RESEARCHING
TO DEEPEN UNDERSTANDING

DEVELOPING CORE PROFICIENCIES
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS / LITERACY UNIT

GRADE 6

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

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DEVELOPING CORE PROFICIENCIES SERIES

This unit is part of the Odell Education Literacy Instruction: Developing Core Proficiencies program, an integrated set of ELA units spanning grades 6-12. Funded by USNY Regents Research Fund, the program consists of a series of four units at each grade level that provide direct instruction on a set of literacy proficiencies at the heart of the CCSS.

Unit 1: Reading Closely for Textual Details
Unit 2: Making Evidence-Based Claims
Unit 3: Researching to Deepen Understanding
Unit 4: Building Evidence-Based Arguments

The Core Proficiencies units have been designed to be used in a variety of ways. They can be taught as short stand-alone units to introduce or develop key student proficiencies. Teachers can also integrate them into larger modules that build up to and around these proficiencies. Teachers can also apply the activity sequences and unit materials to different texts and topics. The materials have been intentionally designed for easy adaptation.

Unit materials are available for free at www.odelleducation.com

RESEARCHING TO DEEPEN UNDERSTANDING

Literacy is the ability to explore and express meaning in a given medium. There are certain core proficiencies one develops to gain fluency and expressiveness in that medium. One develops attunement to the intricacies of expression and the way meaning is created and constructed in it. One also develops the ability to express understanding and explain that understanding given the evidence at hand. These proficiencies of attention and explanation serve one of literacy's purposes, which is to explore what that medium holds—the aspects of life it illuminates.

Exploration, itself, is a proficiency. There are skills, methods, and habits of mind that we can develop to lead us ever deeper into the experiences accessed in that medium. These skills involve being open to new knowledge, asking questions and finding better and new answers. They involve listening to those around us, building on what they know and have experienced, and incorporating that knowledge into our own exploration. They also involve making connections and organizing what we find, then returning to and refining those questions. As we explore, we also develop our ability to explain what we've come to think and show why we think it. Eventually this exploration—the process of research —leads us to an evolving perspective rooted in deep knowledge and understanding.

This unit develops that explorative proficiency: researching to deepen understanding. It lays out a process through which students learn to explore topics with their learning community, posing and refining questions and listening to experiences, and discovering areas they wish to investigate. It develops their ability to determine what they don't know or understand, and where and how to find that information. The unit also develops and supports student ability to archive and organize information in order to see and analyze connections in ways that aid comprehension, deepen their understanding and prepare them to express their evolving perspective.

HOW THIS UNIT IS STRUCTURED

Instruction in this unit is built around three components: a process for conducting research, a Research Portfolio developed by students throughout the process, and choosing a topic to research. The unit activities integrate these components in a learning progression that develops and supports proficiency in the entire research process.

Note on CCSS Requirements for Grade 6

Students in grade 6 are not expected by the CCSS to perform independent searches. Therefore, this unit outlines a simulated research process around a series of common sources that teachers provide to the class. Students engage in a sequence of activities that will support the development of research skills they will continue to use in the future, when performing searches independently.

Research Portfolio

The Research Portfolio is a structured collection of the research and analysis that students compile in their investigation. The components of the portfolio guide and archive the student's work in a way that teaches them key critical thinking, academic habits and organizational skills. By the end of the unit, students will have an organized, structured set of sources, annotations, notes, and analysis from which they can successfully accomplish any purpose they may have for their newly developed evidence-based perspective, whether that be an academic research paper or the construction of a product or process plan.

Instructional Sequence

The process for conducting research outlined in this unit is introduced and developed over a series of activities. As students work through these activities they create and compile the various parts of their Research Portfolios. While each part of the unit introduces skills associated with the various steps in the research process, it should be understood that the process itself is recursive and that these steps will be repeated and integrated as students conduct inquiry.

Part 1 introduces students to the idea of researching to deepen understanding and immerses students in a collaborative process for exploring a topic, choosing an Area of Investigation, and developing Inquiry Questions.

Part 2 addresses essential skills for assessing, annotating and making notes on sources to answer Inquiry Questions. Introduced here, these skills will be developed throughout the remainder of the unit.

Part 3 focuses students on the strategic close reading and evidence-based claim-making skills for analyzing sources in order to develop a deeper and comprehensive understanding of the Area of Investigation.

In **Part 4**, they review and evaluate their materials and analysis, refine their Inquiry Questions based on the evaluation, and return to the sources to address the identified gaps, using the skills introduced in Parts 2 and 3 .

Part 5 supports students in organizing their research and synthesizing their analysis in order to develop an evidence-based perspective of the Areas of Investigation. Students can use this perspective and Research Portfolio for creating a range of final products.

