Unit 4 Reading: Deep Reading of Biographies

Content Area: **English Language Arts**
Course(s):
Time Period: **Trimester 2**
Length: **5 Weeks**
Status: **Published**

Brief Summary of Unit

In this fourth-grade unit, students analyze and synthesize biographical texts to understand how ordinary people accomplish remarkable things. Students collaborate in research clubs to study historical figures, taking structured notes that connect character traits, actions, and circumstances. They read across multiple sources to compare perspectives, examine how subjects overcome setbacks, and analyze how passion and relationships contribute to achievements. Students learn to write thematic essays supporting claims about secrets to success and construct indexes to guide others through their text sets. The unit concludes with students reflecting on these biographical lessons and planning how to apply these success strategies to their own lives.

This unit is designed to be part of a developmental progression across grade levels and make interdisciplinary connections across content areas including physical and social sciences, technology, career readiness, cultural awareness, and global citizenship. During this course, students are provided with opportunities to develop skills that pertain to a variety of careers.

Revision Date: June 2026

Pacing Guide

Please refer to the annual Language Arts Reading Workshop and Word Study pacing guides for grade 4 in the curriculum folder in the Grades K-5 folder; sample K-5 Literacy schedules (across a week) are accessible in the instructional materials section as well.

Instructional Reading Level Benchmark: R

Trimester	1 needs support	2 approaching standards	3 meets standards	4 exceeds standards
1st	• Student is reading at an instructional level O or below.	• Student is reading at an instructional level P	• Student is reading at an instructional level Q. (independent P)	• Student is reading at an instructional level R or above.
2nd	• Student is reading at an instructional	• Student is reading at an instructional	• Student is reading at an instructional	• Student is reading at an instructional

	level P or below.	level Q.	level R. (Independent Q)	level S or above.
3rd	• Student is reading at an instructional level Q or below.	• Student is reading at an instructional level R.	• Student is reading at an instructional level S. (Independent R)	• Student is reading at an instructional level T or above.

Small group strategy work/Conferring can provide instruction around specific **Level R** language and literary features:

- Memorable characters change and develop over time
- Multiple characteres revealed by what they say, think, and do and what others say or think about them
- Figurative Language that is important to understanding the plot
- Long stretches of descriptive language that is important to setting and characters
- Specific descriptions of settings that provide information for understanding of plot
- Settings distant in time and space from students' experiences
- Some long strings of unassigned dialogue from which story action must be inferred
- Complex plots with numerous episodes and time passing
- Building suspense through events of the plot
- Texts with multiple points of view revealed through characters' behaviors
- Some words that are seldom used in oral language and difficult to decode
- Sentences with parenthetical material
- Many words used figuratively (metaphor, simile, idiom)

For students reading below or above grade level expectations, please reference The Fountas and Pinnell Literacy Continuum: A Tool for Assessment, Planning and Teaching to target skills for additional reading levels. Additionally, see the Cranford Public School Grades K-5 Google Folder for instructional materials to identify teaching points and design strategy lessons for those above or below grade level reading.

Individual conferences with each student will address specific needs of the reader.

Standards

The identified standards reflect a developmental progression across grades/ levels and make interdisciplinary connections across content areas including social sciences, technology, career readiness, cultural awareness and global citizenship.

These mandates may be hit through the selection of choice literature:

Amistad Commission

This unit also reflects the goals of the Department of Education and the Amistad Commission including the infusion of the history of Africans and African-Americans into the curriculum in order to provide an accurate, complete, and inclusive history regarding the importance of African-Americans to the growth and development of American society in a global context.

Asian American and Pacific Islander History Law

This unit includes instructional materials that highlight the history and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in accordance with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards in Social Studies.

New Jersey Diversity and Inclusion Law

In accordance with New Jersey's Chapter 32 Diversity and Inclusion Law, this unit includes instructional materials that highlight and promote diversity, including:

economic diversity, equity, inclusion, tolerance, and belonging in connection with race and ethnicity, disabilities, and religious tolerance.

Information Literacy:

This unit challenges students to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively. Information literacy includes, but is not limited to, digital, visual, media, textual, and technological literacy. Lessons may include the research process and how information is created and produced; critical thinking and using information resources; research methods, including the difference between primary and secondary sources; the difference between facts, points of view, and opinions, accessing peer-reviewed print and digital library resources; the economic, legal, social, and ethical issues surrounding the use of information.

