other grade.

Small-Group D-ELD within a Shared Block

During designated D-ELD time, the teacher pulls one grade for direct instruction while the other grade engages in self-directed language practice—Sentence Combining or Sentence Expansion exercises, Personal Dictionary work, or language analysis tasks tied to the shared anchor text. The teacher rotates which grade is in direct instruction across the week.

Shared Anchor, Calibrated Objectives

When the host anchor text contains language structures present in both grades' D-ELD progressions, the teacher can provide instruction to the whole class in a single block. While the text and structure are shared, the teacher maintains grade-level integrity through:

- **Grade-Specific Objectives:** Targeting the unique proficiency level of each grade.
- **Differentiated Frames:** Providing scaffolds tailored to each grade's linguistic demand.
- **Targeted Look-Fors:** Assessing mastery based on the specific standards of each grade's progression.

> **Teacher Tip: Protecting the D-ELD Progression**
>
> The shared anchor model is ideal for overlapping language structures. However, when a lesson targets a structure that is "off-progression" for one grade, pivot to a staggered or small-group configuration. Always plan D-ELD configurations in coordination with the school's ELD lead to ensure that grade-specific progressions are protected.

8.6 Performance Tasks Across Grades

Performance tasks are the culminating evidence of unit inquiry and grade-level standards mastery. In a combination class, students remain anchored to the same shared text and essential question, but their final deliverable is calibrated to their specific grade-level standards.

One Inquiry, Two Pathways

This model preserves unit coherence while ensuring every student is evaluated against their intended grade-level benchmarks:

- **Host Grade:** Completes the unit's standard culminating task.

- **Off-Grade:** Completes a thematically-aligned task using the host unit's anchor text, but evaluated through their own grade's standards and rubrics.

Calibration Example: The Argument Essay

In a unit hosted by Grade 7, both grades write an argument essay responding to the shared essential question:

- **Grade 6 Pathway:** Students focus on Claim + Evidence (meeting Grade 6 standards; no counterclaim required).
- **Grade 7 Pathway:** Students must include Claim + Evidence + Counterclaim Acknowledgement (meeting G7 standards).

This dual-pathway approach ensures unit coherence by keeping all students centered on the same inquiry while protecting the integrity of grade-level mastery. It is the most sustainable model for combination classes, allowing for shared brainstorming and peer discussion without compromising specific standards requirements.

8.7 Flex Days as the Grade-Specific Instructional Lever

Flex Days provide the structural space needed to protect the integrity of grade-level standards in a combination class. While daily lessons prioritize shared inquiry, the Flex Day allows the teacher to pivot focus entirely to the unique requirements of each grade.

Targeted Grade-Level Huddles

The Flex Day Huddle is the primary vehicle for this precision work. In a combination setting, these small-group sessions are used to:

- **Calibrate Writing & Language:** Address grade-specific grammar or structural standards that weren't the focus of the shared lesson.
- **Synchronize Language Progressions:** Deliver targeted D-ELD instruction for linguistic structures that are "off-progression" for one of the grades.
- **Finalize Performance Tasks:** Provide coaching on grade-specific culminating pathways (e.g., helping Grade 7s with counterclaims while Grade 6s focus on evidence).
- **Execute Responsive Teaching:** Use data from daily Learning in Action blocks to pull small groups for immediate, standards-based differentiation or intervention.

Teacher Tip: The Rotational Huddle

To maximize Flex Days, split the block: spend the first half in a huddle for Grade 6 while Grade 7 students engage in independent reading or extension tasks, then swap. This ensures every

student receives dedicated, grade-specific “facetime” with the teacher multiple times across a unit.

8.8 Flexible Grouping

Combination classes have access to unique grouping configurations that single-grade classrooms do not. Use these assets to drive a specific instructional purpose:

- **Cross-grade discussion pairs:** A Grade 7 student paired with a Grade 6 student during Reflect & Response or Socratic Seminar must articulate their thinking clearly for a younger peer; the Grade 6 student is exposed to more sophisticated reasoning.
- **Same-grade skill groups** Used to meet specific instructional needs—such as explicit teaching of a writing structure, modeling a literary analysis move, or working through a grade-specific language objective. These groupings belong in Flex Day Huddles or brief targeted pulls during Learning in Action.
- **Cross-grade interest groups:** Ideal for inquiry routines where students are grouped by their connection to the essential question rather than by grade level.—Socratic Seminars, Four Corners Debate, and the inquiry-based project work all benefit from cross-grade composition where students span experience levels.
- **Same-grade writing conferences:** Essential for providing writing feedback calibrated to specific grade-level standards. Teachers should establish a rotation that ensures both grades receive comparable conferring time across each unit cycle.

