

EQuIP Review Feedback



Lesson/Unit Name: Building Evidence-Based Arguments- E pluribus Unum

Content Area: English language arts

Grade Level: 8

Overall Rating:

E

Exemplar

Dimension I – Alignment to the Depth of the CCSS

<p><i>The lesson/unit aligns with the letter and spirit of the CCSS:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Targets a set of grade-level CCSS ELA/Literacy standards.✓ Includes a clear and explicit purpose for instruction.✓ Selects text(s) that measure within the grade-level text complexity band and are of sufficient quality and scope for the stated purpose (e.g., presents vocabulary, syntax, text structures, levels of meaning/purpose, and other qualitative characteristics similar to CCSS grade-level exemplars in Appendices A & B). <p><u><i>A unit or longer lesson should:</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Integrate reading, writing, speaking and listening so that students apply and synthesize advancing literacy skills.❑ (Grades 3-5) Build students' content knowledge and their understanding of reading and writing in social studies, the arts, science or technical subjects through the coherent selection of texts.	<p>Purpose: The purpose of the unit is focused on developing students' abilities to research a social issue, form a reasoned and evidence-based position, and communicate/explicate that position through an argumentative essay. In accomplishing this purpose students will have many opportunities to practice close reading of informational and persuasive texts. The purpose is closely aligned with the standards. Further, the developers clearly state the sequencing of this unit as the capstone unit in grade 8. The developers support the purpose by clearly developing a unit structure that builds to the ability to evaluate arguments and the ability to express reasoned-views.</p> <p>Standards: The unit primarily targets five standards for the culminating essay, targets five additional standards as central to the intermediate activities, and calls out five additional reading standards. Categorizing standards in this way should lead to more effectively developing the skills/abilities that are embedded within the standards. In each segment of the unit, standards categorized as either targeted or supporting.</p> <p>Targets set of grade-level CCSS ELA/Literacy Standards: As the title of this unit indicates, the instructional focus is on the analysis of evidence based arguments and the development of written pieces with specific attention to those standards related to argument: RI.8.1 and RI.8.8 as well as W.8.1, W.8.2, and W.8.9. Relating the significance of perspective to positions taken among authors, RI.8.6 and RI.8.9 further support the unit's teaching and learning plan. Understanding that quality writing is the result of process writing, W.8.4 and W.8.5 are supported by the unit's design. Additionally, supporting reading standards essential to critical analysis of argument and expression of that understanding are explicitly addressed through the unit (p. 4).</p> <p>Text Complexity: With the exception of the political cartoons used in Part 2 "Analyzing Arguments," most of the texts provided for this unit fall within the grade 8 Lexile Levels of 1080-1305 (Appendix A). Furthermore, the unit design provides textual notes for each suggested text within the unit's lesson plans providing source notations, complexity analysis, quantitative and qualitative, as well as suggested text-dependent questions to "drive closer reading and discussion" (Argument Unit Plan, p. 11, 12, 13, 14, 21, 23, 24, 25).</p> <p>Integrate reading, writing, speaking, and listening: The unit begins with integrating reading and writing through a suggested "jigsaw" activity (p. 9) and moves quickly into having students write claim-based synopsis of texts (p. 13). The unit builds progressive lessons guiding students in further readings, reading discussion groups, and individual writing refinement as students are asked to revise claims, compare and evaluate author perspectives, eventually building their own claims as premises of an</p>
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	<p>evidence-based argument in response to the overarching and compelling unit question regarding current immigration policy.</p> <p>The developer does not indicate RI10 or any Language standards for the unit. However, based on the depth of analysis provided for each text source, RI10 would be an appropriate standard for this unit. Also, because students are led to apply grade-level conventions as they write and with conventions included in the self-assessment, peer-assessment, and rubric, including reference to appropriate Language standards would clarify the unit's focus.</p> <p>In the unit overview (p. 4) the developer indicates R5 and R7 are targeted standards. It is unclear whether this is a typographical error or if Anchor standards are intended. Additionally, RI5 is indicated within the unit as a supporting standard only. No form of R7 is indicated within the unit.</p> <p>The developers have built in elements of choice for teachers and even students in choosing the social issue for the early parts of the unit. The developers have suggested how this unit may be tied to other units or completed without that linkage. Both efforts are thoughtful and commendable.</p>
<p>Rating: 3 – Meets most to all of the criteria in the dimension</p>	

