



Media Literacy Toolkit

California Model School Library Standards Alignment

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Introduction: What Is Media Literacy in *Threads & Themes*?

Purpose, Philosophy, and How It Connects to California Standards

Media literacy in Newsela *Threads & Themes* is not a standalone topic, subject, or add-on; it is woven into the fabric of how students read, research, and communicate throughout every unit. Students develop the capacity to find, evaluate, and responsibly use information from a wide range of sources, including written texts, images, digital media, and online databases, within the authentic context of the unit's inquiry.

This **Media Literacy Toolkit** provides teachers with a foundational framework for understanding where media literacy fits in the curriculum, what the California expectations are for Grades 6–8, and how *Threads & Themes'* Research & Media Literacy Progression systematically builds those skills over three years.

Two Foundational Documents Working Together

Media literacy instruction in *Threads & Themes* is grounded in two key California frameworks:

- The **California Model School Library Standards for Students (CA MSLS)**, adopted by the California State Board of Education in 2010, define what students should know and be able to do in four domains: Access, Evaluate, Use, and Integrate.
- The **California ELA/ELD Framework** and **CA CCSS for ELA**, which embed information literacy into the research and writing standards (W.6–8.7, W.6–8.8, W.6–8.9, RI.6–8.6, RI.6–8.7, RI.6–8.9).

The Four Strands of the CA Model School Library Standards

The **California Model School Library Standards** organize information literacy into four overarching standards that apply to all grade levels, with increasing sophistication from K through 12. These standards anchor all media literacy instruction in *Threads & Themes*, Grades 6–8.

Standard	Domain	What Students Do
Standard 1	ACCESS	Access information by applying knowledge of libraries, print materials, digital media, and other sources. Students recognize the need for information, formulate appropriate questions, identify and locate varied resources using effective search strategies, and retrieve information responsibly.
Standard 2	EVALUATE	Evaluate and analyze information to determine what is appropriate to address the scope of inquiry. Students determine relevance, assess comprehensiveness and credibility, and consider whether additional information is needed.
Standard 3	USE	Organize, synthesize, create, and communicate information. Students demonstrate ethical, legal, and safe use of information; draw conclusions and make informed decisions; and use technology creatively to answer questions and solve problems.
Standard 4	INTEGRATE	Independently pursue information to become lifelong learners. Students read widely across media, seek and share information responsibly, and appreciate creative expressions of information.

01—Grades 6-8 California Standards in Focus

Key CA MSLS Expectations for Middle School Media Literacy

The CA Model School Library Standards specify increasingly sophisticated expectations for Grades 6 and Grades 7–8. The table below identifies the priority standards that *Threads & Themes* directly addresses through its Research & Media Literacy Progression, with particular emphasis on source evaluation, digital citizenship, and information synthesis skills most relevant to this age group.

Grade 6 Priority Standards

Standard	Sub-skill	Grade 6 Expectation
1—ACCESS	1.1 / 1.2—Recognize & Question	<p>1.1a: Recognize that accurate and comprehensive information is the basis of informed decision-making.</p> <p>1.1b: Demonstrate and use pre-search strategies (e.g., brainstorming, prior knowledge).</p> <p>1.2a: Identify related keywords, terms, and synonyms for research topics.</p>
	1.3—Search Strategies	<p>1.3a: Identify and locate multiple sources of information that provide a broad view of research topics (e.g., books, reference materials, online sources, periodicals).</p> <p>1.3j: Use Boolean search techniques and other limiters or expanders to locate appropriate resources.</p> <p>1.3k: Identify the authority of an author or sponsoring organization in print and online materials.</p>
	1.4—Retrieve Responsibly	<p>1.4a: Understand and practice the basics of safe use of the Internet.</p> <p>1.4b: Accurately record citation information for each type of resource used.</p> <p>1.4d: Restate facts and details taken from an information source (print, nonprint, or digital) and organize those ideas for notetaking using outlining, webbing, or flowcharting.</p>
2—EVALUATE	2.1—Relevance	<p>2.1a: Analyze information from illustrations, photographs, charts, graphs, maps, tables, and captions.</p> <p>2.1b: Analyze evidence to support a research question.</p> <p>2.1c: Identify unsupported statements in resources used.</p>
	2.2—Credibility/Accuracy	<p>2.2a: Identify how visual language creates an impression for the viewer (angle, lighting, special effects, camera movement).</p> <p>2.2b: Recognize the importance of the publication date as an indicator of information currency.</p> <p>2.2c: Explain the authority, timeliness, and/or accuracy of specific information resources.</p>
3—USE	3.1—Ethical/Legal Use	<p>3.1a: Practice safe handling of personal information online.</p> <p>3.1b: Recognize academic uses of social networking sites and understand how to use them safely (e.g., adjust privacy settings).</p> <p>3.1c: Articulate and follow the rules for online use at school.</p>

