

CORE KNOWLEDGE DESCRIPTION

CONTENT SPECIFIC

A typical state or district curriculum standard might say, “Students will demonstrate knowledge of people, events, ideas, and movements that contributed to the development of the United States.” But which people and events? Which ideas and movements? Another standard says, “Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.” But what text in particular?

The Core Knowledge Sequence is distinguished by its specificity. By clearly specifying important knowledge in language arts, history, geography, math, science, and the fine arts, the Sequence presents a practical answer to the question, “What do our children need to know?”

The Sequence is not a list of facts, events, and dates to be memorized. It is a guide to content from grade to grade, designed to encourage steady academic growth and progress as children build knowledge and develop skills year after year.

CUMULATIVE

The Core Knowledge Sequence provides a clear outline of content to be learned from preschool through grade eight. Knowledge, language, and skills build cumulatively from grade to grade. This cumulative building of knowledge helps ensure that children enter each new grade ready to learn.

Teachers in Core Knowledge schools can confidently predict the knowledge and skills children have been taught in prior grades, build on that learning, and prepare them for what comes next. That’s because the Core Knowledge Sequence is built on the principle, firmly established by cognitive scientists, that we learn new knowledge by building on what we already know.

Individual students will differ in their degree of mastery, and mobility will require focused help for students who lack the expected prior knowledge. But the cumulative quality of the Core Knowledge Sequence greatly increases the likelihood that as children proceed from one grade to the next, they will emerge well prepared with a shared body of important knowledge and skills.

COHERENT

In the United States, especially in language arts instruction, curriculum tends to be fragmentary and disconnected. Such incoherence can hinder learning and vocabulary acquisition. It also leads to the repetitions and gaps that too many children experience in their early education.

In contrast, the Core Knowledge Sequence provides a coherent approach to building knowledge within a grade level and across grade levels. In schools following the Sequence, there are no repeated units in multiple grades on, say, the rain forest or pioneer days, with little or no attention to the Bill of Rights, world geography, or exposure to other cultures.

The Sequence is organized to support coherent instruction that allows students to build and deepen their knowledge grade by grade, and to make cross-curricular connections across subjects.

For example, in a school following the Core Knowledge Sequence, students in fifth grade study the Renaissance. The word “renaissance” means “rebirth”—specifically, in Europe in the 1500s, a rebirth of interest in ancient Greece and Rome. Teachers in a Core Knowledge school can confidently build on students’ prior learning about ancient Greece and Rome (grades 2 and 3) and the Middle Ages (grade 4). They can connect their historical studies to topics in Visual Arts (in which the Sequence specifies masterworks by Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and others) and in Language Arts (in which the Sequence specifies episodes from Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*).

Connecting across subjects and building on previous knowledge—these qualities make the Sequence coherent and effective.

The Big Ideas Behind Knowledge-Based Schooling

Why is knowledge-based schooling so important?

Knowledge builds on knowledge.

Knowledge is the key to reading comprehension.

Shared knowledge makes communication possible.

Equal access to knowledge promotes excellence and fairness.

KNOWLEDGE BUILDS ON KNOWLEDGE.

You learn something new by building on what you already know. The more you know, the more you are able to learn.

This insight, well-established by cognitive science (the study of how the mind works), has profound implications for teaching and learning.

Teachers know that when you introduce a new subject, some students will brighten with looks of recognition while others will retreat into puzzlement and uncertainty. Asking students to discuss a “threatened presidential veto” will only make sense to those familiar with the three branches of government and the principle of checks and balances in the Constitution. To learn something new, we need the relevant background knowledge. And such knowledge can’t be left to chance.

“The achievement gap is chiefly a knowledge gap and a language gap. It can be greatly ameliorated by knowledge-based schooling.”

—E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Why Knowledge Matters* (2016)

KNOWLEDGE IS THE KEY TO READING COMPREHENSION.

The earliest reading instruction teaches children to decode—to turn the marks on the page into their corresponding speech sounds (c – a – t > “cat”). But the ability to decode text fluently is only part of the challenge for developing readers.

In American schools, reading instruction typically proceeds from decoding to a focus on skills, such as finding the main idea, inferring, and comparing and contrasting. But if students are to understand what they read, they also need broad, content-rich knowledge of history, geography, science, literature, and the arts.

“We need to see the reading comprehension problem for what it primarily is—a knowledge problem. There is no way around the need for children to gain broad general knowledge in order to gain broad general proficiency in reading.”

—E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *The Knowledge Deficit* (2006)

SHARED KNOWLEDGE MAKES COMMUNICATION POSSIBLE.

No two people share exactly the same knowledge. But most people in a literate society know a great deal in common. In part, it’s this commonly shared knowledge that allows us to communicate.

When we communicate, we assume that our audience knows certain things that we know—not just the definitions of the words we’re speaking or writing, but a whole range of unspoken meanings and associations.

On the evening news you might hear the sportscaster refer to the victory of an underdog team as a “real Cinderella story.” On the same broadcast, the newscaster might refer to “rising interest rates” or “the ozone layer” or “the Brown decision.”

The newscaster doesn’t pause to explain—it’s taken for granted that you understand those terms. Shared knowledge is essential if we are to communicate with and understand each other.

EQUAL ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE PROMOTES EXCELLENCE AND FAIRNESS.

Advantaged students who arrive in the classroom with background knowledge and vocabulary will understand what a textbook or teacher is saying and will therefore learn more. Disadvantaged students who lack such prior knowledge will fail to understand and thus fall even further behind, relative to their fellow students.

Only by specifying the knowledge that all children should share can we guarantee equal access to that knowledge. In our current system, disadvantaged children especially suffer from low expectations that translate into watered-down curricula.

It's important to begin building foundations of knowledge in the early grades because that's when children are most receptive. Academic deficiencies in the first eight grades can permanently impair the quality of later schooling.

"Only a well-rounded, knowledge-specific curriculum can impart needed knowledge to all children and overcome inequality of opportunity."

—E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Why Knowledge Matters* (2016)

OHCS USES THE FOLLOWING CORE KNOWLEDGE PROGRAMS:

CKLA (Reading, Spelling, Writing, Content Area Reading, Vocabulary, Comprehension) **Grades K-8**

CKHG (History and Geography along with basic social studies topics and skills) **Grades 4-8**

CKSci (Science) **Grades 3-8**

*****CKHG and CKSci are embedded into the CKLA for K-3.**

