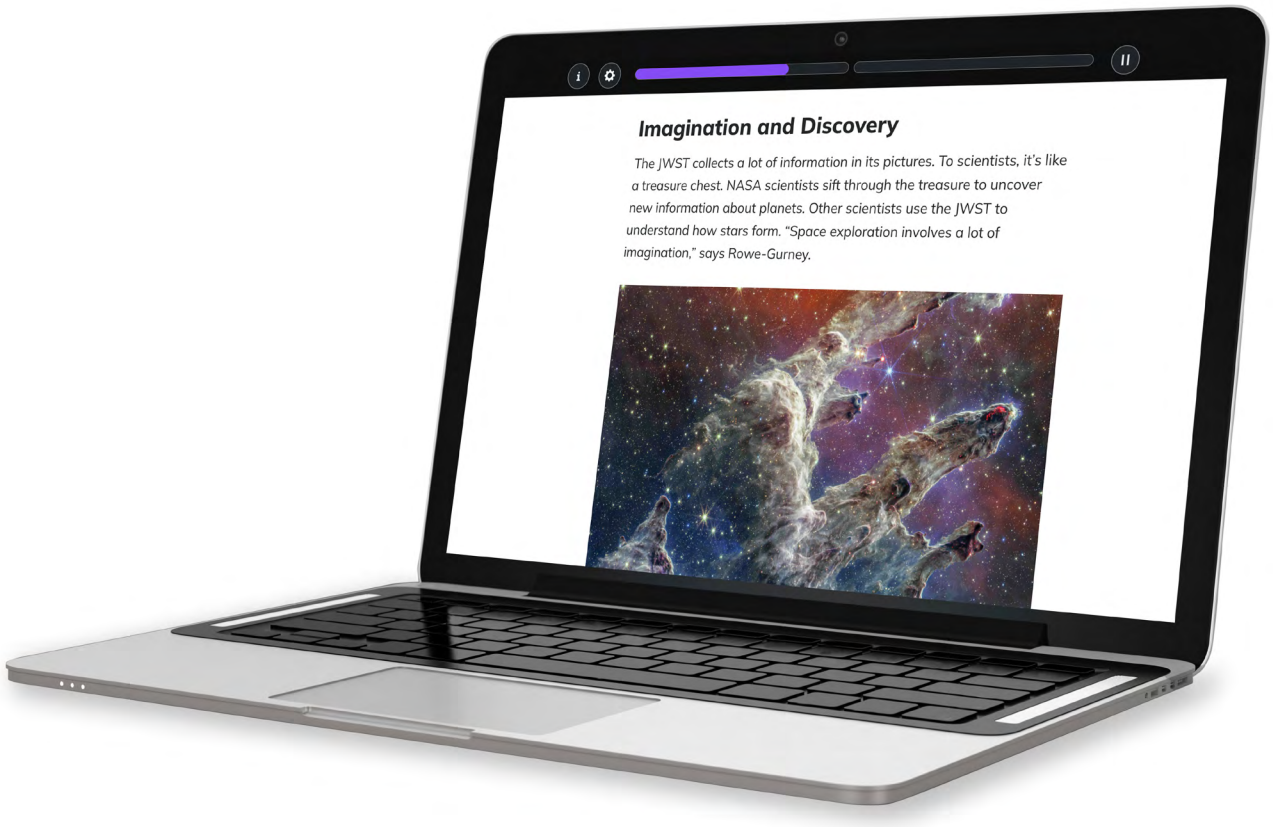
i-Ready Pro

# Essential and Elevate Lessons in Comprehension Research Base

## Reading



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## *i-READY PRO* PROGRAM OVERVIEW

*i-Ready Pro*, the next evolution of *i-Ready* for middle school, offers a reimagined student experience with streamlined lesson pathways and deep insights for educators into progress and development. These enhancements address the diverse range of student needs in today's secondary classrooms with content tailored to this critical developmental stage. The program serves all middle school students, with new accelerated pathways for near- and on-grade level learners, and targeted intervention for older striving learners who need support in comprehension.

Students first complete the *i-Ready* adaptive assessment, which places students in lessons that consider their zone of proximal development in several important Reading domains. Students can place in one of three strands in *i-Ready Pro*:

- ***i-Ready Pro* Essential Lessons in foundational skills** serve middle school students who need intensive intervention in foundational reading skills.

- ***i-Ready Pro* Essential Lessons in comprehension** serve middle school students who have the foundational skills needed to decode but still need support in building knowledge, vocabulary, and key comprehension skills.

- ***i-Ready Pro* Elevate Lessons in comprehension** serve middle school students who are ready to engage in grade-level content, with additional support as needed.

These pathways in *i-Ready Pro* help encourage students to feel confident by helping them acquire the skills and strategies they need to strengthen their reading.

## *i-READY PRO* ESSENTIAL AND ELEVATE LESSONS IN COMPREHENSION OVERVIEW

There are three major organizing principles underlying the instructional design of *i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension.

1. **Effective reading instruction is grounded in the Science of Reading and the science of learning**, ensuring that students develop strong reading comprehension by processing language at multiple levels. This includes gaining access to word meanings, making sense of sentence structures, integrating meaning within and between sentences, and connecting new information to existing background knowledge. To support this process, *i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension build knowledge and embed strategy-based instruction, equipping students with the tools they need to support meaning making with texts. Knowledge-building text sets are used to enhance students' ability to make inferences, fostering deeper understanding and critical thinking as they navigate complex texts. Each text set focuses on a meaningful topic, building ideas for students to think about and synthesize.
2. **Efficient reading instruction prioritizes the most essential skills**, ensuring students receive targeted support based on their most critical needs. *i-Ready Pro* Essential

and Elevate Lessons in comprehension focus on the most important skills and strategies that research shows take time and practice to develop, maximizing learning through repeated exposure. This approach maximizes learning time by focusing on high-priority skills to accelerate progress, helping students build confidence and achieve grade-level proficiency more effectively. By focusing on what matters most, students can develop critical reading skills at an appropriate pace, fostering both confidence and academic success.

