To some readers, “clear, specific content” may sound like a euphemism for “script.” But Core Knowledge demonstrates that standards could—and should—be heavy on content and light on pedagogy. By clarifying what to teach, but letting teachers decide how to teach, Core Knowledge supports good instruction.

Instead of writing a typical standards document, Core Knowledge developed a bare-bones “sequence” of content for grades K-8. It then developed a detailed teacher handbook for each grade that provides key information—like vocabulary, background knowledge, and connections to other subjects. Teachers can use the sequence to quickly see what is taught in the grades above and below theirs, and the handbook to guide their lesson planning and teaching. Here, we show the full fourth-grade language arts sequence, which includes speeches by Patrick Henry and Sojourner Truth, and the speeches section of the fourth-grade teacher handbook (p. 34-37).

The handbooks have some teaching suggestions, but they do not mandate any particular way of teaching, and they don’t offer anything that even resembles a script. But don’t just take it from us, read what two teachers have to say about it. We asked Kethkeo Vichaiyarath and Xia Lee to discuss how they have used the handbook as they developed lessons on the speeches. Both have nine years’ experience and currently teach fourth grade at Phalen Lake Elementary in St. Paul, Minn. Nearly 70 percent of the students are English language learners and roughly 90 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Core Knowledge provides Kethkeo and Xia the rich content their students need.

---Editors

Core Knowledge Sequence

Language Arts: Grade 4

I. Writing, Grammar, and Usage

Teachers: Children should be given many opportunities for writing, both imaginative and expository, but place a stronger emphasis than in previous grades on expository writing, including, for example, summaries, book reports, and descriptive essays. Provide guidance that strikes a balance between encouraging creativity and requiring correct use of conventions. Children should be
given more responsibility for (and guidance in) editing for organization and development of ideas, and proofreading to correct errors in spelling, usage, and mechanics. In fourth grade, children should be able to spell most words or provide a highly probable spelling, and know how to use a dictionary to check and correct words that present difficulty. They should receive regular practice in vocabulary enrichment.

A. WRITING AND RESEARCH

- Produce a variety of types of writing—including stories, reports, summaries, descriptions, poems, letters—with a coherent structure or story line.
- Know how to gather information from different sources (such as an encyclopedia, magazines, interviews, observations, atlas, on-line), and write short reports presenting the information in his or her own words, with attention to the following:
  understanding the purpose and audience of the writing
  defining a main idea and sticking to it
  providing an introduction and conclusion
  organizing material in coherent paragraphs
  documenting sources in a rudimentary bibliography

NOTE: Introduce fourth-graders to the purpose of a bibliography, and have them prepare one that identifies basic publication information about the sources used, such as author, title, and date of publication.

- Organize material in paragraphs and understand how to use a topic sentence
- how to develop a paragraph with examples and details that each new paragraph is indented

B. GRAMMAR AND USAGE

- Understand what a complete sentence is, and identify subject and predicate in single-clause sentences
- distinguish complete sentences from fragments
- identify subject and verb in a sentence and understand that they must agree.
- Identify and use different sentence types: declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamatory.
- Know the following parts of speech and how they are used: nouns, pronouns, verbs (action verbs and auxiliary verbs), adjectives (including articles), adverbs, conjunctions (and, but, or), interjections.
- Know how to use the following punctuation:
  end punctuation: period, question mark, or exclamation point
  comma: between day and year when writing a date, between city and state in an address, in a series, after yes and no, before conjunctions that combine sentences, inside quotation marks in dialogue

- apostrophe: in contractions, in singular and plural possessive nouns
- quotation marks: in dialogue, for titles of poems, songs, short stories, magazine articles
- Understand what synonyms and antonyms are, and provide synonyms or antonyms for given words.
- Use underlining or italics for titles of books.
- Know how the following prefixes and suffixes affect word meaning:
  Prefixes:
  * im, in (as in impossible, incorrect)
  * non (as in nonfiction, nonviolent)
  * mis (as in misbehave, misspell)
  * en (as in enable, endanger)
  * pre (as in prehistoric, pregame)
  Suffixes:
  * ily, y (as in easily, speedily, tricky)
  * ful (as in thoughtful, wonderful)
  * able, ible (as in washable, flexible)
  * ment (as in agreement, amazement)

NOTE: A brief review of prefixes and suffixes introduced in third grade is recommended. Prefixes: re, un, dis. Suffixes: er and or, less, ly.

