



# Science of Reading: The Secondary Years

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## The Secondary Years (7-12): Literacy For Ideas And Identities

During the secondary years, students embark on a journey of self-discovery, ideally engaging in collaborative and individual learning experiences that shape them as both scholars and citizens. Literacy learning continues along the same continuum, but now there needs to be a focus on purpose-driven integration of information across sources. This phase emphasizes the development of strong oral and written communication skills, which showcase students’ content mastery, ability to grasp abstract concepts, and a capacity to articulate insights that are uniquely their own—all fueling their cognitive and social development, including perspective taking, and therefore their academic and personal growth.

## High-Impact Practices: Cultivating the “Big 6” for Lifelong Literacy

Reading, writing, and communication skills develop from early childhood through adolescence. Across these early years, these high-impact practices develop the “Big 6” in literacy-learning environments that are rigorous, authentic and culturally responsive, laying the foundation for lifelong literacy.

### Defining Literacy for Today + Tomorrow

The ability to read, write, speak and listen as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication; the ability to communicate in diverse ways and with diverse audiences; the ability to understand and use print in an increasingly text-mediated, information-rich, digital and fast-changing world.

(See NYSED’s Briefs on Advanced Literacies)

High-Impact Instructional Practices

#### COLLABORATIVE AND CULMINATING PROJECTS, PERFORMANCES, AND CELEBRATIONS

Goal: Application and Integration of Knowledge, Skills, and Competencies; Development of a Product  
Promotes: **BIG 6** + critical and creative thinking • collaborative planning and problem solving • self-regulation

#### TEXT-BASED DISCUSSIONS AND WRITING OPPORTUNITIES

Goal: Development and Application of Language, Interpersonal + Communication Skills, and Content Knowledge  
Promotes: **BIG 6** + critical thinking • knowledge building • perspective-taking • organizing, planning, editing, revising

#### ENGAGEMENT WITH A VARIETY OF HIGH INTEREST, DIVERSE, AND COMPLEX TEXTS

Goal: Intellectual Inquiry into Big Ideas, Rich Content, High-Utility Vocabulary, and Diversity of Perspectives  
Promotes: **BIG 6** + textual analysis + interpretation • knowledge building • reasoning + synthesizing

#### PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS, PHONICS, SPELLING, AND WORD STUDY SKILL-BUILDING

Goal: Fostering Foundational Literacy and Language Skills Alongside Developing Essential Reading and Writing Proficiency  
Promotes: **BIG 6** + joyful and purposeful interactions with language • metalinguistic skills • analytical thinking

#### FOSTERING UNDERSTANDING OF PRINT CONVENTIONS, FEATURES, AND FUNCTIONS

##### Concepts of Print

##### Text Structures, Patterns, and Purposes

Goal: Understanding the Conventions of Written Language + Navigating and Comprehending Increasingly Complex and Varied Texts  
Promotes: **BIG 6** + joyful and purposeful interactions with print • information processing • metacognitive skills • analytical thinking

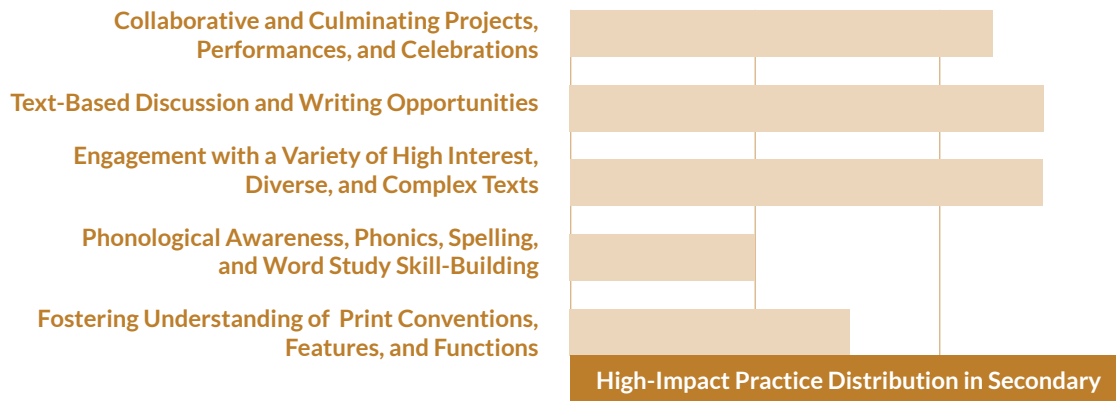
PreK

Elementary Grades

Secondary Grades

## High-Impact Practices in Action: How Much Exposure? How Often?

Maximizing the potential of the high-impact practices requires a well-designed architecture that ensures a developmentally appropriate, meaningful approach to implementation. The graph below is a stylized visual to show the relationship between and among the practices in relation to time, and needed learner exposure and engagement in the secondary years. This distribution could be for a given day, week, month, or any specific period of time or unit.



## High-Impact Practices in Action: Which School and Classroom Structures and Processes?

Laying the foundation for lifelong literacy requires well-designed, high-quality learning environments. In these environments, there are enabling structures and processes to bring the high-impact practices to learners in ways that are developmentally appropriate and engaging.