3. **Engaging reading instruction designed for middle school students** fosters autonomy, belonging, and choice. Unit topics that are aligned to students' interests boost motivation and engagement in the lessons. Students choose which unit topic they want to learn about, driving investment in learning. Quick, interactive activities replace passive listening, while clear instructions and predictable routines reduce cognitive overload. Each lesson encourages self-expression, allowing students to connect personally with content. This approach not only strengthens reading skills but also cultivates ownership and deeper learning.

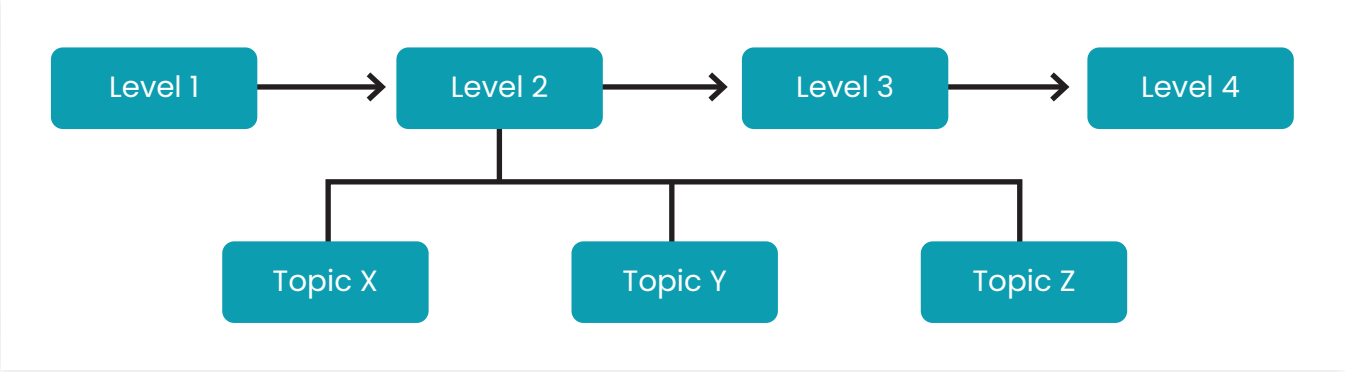
These organizing principles appear in *i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension through structured lessons and topics, depending on students' learning needs.

- **Essential Lessons:** Designed for middle school students reading three or more grade levels below, these lessons provide the intensive scaffolding research shows is crucial for developing comprehension and making meaning from texts.

- **Elevate Lessons:** Designed for middle school students reading at or one or two grade levels below, these lessons support reading of grade-level texts, providing scaffolding only when needed.

## Instructional Design

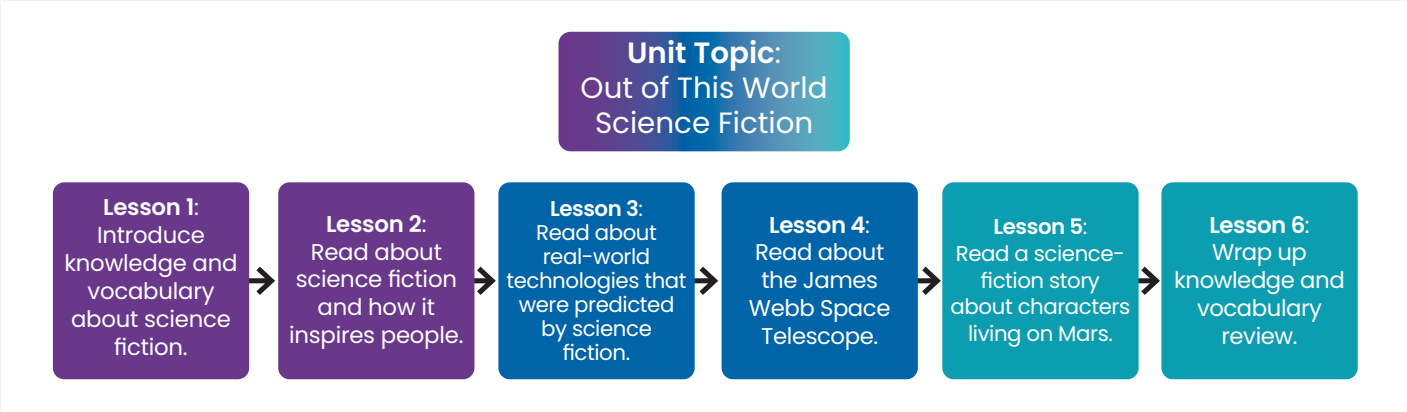
In both Essential and Elevate Lessons, knowledge-building units (also referred to as topics) are organized into levels. Levels refer to specific groups of lessons designed to match students' reading abilities and offer appropriate challenges and support. Each level has several unit topics for students to choose from to give them agency and autonomy over their learning journey while also providing opportunities for them to read appropriately complex texts and grow their reading comprehension skills.




Each level includes multiple unit topics that allow students to choose what they're interested in learning about.

The instructional design of a unit is intentionally structured to build students' knowledge, develop vocabulary, build reading stamina, and increase comprehension while working with the knowledge-building text sets. By progressively expanding students' understanding of a topic across multiple texts, students enhance their comprehension skills and become better equipped to understand more complex material.

The knowledge-building text sets are designed and organized to scaffold students' understanding of a topic without overwhelming them. The text sets focus on topics in science, social studies, art, and more with the goal of engaging students in a variety of different areas of interest and broadening their knowledge base. Each text in a unit is thoughtfully chunked into smaller sections where it is crucial for students to pause and be sure they understand important ideas in each section. Point-of-use instructional support is included to scaffold their comprehension, ensuring they have the support they need to access key information. Students will carry that key information with them to the anchor texts that challenge them to synthesize what they have learned so far and apply it.




Units introduce and build knowledge about a topic of high interest for students.

Units introduce students to the vocabulary and activate their prior knowledge while also setting a purpose for what they are about to read and learn. As lessons progress, texts vary in length and content grows across texts, strengthening reading stamina and expanding background knowledge. In the final lesson, students demonstrate their understanding of the topic and vocabulary while making personal connections through their experiences and opinions.