Section 9: Discussion & Presentation Differentiation

Academic discussion and oral presentation involves simultaneous language and content demands. Differentiation must address required language structures (argument, evidence, elaboration), interactional demands (turn-taking, building on others, disagreement), and affective dimensions (confidence, identity, risk-taking).

Threads & Themes progressively releases students into more complex structures using a layered set of routines:

- **High-Frequency Routines (Daily):** Turn and Talk, Think-Pair-Share, Think-Pair-Write-Share)
- **Structured Discussion Routines (Text-Based):** Reflect and Response Dialogue, Fishbowl Conversation, Socratic Seminar, Debate Protocol, Four Corners Debate, Graffiti / Table Talk
- **Presentation Routines:** Rehearse and Refine, Group Accountability Share

Differentiation in this section focuses on how to maintain access and rigor at every stage of this progression.

9.1 Entry-Point Differentiation by Protocol

Each discussion routine in *Threads & Themes* has a different language demand and interactional structure. Consistent classroom routines—like Turn and Talk, Think-Pair-Share, and Think-Pair-Write-Share—serve as foundational scaffolds that build toward more complex discussion structures.

High-Frequency Foundational Scaffolds

These low-stakes daily routines should be established in the first weeks of school so they become automatic, freeing cognitive resources for the content itself. These include:

- **Turn and Talk:** Provides the lowest-stakes entry; 1–3 minutes, partner only, focused on a specific question
- **Think-Pair-Share:** Adds individual think time before starting a partner discussion.
- **Think-Pair-Write-Share:** Adds a writing step that crystallizes thinking before public sharing.

Structured Protocol Entry Points

The table below identifies the core demand of each structured discussion routine and provides differentiated entry points across three readiness levels. Note that “readiness” here refers to a student’s preparedness for the specific language demands of the routine, rather than their overall academic level.

Protocol	High Support Entry Point	Moderate Support Entry Point	Independent Entry Point
Reflect & Response Dialogue	Pre-written response using a content-specific sentence frame; partner rehearsal before speaking; written response accepted as full participation	Partial frame with student-selected vocabulary from the text; one unrehearsed follow-up response attempted	Open prompt; expected to elaborate, build on partner's ideas, and offer a counter-perspective without a frame
Fishbowl Conversations	Outer circle only; use a tracking record (checkboxes or drawn responses); share one tracked idea during debrief using a frame	Inner circle participation with preparation time (notes written in advance); at least one contribution during the fishbowl	Inner and outer circle; expected to initiate new points rather than only respond; facilitate or synthesize during debrief
Graffiti / Table Talk	Contribute one word, image, or drawn idea; partner or teacher reads contribution aloud and invites a verbal response	Write a phrase or sentence; connect to one peer's idea using a connector ("This makes me think of ___ because ___")	Write multiple ideas and facilitate the group's synthesis of the table content into 2–3 shared conclusions
Socratic Seminar	2–3 annotated sentences prepared before seminar with language stems provided; may pass or echo a peer's comment using a frame	2 prepared discussion entries written before seminar; participate using an academic discourse moves list	Full participation; expected to use metalinguistic language ("What the author is doing here is ___"); may facilitate or synthesize

Debate Protocol	Assigned role on one side with pre-written argument stems; partner rehearsal before speaking; sentence frame for rebuttal	Independent position argument with minimal frame support; one unrehearsed rebuttal using a provided connector	Full participation; spontaneous language, precision, and hedging language ("While it is true that ___, the evidence suggests ___")
Four Corners	Teacher reads the student's assigned position aloud; student moves to the designated corner and uses a sentence frame to explain their placement: "I chose this corner because ___"	Student selects a corner independently and prepares a brief justification using text evidence; shares with a partner in their corner before whole-group debrief	Student selects a corner, articulates a nuanced position explaining why they chose that corner over adjacent options, and initiates cross-corner dialogue during debrief

Teacher Tip: Designing for Independence and Agency

Entry-point differentiation is not permanent. Regularly track student performance to identify those who no longer require support for a given routine. When a student consistently participates at the independent level, remove the scaffold for that routine to allow differentiation to fade and to ultimately promote student autonomy.