HOW THIS UNIT MIGHT BE EMBEDDED IN CONTENT-BASED CURRICULUM

Along with the research process and the Research Portfolio, the topics students explore and investigate make up the third component of the unit. This unit has been intentionally designed to support student research in a variety of curricular contexts. The activities introducing the research process and the materials that guide and construct the Research Portfolio can be used regardless of the subject matter students choose or need to investigate, or their purposes for that investigation.

Depending on their needs and goals, teachers can connect the instruction of this unit to texts and topics they are covering in their English classroom, as well as those that students are learning in other academic and technical disciplines.

Similarly, this unit outlines, develops, and supports a research process leading to an evidence-based perspective and a Research Portfolio that students can use for a variety of purposes, from a thesis-driven academic paper or presentation, to a design plan for constructing a house or industrial menu, to informing personal or community decision making.

To support teachers and students in choosing, connecting and exploring topics, this unit can be connected with Middle School OE Topic Resource Repositories. These repositories have been built for each grade level and contain a series of texts of suitable complexity level. Given that students in grade 6 are not expected by the CCSS to perform independent searches, this unit outlines a simulated research process that relies strongly on collaborative work around a common topic. To ensure a richer experience for the class, it is strongly recommended that all students also work on the same Area of Investigation within that topic. The OE Resource Topic Repositories provide not only common texts, but also potential Areas of Investigation, and model questions and tools to support instruction. Teachers can use these Repositories, as the materials provided cover all their needs for the instruction of this unit. Teachers are encouraged to supplement these Repositories with texts of their own that relate to specific paths of inquiry their class takes. They can also choose their own Topic and/or Area of Investigation and can use the OE Topic Resource Repositories as models for selecting a sequence of appropriate common texts and building all the model tools. Teachers can then use the OE Text Selection Guidelines and Text Suitability Form, available for free at www.odelleducation.com

OE TOPIC RESOURCE REPOSITORIES

Teachers can choose among many approaches for integrating the instructional framework and materials of this unit into the topical context of their class. The unit is designed for adaption to the various contexts in which teachers want to develop their students' research proficiencies.

At the 6th grade level, students are not expected to perform independent searches for sources. Therefore, this unit is built around the concept of modeling the process around a common topic and Area of Investigation. The process involves a combination of collaborative and independent work to achieve a rich and coherent learning experience and allow students to explore and build on each other's knowledge.

Approaching the development of research proficiencies in this way is modeled and supported by the OE Topic Resource Repositories. These repositories model how topics can be presented to students. They provide narrative introductions and Inquiry Questions to stimulate student interest and thinking. They articulate various directions students could explore within the topic and provide pre-selected sources and model tools to support instruction of the research process. Teachers may choose to use these Topic Resource Repositories to support their instruction or could take a similar approach with another topic. Places where the repository resources can be used are indicated in the unit plan.

Odell Education provides Topic Resource Repositories for all grade levels. The Middle School Topic Resource Repositories provide teachers with a set of sources that students can use to conduct supported research.

HOW THIS UNIT TEACHES VOCABULARY

This unit draws on a variety of strategies for teaching academic and disciplinary vocabulary. The primary strategy is the way critical disciplinary vocabulary and concepts are built into the instruction. Students are taught words like "analyze," "perspective," "questioning," and "criteria" through their explicit use in the activities. Students come to understand and use these words as they think about and evaluate their research and analysis and those of their peers. The handouts and worksheets play a key role in this process. By the end of the unit, students will have developed deep conceptual knowledge of key vocabulary that they can transfer to a variety of academic and public contexts. The activities also provide many opportunities for academic vocabulary instruction. Many of the activities focus directly on analyzing the way authors use language and key words to develop ideas and achieve specific purposes.

HOW THIS UNIT ALIGNS WITH CCSS FOR ELA/LITERACY

The instructional focus of this unit is on building student proficiency in a process for conducting research: developing and refining Inquiry Questions; assessing, analyzing, and synthesizing multiple sources to answer those questions; and organizing and using evidence from those sources to explain understanding in ways that avoid plagiarism. As such, the unit primarily aligns with **W.6.7** (*Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate*); **W.6.8** (*Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources*) and **W.6.9** (*Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research*)

This process involves key moments of both collaboration and independence. As the unit leads students through structured collaborative processes for initiating and refining inquiry, it develops their ability in **SL.6.1** (*Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly*). At other moments, students are alone in their search for and analysis of sources, building their proficiency for **RI.6.10** (*Read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 6–8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range*).

The task of writing from researched sources is an important part of larger writing processes. Thus, the unit develops student ability in key aspects of the production of writing expressed in the expectations of **W.6.4-5**, specifically their (*development, organization, planning, with some guidance and support from peers and adults*). And as they strategically write organized analysis,

eventually building to a written evidence-based perspective, students develop their ability for **W.6.2** (*Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content*).