Depending on where students place on the *i-Ready* adaptive assessment, they may need more or less support in their reading. All lessons develop knowledge and offer students scaffolding, such as optional audio support, when they show signs of needing support. Essential Lessons are structured to provide students with more significant scaffolding that research says is crucial, using short, focused texts and instruction based on high-impact reading strategies throughout all lessons. For students who test into the Elevate Lessons, these lessons are structured to give students more opportunities to build their vocabulary, unpack complex syntax, and hone their comprehension skills across a wide range of texts, with scaffolding only when they show signs of needing support.

Students' performance in the lessons determines progression through *i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension. If students are consistently performing at a high level with minimal scaffolds, they will accelerate more quickly through the program. However, if a student shows a consistent need for support, additional topics, lesson content, and scaffolds will be deployed to drive gains. This structure ensures all learners receive instruction that is both effective and efficient, promoting steady progress toward grade-level proficiency.

## ACADEMIC ADVISORS

Guidance from our program authors and advisors ensured the design of a rigorous literacy skills program that provides students with opportunities to practice and apply new learning purposefully and meaningfully while being manageable for teachers to implement.

**Gina Cervetti, Ph.D.—Program Advisor**
Gina Cervetti's research focuses on the interface of literacy and content-area learning. She is interested in how inquiry experience in science can provide an authentic, engaging, and meaning-based context for literacy learning and examines the role of sustained engagement in a set of ideas for literacy development. Cervetti is also looking into ways to help students bring the tools of inquiry to questions they encounter across the curriculum and outside of school.

**Linda Diamond, M.Ed.—Program Advisor**
Linda Diamond has dedicated her career to teaching children to read, particularly those with word-reading difficulties like dyslexia. She co-founded the Consortium on Reaching Excellence in Education (CORE) alongside Bill Honig, former California superintendent of public instruction, and she served as CORE's president for 26 years. Diamond is the co-author of the nationally recognized textbooks *Teaching Reading Sourcebook*, *Assessing Reading: Multiple Measures*, and *Vocabulary Handbook*.

**Devin Kearns, Ph.D.—Program Advisor**
Devin Kearns is Goodnight Distinguished Professor in Early Literacy at North Carolina State University at Raleigh. He studies early reading and works with colleagues in psychology, cognitive science, and neuroscience to understand the brain basis for reading. He also develops programs to improve student reading skills, especially to help with long words, and for content-area literacy in middle school classrooms. Kearns has published more than 70 papers in widely read sources like the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *Structured Literacy Interventions*, and *The Reading Teacher*. He is the Chair-Elect of the Scientific Advisory Board of the International Dyslexia Association. Kearns has received awards for his research and advocacy from Vanderbilt University, the Windward Institute, and the University of Connecticut.

# THE EVIDENCE BASE

Many students need support with reading comprehension not only due to skills gaps but also because of gaps in knowledge. Research consistently shows that as students progress—particularly beyond Grade 5—their ability to engage with and understand texts is deeply connected to their background knowledge. Some students may find reading comprehension easier because they are more familiar with the topics presented in the text. This knowledge advantage allows them to make connections, infer meaning, and engage more deeply with what they read.

A content-rich program that systematically builds students' knowledge across subjects is essential for effective learning. However, many reading programs focus primarily on comprehension skills and abstract reading strategies rather than using texts as a vehicle to expand students' understanding of the world. Without exposure to a broad base of content, students may need support with comprehending complex texts—not because they lack reading skills but because they lack the necessary background knowledge to make sense of them.

Middle school marks a pivotal stage in students' academic development. Those who need support with reading comprehension face not only barriers to accessing grade-level content but also challenges with motivation and engagement. To close these gaps, students need learning experiences that are both intellectually stimulating and accessible. Lessons should provide engaging, big-idea content at an appropriate reading level—challenging enough to foster growth yet supportive enough to ensure meaningful comprehension. When students see relevance in what they are reading, they are more likely to stay engaged, build confidence, and develop the literacy skills they need to succeed.

## Knowledge-Building Approach for Building Comprehension

Building students' background knowledge is fundamental to enhancing reading comprehension, especially for middle school learners, when texts become more complex and content specific. Research by Hirsch (2003) emphasizes that comprehension is not just about decoding words but about making meaningful connections between new information and what a reader already knows. When students lack prior knowledge on a topic, they need support with inferring meaning, leading to gaps in understanding. Willingham (2006) further argues that students with broader world knowledge are better equipped to process and retain new content because they can integrate it into existing cognitive frameworks. This highlights the importance of a curriculum that intentionally builds students' background knowledge alongside literacy skills.

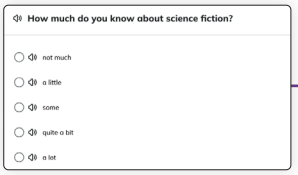
Studies show that background knowledge significantly impacts students' ability to engage with complex texts. Recht and Leslie (1988) conducted a study on baseball knowledge and reading comprehension, revealing that students with prior knowledge of baseball—regardless of their reading ability—outperformed those with little knowledge, demonstrating that domain knowledge plays a crucial role in making sense of new information. This aligns with findings from Cervetti, Jaynes, and Hiebert (2009), who suggest that knowledge-building curricula improve students' comprehension by providing them with the contextual foundation necessary to understand increasingly difficult texts. These insights indicate that effective reading instruction must move beyond teaching isolated comprehension skills—those that are taught separately from the context of students' reading—and incorporate structured opportunities for students to develop broad and deep content knowledge.

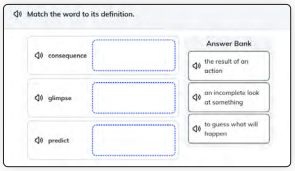
To support comprehension, educators must embed knowledge-building opportunities in literacy instruction rather than treating them as supplementary. Research indicates that integrating content-rich texts across subjects can help students build the background knowledge necessary for improved reading comprehension. Additionally, McNamara and Kintsch (1996) suggest that comprehension-monitoring strategies, such as summarizing key ideas and asking questions, work best when students already have a foundational understanding of the topic.

Therefore, it is important for text sets in a reading program to deliberately integrate these knowledge-building opportunities. Text comprehension is supported when each text's content builds on another and deepens understanding of a particular topic. This deeper understanding supports students' ability to make inferences, make connections across texts, and improve their memory.

## **Unit Topic**: Out of This World Science Fiction

**Lesson 1**




**Lesson 2**

**What If?**

Science fiction is a kind of story that blends real science and the imagination.