- Review correct usage of problematic homophones:
  their, there, they’re
  your, you’re
  its, it’s
  here, hear
  to, too, two

II. Poetry

TEACHERS: The poems listed here constitute a selected core of poetry for this grade. You are encouraged to expose children to more poetry, old and new, and to have children write their own poems. To bring children into the spirit of poetry, read it aloud and encourage them to read it aloud so they can experience the music in the words. At this grade, poetry should be a source of delight; technical analysis should be delayed until later grades.

A. POEMS

- Afternoon on a Hill (Edna St. Vincent Millay)
- Clarence (Shel Silverstein)
- Clouds (Christina Rossetti)
- Concord Hymn (Ralph Waldo Emerson)
- Dreams (Langston Hughes)
- The Drum (Nikki Giovanni)
- The Fog (Carl Sandburg)
- George Washington (Rosemary and Stephen Vincent Benet)
- Humanity (Elma Stuckey)
- Life Doesn’t Frighten Me (Maya Angelou)
- Monday’s Child Is Fair of Face (traditional)
- Paul Revere’s Ride (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)
- The Pobble Who Has No Toes (Edward Lear)
B. TERMS

stanza and line

III. Fiction

Teachers: In fourth grade, children should be fluent, competent readers of appropriate materials. Decoding skills should be automatic, allowing the children to focus on meaning. Regular practice in reading aloud and independent silent reading should continue. Children should read outside of school at least 20 minutes daily.

The titles below constitute a selected core of stories for this grade. Teachers and parents are encouraged to expose children to many more stories, and to encourage children to write their own stories. Children should also be exposed to non-fiction prose: biographies, books about science and history, books on art and music, etc. Also, engage children in dramatic activities, possibly with one of the stories below in the form of a play. Some of the stories below, such as *Gulliver's Travels*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and the stories by Washington Irving are available in editions adapted for young readers.

See also American History 4, American Revolution, re stories by Washington Irving.

A. STORIES

The Fire on the Mountain (an Ethiopian folktale)
From *Gulliver’s Travels*: Gulliver in Lilliput and Brobdingnag (Jonathan Swift)
The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and *Rip Van Winkle* (Washington Irving)
The Magic Brocade (a Chinese folktale)
Pollyanna (Eleanor Porter)
Robinson Crusoe (Daniel Defoe)
Robin Hood
St. George and the Dragon
*Treasure Island* (Robert Louis Stevenson)


See also World History 4, The Middle Ages, re “Robin Hood” and “St. George and the Dragon.”

B. MYTHS AND MYTHICAL CHARACTERS

Legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table
How Arthur Became King
The Sword in the Stone
The Sword Excalibur
Guinevere
Merlin and the Lady of the Lake
Sir Lancelot

See also World History 4, Middle Ages: Feudalism and chivalry, re Legends of King Arthur.

C. LITERARY TERMS

novel
plot
setting

IV. Speeches

Teachers: Famous passages from the following speeches should be taught in connection with topics in American History 4.

Patrick Henry: “Give me liberty or give me death!”
Sojourner Truth: “Ain’t I a woman?”

V. Sayings and Phrases

Teachers: Every culture has phrases and proverbs that make no sense when carried over literally into another culture. For many children, this section may not be needed; they will have picked up these sayings by hearing them at home and among friends. But the sayings have been one of the categories most appreciated by teachers who work with children from home cultures that differ from the standard culture of literate American English.

As the crow flies
Beauty is only skin deep.
The bigger they are, the harder they fall.
Birds of a feather flock together.
Blow hot and cold
Break the ice
Bull in a china shop
Bury the hatchet
Can’t hold a candle to
Don’t count your chickens before they hatch.
Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.
Etc.
Go to pot
Half a loaf is better than none.
Haste makes waste.
Laugh and the world laughs with you.
Lightning never strikes twice in the same place.
Live and let live.
Make ends meet.
Make hay while the sun shines.
Money burning a hole in your pocket
An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.
Once in a blue moon
One picture is worth a thousand words.
On the warpath
RSVP
Run-of-the-mill
Seeing is believing.
Shipshape
Through thick and thin
Timbuktu
Two wrongs don’t make a right.
When it rains, it pours.
You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.
Kethkeo Vichaiyarath, a fourth-grade teacher at Phalen Lake Elementary, describes how she teaches “Ain’t I a woman?”

With Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a woman?” speech, the teacher handbook gives you thorough information about what you need to discuss, some of the background knowledge and vocabulary that students might be stuck on, and some literary elements you can teach. You get to decide how you go about teaching it. The curriculum just gives you a guideline of how to do it. It’s more thorough than the state standards.

How I teach “Ain’t I a woman?” varies from year to year. It depends on my students’ prior knowledge. If my students are not familiar with Sojourner Truth, I do more of her biography. Some years I have to do that; some years I don’t. This year I focused on the state reading standard that says students should “read a long narrative and expository text with fluency, accuracy, and appropriate pacing, intonation, and expression.” Because many of my students are learning English as a second language, I used a poem that I found of “Ain’t I a woman?” (www.womenwriters.net/domesticgoddess/truth.htm). It simplified the speech, making it better suited to fluency lessons for my students.

And at the same time, I looked at the handbook for the different literary elements and devices, such as repetition and alliteration, that I can teach with the poem and speech. When I came to Phalen Lake three years ago, I did not know anything about Core Knowledge. I had to study it, and at the same time, align it with the state standards. The handbook helped me a lot in teaching the core
topics. Because state standards are so vague, and you can go in so many different directions, it’s hard for teachers to figure out what to do. For example, one of the state history standards says to teach colonialism and expansion. What does that mean? I have no idea. But the Core Knowledge handbook talks extensively about the colonial period. It maps out the timeline for imperialism and colonialism really nicely. With Core Knowledge, the curriculum is pretty much all there. I can spend my prep time finding additional resources.

If anything, I’d like the handbook to be even more detailed because I’d like it to suggest additional resources at different reading levels.
Xia Lee, a fourth-grade teacher at Phalen Lake Elementary, describes how she teaches “Give me liberty, or give me death!”

Instead of teaching Patrick Henry’s “Give me liberty, or give me death!” during language arts, I teach it during our history lessons on the American Revolution. To do that, I look at the state standards and my students, many of whom are new to the U.S. To teach them content like the American Revolution, we have to simplify language and break down lessons even further than the curriculum suggests.

As I teach, I say that Patrick Henry is giving a persuasive speech. We talk about what persuasive means. After we read the speech we talk about the ideas behind it. Students then go into groups and discuss it with a partner.

One thing I have done with my students this year is to help them understand the history of the American Revolution first and then talk about what liberty means. We also talk about war in connection with students’ life experiences. Many of my students are from Thailand and their parents have lived through war.

“Give me liberty, or give me death!”—it’s a huge concept for them to understand. It helps that right now, all my students who are recent immigrants speak Hmong. I’m bilingual, so I’m able to use both languages to make sure they understand in Hmong and then in English.

Although we simplify language, we don’t go too slowly because we have regular students in our classroom. We still have the scope and sequence we need to get through by the end of the year. I have simplified as much as possible within my guided reading group. I also have an English language learner teacher who works with me and several of my students.

While the teacher handbook is helpful, some of the words in the Core Knowledge student materials are too difficult for students who are still learning English. When we study the American Revolution, Core Knowledge uses a dialogue that only a native English speaker would understand. So we have to look for
other resources. We don’t just teach from the teacher handbook. We look for guided reading that is based on the American Revolution. For example, the Magic Tree House children’s book series (www.randomhouse.com/teachers/magichth/guides/america.html) does a really nice timeline about how to teach the American Revolution in simple language. We use that as our guide to cover this big concept and in guided reading groups. Kethkeo and I both have done that. But we still use our Core Knowledge handbook as our reference to ensure that we’re not skipping any major concepts that students are supposed to know. If we don’t cover this material thoroughly, then when students go to fifth grade they will have a harder time understanding and they will have much to relearn.