

What is the CKLA program?

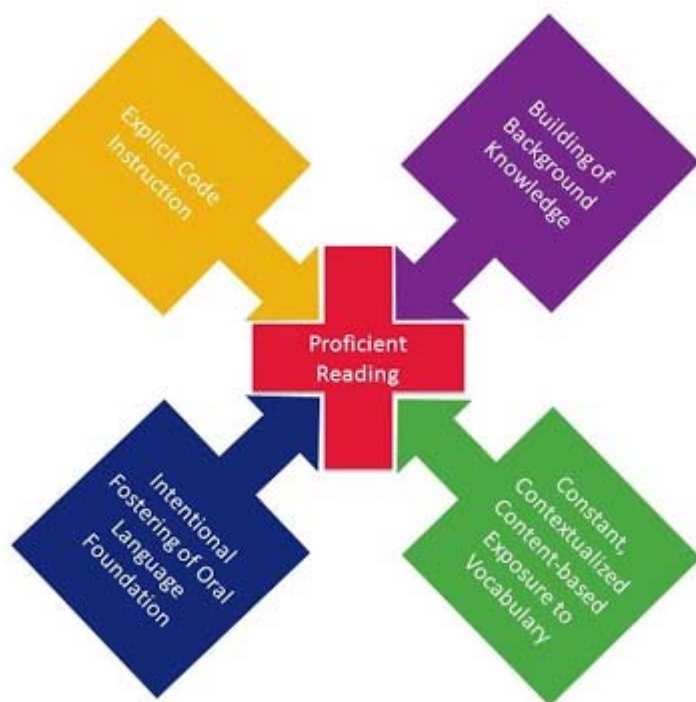
CKLA is a preschool–grade 3 Reading program in which the preschool and K–3 materials respect the important differences between early childhood education and formal schooling.

CKLA is a coherent reading program, but there are important differences between the preschool and K–3 materials and approaches. The focus in preschool is to maintain a developmentally appropriate early childhood setting; the structures, routines, and activities are engaging and often playful, yet children receive a solid foundation for future language arts instruction.

The focus in K–3 is to develop fluent reading and writing skills, and to enhance language comprehension by building knowledge and vocabulary. This is accomplished through two strands: the Skills strand and the Listening & Learning strand. The Skills strand mainly focuses on decoding, encoding, grammar, handwriting, and the writing process; it contains decodable stories on a variety of topics. The Listening & Learning strand mainly focuses on building background knowledge and vocabulary; teachers read aloud stories that are too advanced for students to read on their own, enabling children to enjoy complex texts on a variety of topics from literature, science, social studies, and the arts.

All of the materials, preschool–3, were developed with substantial input from teachers and then were refined based on feedback from teachers and students who used early trial versions of the program.

What is the underlying philosophy of the CKLA program?



The underlying philosophy is that effective ELA instruction revolves around meeting the needs of the students in ways that heed two essential findings from cognitive science: decoding (and encoding) must become automatic and fluent, and broad background knowledge and vocabulary are essential to comprehension.

To be child-centered and research-based, the *CKLA* program is designed around the following four principles of instruction:

1. *Explicit instruction in the code is necessary for automatic and effortless decoding.* It is not enough to teach children to be familiar with letters and sounds. To create strong, fluent readers, instruction must help children read words automatically and effortlessly. Explicit instruction in, and extensive practice with, the spelling patterns of the English language is the only way that children can transition from learning to read (in which their mental energy is mostly focused on decoding) to reading to learn (in which, since decoding has become automatic, their mental energy can be devoted to comprehension of more complex texts and topics).

The *CKLA* Skills strand organizes children's reading experiences to maximize their practice in newly taught spelling-sound patterns. This is achieved in two ways. The first is the organization of instruction. A unique database was created to index every word in the English language and determine the most frequent spelling patterns. *CKLA* organizes instruction to teach the most frequent spelling patterns first in order to maximize the words children can read and move them into engaging, well-written, decodable texts early in the program.

These 100% decodable readers are uniquely designed to provide children intensive practice with the code within an authentic reading experience. They reinforce children's sense of success as readers by eliminating the distraction of encountering untaught spelling patterns or exceptions. These decodable texts not only engage children in a variety of topics, they are written in the style of chapter-books and inspire children to want to read more. Check out our sample readers at:

http://www.coreknowledge.org/mimik/mimik_live_data/view.php?id=1833&record_id=351

2. *Background knowledge is essential to strong comprehension.* The ability to be a critical and strategic reader depends on having a wide breadth of knowledge and related vocabulary. Comprehension isn't a transferable skill that can be applied equally well to any text. While reading comprehension strategies are often helpful, the less the reader knows about the topic at hand, the less he or she will grasp.