**Scientists Love Sci-Fi Too!**

Science fiction inspires people to become scientists.

**Road-Tripping the Galaxy**

People will probably visit Mars someday, but other galaxies would be too far away.

**Lesson 3**


**Science Fiction Gets Real**

by Jacqueline Adams

There are many real-world technologies that were predicted by science fiction (e.g., robots, cell phones, hoverboards, holograms, artificial intelligence). What could be next?

**Lesson 4**

**Traveling Through Space—and Time!**

The James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) allows scientists to observe and learn about what the universe was like billions of years ago, which sounds like sci-fi—but isn't. It's real science! Images that come back from the JWST inspire the scientists.

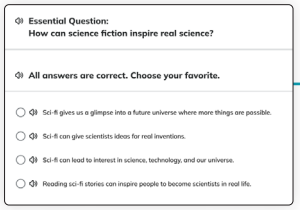
**Lesson 5**

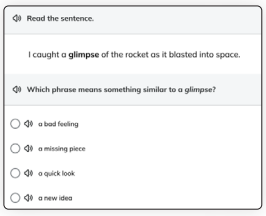
**The $H_2O$-Scope**

by George Jreije

This science-fiction story is about Layla and Salim, two teens who live on Mars and invent a device that detects water on other planets in order to help save their own. But what else will they find?

**Lesson 6**




Students acquire and apply knowledge in an Essential Lessons unit about how science fiction can inspire real science.

*i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension use the knowledge-building approach for building comprehension in the materials by:

- **Featuring high-interest and relevant topics.** The topics use a variety of rich, engaging texts to develop knowledge about the subject and vocabulary.
- **Conceptually and topically related text sets with a unifying essential question.** Text sets are designed around a thought-provoking topic and question that requires background knowledge and synthesis. For example, "What happened to the ancient Maya cities?"
- **Connecting to multiple domains.** Topics include ties to science, social studies, and literature in partnership with Johns Hopkins University (JHU). By evaluating each text and unit for its alignment to their knowledge-building approach, JHU helped ensure strong unit topics for students to read with purpose and in service of comprehension.
- **Supporting vocabulary development.** Some lessons preview vocabulary before reading, and others provide a glossary for challenging vocabulary during reading, which improves comprehension; opportunities for active processing of vocabulary after reading deepens understanding and improves retention.
- **Access to informational texts.** Students can practice engaging and making meaning of informational texts they will encounter inside and outside of the classroom.

## High-Impact Reading Instruction

High-impact reading instruction focuses on effective methods to improve reading comprehension, particularly for striving readers. A Bayesian network meta-analysis by Peng et al. (2024) explored the critical elements of reading comprehension interventions, revealing that active engagement through strategy instruction plays a key role in improving reading outcomes. Their research emphasized that high-impact instruction, such as teaching cognitive and metacognitive skills, enhances readers' ability to comprehend text, making these approaches highly effective for striving learners. These findings underscore the importance of explicitly teaching strategies, like summarization, which have been shown to significantly improve comprehension across various age groups and reading levels. Focusing on evidence-based interventions supports students in actively processing and reflecting on text, which is critical for deep comprehension.

Establishing structured high-impact reading instruction, such as summarizing, identifying the main idea, and making inferences, provides students with a consistent framework for processing and analyzing texts. Research indicates that repeated engagement with structured reading strategies not only enhances comprehension but also builds students' ability to think critically and independently about what they read (Duke & Pearson, 2002). This instruction creates a systematic approach to breaking down complex texts, allowing students to move beyond surface-level understanding and engage with deeper meaning.

In *i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension, students are guided through the steps of some of this high-impact reading instruction. Students who test into Essential Lessons are offered further scaffolding and practice.

- **Repeated practice with high-impact reading instruction.** Gist identification, sentence comprehension and syntax, and inference making create a model for students to practice and effectively apply throughout their work to develop strong skills and make meaningful connections to what they read and learn.

- **Access to key information to scaffold comprehension.** The high-impact reading instruction provides students with a Key Ideas card that helps them make meaning of key ideas in small chunks of each text. The Key Ideas cards give students clues to help them scaffold their comprehension and experience success.

## Gist

Teaching students how to determine the gist of a text is a crucial skill for reading comprehension, particularly in middle school, when texts become more complex and information dense. Research has shown that structured summarization (i.e., gist) routines help students distill key information, improving both retention and comprehension (Brown & Day, 1983; Duke & Pearson, 2002). By learning to focus on essential ideas while filtering out less critical details, students develop stronger analytical skills, such as inference making and deep text analysis, enabling them to engage in higher-order thinking (Kintsch, 1998).

The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) (Vaughn et al., 2022) meta-analysis *Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4–9* identified interventions that help students identify the gist of a text as the top recommended approach, supported by a "strong" level of evidence. Gist-based instruction, which focuses on one-sentence summaries of small portions of texts, enhances students' ability to summarize longer texts, make inferences, and engage with texts at a deeper level. The WWC highlights that such interventions are effective in improving reading comprehension, particularly in middle school, by promoting higher-order thinking skills necessary for academic success.

*i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension offer students the opportunity to practice determining the gist. During reading, students read a chunk of text at a time. At the end of each chunk, they pause and check their understanding of what they just read. The gist instruction and carefully chunked sections support students in knowing what is happening throughout a text and ultimately comprehending the whole text effectively. The design of *i-Ready Pro* helps students identify and synthesize:

- **Who or what.** Who or what each small section of text is about

- **Supporting details.** Details in the text that tell them more about who or what the small chunk is about. This may include what is happening, why it is happening, or how it is happening.

## Sentence Syntax and Comprehension

Complex sentence structures can present challenges for striving readers, making it essential for educators to provide steps for breaking down difficult sentences into more manageable parts (Snow, 2010).

*i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension equip students with the tools needed to recognize and analyze complex syntax in sentences. The sentence and syntax instruction are tools for getting to a key understanding in the text that is blocked by a complex sentence. This sentence syntax instruction addresses three potential blockers to a key understanding in a text they are reading:

- **Ellipses.** This encourages students to slow down and ask themselves which ideas belong, where readers are typically expected to fill in information the writer or speaker left out.
- **Pronoun or substitution replacement.** This asks students to think about who or what a substitution or pronoun is referring to in a text.
- **Sentence breaker.** This helps students break one sentence with multiple dependent or independent clauses into two or three shorter sentences that represent separate idea units so the individual ideas in the sentence are clear.