The technology and career readiness standards that follow are relevant to this course in addition to the associated content-based standards listed:

Language Arts Standards:

Reading Informational Text Standards

- RI.CR.4.1: Referencing explicit details and examples from an informational text as textual evidence when explaining what the text says explicitly, and making relevant connections when drawing inferences.
- RI.CI.4.2: Summarizing informational texts and interpreting the author's purpose or main idea by citing key details.
- RI.IT.4.3: Describing the impact of individuals and events throughout a text, including explaining what happened and why in historical, scientific, or technical texts.

- RI.TS.4.4: Describing the overall structure (such as chronology, comparison, cause/effect, or problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.
- RI.PP.4.5: Comparing and contrasting multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.
- RI.AA.4.7: Analyzing how an author uses facts, details, and explanations to develop ideas or to support their reasoning.
- RI.CT.4.8 (or RI.4.CT.4.8): Comparing and contrasting the treatment of similar themes, topics, and patterns of events in informational texts from authors of different cultures.
- RI.4.9: Synthesizing information from multiple biographical texts or sources to build a deeper understanding of a single person's life or subtopic.
- RI.CR.4.10: Reading a wide range of texts within biography sets, including texts that are a notch more challenging.

Writing Standards

- W.WR.4.5: Conducting short research projects using multiple reference sources to build knowledge through focused investigation of different aspects of a topic.
- W.RW.4.7: Writing routinely over extended time frames (with time for research and revision) and shorter, single-sitting time frames for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Speaking and Listening Standards

- SL.PE.4.1: Engaging effectively in collaborative discussions with diverse partners, which includes drawing on previously read material, following discussion rules, asking clarifying questions, and reviewing key ideas.
- SL.PI.4.4: Reporting on a topic or text in an organized manner using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details while speaking clearly at an understandable pace.

	Collaboration with individuals with diverse perspectives can result in new ways of thinking and/or innovative solutions.
P.4	Demonstrate creativity and innovation.
P.5	Utilize critical thinking to make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.
9.4.5.CI.3	Participate in a brainstorming session with individuals with diverse perspectives to expand one's thinking about a topic of curiosity (e.g., 8.2.5.ED.2, 1.5.5.CR1a).
P.8	Use technology to enhance productivity increase collaboration and communicate effectively.
P.9	Work productively in teams while using cultural/global competence.
9.4.5.CT.4	Apply critical thinking and problem-solving strategies to different types of problems such as personal, academic, community and global (e.g., 6.1.5.CivicsCM.3).
	Culture and geography can shape an individual's experiences and perspectives.
9.4.5.GCA.1	Analyze how culture shapes individual and community perspectives and points of view (e.g., 1.1.5.C2a, RL.5.9, 6.1.5.HistoryCC.8).
9.4.5.TL.5	Collaborate digitally to produce an artifact (e.g., 1.2.5CR1d).

Performing Arts Standards

1.4.5.Cr2: (a). Devise original ideas for a drama/theatre work that reflect collective inquiry about characters, plots, and their given circumstances. (b). Participate and identify defined responsibilities required to present a

drama/theatre work informally to peers/audience and participate in the process.

1.4.5.Pr4: (a). Participate in, propose, and practice a variety of physical, vocal, and cognitive exercises that can be used in a group setting for drama/theatre work. (b). Identify and utilize basic technical/design elements that can be

used in drama/theatre work to demonstrate an understanding of the elements.

Essential Questions

- How can biography readers understand the ways a person can tackle obstacles and accomplish remarkable things?
- How can readers connect a person's traits, relationships actions, and context in order to better understand their pathways towards doing remarkable things?
- How doe readers analyze biographies to grow insights about what, it takes to make a remarkable life?

Students Will Know/ Students will be Skilled At

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- perform deep analysis and synthesis of biographical texts:
- understand how a person tackles obstacles and connect their traits, actions, and relationships to their accomplishments.
- synthesize across texts by combining information from multiple texts to build a deeper understanding of a single person's life.
- identify central ideas in a biography and -determine how specific details, even those that seem irrelevant at first, contribute to a person's "path toward greatness"
- summarize biographies by providing the "gist" of a person's life and organizing information around key questions (Who, What, When, Where, Why).
- reflect on historical context in order to understand the magnitude of one's accomplishments.
- distinguish between minor details and those that explain why a person became remarkable.
- engage in collaborative research.