Standard	Sub-skill	Grade 6 Expectation
		<p>3.1g: Identify urban legends and hoaxes spread through e-mail and the Internet.</p> <p>3.1h: Understand how to provide limited copyright and authorize use of original works (e.g., Creative Commons).</p>
	3.2 / 3.3—Synthesis	<p>3.2a: Analyze evidence to support a research question.</p> <p>3.3a: Choose an appropriate format to produce, communicate, and present information (e.g., written report, multimedia presentation, graphic presentation).</p>
4—INTEGRATE	4.2—Seek & Share	<p>4.2a: Respect others’ right to freedom of speech.</p> <p>4.2b: Pursue information related to personal well-being (e.g., career interests, community involvement, health matters, recreation).</p>

Grades 7–8 Priority Standards

Grades 7 and 8 share a grade span in the CA MSLS, with expectations that build on Grade 6 toward greater independence, complexity, and civic awareness.

Standard	Sub-skill	Grades 7–8 Expectation
1—ACCESS	1.1 / 1.2—Recognize & Question	<p>1.1a: Recognize the need for specific information in preparing research reports and persuasive compositions and in delivering informative presentations.</p> <p>1.2a: Establish a hypothesis, a position statement, or both.</p> <p>1.2b: Identify topics and subtopics; ask and evaluate research questions for relevancy.</p> <p>1.2c: Create a plan of action for research by defining the topic and identifying key questions, keywords, and possible resources.</p>
	1.3—Search Strategies	<p>1.3a: Conduct multistep information searches by using various search strategies to locate digital information that supports research and writing tasks.</p> <p>1.3b: Identify scholarly, accurate, and current sources of information in a variety of formats.</p> <p>1.3c: Prioritize sources of information for efficient and effective use.</p> <p>1.3d: Develop and use successful search strategies to locate information sources, including primary and secondary sources.</p> <p>1.3i: Identify the authority of URL Internet extensions and the potential for bias (e.g., .com, .org, .edu, .gov, .us, .net).</p> <p>1.3l: Use print and/or digital indexes or the search engines of subscription periodical databases to locate information in periodicals.</p>
	1.4—Retrieve Responsibly	<p>1.4a: Demonstrate effective use of digital sources (e.g., navigating within the source, searching one source for a specific topic before searching multiple sources for multiple topics).</p>

Standard	Sub-skill	Grades 7–8 Expectation
		1.4e: Demonstrate effective note-taking, including citation references, quotations, and major points.
2—EVALUATE	2.1—Relevance	<p>2.1a: Assess the author’s evidence to support claims and assertions, noting instances of bias and stereotypes in a variety of visual and audio materials.</p> <p>2.1b: Evaluate sources for fact, opinion, propaganda, currency, and relevance.</p>
	2.2—Credibility/Accuracy	<p>2.2a: Evaluate the credibility, comprehensiveness, and usefulness of print, nonprint, and digital information sources.</p> <p>2.2b: Analyze differences among various categories of informational materials (e.g., textbooks, newspapers, magazines, atlases, online resources) in terms of structure and purpose.</p> <p>2.2c: Evaluate the authority of authors, website hosts, and sponsoring organizations of websites and print material.</p> <p>2.2d: Assess currency and timeliness in evaluating a Web site and other media.</p> <p>2.2f: Evaluate information from visual media as a primary and a secondary source, and distinguish the differences.</p>
	2.3—Corroboration	<p>2.3a: Revise, add, or delete questions as the need for information changes.</p> <p>2.3b: Modify the research plan as needed.</p>
3—USE	3.1—Ethical/Legal Use	<p>3.1a: Explain ethical and legal issues related to the use of intellectual property, including print, visual, audio, and online materials (e.g., fair use, file sharing).</p> <p>3.1b: Recognize the consequences of inappropriate and illegal use of information.</p> <p>3.1d: Give credit to authors in an acceptable format when appropriate in written and oral presentations, including music and visual content.</p> <p>3.1e: Understand ethical issues in audio and visual media relating to ownership of content.</p>
	3.2 / 3.3—Synthesis	<p>3.2a: Evaluate evidence to support a proposition or proposal.</p> <p>3.2b: Present a report visually, orally, or in writing, that conveys a clear point of view with evidence supporting that perspective.</p> <p>3.3a: Use a variety of media (e.g., audio, video, print) to impart information, share opinions, or persuade an audience.</p> <p>3.3c: Create presentations and documents that demonstrate proper citation and attribution of written, audio, and visual resources used.</p>
4—INTEGRATE	4.2—Seek & Share Responsibly	<p>4.2a: Present information collaboratively through a written, audio, or visual format.</p> <p>4.2b: Explain how social networks operate and identify issues related to participation and sharing of information.</p> <p>4.2c: Publish online content that is appropriate to the curriculum and personal interests.</p>

02—The Research & Media Literacy Progression

How Threads & Themes Builds Skills Across Grades 6–8

Threads & Themes builds research and media literacy skills through a deliberate, multi-year progression using two-lesson Flex Day touchpoints in Units 1, 2, and 4, and a full-length research investigation in Unit 3 (for each grade). Each touchpoint pair uses the unit’s own knowledge-building content as the research vehicle, so skill development is never decontextualized.