## Inference Making

Inference making is a fundamental component of reading comprehension, requiring students to connect textual information with prior knowledge to draw logical conclusions. Research shows that skilled readers consistently engage in inferencing, integrating explicit details with their own background knowledge to fill in gaps and construct meaning (Kintsch, 1998). To support this process, reading instruction must explicitly define what an inference is and model how to make inferences effectively.

*i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension support this process by equipping students with the tools needed to recognize and analyze different types of inferences by asking students about a key inference in the text. Inference instruction addresses two types of inferences that may act as major blockers to a key understanding.

- **Background knowledge-inclusive inferences.** This helps students recall a piece of information they likely already know from their lived experiences and connect it to a detail in the text to make stronger, more accurate inferences.
- **Local text-based inferences.** This helps students identify context details in the text to develop deeper layers of meaning in the text.

## Vocabulary Instruction

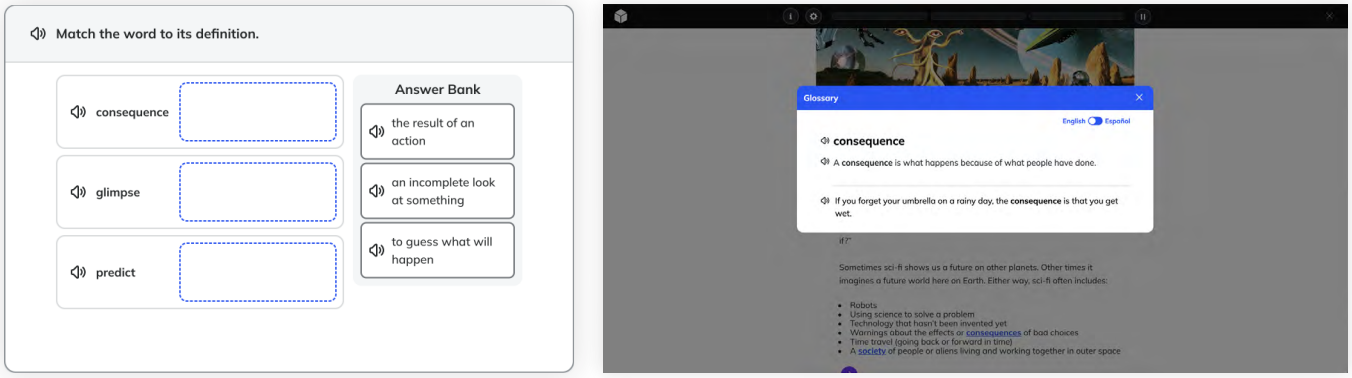
Vocabulary knowledge is a foundational pillar of reading comprehension, particularly for middle school students who are encountering increasingly complex texts across academic subjects. Research consistently demonstrates a strong correlation between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension, as students must understand the meanings of keywords in order to grasp the main ideas, themes, and nuances of a text (Stahl & Nagy, 2006). When students encounter unfamiliar vocabulary, especially domain-specific terms central to a text, these words can act as barriers to comprehension, preventing them from fully engaging with the text and completing essential tasks like answering questions, identifying key themes, or summarizing information (Beck et al., 2013). Therefore, materials must integrate systematic vocabulary instruction that not only introduces students to difficult words but also provides repeated exposure and structured support to ensure deep understanding and retention.

### Pre-Teaching Vocabulary

One of the most effective ways to prevent vocabulary from becoming a barrier to comprehension is teaching key words before students encounter them in a text. Research by Marzano and Pickering (2004) highlights that direct vocabulary instruction, particularly when paired with contextual learning opportunities, significantly improves students' ability to comprehend and retain new words.

Cervetti et al.'s research (2009) additionally points out the value of teaching key vocabulary words before students encounter them in a text. By explicitly teaching these words in advance, students are better equipped to process and understand the text as they read. This not only helps with direct comprehension of the taught vocabulary but also supports the implicit acquisition of additional vocabulary. As students encounter unfamiliar words in context, the reduced cognitive load from knowing key terms allows them to focus more on meaning making and word relationships, facilitating the learning of new vocabulary without direct instruction. This approach enhances overall reading comprehension by easing cognitive demands and promoting vocabulary growth in a more organic, context-rich manner.

In the context of a structured program, pre-teaching vocabulary ensures students enter a reading experience equipped with the foundational knowledge necessary to make sense of what they are about to read. This approach is particularly critical in topics that introduce challenging or specialized vocabulary, as students must be able to access the meaning of these words to engage meaningfully with the content. By repeatedly encountering these words throughout the topic and having access to a glossary, students build deeper word knowledge that extends beyond a single text, supporting their ability to comprehend related topics in future learning.




Vocabulary is pre-taught in lessons at the beginning of a unit (left) and reinforced in texts that follow through repeated exposures and access to a glossary (right).