Dimension II – Key Shifts the CCSS

<p><i>The lesson/unit addresses key shifts in the CCSS:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reading Text Closely: Makes reading text(s) closely, examining textual evidence, and discerning deep meaning a central focus of instruction. ✓ Text-Based Evidence: Facilitates rich and rigorous evidence-based discussions and writing about common texts through a sequence of specific, thought-provoking, and text-dependent questions (including, when applicable, questions about illustrations, charts, diagrams, audio/video, and media). ✓ Writing from Sources: Routinely expects that students draw evidence from texts to produce clear and coherent writing that informs, explains, or makes an argument in various written forms (e.g., notes, summaries, short responses, or formal essays). ☐ Academic Vocabulary: Focuses on building students' academic vocabulary in context throughout instruction. <p><u><i>A unit or longer lesson should:</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increasing Text Complexity: Focus students on reading a progression of complex texts drawn from the grade-level band. Provide text-centered learning that is sequenced, scaffolded and supported to advance students toward independent reading of complex texts at the CCR level. 	<p>Reading Text Closely: Parts 1 - 3 of 5 address students' gaining of meaning from texts.</p> <p>Text-based Evidence: From Activity I Part I (p. 10) to Activity 4 Part V (p. 45), students are asked to focus on text-centered discussions, first through a focus on the evidence published authors use in developing written claims to the culminating activities wherein students analyze their own selection of text-based evidence in their own writing for relevance, credibility, and sufficiency (p. 46). The developers provide sample text-dependent questions for each reading and thoughtfully suggest that teachers pick and choose questions to use. The text-dependent questions are closely linked to understanding and writing the claims made in each text.</p> <p>Writing from Sources: The unit provides a structured sequence for research of a topic, developing a position, and effective integration of evidence. The developers have students write claims-based synopses of the texts focusing on what the text says explicitly. This activity and the activity of developing text-based questions requires rereading of the texts to find additional evidence to support the claims. This sort of rereading--done in support of developing ideas about the text--is purpose-driven activity.</p> <p>Academic Vocabulary: Although this unit is rife with opportunities for teaching academic vocabulary, as a practice, the unit directions reference instruction only once, on page 4 by saying that the "activities also provide many opportunities for academic vocabulary instruction...." The primary focus of vocabulary instruction within the unit is that of technical vocabulary associated with writing evidence-based arguments. Through the unit's focus on perspective in argument development and other questions probing the inferred meaning behind an author's diction, vocabulary can indeed be taught; however, to see this done in ways that</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Building Disciplinary Knowledge: Provide opportunities for students to build knowledge about a topic or subject through analysis of a coherent selection of strategically sequenced, discipline-specific texts. □ Balance of Texts: Within a collection of grade-level units a balance of informational and literary texts is included according to guidelines in the CCSS (p. 5). ✓ Balance of Writing: Include a balance of on-demand and process writing (e.g., multiple drafts and revisions over time) and short, focused research projects, incorporating digital texts where appropriate. 	<p>support RI.8.4 and/or L.8.4-6 appear to be at the teacher's discretion. The developers should consider creating more target activities in line with the overall purpose that address acquisition of vocabulary. To wait until the newly learned vocabulary is displayed in the final essay is too late.</p> <p>Increasing Text Complexity: As a likely capstone unit, the texts in this unit are at the high end of the complexity range. When the complexity is balanced against the likely unfamiliarity of the topic for most students, the texts seem both mature and complex. Within the unit there are opportunities to move from supported to independent reading. However, the reviewers noted that within the unit itself there is no movement from less to more challenging texts. This is mitigated by the suggested placement of the unit at the end of the year.</p> <p>Building Disciplinary Knowledge: Through the combination of primary texts, secondary texts, political cartoons, and tertiary texts, the suggested texts on immigration present a broadening opportunity of student understanding to the concept of immigration from yesteryear to the present. In terms of ELA disciplinary knowledge, the unit provides instruction on creating effective arguments and focuses strongly on technical vocabulary around argumentative writing.</p> <p>Balance of Texts: The unit contains a balance of primary and secondary sources. The unit also contains political cartoons and at least one audio text for the early parts of the unit. For the four units mentioned in the introductory text, it is not obvious how any literary texts may be incorporated. The title labels this unit as an ELA unit and refers solely to core ELA standards rather than those for the social sciences and hence there is a clear expectation for literary text though literary texts seem inappropriate for this unit. The developers should consider whether this unit is more of a social science unit with a strong literacy focus. This rubric point was not considered in evaluating this section since the full collection of units is not provided.</p> <p>Balance of Writing: Students research and take notes to produce a process writing piece that addresses the unit topic. On-demand writing and digital texts are not included in the unit. The early parts of the unit balance writing by asking for claims writing, question writing, question responses, and writing brief synopses.</p>
<p>Rating: 3 – Meets most to all of the criteria in the dimension</p>	