How the Progression Works

Units 1, 2, and 4 each include two dedicated research/media literacy lessons (Flex Day Touchpoints). These are light-touch skill-building moments that use the unit’s anchor text content as practice material. **Unit 3** is a full research investigation that applies and deepens all skills from Units 1 and 2; it is not represented in the two-lesson touchpoint structure. **The Digital Citizenship thread runs through all units, culminating in a civic discussion in Unit 4.**

The Five Media Literacy Routines

Five core routines anchor the progression. They are introduced in sequence and then reactivated throughout the year, becoming increasingly automatic as the year progresses.

#	Routine Name	What It Teaches
1	Inquiry Protocol: Focus & Frame	Students move from a broad topic to a focused, researchable question by applying pre-search strategies (brainstorming, KWL, prior knowledge activation). The question must be narrow enough to be answerable with available sources. Used to open every research cycle.
2	Source Evaluation (CARP)	Students evaluate sources using the CARP framework: Currency (is this information current?), Accuracy (is this verifiable?), Relevance (does this address my question?), Purpose/Point of View (who created this and why?). Introduced in Unit 1, Lesson 2 and reactivated throughout the year. Graphic organizer: Evaluating News.
3	Visual Rhetoric	Students analyze how visual sources (photographs, artwork, propaganda posters, data visualizations) use framing, angle, color, symbol, and composition to make arguments. Introduced in Unit 2, Lesson 1, connecting directly to the unit’s anchor text content.
4	Corroboration	Students find a second source on the same topic and ask: where do these sources agree? Where do they differ, and why might that be (purpose, audience, time period, perspective)? Introduced in Unit 2, Lesson 2. Moves students beyond single-source thinking.
5	Digital Citizenship & Citation	Students engage with the ethical, legal, and civic dimensions of information use. Topics escalate across years: attribution and plagiarism (G6) → algorithmic influence and health misinformation (G7) → lateral reading and information ecosystems (G8).

The Digital Citizenship Thread: Vertical Progression

A **Digital Citizenship (DC)** thread is woven across all four units in every grade, increasing in sophistication from personal practice in Grade 6 to systemic analysis in Grade 8.

Unit	Grade 6: Self & Story	Grade 7: Belonging & Witness	Grade 8: Systems & Stewardship
Unit 1	PLANTED: Sources belong to someone, and information has an origin and purpose. Basic attribution was introduced alongside the first research work.	PLANTED: Sources have an origin, purpose, and audience. Standard citation format introduced—to be formalized in Unit 4.	PLANTED: The ethical weight of the research is named. Using ellipses correctly as an honest representation of a source is itself a DC practice.
Unit 2	APPLIED: Image attribution and intellectual property for visual sources. Responsible searching, evaluating search results pages, not just individual sources.	APPLIED: Intellectual property (IP) for images and testimony. Who owns a photo of a historical event? Algorithmic influence is named as a factor in what information students encounter.	APPLIED: Responsible use of media images. Lateral reading, as a DC practice, the same strategy fact-checkers use against propaganda.
Unit 3	EMBEDDED: DC accountability structures built into the full research investigation. No separate touchpoint, citizenship is practiced in the research itself.	EMBEDDED: DC accountability structures built into the full research investigation.	EMBEDDED: DC accountability structures built into the full research investigation.
Unit 4	CIVIC: Who owns a myth? Cultural knowledge belongs to communities. Attribution raises questions about IP that go beyond standard source citation.	CIVIC: Health information online, who funds a study? What responsible sharing looks like when misinformation carries real human consequences.	CIVIC: Algorithms as systems with power. Who decides what information survives? Search platforms, digital archives, and the stories carried forward.

The Integrated-First Principle

Media literacy is most powerful when it is taught in context, with real sources, questions, and real stakes. Every research touchpoint in *Threads & Themes* is anchored in the unit's knowledge-building content, so students are never practicing skills in a vacuum. The source they evaluate is connected to something they are genuinely curious about.

Connecting Media Literacy to AI Literacy

Extending the Five Routines to AI-Generated Content

AI-generated content is now part of the information landscape students encounter during research. The good news: the five media literacy routines in *Threads & Themes* already give students the tools they need to get started. AI Literacy is not a new unit—it is what happens when students apply the habits they have already built to a new kind of source.