Building knowledge to build strong comprehension is the core premise of the *CKLA* program's Listening & Learning strand. The Listening & Learning strand provides teacher fiction and nonfiction read-alouds organized within domains of knowledge. There are 11–12 domains a year, each taking 10–15 days of instruction and giving children deep exposure to topics such as fables, insects, early Asian civilizations, the five senses,

mythology and more. The read-alouds in each domain build on each other, and domains within and across grades build on each other. The result is children with surprisingly broad knowledge of literature, science, social studies and the arts, as well as the ability to comprehend increasingly complex ideas and texts, to make connections and inferences, and to engage in lengthy discussions of the works they are hearing.

3. *Vocabulary learning is most efficient when it is contextualized, content-based, and constant.* There is nothing wrong with studying vocabulary lists—but the sheer number of words that children know clearly demonstrates that most vocabulary is learned in context, by hearing a word many times and thus having many contexts in which to guess at and infer its meaning.

The average six year old knows 6,000 words; the average high school graduate knows 40,000 words. Between third and twelfth grade children learn about 3,000 words a year. Not all these words are known equally well and most of these words were never taught—they were inferred through multiple exposures. Exposure to words that are related to different bodies of knowledge (i.e., domain-specific vocabulary like *photosynthesis* and *couplet*) and exposure to academic words that apply to many topics (e.g., *gravity*, *analyze*, *chorus*, and *trivial*) are both necessary for building a strong vocabulary. Everyday conversations, even classroom conversations, typically contain few of these words. Varied and complex texts on a wide range of topics—fiction and non-fiction—are necessary to provide children the multiple exposures they need to build their vocabulary.

Shared reading of carefully sequenced texts, which is at the heart of the Listening & Learning strand, is a powerful way to build young children’s vocabulary because it provides multiple exposures to words and ideas. Even better, the texts are more sophisticated than what the children can read on their own, and the teacher is there to answer questions and foster discussions that get students to use the words they are learning. By hearing complex texts on a coherent and systematically ordered set of topics, children begin connecting words to each other, to words they already know, thus forming an intricate web of words that they will continue to weave their whole lives. These words, and their connections, become children’s mental encyclopedia, allowing them to continually, and ever more easily, access the knowledge they need to understand what they read.

4. *The connection between oral and written language must be supported.* Although children do transition from learning to read to reading to learn in elementary school, it is not until the end of middle school that students’ reading comprehension is as strong as their listening comprehension. Even as children become strong readers and writers, there is a benefit to hearing and discussing complex texts that the teacher read-aloud. What is more, reading and writing are not all there is to English language arts—listening and speaking are important too. CKLA’s two-strand model respects all aspects of language development, and is designed to ensure that children become competent in all modes of communication.

Is CKLA a research-based program?

The research foundation for *CKLA* is interdisciplinary; it draws from decades of research in cognitive science, special education, and psycholinguistics.

Unlike many language arts curricula, *CKLA* has also been piloted with a longitudinal field test and found to be very promising in what it can offer students and classrooms.

For more, see:

http://www.coreknowledge.org/mimik/mimik_live_data/view.php?id=1833&record_id=357 and

<http://www.coreknowledge.org/ckla-research-basis>

Rationale and Program Design

How does the program support children’s reading and writing success across preschool–grade 3 in a systematic way?

Reading and writing—decoding and encoding—are inverse processes and the CKLA program teaches them as such.

Further, the ability to read and write is grounded in the ability to listen and speak. *CKLA* supports children’s success by explicitly recognizing these two facts in the design of its program. Children’s speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills are supported daily in intentional and systematic ways. The emphasis that any one of these individual skills receives during the *CKLA* instructional block shifts across preschool–3 in developmentally appropriate ways. This comprehensive, developmental approach supports children’s success as they move from being primarily oral language users in preschool and kindergarten to skilled oral and written language users by the end of third grade.

Why does the program include two strands of materials? How do the two strands work together?

CKLA is based on decades of cognitive science research revealing that reading is a two-lock box—a box that requires two keys to open. The first key is decoding skills, which are addressed in the Skills strand of CKLA. The second key is oral language, vocabulary, and background knowledge sufficient to understand what is decoded. These are covered in the Listening & Learning strand of CKLA. Together, these two strands unlock a lifetime of reading for all children.