Students develop these skills throughout the unit through direct instruction and guided practice, and they are assessed continuously through activities, graphic organizers, and written products.

As students develop these primary targeted CCSS skill sets, they also practice and use related reading skills from supporting CCSS. Throughout the research process, they read key sources closely and analyze textual detail to answer their Inquiry Questions, particularly building their growing proficiency for **RI.6.1** (*Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text*); **RI.6.2** (*Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments*); **RI.6.4** (*Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text*); **RI.6.6** (*Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text*); and **RI.6.9** (*Compare and contrast one author's presentation of events with that of another*).

SOURCES OF THIS UNIT INSTRUCTION

The instructional ideas contained in this unit are presented as our contribution to the national effort to prepare all US secondary students for college and career readiness. We intend that these principles, activities, tools, and strategies will be taken up, adapted, and improved upon by the educators who use them. While we take full responsibility for the content of the unit, and recognize that mentioning our key sources in no way implies their endorsement of that content, we would like to acknowledge some important influences and reference points for this work: the students and colleagues who contributed to the classroom experiences of our development team; the Common Core Standards; the PARCC ELA Curriculum Frameworks; the EQuIP Quality Review ELA Rubric; and the research on text complexity and text-dependent questioning from Student Achievement Partners.

DEFINITION OF TERMS USED IN THIS UNIT

Area of Investigation: a particular theme, question, problem, or more focused sub-topic within the general topic that warrants investigation.

Inquiry Question: questions posed by researchers about their Areas of Investigation to be answered through inquiry.

Research Portfolio: the binder or electronic folder where students physically or electronically store and organize all the material related to their personal research.

Topic: the general topic chosen for class exploration.

Topic Resource Repository: a repository of information on a topic including a general description, possible Areas of Investigation, source locations and model sources provided by OE to facilitate and support teaching and learning of the research process.

HOW TO USE THESE MATERIALS

This unit is in the format of a Compressed File. Files are organized so you can easily browse through the materials and find everything you need to print or e-mail for each day. The materials are organized into folders:

RESEARCH UNIT PLAN

- The Research Unit Plan (outlines the instructional activities of this unit and provides instructional notes)
- Teacher Research Unit Guide (lists the sequence of unit activities and related materials)
- Student Research Plan (guides students through the main steps of the research process)

HANDOUTS

This folder contains all of the supporting handouts that guide students through the research process, explaining key processes for students and teachers.

It includes the Research Criteria Matrix that aids teacher and student evaluation of student

TOOLS

This folder contains all of the supporting tools that help students build their Research Portfolios, aiding student thinking, habits, and analysis of researched information. Annotated Tools are provided to aid teacher instruction.

CHECKLISTS

This folder contains all of the checklists that guide students and teachers in the process of evaluating their work based on specific qualitative criteria.

TOOLS and **CHECKLISTS** have been created as *editable PDF forms.* With the free version of Adobe Reader, students and teachers are able to type in them and save their work for recording and e-mailing. This allows students and teachers to work either with paper and pencil or electronically according to their strengths and needs. It also allows teachers to collect and organize student work for evaluation and formative assessment.

TOPIC RESOURCE REPOSITORIES

Teachers can elect to use Topic Resource Repositories to support the instruction of the Research Unit Plan. The repositories contain information and sources for stimulating and supporting student research within a broad topic. The repositories contain:

- Information for framing the topic
- Possible Areas of Investigation
- Model Inquiry Questions
- Common source texts for instruction
- Models of Unit Tools

Activities where repository texts should be used are specifically referenced in the Unit Plan.

INTRODUCTION TO UNIT

OBJECTIVE: The teacher explains how critical readers use inquiry and research to deepen their understanding and develop an evidence-based perspective on a topic. Students are introduced to the purposes, the process, and the materials of the unit.

MATERIALS:
Teacher Research Unit Guide
Student Research Plan

TEACHER RESEARCH UNIT GUIDE - GRADE 6

INTRODUCTION	**Introduction to Unit**
I. INITIATING INQUIRY *Students determine what they want to know about a topic and develop inquiry questions that they will investigate.*	**1. Exploring a Topic**
	2. Choosing an Area of Investigation
	3. Generating Inquiry Questions
II. GATHERING INFORMATION *Students find and take notes on sources that will help them answer their inquiry questions and define the scope of their investigation.*	**1. Introduction to Sources**
	2. Assessing Sources
	3. Making and Recording Notes
III. DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING *Students analyze sources to deepen their understanding and answer their inquiry questions.*	**1. Reading Sources Closely**
	2. Writing Evidence-Based Claims about Sources
	3. Discussing Understanding of the Area of Investigation
IV. FINALIZING INQUIRY *Students synthesize their information to determine what they have learned and what more they need to know about their area of investigation. They gather and analyze more information to complete their inquiry.*	**1. Addressing a n Inquiry Question**
	2. Organizing Evidence
	3. Evaluating Research
	4. Refining Inquiry
V. DEVELOPING AND COMMUNICATING AN EVIDENCE-BASED PERSPECTIVE *Students review and synthesize their research to develop and communicate an evidence-based perspective on their area of investigation.*	**1. Reviewing Research Portfolios**
	2. Expressing an Evidence-Based Perspective
	3. Writing a Bibliography