Applying the Media Literacy Routines to AI Content

#	Routine Name	What It Teaches
1	Inquiry Protocol	Treat AI-generated topic summaries as background, not as a source. Students ask: Can this question be answered with a citable, human-authored source—or am I outsourcing the thinking to the tool?
2	Source Evaluation (CARP)	Apply CARP directly: Who authored this—a person with accountability, or a model? Can the specific claims be traced to a verifiable source? AI tools can produce hallucinations—fluent, confident text with no basis in fact. Fluency is not accuracy.
3	Visual Rhetoric	Students may encounter AI-generated data visualizations or infographics during research. Apply the same visual rhetoric lens: Who generated this, what choices shaped it, and can the underlying data be traced to a verifiable source?
4	Corroboration	Lateral reading is especially critical for AI-generated content. Before trusting an AI output, open new tabs to verify the underlying claims in independent, human-authored sources. Students ask: Can I find a citable source that confirms this—or does it only appear in AI summaries?
5	Digital Citizenship & Citation	AI raises the same attribution questions as any other source—and a few new ones. When does using AI cross into academic dishonesty? If AI drew on human sources to generate text, what do students owe those original authors? These questions escalate naturally across the G6–G8 DC thread.

Teacher Tip: Responsible AI

For a deeper background on responsible AI use in schools—including how to address bias, hallucinations, and academic integrity with students—see Newsela’s guide [AI in Schools: What K–12 Leaders Need to Know](#).

03—Grade-by-Grade Breakdown

Unit Touchpoints, Skill Focus, and CA Standards Alignment

The following section details the research and media literacy touchpoints for each grade, including the unit context, skill focus, media literacy routine activated, and CA standards addressed. Use this information as a planning reference when preparing Flex Day lessons and research investigations.

Grade 6: Self & Story

Exploring identity, curiosity, and empathy through the power of shared stories

Grade 6 establishes the foundational research habits students will carry through Grades 7 and 8. The focus is on building reliable, repeatable practices, such as narrowing a research question, evaluating sources with CARP, attributing sources correctly, and thinking critically about visual information.

Unit	Lesson	Skill Focus	Routine	CA CCSS	CA MSLS
Unit 1	L1	Narrowing a Topic & Generating a Research Question: Move from a broad topic to a focused, researchable question; evaluate whether a question can be answered with available sources.	Routine 1: Inquiry Protocol: Focus & Frame	W.6.7	MSLS 1.1, 1.2
Unit 1	L2	Source Credibility Evaluation + Quoting, Paraphrasing & Basic Attribution: Evaluate a source against the research question; introduce CARP; practice quoting and paraphrasing with attribution.	Routine 2: Source Evaluation (Intro)	W.6.8, W.6.9	MSLS 1.4, 2.2, 3.1
Unit 2	L1	Visual Rhetoric—Reading Craft & Art Images as Sources: Analyze images of Korean celadon pottery and artisan craft, asking what each image includes, emphasizes, or omits.	Routine 3: Visual Rhetoric (Intro)	RI.6.7, W.6.8	MSLS 2.1, 2.2, 3.1
Unit 2	L2	Corroboration + Search Strategies: Find a second source on the same topic; where do sources agree and differ and why? Search strategies introduced for finding comparative sources.	Routine 4: Corroboration (Intro)	RI.6.9, W.6.7, W.6.8	MSLS 1.2, 1.3, 2.3

Unit	Lesson	Skill Focus	Routine	CA CCSS	CA MSLS
Unit 4	L1	Research Synthesis—How Different Cultures Explain the Natural World: Students choose one natural phenomenon and research how two or more cultures explain it through myth; draft 2–3 sentence synthesis claim.	Routines 1 + 3: Research Synthesis (Applied)	W.6.7, W.6.8, W.6.9	MSLS 1.1, 1.2, 2.2, 3.1
Unit 4	L2	Digital Citizenship—Cultural Knowledge, Attribution & Whose Stories We Share: What are researchers’ responsibilities when gathering information about other cultures’ traditions? Year’s DC thread culminates.	Routine 5: Digital Citizenship & Citation	W.6.8	MSLS 3.1, 4.2

Grade 6 Graphic Organizers Introduced

Evaluating News / CARP (L1:U1) • Research Notes (L2:U1) • Visual Rhetoric Analysis (L1:U2) • Comparing Multiple Sources (L2:U2)

Grade 7—Belonging & Witness

Investigating identity, history, and fairness through seeing beyond ourselves

Grade 7 deepens the Grade 6 foundation with a heightened focus on perspective, representation, and the reliability of historical sources. Students apply Source Evaluation and Corroboration to increasingly complex materials—including photographs, testimony, and scientific claims—and begin to name algorithmic influence as a factor in the information they encounter.