## High-Impact Practices in Action: What Do These Look Like in Secondary Settings?

	What Does This Look + Feel Like?	What Skills are Fostered?	Whats Structures And Processes Are Needed In a Secondary Literacy Setting?
<b>Collaborative and Culminating Projects, Performances, and Celebrations</b>	Learners plan and work together, express themselves orally and in writing, and showcase their thoughts and ideas in an extended project, performance or celebration.	Learners hone their social-emotional skills and competencies, especially executive functions and perspective taking, and cultivate their multiple identities while building up the “Big 6.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A plan to ensure the topics and content are directly connected to prior learning, to serve as opportunity to consolidate and extend learning.</li> <li>• Communication protocols and thinking routines as well as access to and familiarity with multiple modes of expression.</li> </ul>
<b>Text-Based Discussion and Writing Opportunities</b>	Learners engage in intensive interactive reading experiences with grade-level text; they are discussing, debating, and writing about what they’ve read—comparing information and perspectives across sources and conducting research.	Learners cultivate and consolidate conceptual knowledge, and hone critical thinking and communication skills, including argumentation, all the while actively engaging in identity formation and developing the “Big 6.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Text sets with content-rich themes to support knowledge-building opportunities.</li> <li>• Protocols and routines to promote discussion and debate skills.</li> <li>• Tools for writing ideation, planning, and organizing information.</li> </ul>
<b>Engagement with a Variety of High Interest, Diverse, and Complex Texts</b>	Daily classroom work features content-rich text sets, organized around the unit theme—and that span genres, affirm and broaden perspectives, and develop inclusive community.	Learners cultivate and consolidate their critical thinking, perspective taking, and social-emotional skills while building the “Big 6.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Units with text sets organized around engaging, content-rich topics, and that promote multiple perspectives and/or stances.</li> <li>• Talk and learning routines that encourage integration of information across texts, use of textual evidence, and integration of academic language.</li> </ul>
<b>Phonological Awareness, Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study Skill-Building</b>	Learners analyze words with complex spelling patterns, intricate morphological structures, and nuanced linguistic elements such as connotations. Target words are explicitly taught, and application in authentic tasks is modeled and practiced.	Learners are developing their metalinguistic and metacognitive skills, building a toolkit of advanced vocabulary, and developing a curiosity for and appreciation of the precision of word choice in oral and written communication, all while building the “Big 6.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A systematic plan for connecting word study to subject-specific vocabulary and terminology.</li> <li>• Embracing linguistic diversity by intentionally selecting words spanning languages and dialects and a prioritization of critical language awareness.</li> </ul>
<b>Fostering Understanding of Print Conventions, Features, and Functions</b>	Learners apply print concepts to digital texts, refining online navigation across articles, e-books, social media posts, and online magazines. They explore subject-specific structures like script formatting, lab reports, and scientific papers.	Learners develop metacognitive skills, digital literacy skills, and recognize the significance of print in conveying meaning across a wide variety of subjects, mediums and genres all the while building up the “Big 6.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A comprehensive plan for integrating technology use into classrooms, including equitable access to digital resources and comprehensive digital literacy training.</li> <li>• A scope and sequence of subject-specific conventions that will be explicitly taught.</li> </ul>

## Supporting Developing Readers With Identified Needs

Today’s diverse population of learners includes English Language Learners and/or students with identified disabilities. When organizing for these populations, it is critical to ensure two things: that all students feel valued, understood, and represented, and that they have access to the rigorous, high-quality learning and teaching described in this briefs series. That high-quality approach involves attention to learning environments that reflect key principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL):

- Presenting information and content in different modalities
- Ensuring multiple means of engagement and representation
- Using supportive digital learning tools and flexible class spaces to promote choice and investment

Many of these design principles are reflected in today’s frameworks aimed at supporting students with identified needs, including Response to Intervention (RTI), Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

### Case Snapshots



Antonio is a 9th grader who is thrilled to be in high school where they can take electives that cater to their passion for art. Antonio was surprised to find they were really enjoying their U.S. History course, where the teacher taught the significance of several famous monuments, including local ones. Later, their teacher had students research recent campaigns to remove and/or rename monuments and memorials with controversial histories. This unit of study culminated in a debate where students articulated and considered various perspectives while using evidence from key sources to support their ideas. Antonio’s teacher was especially impressed with Antonio’s use of several of the high-utility vocabulary words that were introduced and explored in the unit, such as “heritage”, “monument”, “campaign” and “rationale.”



Soojin, a gregarious 12th grader who recently discovered her passion for writing, and at the encouragement of her 11th grade creative writing teacher, signed up for a fall semester journalism course. Her favorite assignment involved examining the ways in which various local, national, and international newspapers covered the Olympics. Her culminating project involved collaborating with a peer to write and submit an article to the school newspaper in which they cautioned fellow students to be aware of biases inherent in journalistic writing. Soojin belongs to the school’s club for Asian-American students and enjoys time spent with that circle of friends.

### Case Analysis

1. How did Antonio and Soojin’s history and journalism assignments, which required research, debating, and adept use of high-utility vocabulary, enhance 21st-century literacy skills, such as critical thinking, effective communication, and understanding diverse perspectives?
2. How might the opportunity for social development—through course electives and participation in affinity groups—influence the formulation of insights that are uniquely Antonio and Soojin’s own? Consider the role of personal experiences, cultural perspectives, and societal influences in shaping their unique understanding.

## Reflect and Analyze: Professional Learning & Strategic Planning

With an understanding of relative instructional time and practice distribution in an elementary setting, recognition of critical structures and processes, and knowledge of what high-impact practices look like and feel like at this level, use your take-aways to:

- Review curricula in use or select potential new ones; review and/or adjust literacy blocks or subject-area instruction.
- Audit students' instructional environments and experiences across classrooms and grades.
- Ensure implementation of both culturally and linguistically responsive sustaining and practices for inclusion, belonging, and academic rigor.
- Consider the match with professional learning opportunities for educators.
- Examine vertical instructional trends across PreK, elementary, and secondary classrooms within a school or district.

## Key References & Resources

### References

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### Resources

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