Dimension III – Instructional Supports

<p><i>The lesson/unit is responsive to varied student learning needs:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Cultivates student interest and engagement in reading, writing and speaking about texts. ✓ Addresses instructional expectations and is easy to understand and use. ✓ Provides <i>all</i> students with multiple opportunities to engage with text of appropriate complexity for the grade level; includes appropriate scaffolding so that students directly experience the complexity of the text. ✓ Focuses on challenging sections of text(s) and engages students in a productive struggle 	<p>This is very much a unit plan and not a series of lesson plans that would constitute a unit. As such, the unit has many strengths: logical development of activities, abundant and thoughtfully chosen texts and attention to important elements of a strong unit including technical vocabulary, movement toward independence, and formative assessment. However, since it is not fine-grained at the lesson plan level, what is not included are the specific day to day supports needed for ELL and SWD (nor the focus on specific vocabulary activities other than technical vocabulary.) The developers include at the end of each part, assessment opportunities. In the same way, the developers might call out specific support practices for ELL and SWD for each section. This might include how to develop and use the "reading teams" as a way to support students with needs. Similarly, the unit offers only general statements about alternative and further reading but these are not focused on providing enrichment for highly able</p>
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through discussion questions and other supports that build toward independence.

- Integrates appropriate supports in reading, writing, listening and speaking for students who are ELL, have disabilities, or read well below the grade level text band.
- Provides extensions and/or more advanced text for students who read well above the grade level text band.

A unit or longer lesson should:

- ✓ Include a progression of learning where concepts and skills advance and deepen over time (*may be more applicable across the year or several units*).
- ✓ Gradually remove supports, requiring students to demonstrate their independent capacities (*may be more applicable across the year or several units*).
- ✓ Provide for authentic learning, application of literacy skills, student-directed inquiry, analysis, evaluation and/or reflection.
- ✓ Integrate targeted instruction in such areas as grammar and conventions, writing strategies, discussion rules and all aspects of foundational reading for grades 3-5.
- Indicate how students are accountable for independent reading based on student choice and interest to build stamina, confidence and motivation (*may be more applicable across the year or several units*).
- Use technology and media to deepen learning and draw attention to evidence and texts as appropriate.

students. Developers offer much teacher choice in the unit and thus do not offer pacing guidance. Because of the length of the unit and its complexity, developing a pacing plan for the unit would be a non-trivial task. The developers should consider offering a suggested pacing guide or even a couple suggested pacing guides to help less experienced teachers frame their instruction.

Interest and Engagement: The topic of immigration is important for study. Instruction revolves around a collection of texts that reveal views, both historical and current, for students to consider. By their nature, middle school students appreciate opportunities to express their own opinion on topics of current interest. By using a variety of texts as well as a variety of interactive strategies, e.g. jigsaw, reading groups, partnering, the unit provides engaging means for students to learn about the topic of immigration (or another topic at the teacher's discretion) and work in social environment to do so.

Addresses instructional expectations and is easy to use: The unit begins (p. 3) by providing an overview of the five-part structure; the unit design further elaborates on each element (p. 5) outlining teacher & student activities within each of the five-parts. Additionally, at the beginning of each of the five parts, the activities and materials are listed along with the targeted standards. The unit conveniently provides all texts listed in the Unit's Text Sets (p. 7). Student support materials (checklists and handouts) are provided in the materials packet and the unit is relatively clear about when and how they should be used. One minor instance of confusion regarding these materials is the reference to the EBA Criteria Checklist vs. Evidence Based-Argument Checklist.

All Students Multiple Opportunities: The developer provides a multitude of texts in different formats through which students are able to gain understanding of the topic. One instructional support is providing parallel texts at different quantitative measures that address the same information. This is a good practice for secondary sources. Since each passage contains different information, students reading the lower level passage have information to provide the group. This can be motivating. The element of student and teacher choice about topics and readings also increases engagement.

Challenging Sections of Text: The developer provides sample text-dependent questions "to drive closer reading and discussions". It would strengthen the unit to indicate whether identified questions are indicative of challenging sections of text.

Progression of Learning: The unit is intentionally designed to build toward students' writing to prove understanding of a topic while developing and supporting a position.

Gradually Removes Supports: The level of scaffolding throughout the unit is stable. Teacher modeling and peer interaction are level throughout the unit. Demonstration of independent capacities is limited (but evident). Through this unit, students develop new learning that is intended to be developed throughout the school year.

Authentic Learning: The unit provides an authentic purpose for students to develop skills needed to read, speak, and write about text. Immigration is a hot topic now and has been an ongoing interest of Americans in the past.

