**K-2 ELA Questions to Guide Developing Units**

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| **Dimension I:**  **Alignment to the Depth of the ELA Core** | **Questions to guide development of units that meet the instructional intent of the CCSS** |
| * **Targets a set of grade-level CCSS ELA/Literacy standards for teaching and learning.** | * Does the teacher/developer articulate alignment to a reasonable set of standards? Do they make sense as a group? Too many? Too few? * Do the standards selected relate directly to the essential question / big understanding and do they direct the kinds of activities and assessments that will be used in the unit of study? * Are only a few literacy standards the focus of instruction for a multi-day plan or unit? * Will the selected standards be directly assessed? * Will the selected standards be explicitly taught? * Do the assignments, tasks and activities suggest a set of standards that should be targeted for instruction? * Do the assignments and activities make sense given the standards listed? * Is the lesson/unit instructionally tight?   ***Note****: Don’t lose sight of the content objectives over and above the literacy objectives. Literacy objectives need to be in service of the content objectives.* |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Includes a clear and explicit purpose for instruction.** | * Is the instructional purpose of the lesson/unit clearly communicated? * Is the purpose for instruction coherent with the standards identified and/or the assignments and activities? * Is accomplishing the purpose sustained throughout the unit? * Are there multiple purposes? Do they compete with each other? * When there are multiple lessons in a unit, do the purposes relate in a way that is sensible? When taken together, do the lessons accomplish the overall purpose? * Will the purpose be clear to the student? * Is there coherence and appropriate scope to the purpose? Does the focus of the unit remain strong throughout the unit? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Selects quality text(s) that align with the requirements outlined in the standards, presents characteristics similar to CCSS K-2 exemplars (Appendix B), and are of sufficient scope for the stated purpose.** | * Does the text measure within the grade-level complexity band, both quantitatively and qualitatively? (grades 2-12) * Is the text of sufficient quality and scope for the instructional purpose? Are the texts of sufficient quality? * Can the selected texts sustain the work that students are being asked to do? * Do the texts relate to one another? * Do the texts relate clearly to the key ideas / understandings of the unit? * Are a variety of genres represented? * What scaffolding will be needed to help all students have access to the text?   ***Note****: The point is to discern whether or not the texts are rich enough and worth the time for study. Determine whether or not the texts can sustain the work that students are being asked to do. If some of the texts measure below the grade level of complexity, have a rationale for including them. Every text within a unit does not need to be at the complexity of the grade band. When considering text complexity, take into account the associated tasks as well as the place in the sequence of instruction where students encounter it.* |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Provides opportunities for students to present ideas and information through writing and/or drawing and speaking experiences.** | Does the lesson/unit provide opportunities for students to present ideas and information through writing and/or drawing and speaking experiences? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| *A unit or longer lesson should:* |  |
| * **Emphasizes the explicit, systematic development of foundational literacy skills (concepts of print, phonological awareness, the alphabetic principle, high frequency sight words, and phonics).** | * Does the lesson/unit take advantage of opportunities that the text provides to teach foundational skills ? * Are students provided direct instruction in foundational skills ? * Is the progression of skills in the lesson systematic? Not too much and not too little. |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Regularly include specific fluency-building techniques supported by research (e.g., monitored partner reading, choral reading, repeated readings with texts, following along in the text when teacher or fluent reader is reading aloud, short-timed practice that is slightly challenging to the reader).** | * How will the students build fluency skills in the unit/lesson? What technique will be used? * Is the selected fluency technique new for the student(s)? If so, how does the lesson provide scaffolding for a new technique? How does it provide feedback to the students so they know they are using the technique properly? * How will students receive feedback on how they are doing as fluent reader? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Integrate reading, writing, speaking and listening so that students apply and synthesize advancing literacy skills.** | * Are students provided with multiple opportunities to develop reading, writing, speaking and listening skills? * Are students provided explicit instruction on reading skills needed to handle the selected texts? * Are students provided with explicit instruction on writing skills needed to complete the assigned tasks? * How will speaking and listening skills be enhanced? * Does the lesson/unit provide opportunities for students to present ideas and information through writing and/or drawing and speaking experiences? (K-2) * Do the text and writing tasks connect coherently? Does the student use the text directly in the assigned writing? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Build students’ content knowledge in social studies, the arts, science or technical subjects through a coherent sequence of texts and series of questions that build knowledge within a topic.** | * Does the instruction help students understand the disciplinary nature of the reading and writing skills needed in the content area? * Does the text build student’s ability to read text in the discipline? * How will the unique structure of text in the discipline be made evident? * How will students’ increasing understanding of reading skills in the content area contribute to their understanding of the content?   ***Note:*** *This is about disciplinary behaviors and moving past general reading behaviors. It is about significant context.* |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| **Dimension II: Key Shifts in the ELA Core** | **Questions to guide development of units that meet the instructional intent of the CCSS** |
| * **Reading Text Closely**: Makes reading text(s) closely (including read alouds) a central focus of instruction and includes regular opportunities for students to ask and answer text-dependent questions. | * Is the text WORTH reading closely (including read alouds)? Is it of sufficient merit and quality that the time and attention necessary for close reading (including read alouds) is warranted? * Is the text at the center of the instruction? Are activities about the information in the texts, or is the text just a jumping off point for a general conversation? * Are students being asked to read and reread (or listen to) the text, think deeply about it, participate in thoughtful discussions, and grapple with the particulars of the text? * Do the multiple texts being used create a clear, coherent focus on the essential question / big understanding of the unit?   ***Note****: The whole text does not need to be read closely especially if it is a long text. Moreover, only some texts in a lesson or unit need to be read closely. [Reading closely is not the only strategy aligned to the CCSS ELA, but it is an important one to reach the perseverance and thinking of the Core.]* |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Text-Based Evidence:** Facilitates rich text-based discussions and writing through specific, thought-provoking questions about common texts (including read alouds and, when applicable, illustrations, audio/video and other media). | * Are the questions WORTH answering? Do they merit the time and attention needed to answer them and lead students to a deeper understanding of the content? * Do the questions flow from the standards and help students develop skills in the standards? * Do the questions reflect a broad range of thinking (Bloom’s Taxonomy) and application (DOK)? * Are there a series of questions that require evidence from text and work together to facilitate rich conversations and writing? * Did the majority of the questions make the student go back to the text to find the answer? * Do questions ask for an inference drawn from across the text? * Have students been provided with enough of a background to have a rich, evidence-based discussion?   ***Note****: Don’t have to include a huge number of questions; rather focus on creating a series of valuable questions.* |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Academic Vocabulary:** Focuses on explicitly building students’ academic vocabulary and concepts of syntax. | * Is there evidence of conscious, intentional thought about the vocabulary that should be focused on when studying a particular text? * Are the vocabulary selected from the text under study consequential to the meaning of the text? * Are the vocabulary linked to the text, NOT drills? * Are there text-dependent questions that focus on vocabulary in context? * Are students building deep understandings of and applications of academic vocabulary? * Do vocabulary activities provide contextual understanding of the words as they are used in the text(s)?   ***Note:***  *Academic vocabulary is important in K-2 and there may be instances where lessons/units focus on vocabulary more overtly than others. There can be a variety of ways to focus on vocabulary – some can be teacher directed and others can be student directed. Academic vocabulary are really useful words that are transferrable across disciplines. Are they being developed from the text?* |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| *A unit or longer lesson:* |  |
| **Grade-Level Reading:** Include a progression of texts as students learn to read (e.g., additional phonic patterns are introduced, increasing sentence length). Provides text-centered learning that is sequenced, scaffolded and supported to advance students toward independent grade-level reading. | * Has an anchor text been identified for a set of complex tests that build knowledge and understanding about the subject area content? * What potential obstacles exist for some students in comprehending the text? * How will students be scaffolded in order for them to have access to appropriately complex text? * Do the questions and activities that are used with the complex text encompass the essential questions and big understandings that were targeted? * Are a variety of readability levels included in a set of text around the content? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Balance of Texts:** Focus instruction equally on literary and informational texts as stipulated in the CCSS (p.5) and indicated by instructional time (*may be more applicable across a year or several units).* | * Has the text been coded to designate informational vs. literary text? * Does the relative balance of information vs. literary align with the recommendations of the CCSS? * How does the unit contribute to a balance of informational and literary texts over time? * Are multiple types of text included in the text set for this unit? * Do the writing tasks of the unit match the text? * Is their adequate time for the unit? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Balance of Writing:** Include prominent and varied writing opportunities for students that balance communicating thinking and answering questions with self-expression and exploration. | * Have writing tasks of various length been included within the unit? * Is both on-demand and process writing included in the unit? * Does the writing enhance the understanding of subject area content and lead students to answers to the essential questions that form the purpose of the unit? * Has digital, as well as print, text been included as background for the writing that is done? * Does the text used provide exemplars for the types of thinking and writing that students will be doing as they complete the writing tasks? * What pre-writing activities will be used to prepare students for writing? * What writing skills must be taught explicitly / directly in order for students to complete the writing tasks? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| **Dimension III: Instructional Support** | **Questions to guide development of units that meet the instructional intent of the CCSS** |
| * **Cultivates student interest and engagement in reading, writing, and speaking about texts.** | * How is student interest used to motivate students to learn the content? * How does the instruction provide opportunities for deep learning and engagement with the content? * How are students provided choice in their reading, writing and speaking tasks? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Addresses instructional expectations and is easy to understand and use for teachers (e.g., clear directions, sample proficient student responses, sections that build teacher understanding of the whys and how of the material).** | * Does this set of instructional materials closely outline and support a sequence of learning? * Are the student resources (e.g., handouts and assignments) clear? * Could someone who is new to the lesson or unit pick it up and use it? * Are the materials sensible and usable for teachers so they can be followed easily without an inordinate amount of time and study? * Are the teacher resources (annotated student responses , supports for ELLs, SPED, etc.) clear? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Integrates targeted instruction in multiple areas such as grammar and syntax, writing strategies, discussion rules and aspects of foundational reading.** | * How does the unit integrate instruction (writing, grammar, discussion rules, and foundational reading? * Are the integrated areas being assessed formatively? How does the student know they have improved? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Provides substantial materials to support students who need more time and attention to achieve automaticity with decoding, phonemic awareness, fluency, and/or vocabulary acquisition.** | * How the unit provide additional support for students who have not reached automaticity in the selected learning targets? * How will students be identified who need additional support? * How will students and teacher know the student has improved during this unit in the selected targets? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Provides all students (including emergent and beginning readers) with extensive opportunities to engage with grade- level texts and read alouds that are at high levels of complexity including appropriate scaffolding so that students directly experience the complexity of text.** | * Are all students expected to engage with the same, appropriately complex text? * What scaffolds can be put in place to ensure that all students have access to the text? * Are multiple opportunities provided for engagement with the text, utilizing varied approaches, strategies and types of assistance?   ***Note****: This criterion is primarily about opportunity. Provide evidence that all students are given opportunities to engage with the central text with scaffolding that preserves the grade level complexity of the text. Although this criterion has a close relationship to the 5th and 6th criteria in this dimension, this particular criterion does not require evidence of scaffolding specific to special learning or language needs. Rather, this criterion asks for evidence that all students are expected and given opportunity to read the grade-level text.* |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Focuses on sections of rich text(s) (including read alouds) that present the greatest challenge; provides discussion questions and other supports to promote student engagement, understanding and progress toward independence.** | * Does the lesson/unit focus on sections of rich text(s) (including read alouds) that present the greatest challenge? * Do discussion questions and other supports promote student engagement?   Note: *Rich text(s) are texts that are worthy of rereading, include Tier 2 words, incorporate layers of meaning, and serve as mentor texts for writing. Challenging sections often require scaffolding for close reading.* |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Integrates appropriate, extensive and easily implemented supports for students who are ELL, have disabilities and/or read or write below grade level.** | * Have instructional supports been pre-planned for all potential areas of needs, including those of ELL students, students with disabilities or students who are below grade level in their reading? * How will the needs of students be identified? * How will students with special needs be supported socially as they read, write, listen and speak? * What special instruction will be provided for students with special needs in order to provide them with the skills and knowledge they need to meet the literary standards?   ***Note****: This criterion is about equity and access. This criterion requires that the developer/teacher has included supports that address special learning and language needs that is tied to instruction. Think about the experience of the lesson or unit from the student perspective in developing appropriate supports.*  *Supports may be included that will assist students with special learning and language needs but also are good for all students, and are noted as such.* |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Provides extensions and/or more advanced text for students who read or write above grade level.** | * How are the advanced learning needs of students addressed through extension activities? * Are the activities tailored to the needs of advanced students rather than just adding more of the same kind of work? * Does the advanced text align with the essential question / big understanding? * How will advanced students interact with other students to share their building knowledge and skills? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| *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).*** | * Is there a clear progression in the learning throughout the unit? * Are the skills and concepts being worked on and deepened over the course of the unit? * Can students identify how their skills are being advanced and deepened across the unit or a series of units or lessons? * What overt criteria has been developed to share the increasing progression of learning expectations? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Gradually remove supports, requiring students to demonstrate their independent capacities *(may be more applicable across the year or several units).*** | * Are students working toward independence? * Have students had the time to build capacity toward independence? * What criteria will be used to remove supports as students become more skilled? * What evidence will be accepted to show that a student can independently access the content? * How will supports be withdrawn and added as needed throughout the unit? Are there multiple entry and exit points for supports? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Provide for authentic learning, application of literacy skills and/or student- directed inquiry.** | * How will students apply the skills they have learned in another content or independent reading? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **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).*** | * How will students be held accountable for independent reading? * How much time will be devoted to independent reading based on student choice and interest? How will time used for this purpose move students toward attainment of the standards? * How will confidence and motivation be enhanced through the use of independent reading? What measures will be used to assess these? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| * **Use technology and media to deepen learning and draw attention to evidence and texts as appropriate.** | * How will technology and media provide additional content? * How will technology help identify and organize evidence? * How will technology and media support reading, writing, and speaking/listening? * How will technology support all learners? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| **Dimension IV: Assessment** | **Questions to guide development of units that meet the instructional intent of the CCSS** |
| **Elicits direct, observable evidence of the degree to which a student can independently demonstrate foundational skills and targeted grade level literacy (CCSS (e.g., reading, writing, speaking and listening, and/or language).** | * Are the assessments aligned to the major targeted standards and to the instructional activities? * Is there a coherent assessment strategy that is related to the instruction and sustained throughout the unit? * Is there a match between the targeted standards, instructional activities, methods of assessment, and the Depth of Knowledge?   **Note**: Evidence of what students can do may be produced by the assessment but it may not provide evidence of proficiency of the targeted standards. When evaluating the unit for this criterion, reviewers should consider all of the assessment across the entire unit, not only the summative assessment at the end. This is about a true alignment of standards, tasks, and assessment. |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| **Assesses student proficiency using methods that are unbiased and accessible to all students.** | * How will students be allowed to show what they have learned? * How does the unit provide for possible student responses to discussion questions? * How does the unit/lesson provide teacher and student with exemplars? * How does the formative and summative exemplar(s) model the standards? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| **Includes aligned rubrics or assessment guidelines that provide sufficient guidance for interpreting student performance and responding to areas where students are not yet meeting standards.** | * How do the assessments describe student expectations (e.g. annotated student work, descriptive rubrics/checklists)? * How will the unit provide users with clear criteria for interpreting student work as developing toward or mastery of the targeted instruction? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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| *A unit or longer lesson should:* |  |
| **Use varied modes of assessment, including a range of pre-, formative, summative and self-assessment measures.** | * How will the unit provide for a balance of assessments? |
| Other Questions / Criteria: | |
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