The Skills strand provides intentional and systematic support in building decoding skills. The lessons support learning related to phonemic awareness, sound-letter patterns (or spelling patterns), decoding (both in explicit lessons and with engaging decodable texts), writing mechanics, and writing structure and processes on a daily basis, for 60 minutes.

The Listening & Learning strand develops young children’s language and background knowledge. By exposing children to rich and complex texts through daily read-alouds, engaging in text-based and analytic discussions of the text and content, and building connections from the text to the work of the classroom through extension activities, the Listening & Learning strand provides daily, extensive (60 minutes) broadening and deepening of children’s oral language and comprehension.

What is the rationale underlying the Skills strand of materials?

To create strong, fluent readers, instruction must help children decode words automatically and effortlessly. The Skills strand provides the explicit instruction and practice necessary to attain such fluency.

The CKLA program takes a comprehensive approach to teaching the code of the English language within the Skills strand. While the English language only has 26 letters, these letters combine to create 150 spelling patterns that represent 44 sounds of language. Typically, children are explicitly taught only a fraction of this information and must glean the rest from ad hoc and incidental exposure to these spelling patterns through text. CKLA focuses on explicitly teaching each of the 44 sounds and the 150 ways that these sounds are represented (via letters and letter combinations). This comprehensive approach assures educators that children have the knowledge they need to address any text and any word.

What is the rationale underlying the Listening & Learning strand of materials?

Reading comprehension depends on having knowledge of the topic of the text—so the Listening & Learning strand’s primary purpose is to build broad knowledge.

The Listening & Learning strand reflects the fact that knowledge, comprehension, and vocabulary are intimately related. The materials are designed to provide children sustained time on a variety of domains (bodies of knowledge) through shared read-alouds. This coherent organization of content is critical to building knowledge, inferring new vocabulary, and enabling comprehension. The content-rich, intentionally sequenced nature of the shared read-alouds within Listening & Learning creates the optimal context for incidental and explicit vocabulary-learning opportunities. After the read-aloud, children analyze the text through interactive discussion questions, engage in activities that foster their comprehension of complex sentences and ideas, and extend the ideas of the read-aloud into other activities in the classroom. In this way, the lessons create rich, academically oriented, oral language experiences that promote both receptive and expressive language skills.

Is the content of the readers in the two strands aligned?

The content of readers in the two strands is independent in the early grades; once children are strong readers the content is aligned.

Until the end of second grade, there is no systematic alignment in the content of the readers in the Skills strand and the Listening & Learning strand. This is for pragmatic and developmental

reasons. During the interactive shared read-alouds in the Listening & Learning strand, young children hear, understand, and use concepts, vocabulary, and sentence structures that are far more sophisticated than what they can read. Within the Skills strand, however, the priority is to ensure that children are systematically learning the code, so that by the end of second grade all children can read complex text independently. Readers in the Skills strand are written by expert children’s authors to be both engaging and 100% decodable. Thus, both strands offer rich texts—the texts simply prioritize different things. Since the readers in both strands are systematically organized, the fact that the content is not aligned in the early grades is actually a benefit: Students are exposed to more topics and thus have more opportunities to build broad knowledge and vocabulary.

How is writing taught in CKLA?

Writing in multiple genres is taught through a three-step process: plan, draft, and edit.

In addition to explicit lessons in handwriting, spelling, and grammar, a three-step writing process—plan, draft, and edit—is taught in the Skills strand. The process is reinforced as each new writing genre is addressed. Each genre is taught through a gradual reduction in scaffolding over a 6-lesson duration that includes teacher modeling, group practice, independent practice, and independent application. This systematic approach allows for continued support and predictable learning as children progress in their knowledge of text types and complexity of writing.

Is the program aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?

Yes. CKLA is fully aligned to the CCSS.

CKLA is 100% aligned to both the knowledge-building spirit of the standards and to each of the individual standards. At the individual standard level, the alignment is explicit: It is present at the domain level and unit level, as well as the lesson level.

It is important when considering the materials in light of the CCSS that the focus is on the grade-level standards, not the anchor standards. The anchor standards provide the essentials for college and career readiness—as such, they are not designed to be followed literally in the early grades. So, for example, while anchor standard 1 states “Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text” one of the corresponding standard for kindergartners is “With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.”

In terms of the spirit of the CCSS, that is captured in the ELA standards introduction:

Students who meet the Standards readily undertake the close, attentive reading that is at the heart of understanding and enjoying complex works of literature.... They actively seek the wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and informational texts that builds knowledge, enlarges experience, and broadens worldviews. They reflexively demonstrate the

cogent reasoning and use of evidence that is essential to both private deliberation and responsible citizenship in a democratic republic. In short, students who meet the Standards develop the skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening that are the foundation for any creative and purposeful expression in language.