	<p>Together, they provide authenticity both in learning and doing for students.</p> <p>Targeted Instruction: As a unit with a performance outcome clearly stated, an evidence-based argument, Part 5 goes a long way in integrating targeted instruction both in the writing process and the conventions of writing. Many tips in this section should support even the most reticent of writing teachers. Discussion is central to the unit; however, attention to discussion rules is not evident nor are norms for the functioning of "reading teams". Developers might consider adding further support for teachers in using discussion and teams.</p> <p>Independent Reading: Suggested but no clear indication of individual accountability.</p> <p>Use of technology to deepen and/or draw attention to evidence and texts: Suggested but not a strong component within the unit.</p>
<p>Rating: 2 – Meets many of the criteria in the dimension</p>	

Dimension IV – Assessment

<p><i>The lesson/unit regularly assesses whether students are mastering standards-based content and skills:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Elicits direct, observable evidence of the degree to which a student can independently demonstrate the major targeted grade-level CCSS standards with appropriately complex text(s). ✓ Assesses student proficiency using methods that are unbiased and accessible to all students. ✓ Includes aligned rubrics or assessment guidelines that provide sufficient guidance for interpreting student performance. <p><u><i>A unit or longer lesson should:</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use varied modes of assessment, including a range of pre-, formative, summative and self-assessment measures. 	<p>There is sufficient oral and written checks in each segment of the unit for teachers to assess whether students are on track. As the unit builds to a final project, there are many benchmarks--almost too many benchmarks--that will allow teachers to make both formative decisions and adjustments. As students are working toward the final product, there are benchmarks that allow for self-assessment as well as peer assessment.</p> <p>A rubric is provided for the final essay and checklists are provided for formative use. The checklists are used for both the published writing and for student writing which adds an authenticity to the student writing.</p> <p>Discussion is essential to student growth as thinkers and exemplified in the unit's use of expert panels as part of jigsaw activities, within reading panels, and between partners in frequent, perhaps daily activity. Guidelines for those discussions are framed within the existing handouts, checklists, etc., however, there are no rubrics for those discussions. A discussion rubric for student self-evaluation and teacher assessment of student speaking and listening skills could prove a useful addition to the units assessment materials.</p>
<p>Rating: 3 – Meets most to all of the criteria in the dimension</p>	

Summary Comments

<p>The various strengths of the unit are fully documented in the comments in each section: at a high level, logical development of activities, abundant and thoughtfully chosen texts, and attention to important elements of a strong unit such as building disciplinary knowledge in ELA and social studies, moving toward independence, and embedding formative practice and assessment. The developers are commended for all these attributes and others not called out here but mentioned above.</p> <p>Since this is a unit plan rather than a series of lesson plans that would constitute a unit, inexperienced teachers may struggle with this unit because explicit instructional moves usually found in strong lesson plans are not present. Beyond the day to day, one big struggle might be simply understanding the totality of the unit to set up a reasonable pacing plan for instruction.</p> <p>On the other hand, newer teachers and even veteran teachers will benefit from the thoughtful discussion about how to understand and instruct student writing provided at the beginning of part 5. Along these same lines, the discussion about evidence-based argumentation is valuable.</p>
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Given the caveat for newer teachers, this unit is considered exemplary. For any district ready to develop daily plans from the unit plan, everything is here.

Rating Scales

Rating Scale for Dimensions I, II, III, IV:

3: Meets most to all of the criteria in the dimension

2: Meets many of the criteria in the dimension

1: Meets some of the criteria in the dimension

0: Does not meet the criteria in the dimension

Overall Rating for the Lesson/Unit:

E: Exemplar – Aligned and meets most to all of the criteria in dimensions II, III, IV **(total 11 – 12)**

E/I: Exemplar *if* Improved – Aligned and needs some improvement in one or more dimensions **(total 8 – 10)**

R: Revision Needed – Aligned partially and needs significant revision in one or more dimensions **(total 3 – 7)**

N: Not Ready to Review – Not aligned and does not meet criteria **(total 0 – 2)**

Rating Descriptors

Descriptors for Dimensions I, II, III, IV:

3: Exemplifies CCSS Quality - meets the standard described by criteria in the dimension, as explained in criterion-based observations.

2: Approaching CCSS Quality - meets many criteria but will benefit from revision in others, as suggested in criterion-based observations.

1: Developing toward CCSS Quality - needs significant revision, as suggested in criterion-based observations.

0: Not representing CCSS Quality - does not address the criteria in the dimension.

Descriptor for Overall Ratings:

E: Exemplifies CCSS Quality – Aligned and exemplifies the quality standard and exemplifies most of the criteria across Dimensions II, III, IV of the rubric.

E/I: Approaching CCSS Quality – Aligned and exemplifies the quality standard in some dimensions but will benefit from some revision in others.

R: Developing toward CCSS Quality – Aligned partially and approaches the quality standard in some dimensions and needs significant revision in others.

N: Not representing CCSS Quality – Not aligned and does not address criteria.