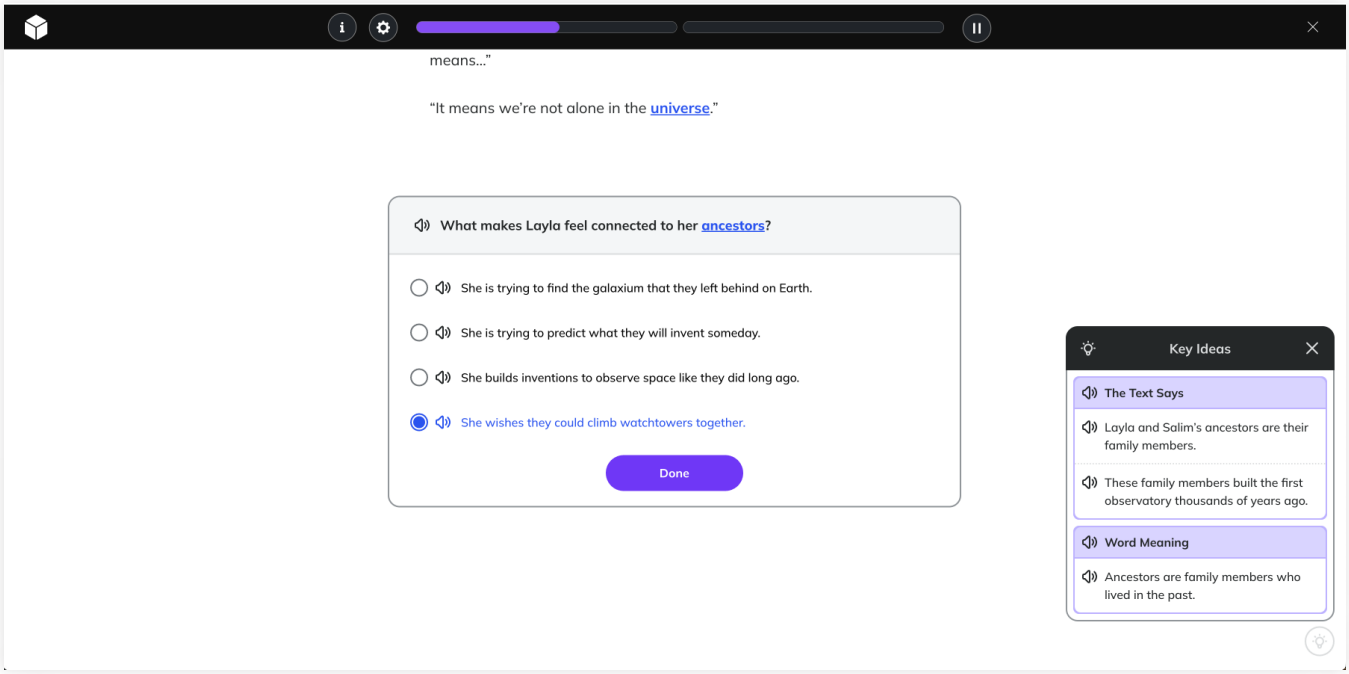
*i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension offer students the opportunity to build their vocabulary by:

- **Introducing vocabulary.** At the beginning of the topic, students are introduced to vocabulary related to the texts they are about to read.
- **Repeated exposure.** Across all the lessons in a topic, students are given repeated exposure to pre-taught words in texts and instruction to reinforce meaning and exposure.
- **Glossary access.** Students have access to an on-demand glossary across all lessons, except for the final lesson when they are being assessed on their word knowledge. The glossary includes a definition and a sample sentence of each word.
- **Teaching multiple strategies.** Students practice multiple types of strategy-based instruction, such as applying their background knowledge and finding context clues, that help them unlock the meaning of unknown words.

## Vocabulary Strategies

Beyond explicit vocabulary instruction, students also need strategies to "unblock" words they may not have learned in advance but are crucial for making inferences and extracting meaning from a text. Using a vocabulary word meaning strategy, students can systematically break down unknown words, identify contextual clues, and connect new words to prior knowledge, thereby supporting their comprehension in real time.

This aligns with research by Graves (2006), who found that teaching students metacognitive strategies for determining word meaning improves their overall reading comprehension and their ability to navigate unfamiliar texts independently. These words play a critical role in comprehension, requiring students to use word-learning strategies to "unblock" these words and infer meaning. Embedding these practices into materials ensures vocabulary instruction is not just an isolated activity but a continuous, integrated process that enhances students' ability to access, analyze, and engage deeply with academic texts.




Students use a context clues vocabulary strategy to determine the meaning of a word that is important to understanding the text.

*i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension provide students the opportunity to practice vocabulary strategies and complete definitions of unknown words by:

- **Activating prior knowledge about a word.** This unpacks the word by providing a key piece of background knowledge about the word or a related word.
- **Finding context clues in the text.** This points students to context clues for a difficult, complex word.
- **Using morphology to help determine the meaning of a word.** This points students to word parts—prefixes, suffixes, and root words—that clue students to the meaning of the word.

## Building Complexity and Stamina

### Text Complexity

Gradually increasing text complexity is essential for supporting middle school students who are reading below grade level, as it helps them build the skills and confidence necessary for tackling more challenging material. Research underscores that exposure to increasingly complex texts—when scaffolded appropriately—enhances students' comprehension, vocabulary development, and critical-thinking skills (Shanahan et al., 2012).

Research by Fisher and Frey (2014) highlights the effectiveness of scaffolding text complexity by starting with shorter, more accessible texts and gradually introducing longer, multi-idea texts. This method supports students in synthesizing key ideas while strengthening their ability to navigate denser and more information-rich material. By systematically increasing text complexity, students not only develop comprehension skills but also improve their confidence in reading.

*i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension are designed to support middle school students reading significantly below their chronological grade level by gradually increasing text complexity across program levels. Based on their *i-Ready* adaptive assessment placement, students receive texts that progress from single-idea passages to more complex, multi-idea anchor texts. As students progress through the program levels, the difficulty and complexity of the key knowledge, vocabulary, and sentences in each topic increase. The gradual increase in complexity ensures students have continued access to texts with appropriate challenges in the instruction.

This structured progression ensures students develop the skills necessary to tackle more complex texts, fostering confidence and reading growth at an appropriate pace.

### Reading Stamina

Building reading stamina is a critical skill for middle school students, as it directly impacts their ability to engage with and comprehend increasingly complex texts across academic disciplines. Reading stamina refers to a student's capacity to sustain attention and engagement with a text over an extended period without losing comprehension. Research suggests that as students advance in grade levels, the demands of academic reading increase significantly, making the ability to read for longer durations essential for success (Allington, 2014). Without sufficient reading stamina, students may need support with completing assigned readings, engaging in deep comprehension, or developing the fluency necessary for academic growth. Students need access to materials that intentionally foster reading stamina, as this is crucial in preparing students for the rigorous literacy demands of middle and high school.

*i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension support students in building their reading stamina by:

- **Breaking texts into short, digestible chunks.** Students pause throughout the reading of a text to practice making meaning from small sections of text.
- **Gradually increasing the length of the texts in each unit and across program levels.** Students start with short texts that include a few simple ideas and work their way toward longer texts that include more complex ideas.
- **Asking questions about text details.** Students answer questions at crucial points in the text to ensure understanding of key ideas. At the end of their reading, they practice synthesizing the key ideas of the text into a summary.

## Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

The UDL is a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practices that anticipates learner variability, removes barriers in instruction, and incorporates goal setting and reflection to create "expert learners" who are purposeful and motivated, strategic and goal directed, and resourceful and knowledgeable (CAST, 2017). The UDL is built on decades of research in neuroscience and is grounded on the foundation of three principles that remind educators to provide students with options for personalizing their education: 1) multiple means of engagement, 2) multiple means of representation, and 3) multiple means of action and expression (Chardin & Novak, 2021). *i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension deliver engaging, research-based reading comprehension instruction that leverages key components of all three UDL principles so older, striving learners can experience mastery and success.

The UDL's first principle of engagement hinges on the fact that one's emotional state is a crucial element to learning (CAST, 2018). Additionally, *i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension optimize relevance and authenticity with age-appropriate content and images that portray diverse cultural identities. To reduce cognitive load and distractions, all topics and lessons follow a predictable structure with repeated activities. When a student needs support, they receive specific, in-the-moment, helpful scaffolding that encourages their sustained effort and persistence.

The second UDL principle of representation is grounded on the baseline understanding that learners differ in the ways they perceive and comprehend information. Therefore, use of a gradual-release model allows learners to transform accessible information into usable knowledge for future decision making by engaging active "information-processing skills" (CAST, 2018). *i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension leverage responsive web design and accessibility guidelines to ensure all students have access to each lesson's information. Alternatives for visual information include spoken descriptions and alt text for all images as well as strategic human-voiced audio for onscreen text.

The third principle of the UDL expounds the necessity for learners to have options that allow them to independently navigate a learning environment, express what they know, and monitor their progress (CAST, 2018). *i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension integrate mouse and keyboard navigation to ensure all students can navigate and interact with lesson screens and provide a seamless interface with many common assistive technologies, such as screen readers.

## Supporting Multilingual Learners

Multilingual Learners represent a broad spectrum of learners with a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, languages, and academic proficiencies. Multilingual Learners represent more than 10 percent of the nation's public school students as well as the fastest-growing population in the country (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Multilingual Learners often enter school with key linguistic skills in their home language. While Multilingual Learners can engage in complex, cognitively demanding tasks requiring language, they can be challenged to make meaning of oral and written English while simultaneously learning academic content. With different levels of exposure to English, Multilingual Learners can need support without comprehensive literacy instruction in both language-based skills, related to oral language, comprehension, and word knowledge, and code-based skills, related to foundational skills (Fillmore, 2017; Mesmer, 2020; Scarcella, 2003).

*i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension provide practice and instruction in vocabulary and comprehension. This comprehensive and connected approach helps build literacy skills for Multilingual Learners to help provide greater access to grade-level content (Council of the Great City Schools, 2023). It is important for code-based skills to be taught in conjunction with language-based skills to help Multilingual Learners gain a greater understanding of the formation of sentences, phrase- and sentence-level structures, and how the English-language system works (Fillmore, 2017; Fillmore & Snow, 2018; Scarcella, 2003). Sentence fluency in *i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension activities provides Multilingual Learners with authentic practice in applying previously taught skills in reading sentences.

Multilingual Learners can benefit from repeated exposure and practice in literacy instruction (August et al., 2014; Echevarría, 2021). *i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension give learners the exposure to and practice with vocabulary words they may need throughout a topic. Students also work through instruction and vocabulary strategies on other difficult, complex words in the texts to help make sense of where unfamiliar words or phrases, like figurative language or colloquial words, may be a blocker to comprehension.

## Engagement and Motivation

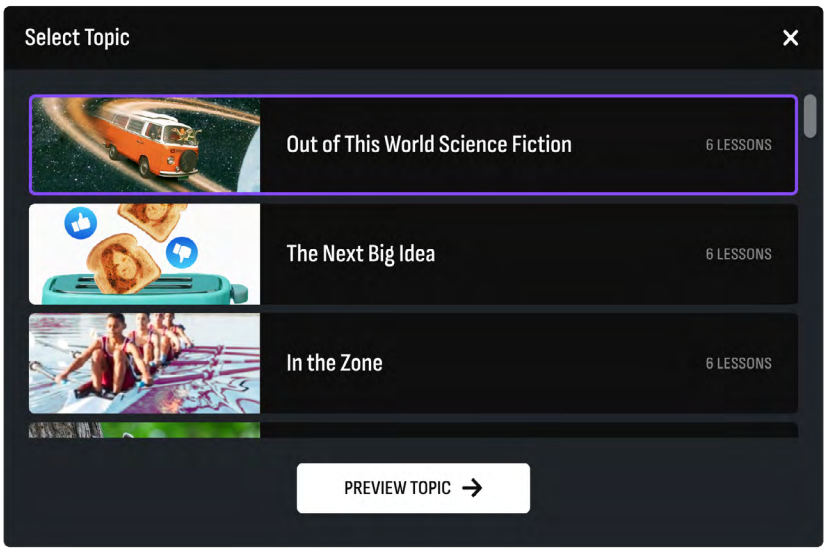
The importance of motivation to learning underpins the approach to *i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension. Self-determined motivation—a consequence of values or pure interest—leads to better long-term outcomes than controlled motivation—a consequence of reward/punishment or perceptions of self-worth (Davis et al., 2008). Contexts and activities that support students' feelings of having agency and competence and seeing the relevance of what they are doing have been shown to result in "high-quality, self-directed, intrinsic motivation" (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

Research has shown that boredom is negatively correlated with learning (Craig et al., 2004). Additionally, pedagogically motivated learning modification may lead to

increased learning in the short run, however, if learners find the modifications boring, they may not learn as much in the long run (Jackson & McNamara, 2011; 2013). Sustained motivation during lessons is a key focus of *i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension. Lessons build motivation by giving students autonomy, positive reinforcement, and creating a learning experience that is relevant and that students value.

### Opportunities for Autonomy

When students feel they have autonomy, they have positive feelings about the task they are being asked to complete and are therefore more likely to value the task (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Grolnick et al., 1991). Additionally, students who experience autonomy are more likely to show strong behavioral and cognitive engagement (Connell, 1990; Deci et al., 1991; Deci & Ryan, 1996; Grolnick et al., 1997; Ryan, 1993). Actions that support autonomy include providing choice and encouraging self-initiation/self-direction (Assor et al., 2002; Reeve et al., 2004).




Students can choose the unit topic that interests them.

*i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension encourage student autonomy through:

- **Choice of unit topic.** Students will have the opportunity to choose the unit topic they want to learn about within their assigned program level. With a variety of subject areas that encompass many different areas of interest for middle school students, they can take agency over their learning and find value in their reading.

- **Choice to learn more.** Students will have the opportunity to click on background knowledge, glossary, or author's biography modals to learn more about a particular idea, topic words, or an author of a text.

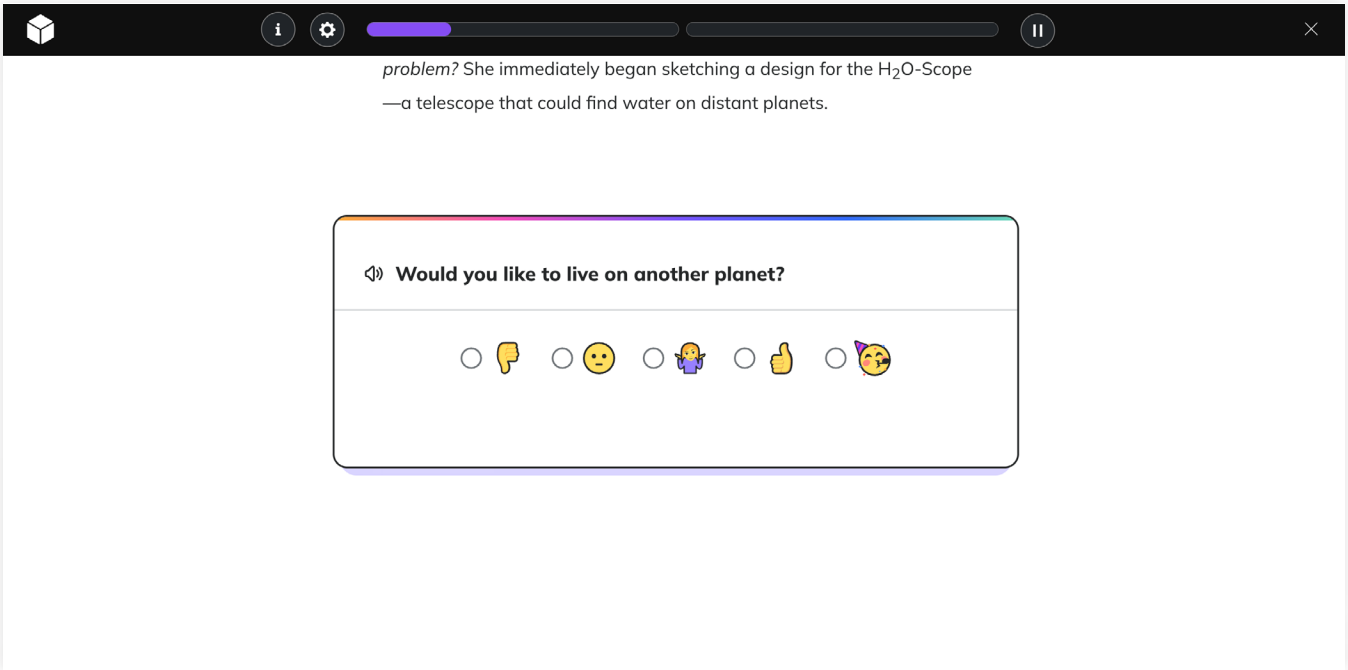
- **Optional audio support.** Students, across lessons, can opt into audio support as they read.

## Relevant Learning Experiences

There are a few factors that drive a student's decision to invest in a learning activity. A few of those reasons include: the importance students attach to doing well on a task, the enjoyment they experience as a result of participation, the usefulness of participating toward future goals, and the extent to which participating in one activity may come at the expense of another (Carter, 2006; Horvat & Lewis, 2003; Juvonen et al., 2012).

In designing materials that capture and excite a learner, research has shown that "designers have only 25–35 seconds to capture and engage a user's attention" (Nielsen & Loranger, 2006). Research also shows that older students can quickly become bored, distracted, and frustrated. Regarding digital content, students also can become easily overwhelmed with content on websites, and cluttered screens can distract and deter learning. For older students, it is especially important to provide age-appropriate content with neutral graphics rather than childish ones (Nielsen, 1994).


Students' experience with *i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension is engaging, clean, and age appropriate.




Lessons include multiple opportunities for students to think and respond to their reading with their own opinions.

*i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension create relevant learning experiences through:

- **Design that engages older students.** Lessons are designed specifically for Grades 6–8 students. Everything from the color palettes, to animation, to the interactions were tested with students to find an experience that would appeal to students and feel age appropriate.

- **Design that holds users' attention.** The screens students interact with are clean and uncluttered, allowing the learner to focus solely on each instructional task that they are presented with across the lesson. Instruction is provided efficiently and in short bursts to hold students' attention, only when students demonstrate a need. Otherwise, students are interacting regularly to read and complete items.

- **Transparent objectives.** Students are shown exactly what they will focus on for learning at the beginning of each lesson and see how they performed at the close of the lessons.

- **Self-expression opportunities.** Self-expression opportunities are embedded throughout all lessons to enhance student motivation and engagement. These opportunities encourage students to self-report on what prior knowledge they feel they have on both the topic and vocabulary, reflecting on key moments in the text. They share their feelings, reactions, and opinions, monitor their own comprehension, and connect their learning to the Essential Question.

# CONCLUSION

*i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension are research-driven lessons designed to accelerate reading growth for middle school students. Grounded in evidence-based practices, the lessons deepen comprehension and strengthen vocabulary through high-impact reading strategies, which guide students to build crucial skills for making meaning of their reading. At the same time, students engage with text sets that offer them the opportunity to build their knowledge with relevant and age-appropriate topics. The lessons foster confidence, motivation, and critical thinking—empowering striving readers through opportunities for autonomy and self-expression in an age-appropriate digital learning environment. With scaffolding, knowledge building, and the UDL principles, *i-Ready Pro* Essential and Elevate Lessons in comprehension ensure all students can access and engage with complex texts.

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