Students who complete the full *CKLA* program are well on their way to meeting or exceeding the college- and career-readiness goals that shaped the CCSS, as well as becoming engaged, productive, responsible citizens who enjoy lifelong learning.

Are there spelling lists?

Yes. Beginning in first grade, the units within the Skills strand have spelling lists, as well as spelling practice infused in other activities. Prior to that there are lists of words that children write and learn.

In *CKLA*, spelling is not taught as an isolated list of words each week, but as a continually reinforced skill. As such, writing and reading work together to reinforce specific spelling/letter patterns. For example, a unit at the end of K teaches the digraph “i_e” for the sound /ie/. The writing work and spelling work in that unit will ask children to write words using this digraph, to write words from dictation (a traditional spelling test/activity), to answer story questions using words that would involve this spelling pattern, and to read stories that contain words that use this spelling pattern.

How do the stories and materials represent multiple cultures?

CKLA teaches children about people, cultures, events, and ideas from all over the world, past and present. The content, characters, and illustrations are diverse, so all children will see themselves, and their heritage, reflected in the program—and they will learn about others as well.

Much of this diverse knowledge building occurs in the Listening & Learning strand, where the domains, and the read-alouds in each domain, are so well organized that far more content is taught than in other early grades programs. Teacher do not have to make agonizing tradeoffs between traditional Western Civilization content and the equally important books, ideas, people, and events emphasized in multicultural approaches to education. *CKLA* provides both throughout its read-alouds in literature, science, history, and the arts.

The list of domains shows that children will be exposed to classic tales like Aesop’s fables, *The Three Little Pigs*, and *Peter Rabbit* and they will also find *Medio Pollito* (a Latin American tale), *It Could Always Be Worse* (a Yiddish folktale), and the Anansi stories (trickster tales from Africa). They will hear about Susan B. Anthony, Rosa Parks, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Cesar Chavez. They will learn about American history and they will also study cultures from around the world—Ancient Egypt, Early Asian Civilization, the Maya, Aztec, and Inca civilizations, and others.

To see this global knowledge building throughout the Listening & Learning strand, you can explore lists of the domains located at:

http://www.coreknowledge.org/mimik/mimik_uploads/documents/733/DomainSequence_CKLA_L&L.pdf

Is CKLA available in Spanish?

The program is not currently available in Spanish. Core Knowledge has translated the K – 3 versions of the books in the What Your Preschooler–Sixth Grader Needs to Know series into Spanish.

We hope to secure a grant or donation for more translations in the near future. For now, these translated books can be used as supplements to the original books to help children read and learn from the corresponding English-language volume.

Translations into Spanish of the K–3 books are now available free of charge. Download from:

http://www.coreknowledge.org/mimik/mimik_live_data/view.php?id=1833&record_id=191

How does the program support students who are learning English?

CKLA supports English learners (ELs) by providing a strong, comprehensive approach to English language arts instruction. The program’s heavy emphasis on listening and speaking, as well as building knowledge and vocabulary, should be especially helpful to ELs. In addition, Core Knowledge has some K–3 books in Spanish that can be downloaded for free.

According to Claude Goldenberg, a professor at Stanford University and a leading researcher in bilingual education and English as a second language, what educators and researchers have learned about good reading instruction for all students seems to also hold true for ELs—but ELs being instructed in English need some additional supports.

The design of CKLA is based on what educators and researchers have learned about good reading instruction. The Skills strand provides children systematic, explicit, and comprehensive instruction in the code of the English language. The sound-first approach in CKLA (as described under the FAQ "What is the rationale underlying the Skills strand?") is particularly supportive of ELs, as it lets them focus first on the sounds in words and then make the translation to how that sound is represented in the English alphabet. Explicit grammar lessons are also a feature of the Skills strand, which is consistent with the best thinking about how to build the foundational language skills needed to learn a second language. Anecdotal evidence from teachers using the Skills materials with diverse students indicates that the Skills materials are accessible for all learners, including ELs.

The vocabulary work, multiple meanings work, guided listening supports, and text exposure within the Listening & Learning strand also are beneficial to ELs.