Evidence/Performance Tasks

Students demonstrate differentiated proficiency through both formative and summative assessments in the classroom. Based on individual student readiness and performance, assessments can be implemented as formative and/or summative.

Developmental progression across years in both reading and writing is evidenced by multiple benchmark assessment screeners, administered three times per year. Follow up diagnostic assessments are used to target skill remediation. Student proficiency allows for additional or alternative assessment based on demonstration or absence of skill.

The performance tasks listed below are examples of the types of assessments teachers may use in the classroom and the data collected by the district to track student progress.

Formative Assessments:

- Formative Assessments for this specific unit are linked on the detailed curriculum map in the learning plan.
- Responses to Essential Questions
- One-to-one reading conferences and accompanying conferring notes
- Peer conferences
- Turn and talks
- Read Aloud Reading responses, written and oral
- Exit tickets or do nows
- Engagement Observations
- Accountable Talk
- Reading Logs
- Post-it Notes/Board
- Monitor Stamina, Volume, and Fluency through rubrics
- Read increasingly complex text by monitoring student self-selection of leveled text
- Stop and Jot
- Small Group Strategy Reading group work
- Reading Responses on Post-its and in Notebooks
- Answer assigned journal questions
- Knowledge of domain specific vocabulary
- Envision and prediction post-it notes
- Student is able to make predictions based on the actions of characters: post-its, retell, partner conversations. using grade-level text: Level P *
- Retell: Retell the nonfiction text using main idea and supporting details/summaries using grade-level text: Level P *
- Summarize: Summarize story by determining important events in relation to character and eliminating inconsequential details (novels, chapters, test prep) using grade-level text: Level P *
- Retell/Summarize using grade-level text: Level P*
- Inferencing post-its using grade-level text: Level P*
- Student Writing using grade-level text: Level P

Summative Assessments, including Alternative Assessments:

- Summative Assessments for this specific unit are linked on the detailed curriculum map in the learning plan.
- Assessments created that align with the report card using grade-level text: Level P
- Reading Notebooks using grade-level text: Level P
- Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Reading Assessment, recorded three times per year
- Running Records
- Teachers College Reading and Writing Project: Reading learning progressions
- Teachers College Reading and Writing Project: rubrics with student samples
- Standards-based reporting system and report card
- Word Study Assessments
- Performance- and project-based learning
- Personalized, student-designed assessments

Benchmark Asessments:

- Complete pre- and post-assessments for this specific unit linked on the detailed curriculum map in the learning plan.
- Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Reading Assessment, recorded three times per year
- Complete Comprehension, Independent Reading Assessment, fiction, Jennifer Serravallo, Heinemann
- Screener: Dynamic Indicator of Basic Literacy Skills (DIBELS), recorded three times per year
- iReady Screener and Diagnostic Assessment, recorded three times per year
- Diagnostic Assessments including Phonological Assessment Profile by Linguisystems (PAPL), Heggerty, Quick Phonics Screener (QPS), UFLI (University of Florida Literacy Institute), and Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) are sometimes administered, as needed.

Learning Plan

Upper elementary reading instruction for the Cranford Public Schools embraces a centrist approach, employing both balanced and structured literacy practices to both comprehend, analyze, and decode texts.

Balanced Literacy

To teach comprehension and analysis, reading instruction is literature and informational text-based and follows a balanced literacy approach through a number of strategies and techniques in Reading Workshop These include interactive read-alouds/alongs, mini lessons, independent reading, small group strategy instruction or guided reading, one-to-one conferencing, and book club discussions. Students will select from authentic literature at their independent reading levels from a rich classroom library. Teachers will focus on the needed skills and behaviors identified on the F&P Continuum at each student's instructional reading level. Grade level indicators are outlined above. Individual conferences with each student will address specific needs of the reader.