Unit	Lesson	Skill Focus	Routine	CA CCSS	CA MSLS
Unit 1	L1	Narrowing a Topic & Generating a Research Question: Using 1960s youth culture and social class as practice terrain; evaluate whether a question can be answered with available sources.	Routine 1: Inquiry Protocol: Focus & Frame (Deepened)	W.7.7	MSLS 1.1, 1.2
Unit 1	L2	Source Accuracy Evaluation + Quoting, Paraphrasing & Attribution: Does this source verify what it claims? Evaluation moves to accuracy. Citation format was introduced as a standard practice.	Routine 2: Source Evaluation (Reactivated—Accuracy Focus)	W.7.8, W.7.9	MSLS 1.4, 2.2, 3.1

Unit	Lesson	Skill Focus	Routine	CA CCSS	CA MSLS
Unit 2	L1	Visual Rhetoric—How Perspective Shapes What Photographs Show (and Hide): Analyze photographs from the Japanese American incarceration—how do photographer choices (framing, proximity, what is cropped out) shape understanding? Production extension introduced.	Routine 3: Visual Rhetoric (Reactivated—Photographs)	RI.7.6, RI.7.7, W.7.8	MSLS 2.2, 3.1
Unit 2	L2	Corroboration—Why Historical Accounts Differ + Search Terms That Work: Why do two sources represent the same event differently? Purpose, audience, access, and time period are factors. Algorithmic influence is named.	Routine 4: Corroboration (Reactivated—Why Sources Differ)	RI.7.6, RI.7.9, W.7.7, W.7.8	MSLS 1.3, 2.2, 2.3
Unit 4	L1	Research Synthesis—What Science and Story Both Say About Blood and Belonging: Research one biology-of-connection topic; draft a synthesis claim bridging scientific evidence and human meaning.	Routines 1 + 3: Research Synthesis (Applied)	W.7.7, W.7.8, W.7.9	MSLS 1.1, 1.2, 2.2, 3.1
Unit 4	L2	Digital Citizenship—Health Information, Sensitive Sourcing & Responsible Sharing: Who funds a study? What does responsible sharing look like when biological misinformation carries real human consequences? MLA citation formalized.	Routine 5: Digital Citizenship & Citation	W.7.8	MSLS 3.1, 4.2

Grade 7 Graphic Organizers Used

Evaluating News / CARP (reactivated) • Research Notes (reactivated) • Comparing Multiple Sources (reactivated) • Production Extension: Visual Rhetoric Analysis

Grade 8—Systems & Stewardship

Examining how power, memory, and civic action shape the stories we know and carry forward

Grade 8 moves the focus from individual source evaluation to systemic thinking about information ecosystems. Students apply lateral reading, analyze propaganda, and begin to see that algorithms and archival decisions are not neutral—they reflect the choices of people with interests. The anchor text for Unit 4, *The Last Cuentista*, provides a powerful lens for this systemic perspective.

Unit	Lesson	Skill Focus	Routine	CA CCSS	CA MSLS
Unit 1	L1	Narrowing a Topic + Primary vs. Secondary Sources: Using the Civil Rights Movement as practice terrain; introduce primary/secondary source distinction. Students leave with a narrowed question and a source labeled as primary or secondary.	Routine 1: Inquiry Protocol: Focus & Frame (Deepened—+Primary/Secondary)	W.8.7	MSLS 1.1, 1.2
Unit 1	L2	Evaluating Sources for Most Useful Evidence + Quoting with Ellipses & Attribution: Moves evaluation beyond credibility to usefulness. Is a primary source photograph the right kind of evidence for this specific question? Quoting with ellipses as honest representation.	Routine 2: Source Evaluation (Reactivated—Usefulness)	W.8.8, L.8.2b, W.8.9	MSLS 1.4, 2.2, 3.1
Unit 2	L1	Visual Rhetoric—How Propaganda Uses Visual Choices to Persuade: Analyze Cold War-era and WWII propaganda posters. Move from ‘what does this show’ to ‘what argument does this make and how’? Production extension: students apply the same analysis to their own visual choices.	Routine 3: Visual Rhetoric (Reactivated + Production—Propaganda)	RI.8.6, RI.8.7, W.8.8	MSLS 2.2, 3.1
Unit 2	L2	Corroboration—Conflicting Credible Sources + Lateral Reading + Search Strategies: Lateral reading is introduced as the fact-checker’s strategy. The propaganda poster from L1 becomes the first test case—students open new tabs to find what others say about its origin and purpose.	Routine 4: Corroboration (Reactivated—Lateral Reading)	RI.8.6, RI.8.9, W.8.7, W.8.8	MSLS 1.3, 2.2, 2.3
Unit 4	L1	Research Synthesis—What Gets Preserved, and How: Students research how communities and institutions preserve what matters (oral storytelling, digital archiving, heritage sites, endangered languages); draft synthesis claim about what shapes what survives.	Routines 1 + 3: Research Synthesis (Applied)	W.8.7, W.8.8, W.8.9	MSLS 1.1, 1.2, 2.2, 3.1