In addition, a *Supplemental Guide* is currently being developed that will provide further support to educators seeking to meet the specific needs of ELs (as well as children with weak or lagging language skills). The *Supplemental Guide* will adjust the pacing of instruction, provide more specific guidance on explicit instruction for Tier 2 (broadly academic) and Tier 3 (domain specific) vocabulary words, and offer deeper support for syntactic awareness.

Currently, the *Supplemental Guide* is being developed; materials for kindergarten will be available online for free download in summer of 2013.

How do you differentiate instruction in the Skills strand for students who are reading on different levels?

Skills instruction is differentiated based on each student's needs, which are identified through a comprehensive placement test at the beginning of the year, as well as frequent formal and informal assessments throughout the year.

The *CKLA Skills* materials use a multifaceted approach to ensure that every student masters the decoding skills needed to become a proficient reader. First and foremost, *the Skills lessons and materials, including the Student Readers, were created using an explicit, systematic scope and sequence of letter-sound correspondences and phonics skills developed by the Core Knowledge Foundation*. There is no single, universally accepted sequence of instruction of letter-sound correspondences; however, the Foundational Skills section of the Common Core State Standards, which is supported by an overwhelming body of research, calls for instruction and materials in the early grades that provide explicit, systematic teaching and practice of these skills to ensure that all students have the fundamental competencies needed to become proficient readers. The *CKLA Skills* materials are structured to provide time for repetition, extra support, remediation, and/or enrichment as needed.

The skills in the later part of the *CKLA* decoding sequence assume mastery of the earlier, prerequisite skills. Therefore, the teacher's goal and focus is always to ensure that students master the skills in each unit before proceeding to the next unit of instruction.

To this end, teachers make use of frequent formal and informal assessments of students' progress. Beginning in kindergarten, instructional time and materials are explicitly allocated for assessment; differentiated instruction is then provided on the basis of these assessments. While highly scaffolded whole group instruction of the specific letter-sound correspondence(s) under study is a part of every Skills lesson, opportunities for small group instruction are also included. Guidance and materials to support students needing additional instruction and practice, as well as additional text selections for students ready for a challenge, are included in each unit.

Detailed guidance is provided to assist teachers in administering and analyzing the formative assessments included at the end of each Skills unit. Teachers are encouraged to pause before proceeding to the next unit if the formative assessment data suggest that students have not mastered the skills taught. To bring all students to mastery, additional materials are included in the optional Pausing Point for each unit, as well as in the *Assessment and Remediation Guide* for each grade level.

In grades 1–3, a placement test is used in the beginning of the year as an important screening tool to assist teachers in differentiating which students are ready for Skills instruction on grade level and which students may lack the prerequisite skills. Those who are not ready are regrouped for skills instruction beginning at an earlier point in the *CKLA* Skills strand. Students may lack these skills for a variety of reasons, including being new to *CKLA*, perhaps having used different approaches and/or instructional materials in earlier grades, failure to have thoroughly mastered the previous year’s skills, and/or regression over the summer break. Whatever the reason, it is important to identify knowledge gaps at the start of the year and address them (rather than pushing students ahead through grade level materials simply because they have been placed in that grade).

Detailed guidance is provided to assist teachers in analyzing and interpreting each student’s performance on the placement test. All teachers in a given grade level then meet to review the placement test results for all students in that grade. Using the criteria specified in the *CKLA* Teacher Guides, teachers then regroup students for Skills instruction only across all teachers within the grade level to create classroom groupings of students with similar skills in each classroom. The *CKLA* Teacher Guides at the various grade levels show teachers where to start in the *CKLA* sequence of decoding instruction and which materials to use for the particular students in their classes.

How much time will be spent on *CKLA* each day?

Combined, the Skills strand and the Listening & Learning strand require 120 minutes per day, and 160 days of instruction.

CKLA provides approximately 160 days of instruction (the exact number of days varies, depending on how much time teachers decide to devote to pausing for reinforcement and remediation). Each day of instruction involves 120 minutes of dedicated language arts time. This time will comprehensively address all language arts objectives and will comprehensively address all of the Common Core State Standards related to language arts.

Because the Listening & Learning strand contains so much science and social studies content, some schools choose to dedicate most of their science and social studies time to teaching *CKLA*.

Although the Listening & Learning strand can be broken into pieces (i.e., not requiring 60 straight minutes), the Skills program requires a full 60 minute block of time. Within the Skills strand, there is whole group instruction, small group/individual time (varying by lesson), and independent work (some writing, some reading). It is a comprehensive strand that fully supports children learning to read and write and that is why it requires the dedicated time.

What if I feel my child is performing above grade level?

How will my child's progress be assessed?

How can I help my child at home?