Teachers should follow the mini-lesson format:

- Teaching point(s) for each lesson
- Connection: Connects new learning to previous learning/lessons
- Teach/Modeling: Uses 'think alouds' when modeling what you expect students to do
- Guided Practice/Active Engagement: Guides students through practice of the teaching point
- Link to Independent Practice: Helps writers understand the purpose for the writing they are about to do and the skills/craft they will be practicing/applying independently as good writers
- Independent Reading/Student Conferences: Provides time for students to do independent reading while teacher confers with individual students, works with small groups, or reading clubs*.
- Closure/Sharing: Pull students back together and recognize the work they have done relating to the teaching point. (See end of section for closure ideas.)

For teaching purposes, see attached template for structure of a Reading Workshop lesson. (Change the red font to match your teaching point. Click here.)

For students reading below or above grade level expectations, please reference The Fountas and Pinnell Literacy Continuum: A Tool for Assessment, Planning and Teaching to target skills for additional reading levels.

Structured Literacy

To teach decoding, reading instruction follows a structured literacy approach through an number of multi sensory strategies and research-based techniques. Daily word work emphasizing prefixes, suffixes, and root words enhancing vocabulary word power is embedded within the reading block. Teachers use a multisensory approach to teach morphology. Advanced phonics lessons are embedded in this word work as well. For Word Study, please refer to the Cranford Scope and Sequence in the K-5 folder and linked under materials.

Decodable and controlled texts are used as needed and primary work study lessons may be referenced. Additionally, see the Cranford Public School Grades K-5 Google Folder for instructional materials to identify teaching points and design strategy lessons for those above or below grade level reading. Individual conferences with each student will address specific needs of the reader.

Teachers may personalize instruction during this unit and address the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations, or cultural backgrounds of individual students.

Getting Ready

Before beginning this unit:

- Assign students into groups
- Prepare student biography text sets
- Preview read-aloud texts
- Set up your Vocabulary Word Wall
- Prepare anchor charts

Learning Plan: Detailed Curriculum Map

Teaching Points and lessons are located in the K-5 folder under Grade 4 Curriculum for Language Arts. These curriculum unit guides include not only aligned teaching points to standards, but also specific lessons and appropriate resources. Guidelines for preparing to teach the unit as well as goals for the end of the unit are outlined. Academic vocabulary and prerequisite skills are identified. Essential questions and possible assessments are detailed as well.

Materials

In addition to the materials below, the link that connects to district-approved books and resources utilized in this course can be found here: Core Book List. Teachers must refer to this list while selecting whole-class or small-group leveled resources.

The materials used in this course integrate (varied and leveled) instructional, enrichment, and intervention materials that support student learners at all levels in the school and home environments. Associated web content and media sources are infused into the unit as applicable and available.

Please see the Cranford Public School Grades K-5 Google Folder for instructional materials to identify teaching points and design strategy lessons for those above or below grade level reading. The sections/bends below provide detailed teaching points and lesson ideas for on-level reading.

Instructional Materials

The core materials for this unit include the Units of Study in Reading for grade 4, The Reading and Writing

Project at Mossflower, 2026.

Materials used in all classrooms include the following: Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Reading Assessment System, System 2; Fountas and Pinnell Classroom System, Guided Reading and Interactive Readaloud; Fountas and Pinnell Classroom System, Mini Lessons; Fountas and Pinnell Classroom System, Read aloud; Jennifer Serravallo Complete Comprehension; Intervention materials include, but are not limited to, Leveled Literacy Intervention kits, UFLI, FCRR, and Visualizing and Verbalizing.

The instructional materials which correspond directly with this unit are linked in the detailed curriculum map found under the Learning Plan and housed in the Grades K-5 folder under grade 4.

Word Study:

Follow this link to see Word Study Scope and Sequence using multisensory approach to word work: Fourth Grade Word Work. This approach was recognized and audited by both the NJDOE and Rutgers University through New Jersey Tiered System of Supports-Early Reading (NJTSS-ER) and Data-Driven Instructional Coaching Model (DDICM) grants.