Unit	Lesson	Skill Focus	Routine	CA CCSS	CA MSLS
Unit 4	L2	Digital Citizenship—Algorithms, Digital Archives & Who Decides What Survives: Connect The Last Cuentista’s central inquiry to real-world systems—search algorithms, platform decisions, archiving limitations. Information ecosystems are designed by people with interests.	Routine 5: Digital Citizenship & Citation	W.8.8, L.8.2b	MSLS 3.1, 3.3, 4.2

Grade 8 Skills Extended from Previous Years

Source Evaluation (credibility → usefulness) • Visual Rhetoric (analysis → production extension) • Corroboration (comparing → lateral reading) • Citation (basic attribution → systemic awareness)

About Unit 3: The Full Research Investigation

Unit 3 at each grade level is a full-length research investigation in which students apply what they’ve learned over the year in service of an original research question. The two-lesson Flex Day touchpoint structure does not apply here—research and media literacy work is embedded across the unit’s lessons rather than isolated in dedicated touchpoints.

In Unit 3, students:

- **Open with the Inquiry Protocol** to frame their own research question from unit content.
- **Apply CARP and Corroboration to sources they select themselves**, rather than sources the teacher pre-selects.
- **Use Visual Rhetoric** when their sources include photographs, data visualizations, or other visual material.
- **Practice Digital Citizenship and Citation** as they take notes, attribute sources, and prepare their final research product.

Because students are choosing sources independently, Unit 3 is the richest summative evidence of their media literacy growth. Look for transfer: are students applying the routines without prompting? Are they catching their own attribution errors? Are they evaluating sources before reading them deeply, rather than after?

04—Teacher Guidance

Implementing the routines, connecting to unit content, and assessing growth

How the Touchpoints Fit Into Your Instructional Week

Research and media literacy touchpoints are designed as Flex Day lessons—self-contained two-lesson pairs that fit within the Flex Day structure. Each lesson pair follows a consistent pattern:

- **Lesson 1**—Introduces or reactivates a media literacy skill using a specific source connected to the unit’s content. Students work with one concrete example and leave with a product (e.g., an annotated source, a draft question, or a visual analysis).
- **Lesson 2**—Builds directly on Lesson 1’s product. Students deepen the skill, often through corroboration or synthesis, and engage with the unit’s Digital Citizenship thread.

Planning Tip

Because Lesson 2 always begins with what students produced in Lesson 1, it is important to sequence these lessons within the same unit window. Avoid placing a long instructional stretch between L1 and L2 of the same touchpoint pair.

Facilitation Guidance for Each Routine

Inquiry Protocol (Focus & Frame)

This routine opens every research cycle, so it is the most frequently reactivated across the year. The core move is narrowing: students begin with a broad interest and work toward a question specific enough to be answered with available sources within the time they have.

Model the move explicitly the first time. Take a broad topic the class has in common (from the unit’s anchor text content) and narrow it aloud, rejecting questions that are too big (‘How did the Civil Rights Movement happen?’), too small (‘When did Rosa Parks take the bus?’), or not answerable with the sources available (‘How did she feel at that exact moment?’). The question that stays should be specific, answerable, and genuinely interesting to the researcher.

- **Look for:** Are students testing their questions against the sources available to them? Can they explain why their question is narrower than the one they started with, and what was adjusted?
- **Common misconception to address:** A good research question is not the first question that sounds academic—it is the one that has survived several rounds of narrowing. Build time for that narrowing into the lesson; do not let students commit to their first draft.

Source Evaluation with CARP

Begin by modeling with a source students already know—ideally a news article or reference page connected to the unit’s anchor text. Walk through each CARP criterion explicitly before asking students to evaluate independently. The first time students use the Evaluating News graphic organizer, have them co-construct one row as a class.

- **Look for:** Can students articulate why a source does or does not meet one of the CARP criteria? Are they going beyond ‘it seems credible’ to specific reasoning?
- **Common misconception to address:** ‘It came up first in search results’ does not mean it is most credible. Model evaluating the search results page, not just the source itself.

Visual Rhetoric

The visual rhetoric lessons work best when the images are displayed large and shared as a class before students annotate individually. Begin with ‘what do you notice?’ before moving to ‘what argument does this make?’ The shift from description to analysis is the key skill move.