9.2 Oral Presentation Scaffolds at Three Levels of Independence

Oral presentation demands—such as stand-alone share-outs, fishbowl contributions, seminar facilitation, and debate arguments—require a distinct scaffold structure that differs from casual discussion. The program's Rehearse and Refine routine provides the core engine for this development: students practice with a partner or small group, receive structured feedback using sentence frames, incorporate that feedback, and present again.

The following framework applies to any moment in the program where a student presents orally to a group or the whole class.

Level	Scaffold Provided	Appropriate For
Level 1: Structured	Complete sentence frame with content blanks pre-filled by student in writing before presenting.	Students early in English acquisition;

	Student **reads** or closely follows the frame during oral presentation. Rehearsal with a partner is required before whole-group sharing.	students with significant oral anxiety; students new to the specific routine
Level 2: Guided	Keyword notes (3–5 words or phrases) instead of full sentences. Student **speaks** from their notes rather than reading a script. One practice run with a partner or small group is required before presenting to the whole class.	Students who can produce oral sentences but need organizational support; most students at the moderate support level
Level 3: Independent	No written notes during the presentation. Student has prepared their thinking in writing but presents without written support. Expected to **adjust language in real time** based on audience response or follow-up questions.	Students ready for full oral independence in this routine; advanced learners; students who have consistently demonstrated Level 2 fluency

9.3 Students with High Oral Language but Low Written Production

Certain students—including many ML students at Expanding or Bridging levels and those with strong AAE fluency —can participate at a sophisticated level in oral discussion but struggle to transfer that sophistication to written form. These students are frequently underestimated when written assessments are the primary measure of mastery. To avoid this, teachers should utilize specific instructional strategies that bridge the gap between oral proficiency and written performance.

- **Recognize oral discussion contributions as evidence of learning:** Explicitly respond to nuanced analysis in discussion:"You just did in conversation exactly what this writing prompt is asking for—let's get that on paper."
- **Use oral-to-written bridges:** Leverage the Structured Oral Rehearsal routine to rehearse responses aloud using academic language scaffolds before writing. Use Think-Pair-Write-Share to “lock in” what the conversation produced through an explicit writing step. Sentence Combining and Sentence Expansion routines from the Literacy Lab can also build the syntactic complexity students demonstrate orally but struggle to produce in writing.

- **Record and transcribe oral drafts:** With student permission, brief audio recordings of oral contributions as a drafting resource: "Listen to what you said during seminar—now write that paragraph."
- **Separate genre and register instruction from content assessment:** If the goal of an assessment is to evaluate a student's understanding of the text, a verbally dictated response can be a valid form of assessment. Reserve written production as the assessed skill specifically when writing is the target standard.
- **Set specific transfer goals:** Identify one structural feature from the student's oral language to practice in writing each week: "When you use 'because' in discussion, we're going to practice using it the same way in your Look Back writing."

9.4 Students with High Written Production but Reticent Oral Participation

Some students—often including students with high academic writing fluency, social anxiety, multilingual students not yet confident in oral English, or those with processing differences—produce sophisticated written work but do not participate visibly in oral discussion. These students are often underserved by standard differentiation approaches. To support these students, teachers should implement strategies that reduce the social risk of speaking and provide alternative channels for participation.

- **Distinguish reticence from disengagement:** Recognize that a silent student is not necessarily disengaged;—they may be processing information deeply. Observe whether their written Look Back and formative writing reflects engagement with the discussion content. If it does, the student is participating intellectually without producing oral output.
- **Create low-stakes oral entry points:** Utilize pair shares before whole-group discussion to reduce the social risk of speaking. A student who has already rehearsed their idea with a single peer is significantly more likely to share with the whole class.
- **Assign structural roles:** Encourage hesitant students to participate by providing assigned, bounded roles (e.g., recorder, timekeeper, synthesizer). Having a defined role removes the need for a student to choose the moment to speak spontaneously.
- **Use written discussion formats:** Provide an alternate channel for intellectual work through asynchronous or live written discussions, such as sharing responses on a shared document or paper during discussion time. This is particularly helpful for students with significant oral language anxiety.
- **Never publicly call out non-participation:** Avoid cold-calling a reticent student in front of the class, as this typically increases anxiety and decreases future participation. Instead,

pre-arrange contributions privately: "I'd like you to share your pair-share idea when we come back to the whole group—what would you like to say?"

9.5 Feedback Frameworks for Academic Discussion

Effective feedback on academic discussion must address three dimensions simultaneously: the language used, the content and reasoning offered, and the quality of participation within the shared conversation. Feedback that focuses on only one dimension fails to capture the full scope of a student's communicative competence.

Dimension	What to Look For	Feedback Stems
Language	Academic register, sentence complexity, and precision of vocabulary. Observe the use of connectors, discourse moves;, and the ability to produce increasingly complex sentences as the discussion progresses	"I noticed you used [vocabulary word]—that's a strong academic choice." / "Can you try adding a 'because' clause to that?" / "How would you say that in a complete sentence?"
Content and Reasoning	Accuracy of text references, quality of inference, and presence of evidence. Evaluate whether a student's contribution advances the collective understanding of the group.	"What text evidence supports that?" / "That's a strong claim—where in the text does the author give you that idea?" / "Can you say more?" / "What in the text led you to that idea?"
Participation Quality	Whether the student built on a peer's idea, asked a question, or acknowledged disagreement respectfully.Observe if their participation elevated the overall discussion.	"I noticed you built on [peer's] point—that's what strong academic discussion does." / "How does your idea connect to what [peer] just said?" / "What would someone who disagrees with you say?"

Teacher Tip: Building Metacognitive Awareness Drives Agency

To ensure students take ownership of their growth, implement a brief, weekly participation reflection during the Look Back routine. This practice builds real-time awareness of discussion quality by asking students to identify:

- "What is one way you participated today that you're proud of?"
- "What is one thing you want to do differently next time?"

↗ **See also:** *Section 4.2 of this Playbook (Academic Discussion Protocol Differentiation by ELD level) for ML-specific entry points to each discussion routine.*

↗ **See also:** *Universal Access Handbook, Section 2.6 (ML-Specific Lesson Routines) for D-ELD discussion routine guidance and sentence frame scaffolding principles*

Section 10: Adapting Your Schedule

Threads & Themes is designed around a 50-minute daily lesson, with each 45-day unit building toward a culminating performance task. While the program baseline assumes this structure, its four-phase architecture—Launch, Literacy Lab, Learning in Action, Look Back—is designed to adapt cleanly to common alternative schedules.

Core Scheduling Principles

Regardless of your specific school calendar, four principles must remain intact:

- **45-day unit target:** While session frequency may change, the four-unit annual arc remains the goal.
- **Four-phase lesson architecture:** Every session moves through all four phases: Launch → Literacy Lab → Learning in Action → Look Back. The phases should be expanded or compressed proportionally, but never skipped.
- **Culminating performance tasks :** Plan for these end-of-unit tasks in the final two to three sessions of each unit, sized to your available session time.
- **Flex Day integration:** Differentiated small-group work (Flex Days) should still occur every 5-7 sessions. On schedules with longer sessions, Flex Day Huddles can run concurrently rather than sequentially.

Schedule Mappings at a Glance

The table below summarizes how the program maps to the most common middle school schedules. Annual instructional minutes are estimated for a 36-week instructional year.

Schedule	Session Length	Annual Minutes	Lesson Mapping	Pacing per Unit
Daily (design baseline)	50 min	~9,000	1 program lesson per session	45 sessions
Daily, shorter	45 min	~8,100	1 program lesson per session (tightened)	45 sessions
Daily, longer	60–75 min	~10,000–13,500	1 program lesson per session, with built-in differentiation and extension	45 sessions, with differentiation and extension time
A/B block	80–90 min, every other day	~7,200–8,100	2 program lessons combined per session	~22 block sessions
Daily literacy block	80–100 min	~14,400–18,000	1.5–2 program lessons per session	25–30 sessions

10.1 A/B Block: 80–90 Minutes, Every Other Day

In an A/B block schedule, two consecutive program lessons combine into one block session. Teachers can choose between two approaches:

- **The two-cycle approach:** Run two complete lesson cycles back-to-back. This works best when consecutive lessons cover distinct content, such as a Reading lesson followed by a Writing lesson. Students experience two complete reflection-and-self-assessment moments, which preserves the program's formative data structure.
- **The merged-cycle approach:** Merge two lessons into an extended cycle (one Launch and one Look Back bracketing an expanded middle). This is ideal when consecutive lessons build directly on the same anchor text or skill, such as two consecutive close-reading lessons on the same passage. Open with a single Launch, run an expanded Literacy Lab and Learning in Action that covers both lessons' tasks, and close with a single Look Back addressing both objectives.

> **Teacher Tip: Master Planning for the A/B Cycle**
>
> To maintain pacing, plan at the block-session level rather than the daily-lesson level, mapping the 45 program lessons to roughly 22 block sessions. Because the two-day gap between sessions can disrupt cognitive flow, use the "reactivation routines" detailed in Section 10.5 to re-engage students with the text before beginning a new block.

Managing Reading Transitions within the Block

When the second lesson in a block requires students to have completed a new reading, teachers should choose an option based on the text's complexity:

- **Pre-assigned reading:** If the reading is independent of the first lesson's framing, assign it as homework before the block so lessons run in sequence without disruption.
- **In-block transition:** For readings that depend on the first lesson's framing, build in 10–15 minutes of supported in-class reading time. Use extra scaffolding like vocabulary previews, partner readings, or prior-knowledge activation to compensate for reduced processing time. And compress the first lesson's Look Back and the second lesson's Launch into a merged 5-minute pivot to recover some of the time.
- **Split-block mapping:** If a reading is too long for a single block, —run the first lesson in one block, assign the reading during the two-day gap, and run the second lesson in the next block.

10.2 Daily Periods Shorter Than 50 Minutes

For 45-minute periods, the program's lesson architecture maps one-to-one, but each phase must compress slightly. In doing so, it is recommended to consider the following:

- **Priority Phases (Skill-Building and Inquiry):** The Literacy Lab and Learning in Action phases should be protected.
- **Adaptable Phases (Opening and Closing):** The Launch and Look Back phases are the most flexible—both can tighten by one to two minutes without losing material instructional value when teachers maintain a consistent routine that students recognize.

Pacing Implications

A 45-minute schedule typically requires 49-50 sessions to complete a standard 45-day unit at the same depth. This delivers roughly 90% of the design baseline's instructional minutes. Build this buffer into your unit calendar at the start of the year by treating the design baseline's 45-day unit as a 49–50-session unit on a 45-minute schedule.

10.3 Daily Periods Longer Than 50 Minutes

In schedules with daily periods of 55 to 75 minutes, the program's lesson architecture maps one-to-one, with extension time built into each session. The extra time should not be used to compress the unit calendar—the 45-day unit pacing is calibrated to support depth, not speed. Instead, use the extra time to deepen the existing lesson phases:

- **In a 60-minute period:** The additional 10 minutes typically extend Learning in Action—supporting longer discussions, more student writing, or more thorough peer feedback.
- **In a 75-minute period:** The additional 25 minutes can extend Learning in Action significantly, support concurrent standards-based Huddles within a regular lesson, or begin the next session's reading as a preview.
- **Flexible Closures:** The Look Back phase can also expand to include richer self-assessment and peer reflection when time allows.

Longer daily periods provide the most flexible schedule for combination classes (see Section 8) and for incorporating extended independent reading into the daily lesson. Teachers on these schedules should plan with the design baseline as the floor, not the ceiling.

10.4 Daily Literacy Block: 80–100 Minutes Daily

A daily literacy block provides significantly more instructional time compared to the design baseline, creating space for high-leverage instructional uses. The recommended approach is to run one program lesson with an extension, using the additional 30–50 minutes for two specific equity advantages:

- **Supported In-Class Reading:** Students complete the next sessions' reading during class in a teacher-supported environment with access to peers and scaffolds. This ensures all students arrive prepared for discussion-dependent lessons, regardless of their ability to complete work at home.

- **Daily "Mini-Flex" Sessions:** Instead of concentrating differentiation into a single Flex Day every 5-7 lessons, teachers can embed 10-15 minutes of continuous small-group instruction into every block. This allows for ongoing rotations based on formative data to support performance task preparation, targeted reaching, and extension. **One block per session, with extension (recommended).** Run one program lesson within the standard 50-minute architecture and use the remaining 30–50 minutes for two purposes that the program's design baseline can rarely deliver in one session.

Example: A Typical 90-Minute Literacy Block

This approach might look like:

- **50 minutes:** Standard program lesson (four-phase architecture)
- **20 minutes:** Supported in-class reading for the next session.
- **15 minutes:** Small-group differentiated work ("Mini-Flex") or independent inquiry.
- **5 minutes:** Close-out routine.

While unit pacing remains at the 45-day design baseline, this configuration provides substantially more support than the baseline alone.

10.5 Homework Reading and Reading-Dependent Discussion

Many lessons assign at-home reading to prepare for the next session's discussion. Non-standard schedules can disrupt this cognitive flow—most acutely on A/B block schedules, where the gap between sessions is two days rather than one. Since at-home reading time is not equally available to all students, and routines like Socratic Seminars and Fishbowl require every participant to have engaged with the text, several approaches address this need:

- **Approach 1: At-home reading with reactivation routines.** This works best for daily schedules. For A/B blocks, structure the reading as a single combined assignment with an annotation tracker to distribute the work. Open every block with a brief reactivation routine before the first Launch—(e.g., a Retell and Paraphrase Partner Check, a 3-2-1 written reflection, or a first-impression prompt)—to re-engage students before the first Launch.
- **Approach 2: Reading moved into class time.** When at-home reading is not viable—for equity or complexity reasons, —reading can move into class. This is seamless in daily literacy blocks (80–100 minutes)or longer daily periods (60–75 minutes). In an A/B block, in-class reading at the end of one block can set up the discussion in the next block.—In shorter daily periods (45 minutes), in-class reading is hardest; reserve this approach for the most critical texts to avoid over-compressing other phases.

Choosing Among the Approaches

Most teachers will use a mix of strategies across a unit. At-home reading with reactivation routines work for the majority of lessons, while in-class reading is typically reserved for high-stakes, complex, or equity-sensitive texts.

Teacher Tip: Ensure Every Student is Prepared

When homework reading is essential, always provide alternative completion paths for students with constrained at-home time. To prevent participation gaps, offer options such as:

- Digital versions of the text for easier access
- Partner check-ins during homeroom or advisory periods
- A structured five-minute in-class catch-up routine with chapter summaries before starting the lesson

10.6 Other Configurations

For any non-standard schedule, plan at the unit level first: identify how many sessions the school year provides for ELA, divide by four to find sessions-per-unit, then map the program's 45 daily lessons to that session count.

- **If the session count is lower than 45 per unit:** Plan to combine consecutive lessons while maintaining the four-phase architecture.
- **If the session count is higher than 45 per unit:** Plan to extend lessons to support deeper inquiry or build in additional Flex Day-style differentiated work.

Regardless of session length, always protect the four-phase lesson architecture (Launch → Literacy Lab → Learning in Action → Look Back) within every session (regardless of length) and the end-of-unit performance task.

Schools with unique scheduling configurations should coordinate with the district ELA coordinator or curriculum lead to validate that the adapted pacing protects the program's developmental arc and the standards coverage embedded in each unit.

Closing: The Power of Responsive Instruction and Differentiation

The architecture of *Threads & Themes* is grounded in the conviction that all students—including Multilingual Learners, students with disabilities, and students developing grade-level mastery—can achieve communicative competence when provided with a built-in architecture of access. By moving away from treating differentiation as an "add-on" and instead embedding it into the daily rhythm of the program – the **Launch**, **Literacy Lab**, **Learning in Action**, and **Look Back** phases – teachers are able to create a classroom environment that is both rigorous and deeply supportive.

Building Agency Through Gradual Release

In alignment with the CA ELA/ELD Framework, this playbook emphasizes the gradual release of scaffolds. Whether using tiered oral presentation supports or academic talk stems, the goal is to fade assistance as students internalize linguistic structures. This intentional "fading" is what builds genuine student voice and agency:

- **Responsive Support:** By using real-time Formative Look-Fors and If/Then contingent supports, teachers can adjust instruction in the moment to meet the diverse needs of the "Expanding" or "Bridging" learner.
- **Intellectual Honesty:** Routines like student reflection normalize the process of self-assessment, encouraging students to take ownership of their own learning trajectories and metacognitive growth.

Ultimately, the practical routines and responsive decision tools outlined in this Differentiation Playbook ensure that every student's linguistic identity is honored as a profound asset. By providing multiple entry points to complex, grade-level inquiry, student voice—not just compliance—drives the instructional impact and equity of the classroom.

***Threads & Themes* was designed to support teachers in reaching each and every student, every day.**