INTRODUCTION TO UNIT

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

Introduce the purposes of the unit: 1) to develop the skills and habits used in conducting research to deepen understanding; and 2) to use those skills and habits in developing and communicating an evidence-based perspective on a topic by the end of the research process (in Part 5). Explain that the entire class will decide on a question or problem within a topic that they will all research together. The class will work from the same sources, but each student will compile his or her own Research Portfolio of personal annotations, notes, analysis, and writing.

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH

Begin the unit with a discussion of the nature, process, and tools of research. This unit approaches research as something literate people do to deepen their understanding of topics and develop a perspective that evolves as new evidence is found, analyzed and incorporated. Discuss with students:

- ◊ how this differs from having an opinion and setting out trying to find support for it
- ◊ how successful researchers follow a general iterative process and use tools and strategies to find, analyze, and organize information
- ◊ how this process leads researchers to adopt different points of view and to explore different paths as a consequence of their findings
- ◊ how a researched understanding and perspective serves many purposes, among them:
    - ⇒ Writing an article, essay, or academic paper on a topic or text
    - ⇒ Developing a position on a controversial issue
    - ⇒ Developing business plans
    - ⇒ Designing and building objects
    - ⇒ Informing personal and community decision-making
    - ⇒ Developing processes and plans
    - ⇒ Writing fictional or historical narratives
    - ⇒ Giving presentations

OVERVIEW RESEARCH PROCESS AND PORTFOLIO

Overview the two related instructional focuses: 1) a strategic research process and 2) an organizational system for annotating and archiving sources and making and recording notes and analysis. It's important that students have an initial understanding of the process so they can allow themselves to explore the topic and sources before feeling like they need to have a final position or thesis. Likewise it's important that students use the portfolio to organize and store their research and analysis so they have a strong record from which to draw upon to develop their evidence-based perspectives.

Process

This unit introduces students to a research process. Stress that while students will follow the process sequentially, they will also return to many of the steps and repeat them as their research develops.

Use the Student Research Plan to give students an overview of the process, briefly explaining the elements and importance of each stage. Its purpose is to highlight the general research process, showing the steps students will take and the tools they will use. Students can use it as a guide or checklist while working. They can also use it as a reference for future research projects in ELA or other disciplines.

INTRODUCTION TO UNIT (CONT'D)

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

Portfolio

Throughout the research process, students are expected to use a structured organizational system for annotating and analyzing sources and recording and storing information. As they work through the steps, they build Research Portfolios consisting of various tools that guide, store, and organize their research and analysis. The portfolio may be either electronic or on paper.

Use the Portfolio Description to introduce and explain the purpose and structure of each section.

The Research Portfolio is not filled sequentially. Its purpose is to organize information and analysis **throughout the research process**, as opposed to compiling and organizing information **at the end of the process**. Organizing information along the way helps focus research and supports comprehension and successful writing.

Inquiry Questions are at the heart of the process and guide students every step of the way. Students are constantly asking and answering questions, and the Research Portfolio is a reflection of the process that they follow.

Student research thus remains organized at all times, allowing them to browse within their materials, to establish connections easily, and to decide what inquiry steps to take next based on the analysis of their current findings.

PORTFOLIO SECTIONS	CONTENT
SECTION 1: DEFINING AN AREA OF INVESTIGATION *This section stores all the work you do exploring the Topic and choosing an Area of Investigation.*	Exploring a Topic Area Evaluation Checklist Potential Sources
SECTION 2: GATHERING AND ANALYZING INFORMATION *This section stores all the information you gather throughout your investigation.* *It also stores your notes and analysis of sources.* *All the tools should be grouped by source.*	Potential Sources Annotated Sources Personal Drafts Taking Notes Forming EBC
SECTION 3: DRAWING CONCLUSIONS *This section stores your Notes and EBCs about Inquiry Questions, your research evaluation,* *and the personal perspective that you come to at the end of your inquiry.* *Group the Taking Notes, Forming EBC or Organizing EBC by Inquiry Question.*	Taking Notes Forming EBC Organizing EBC Synthesizing EBC Research Evaluation Evidence-Based Perspective