- **Look for:** Are students moving beyond describing what they see to asking what the image is designed to make the viewer think or feel?
- **Grade-level extension (Gr. 8):** The production extension asks students to apply the same analytical lens to images they create or select. This is a powerful moment for discussing how their own choices as communicators shape audience perception.

Corroboration

The key framing question is: ‘Why might two credible sources represent this differently?’ This shifts the task from finding the ‘right’ source to understanding that all sources reflect a perspective shaped by purpose, audience, access, and time.

- **Look for:** Are students asking analytical questions about differences (why did this photographer choose this frame?), or simply noting that the sources disagree?
- **Grade 8 extension—Lateral Reading:** Teach students to open new browser tabs to search for information about a source before going deep into it. Model this explicitly: ‘Before we read this article, let’s find out who publishes it and what others say about it.’

Digital Citizenship & Citation

The Digital Citizenship lessons work best when connected to a genuine ethical question raised by the unit’s content. Avoid framing DC as a rules-compliance discussion. Instead, frame it as: ‘Given what you’ve just researched, what do you owe the people whose knowledge you used?’

- **Grade 6 frame:** Who owns information? Attribution as an act of respect.
- **Grade 7 frame:** How does misinformation circulate, and what is the cost of sharing it uncritically?
- **Grade 8 frame:** Who designs the systems that shape what we know? What role do researchers and sharers play in those systems?

Daily Reactivation Prompts

Media literacy is most durable when routines are reactivated briefly and often—not only on Flex Research Days. When students encounter a photograph, document, chart, quoted source, or visual choice during daily anchor text reading, a 60-second routine reactivation helps the skill become automatic.

Use the following one-line prompts in the flow of daily reading:

- **CARP:** Before we trust this, what do we know about where it came from?
- **Visual Rhetoric:** What did the person who made this choose to include, emphasize, or leave out?
- **Corroboration:** Where else could we check this? Who else would have been there?
- **Focus & Frame:** If this became your research question, how would you narrow it?
- **Digital Citizenship & Citation:** If we used this, what would we owe the person or community who created it?

Assessing Media Literacy Growth

Media literacy skills develop gradually and are best assessed through observation and portfolio-style documentation rather than discrete tests. The following approaches are embedded in the *Threads & Themes* lesson structure:

Assessment Approach	What to Look For
Graphic Organizer Quality	Are students providing specific, text-based reasoning (citing specific elements from the source) rather than general impressions? Growth shows in the specificity and depth of annotations over time.
Synthesis Claim Drafts	Does the synthesis claim reflect both sources and name a genuine relationship between them (not just summarizing each in turn)? Look for students moving from 'Source A says X and Source B says Y' to 'Although X and Y differ in Z, they both suggest...'
Research Notes	Are students clearly separating their own paraphrases from direct quotations? Are they recording bibliographic information consistently? This is particularly important for the Gr. 7 shift to MLA citation format.
DC Discussion Participation	Are students applying the civic framing to the specific unit content rather than speaking abstractly? Are they able to name a specific example of an ethical responsibility they now feel as a researcher?
Unit 3 Research Investigation	Unit 3 provides the richest opportunity for summative assessment of media literacy. Look for evidence that students can independently apply all five routines to self-selected sources in service of an original research question.

Connecting Media Literacy to ELA Standards

While the CA MSLS provide the primary framework for media literacy, the skills developed in *Threads & Themes* research touchpoints directly support and build toward the following CA CCSS for ELA:

CA CCSS Standard	Strand	Connection to Media Literacy Routines
W.6–8.7	Research to Build Knowledge	The Inquiry Protocol (Routine 1) directly teaches the skill of narrowing a topic and generating a researchable question—the prerequisite for all research writing.
W.6–8.8	Gather Relevant Information	Source Evaluation (Routine 2) and Corroboration (Routine 4) address gathering information from multiple print and digital sources, assessing credibility and accuracy, and avoiding plagiarism.
W.6–8.9	Draw Evidence from Texts	Quoting, paraphrasing, and attribution practice in Units 1 and 4 develop students' ability to draw on textual evidence while representing sources honestly.
RI.6–8.6	Craft and Structure	Visual Rhetoric (Routine 3) builds students' capacity to determine an author's point of view and analyze how the author distinguishes their position from others—applied here to visual and non-traditional sources.

CA CCSS Standard	Strand	Connection to Media Literacy Routines
RI.6–8.7	Integration of Knowledge	Visual Rhetoric extends into integration of diverse media, including analyzing how images, diagrams, and data visualizations present information differently than prose.
RI.6–8.9	Range of Reading	Corroboration (Routine 4) requires students to compare and contrast information from two or more sources, building directly toward the RI.9 standard’s focus on analyzing how sources complement or contradict each other.