Teacher Resources

- Heinemann Online Flight Resources
- Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment Kit
- Word Study Scope and Sequence using multisensory approach to word work
- Cranford Public School Grades K-5 Google Folder for instructional materials
- The Continuum of Literacy Learning: A Guide to Teaching by Heinemann
- Reading Fiction: Notice and Note: Stances, Signposts, and Strategies by Kylene Beers and Robert E. Probst (use articles in this book to guide instruction)
- Solutions for Reading Comprehension: Strategic Intervention for Striving Learners by Linda Hoyt,Kelly Davis, Jane Olsen, and Kelly Boswell
- The Reading Strategies Book by Jennifer Serravallo
- Energize Research Reading and Writing by Christopher Lehman
- Conferring with Readers; Supporting Each Student’s Growth and Independence by Jennifer Serravallo and Gravity Goldberg
- Teaching Reading in Small Groups by Jennifer Serravallo
- Falling in Love with Close Reading: Lessons for Analyzing Texts-and Life by Christopher Lehman & Kate Roberts
- The Literacy Teacher's Playbook, 3-5, Jennifer Serravallo
- Reading Projects Reimagined: Student Driven Conferences to Deepen Critical Thinking, Dan Feigelson

- Independent Reading Assessment, Jennifer Serravallo, Fiction and Non Fiction, Scholastic.

Suggested Strategies for Modifications and Accommodations

Content specific accommodations and modifications as well as Career Ready Practices are listed here for all students, including: Special Education, English Language Learners, At Risk of School Failure, Gifted and Talented, Students with 504 plans.

For possible modifications to content during reading workshop, please . . .

- Refer to the Pathways to Intervention document in the K-5 folder for specific appropriate interventions.
- Consult with Cranford Problem Solving Team (CPST), as needed.
- Adhere to all modifications and accommodations as prescribed in IEP and 504 plans.

The structure of reading workshop is designed to differentiate and address specific goals and learning for each reader:

- The unit includes presentation of material through multiple modalities such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic to address the unique learning styles of all students.
- The teacher will assign, assess and modify if necessary to address the specific needs of the learner.
- Students will select from authentic literature at their independent and instructional reading levels.
- Individual conferences with each student will address specific needs of the reader.

The teacher should use the benchmark assessments to determine strategy groups to build upon weak or enhance skills. Possible groups: recall/monitoring for meaning, accumulating the text, inferences, citing text evidence, synthesizing, interpretation/analyzing author's craft, using details from the text to predict/infer/retell, writing about reading, summarizing, and using meaning and structure to improve fluency.

Possible accommodations during reading workshop include, but are not limited to:

- Use visual presentations of all materials to include organizers, charts, word walls.
- Have a designated reader for difficult content
- Work in partnerships
- Give responses in a form (verbal or written) that is easier for the student
- Take additional time to compete a task or project
- Take frequent breaks
- Use an alarm to help with time management
- Mark text with a highlighter

- Receive help coordinating assignments
- Answering fewer questions or completing shorter tasks
- Create alternate assignments or homework
- Provide a distinct steps in a process; eliminate unnecessary steps, as needed.
- Manage executive function by scaffolding process and amending deadlines
- Use digital ebooks, technology, audio and video version of printed text
- Differentiate roles in discussion groups
- Access speech to text function on computer

Individual conferences with each student will address specific needs of the reader.

Framework for Alternative Setting (LEAP Program at Lincoln School)

In our K–5 alternative school setting, each class consists of students who require a highly personalized approach to reading instruction. The district's core Reading Units of Study will continue to serve as the primary reading curriculum framework; however, lessons will be further adapted to ensure accessibility and engagement for all learners. Teachers will use a combination of pacing adjustments, flexible timing, and individualized goal setting to meet students at their current skill levels. Instruction will be delivered through a blend of whole-group, small-group, and one-on-one settings, with intentional scaffolds in place to build confidence and reduce frustration.

To support targeted skill development, teachers will integrate intervention programs such as Visualizing and Verbalizing and Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) for comprehension, and UFLI and the Sonday System for phonics and morphology. The New Jersey Tiered System of Supports (NJTSS) will be used to guide data-driven decision-making, ensuring that students receive tiered interventions based on ongoing progress monitoring. Modifications may include breaking lessons into smaller, manageable segments; providing alternative activities that align with learning objectives but reflect student interests; using multi-sensory strategies; and allowing for extended time and flexible scheduling. In addition, teachers will incorporate regular movement breaks, personalized reading materials, and opportunities for student choice to maintain engagement and support emotional regulation. This approach ensures that each student receives a structured yet responsive reading experience that addresses both academic and social-emotional needs.