## Grade 3: Animals Adapt to Survive

## Introduction:

### Why Content Literacy?

As knowledge explodes in the digital age, learning the "content" of science and social studies becomes both more challenging and also more critical. Our goal is to teach students how to build enduring understandings about content area topics through reading a variety of texts, discussing them from multiple stances, and writing from various sources. We teach students not to memorize disconnected facts but to sort through information, think about it, and analyze their own and others' perspectives—in other words, to deeply comprehend and synthesize the key information. Content literacy encompasses the skills and strategies necessary to acquire content knowledge through the exploration of a variety of complex texts.

"Content literacy can be defined as the ability to use reading and writing for the acquisition of new content in a given discipline. Such ability includes three principal cognitive components: general literacy skills, content specific literacy skills . . . , and prior knowledge." - McKenna & Robinson, *Journal of Reading*, November 1990

This science content literacy unit of study focuses on providing students with strategies for meeting the challenges of reading and comprehending complex science texts. Throughout the unit, teachers will demonstrate how readers develop conceptual understandings through closely examining and making connections among key science terms, as well as interpreting visual models and representations. Students will not only learn strategies for making the content comprehensible, but they will also learn to observe their world through the lens of a scientist—questioning, activating schema, searching for information, and summarizing and synthesizing their findings. A major barrier to students' deep comprehension of content is often background knowledge. The lessons in the Reading Fundamentals content literacy units are designed to allow students to develop their background knowledge, or schema, and use it as they progress through the study. This gradual acquisition of knowledge through inquiry is a foundation of content literacy and builds engagement and enthusiasm for learning.

For additional resources and information on how to implement science content literacy units of study in which students learn to read and think like scientists and develop skills that lead to deep understanding and application of content, see *What You Need to Know About Science Content Literacy (Grades K-8)* on Fundamentals Unlimited  https://fundamentals.schoolwide.com/books/5136

## Why eLearning Units of Study?

We are faced with new challenges in education today. The need for effective online teaching is our current reality and this leads educators to rethink and re-imagine their instructional practices in order to optimize digital resources and tools. Schoolwide's goal is to create authentic and

meaningful teaching and learning experiences to be utilized in a remote learning environment and to assure teachers have appropriate and quality texts and materials to support effective online instruction.

Questions we considered as we worked on eLearning Unit design:

- **What are our student learning goals?** "Educational standards are the learning goals for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level." (Common Core State Standards Initiative) State and national standards describe the progression of ELA and disciplinary skills across grade levels. These standards help us determine *what* students are expected to know at the end of each grade.

- **In order for students to meet these learning goals, what curriculum resources and support can we provide teachers and students in an online learning space?** Learning goals or standards are *not* a curriculum. Educators need a plan for *how* to deliver instruction online so their students learn and thrive. Having a detailed plan to meet the learning goals often makes the difference in students achieving the goals.

- **How do we design digital lessons so they are meaningful, precise and interactive?** We blend evidence-based instructional practices with effective distance learning practices. This includes many visual supports and examples, opportunities for students to listen to different voices (teacher, video, guest reader, peers), opportunities for students to interact and engage with content (i.e. using digital tools like "whiteboard" on Zoom, to showing a thumbs up, to choral reading or stopping and jotting).

- **How do we create small group experiences or lessons where teachers differentiate instruction and support student learning?** Teachers use small group instruction to provide guided practice, as well as opportunities to extend, reinforce and transfer skills. Meeting with small groups remotely is more manageable and allows for deeper discussions. Additionally, during small group interactions teachers can better ascertain student strengths and challenges, as well as provide timely feedback.

- **What types of meaningful, independent tasks will allow students to practice and apply the strategies and skills taught?** Students will be completing these tasks at home and because equity is essential we need to provide options for both digital assignments and ones students can do with pencil and paper (or other hands-on materials). The independent work should align to the instruction and students should feel successful and prepared to share their work, often during small group time.

- **How do we monitor and assess student progress and learning?** Teachers have access to multiple assessment possibilities within each lesson. Both print and digital assessments are provided and can be assigned to students in multiple learning management systems. Assessments include content specific assignments, appendices to practice the focus skill or strategy, videos with embedded questions to check for understanding, writing projects and performance tasks, as well as teacher and student conversations and observations during small group instruction and guided practice.