05—Quick Reference

Standards Key, Routine Sequence, and Key Vocabulary

CA MSLS Standards Key

Use these codes when annotating lesson plans or when communicating with teacher librarians about standards alignment.

Code	Standard	Description
MSLS 1.1	Access—Recognize	Recognize the need for information; use pre-search strategies.
MSLS 1.2	Access—Question	Formulate appropriate research questions using key words and synonyms.
MSLS 1.3	Access—Search	Identify and locate varied resources using effective search strategies.
MSLS 1.4	Access—Retrieve	Retrieve information in a timely, safe, and responsible manner; record citations.
MSLS 2.1	Evaluate—Relevance	Determine the relevance of information to the research question.
MSLS 2.2	Evaluate—Credibility	Assess comprehensiveness, currency, credibility, authority, and accuracy.
MSLS 2.3	Evaluate—Additional Info	Consider whether additional information is needed to answer the question.
MSLS 3.1	Use—Ethical/Legal	Demonstrate ethical, legal, and safe use of information in all formats.
MSLS 3.2	Use—Decisions	Draw conclusions and make informed decisions from evidence.
MSLS 3.3	Use—Creative Use	Use information and technology creatively to answer questions or solve problems.
MSLS 4.2	Integrate—Seek & Share	Seek, produce, and share information; pursue information as a lifelong learner.

Routine Sequence at a Glance

This chart shows when each routine is first introduced (by unit/grade) and how it is used throughout the three-year progression.

Routine	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Inquiry Protocol (Focus & Frame)	Unit 1, Research Lesson 1—Intro	Unit 1, Research Lesson 1—Deepened	Unit 1, Research Lesson 1—Primary/Secondary Source distinction
Source Evaluation / CARP	Unit 1, Research Lesson 2—Intro	Unit 1, Research Lesson 2—Accuracy focus	Unit 1, Research Lesson 2—Usefulness vs. Credibility

Routine	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Visual Rhetoric	Unit 2, Research Lesson 1—Intro (craft images)	Unit 2, Research Lesson 1 —Photographs (perspective)	Unit 2, Research Lesson 1 —Propaganda + Production Extension
Corroboration	Unit 2, Research Lesson 2 —Intro	Unit 2, Research Lesson 2 —+Algorithmic influence	Unit 2, Research Lesson 2 —+Lateral reading
Digital Citizenship & Citation	Unit 4, Research Lesson 2—Cultural IP & attribution	Unit 4, Research Lesson 2 —Health info & responsible sharing	Unit 4, Research Lesson 2 —Algorithms & information ecosystems

Key Vocabulary

The following terms are used consistently across the Research & Media Literacy Progression. Introduce them in context during the relevant lesson and reinforce them throughout the year.

Term	Definition
CARP	A source evaluation framework: Currency, Accuracy, Relevance, Purpose/Point of View. Applied systematically to print, digital, visual, and other sources.
Corroboration	The practice of checking a claim or source against a second, independent source to determine whether the information holds up. A key strategy for avoiding misinformation.
Lateral Reading	A fact-checking strategy in which the reader opens new browser tabs to learn about a source before going deep into it. What does the wider world say about this publisher, author, or claim?
Visual Rhetoric	The study of how visual choices (e.g., framing, angle, color, composition, symbol) create meaning and construct arguments for a viewer. Applied to photographs, artwork, propaganda, data visualization, and other non-text media.
Attribution	Giving clear credit to the original source of an idea, image, data, or quotation. Treated in <i>Threads & Themes</i> as an ethical practice, not just a formatting requirement.
Digital Citizenship (DC)	The responsible, ethical, and civic practice of participating in digital environments. In <i>Threads & Themes</i> , this includes attribution, privacy, online safety, misinformation awareness, and understanding information ecosystems.
Information Ecosystem	The larger system of platforms, algorithms, publishers, archives, and institutions that shapes which information circulates, reaches audiences, and survives over time. Introduced explicitly in Grade 8.

Term	Definition
Primary Source	A source created at the time of an event or by someone who directly experienced it (e.g., a photograph, letter, diary, testimony, government document). Distinguished from secondary sources, which analyze or interpret primary sources.
Synthesis	The act of combining information from multiple sources into an original claim or analysis. Distinguished from summary: a synthesis makes a new argument; a summary reports what individual sources say.
Intellectual Property (IP)	Creative or intellectual work—including writing, images, data, and cultural knowledge—that belongs to its creator or originating community. Includes copyright, Creative Commons, and the ethics of using cultural knowledge.

About this Toolkit

This document was developed for Newsela *Threads & Themes* ELA, a comprehensive 6–8 English Language Arts and ELD curriculum designed for California’s 2026 ELA/ELD adoption. Standards references draw on the California Model School Library Standards for California Public Schools, K–12 (California Department of Education, 2011) and the California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts.