

Build Background Knowledge

To boost confidence and understanding in your learners



"All new learning builds on prior learning."¹

- What are examples of this in class and outside of it?
- What is a unit, book, or concept where your students could use more background knowledge?



¹.[Ferlazzo, Larry. The Whys and Hows of Activating Students' Background Knowledge. Education Week. June 15, 2020.](#)

When to use Newsela to build background knowledge

Knowledge building at key moments in lessons and units is essential.

Before

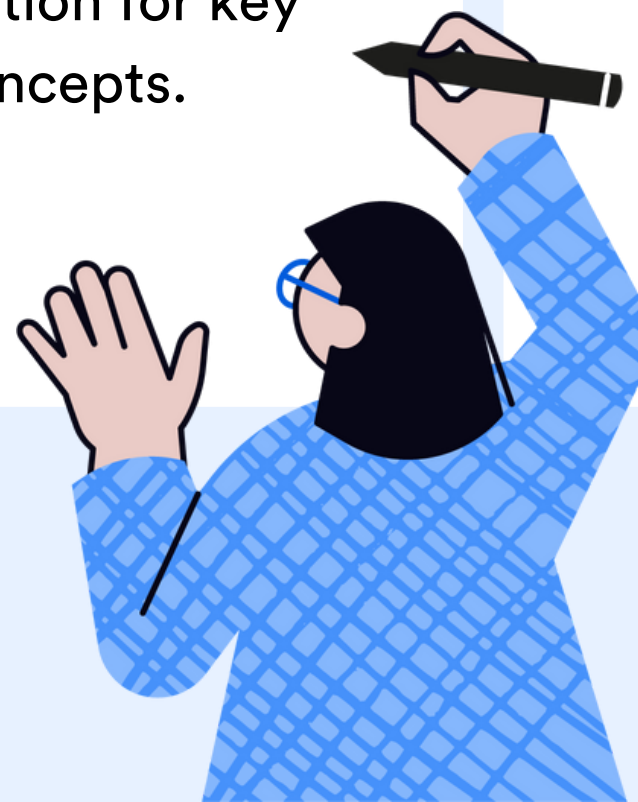
Before a new lesson or unit, share texts and videos that help students build a foundation for key concepts.

During

As the lesson or unit develops, assign content that connects to new concepts that students will encounter.

After

When the lesson or unit is complete, extend learning on topics students found interesting and draw connections to other work.

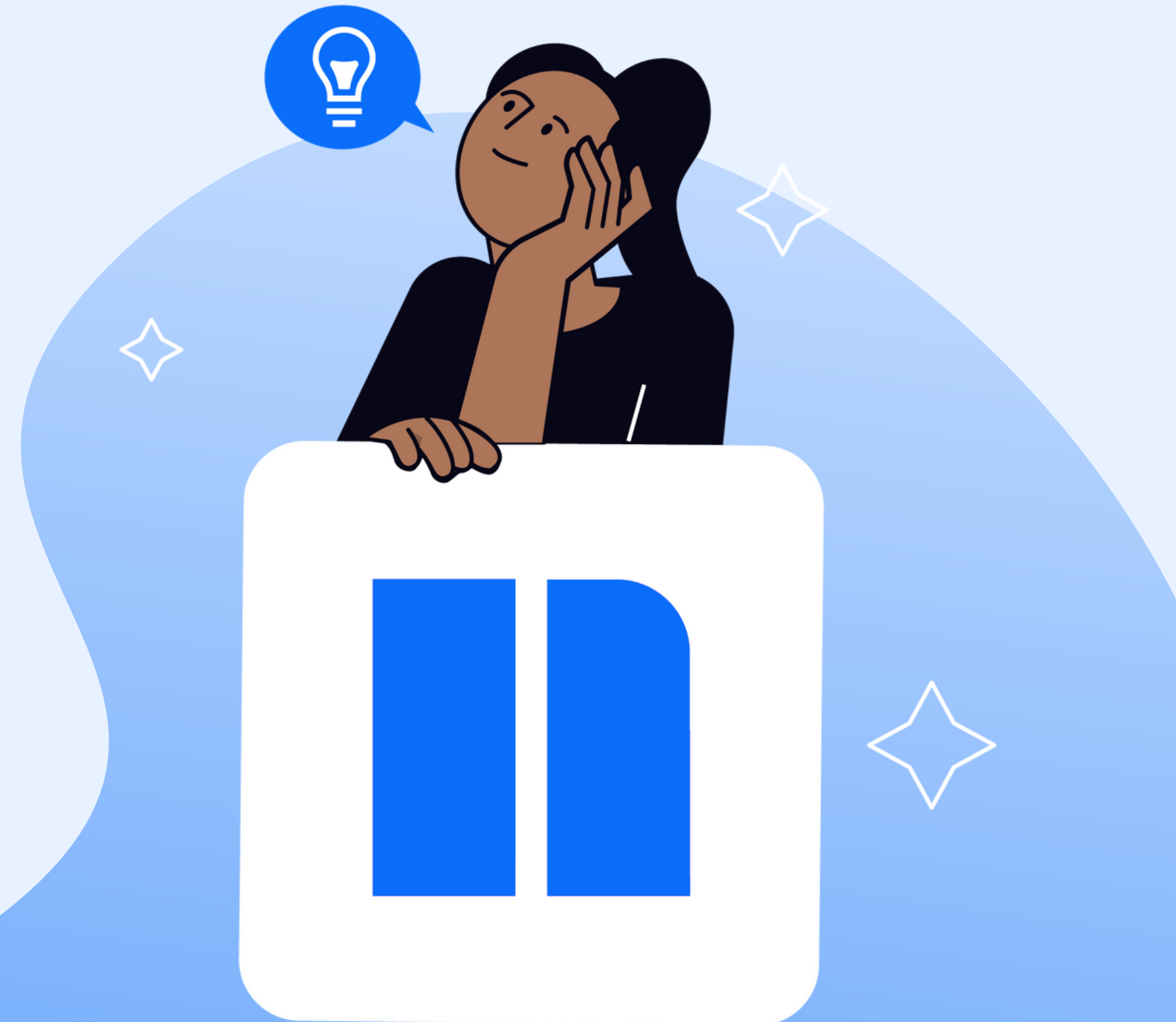


Before you start building...

Give students an opportunity to activate prior learning and get them excited to learn new information.

Try these three simple steps:

1. **Discover** what your students know about a topic
2. **Foster** discussion and information sharing
3. **Connect** to previous learning.



First, search for a text or video that connects to your classroom. There are thousands to choose from.

TIP

Don't forget to filter! These help you find content by type, grade, skill, Spanish/English, and more.

Then, preview the content before sharing with students.

The screenshot shows the Newsela search results page for the query "westward expansion". At the top, the Newsela logo is on the left, and "Educator Center" and a user profile icon are on the right. Below the logo is a navigation bar with "Search", "Browse", "Your Content", "Assignments", and "Binder". The search bar contains "westward expansion" and a "Search" button. Below the search bar, a row of filter buttons is highlighted with a blue box: "All Content Types", "Articles", "Worksheets", "Videos", "Standards", and "Text Sets". Below the filters, it says "842 results available" and lists filter options: "Reading Level", "Grade Level", "Reading Skills", and "Clear Filters". On the right, it says "Sort By Relevance". The main content area displays a grid of article cards. Each card features a thumbnail image, the article title, the date, and an "Assign" button. The visible article titles are: "An Overview of U.S. Westward Expansion", "Westward Expansion: The Louisiana Purchase", "Manifest Destiny: The idea behind America's westward expansion", "Westward Expansion, Introduction: Between Atlantic and Pacific", "Westward Expansion: Part 1, New Settlers", "Westward Expansion Part I: U.S. settlers colonize the West", "Westward Expansion II: Mexican Independence", and "Westward Expansion II: Changing Borders".

Discover what your students know about a topic

Use a simple poll or share a graphic organizer chart to better understand their knowledge level.

NEWSELA TIP:

Find graphic organizers on Newsela by filtering your search results for “worksheets.”

Name: _____

Date: _____ Class: _____

Notice, Wonder, Connect

Directions: Use the space below to record your thinking as you read the text.

Noticings	Wonderings	Connections

Foster discussion and information sharing

Provide time for turn and talk with a partner or small group using prompts focused on the new topic.

NEWSELA TIP:

Add paragraph numbers to any article, then use present mode to focus students on parts of the text they'll turn and talk about.

The screenshot displays the Newsela platform interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the Newsela logo, user profile 'Educator Center', and search/browse options. The article title is 'Checkmate: School custodian coaches student chess teams to victory in Maine'. Below the title are controls for language (English), reading level (680L), and actions (Assign, Print). A central image shows a man coaching students around a chessboard. The article text is presented with numbered paragraphs (1-6) for focus. A right-hand sidebar offers 'Activities' such as 'Annotations', 'Write prompt', and 'Quiz', along with a 'Review Student Work' button. A bottom sidebar contains various utility icons like 'Share', 'Save', 'Hide', 'Add', 'Present', 'Count', and 'Listen'.

Connect to previous learning

Show students an outline or mindmap to make explicit connections to other content.

NEWSELA TIP:

Use annotations while reading to keep track of what you want students to mind map.

The screenshot displays the Newsela website interface. At the top, the Newsela logo is on the left, and 'Educator Center' with a user profile icon 'AS' is on the right. A navigation bar includes 'Search', 'Browse', 'Your Content', 'Assignments', and 'Binder'. The main content area features the title 'Summer with Papaji' under the category 'FICTION'. Below the title are buttons for 'English', 'MAX', 'Assign', and 'Print'. A large illustration shows a woman and two children in a storeroom. An 'Annotations' sidebar is open on the right, showing a green highlight on the text 'physical work of farming' with the annotation 'Why is this important?' by 'A. Saedi'. The sidebar includes 'Delete', 'Edit', and 'Share' buttons. On the left side of the article, a vertical toolbar contains icons for 'Share', 'Save', 'Hide', 'Add', 'Present', 'Size: S', 'Count', and 'Listen'. Below the illustration, the text reads: 'The storeroom at Papaji's house was a treasure trove. Illustration by: Cornelius Van Wright and Ying-Hwa Hu/Highlights for Children'. The author is 'By Jyoti Singh Visvanath, Highlights for Children, Highlights for Children'. It is 'RECOMMENDED FOR Upper Elementary School – Middle School'. Metadata shows 'WORDS 850 | TEXT LEVEL 5 | PUBLISHED 9/30/2019'. The main text begins: 'Papaji, my grandfather, was a stern man. He always stood straight, his body lean and muscular from the physical work of farming. When I was young, I thought he seemed awfully big. His mustache curled at the ends, and his turban made him appear larger than life. A glance from him was enough to keep my sisters and me in line. Yet every summer I looked forward to seeing Papaji. It was a family ritual to visit his farm in the heart of Punjab in India.'

Key tools and student activities

Check out these short videos for an overview of some of the features Newsela teachers love most.



Annotations

Highlighting feature enables you to add questions, vocabulary support, and more to build and activate knowledge.



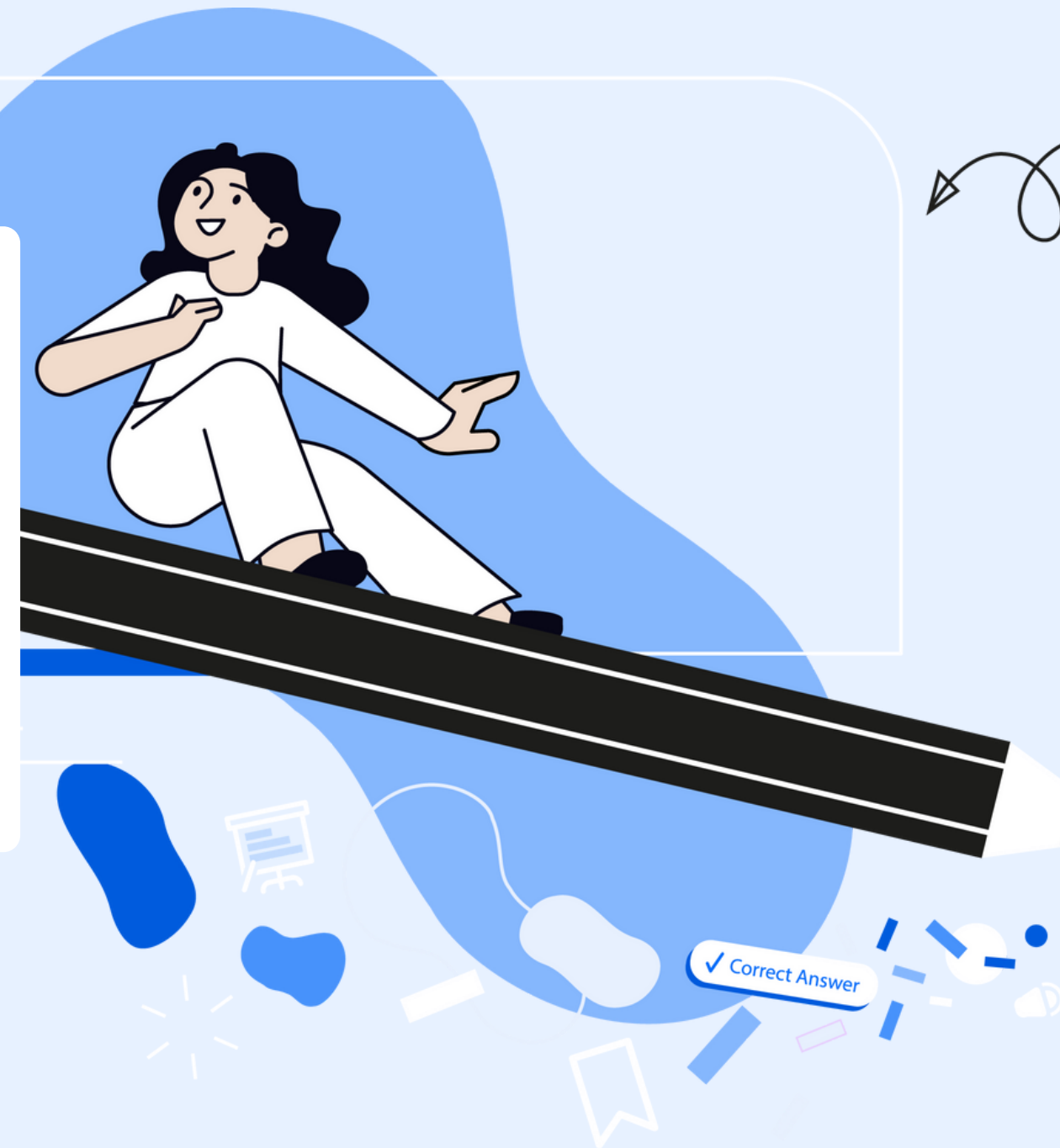
Quizzes

Standards-aligned quick assessments that provide visibility into what students know and where they may need support.



Write prompts

Opportunities for students to demonstrate skills. Use the Newsela provided prompt or create your own.



ELA curations* that support background knowledge

[Novel Studies](#)

Curated texts and practical guides to enhance instruction of over 300+ most commonly taught books.

[Curriculum Complements](#)

Content mapped to the resources you're already using to activate and build knowledge and make them more relevant and accessible.

[Research Projects](#)

Text sets that provide context and current connections for a range of popular research topics to inspire students' investigations and exploration.

The screenshot shows the Newsela website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Newsela logo, search, browse, and account options. The main content area is titled 'Novel and Book Studies' and includes a 'Save' and 'Share' button. Below this, there is a paragraph of text explaining the collection's purpose and a link to a survey. A sidebar on the left lists sub-categories like 'Elementary Novel and Book Studies', 'Middle School Novel and Book Studies', and 'High School Novel and Book Studies'. At the bottom, there is a grid of novel study cards, each featuring a book cover, the title, author, date, and an 'Assign' button.

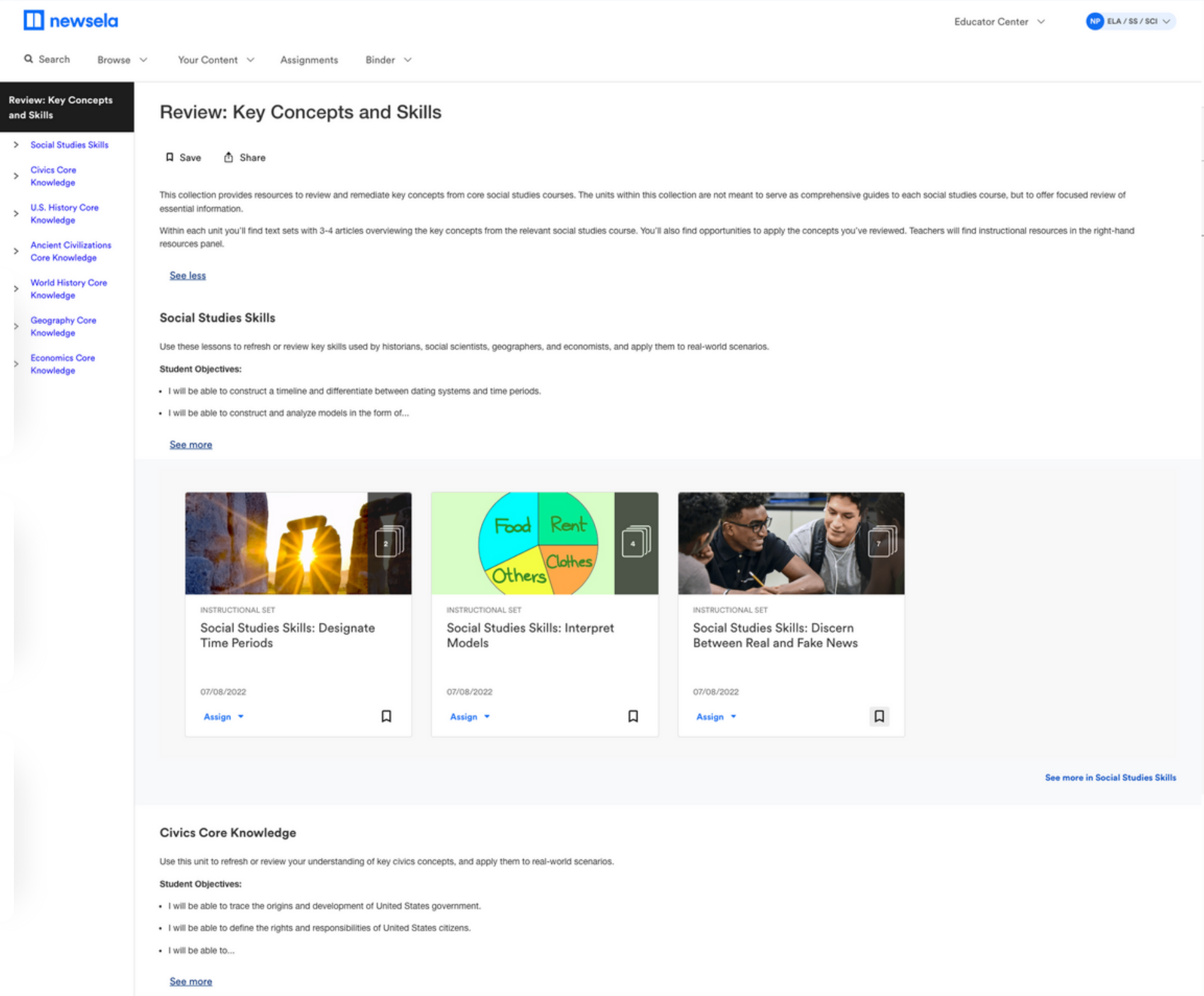
*Available to Newsela ELA users

Social studies curations* that support background knowledge

[Key Concepts and Skills](#) Resources to quickly review key concepts from core social studies courses.

[Explainer Videos](#) Key information on historical events and people necessary for understanding a variety of social studies topics.

[Issue Overviews](#) Deep dive into topics that shape government policy and affect students' daily lives.



*Available to Newsela Social Studies users

Science curations* that support background knowledge

[Review: Science Core Ideas](#) Building blocks of science at progressive levels of depth and complexity with activities.

[Science Videos](#) Exploration of core concepts and ideas across science disciplines.

[Virtual Field Trips](#) Opportunities for students to explore a variety of locations from zoos to national parks to space.

The screenshot shows the Newsela website interface. At the top right, it says 'Educator Center' and 'VT ELA / SS / SCI'. The main navigation includes 'Search', 'Browse', 'Your Content', 'Assignments', and 'Binder'. The left sidebar is titled 'Review: Science Core Ideas' and lists three categories: 'Physical Science', 'Earth and Space Sciences', and 'Life Science'. The main content area is titled 'Review: Science Core Ideas' and includes 'Save' and 'Share' buttons. An 'Instructional Note' explains that the lessons review key science topics (DCIs) of the NGSS across three domains: Physical Science, Earth and Space Science, and Life Science. A list of links follows, including 'NGSS Grade 3', 'NGSS Grade 4', 'NGSS Grade 5', 'NGSS Middle School Life Science', 'NGSS Middle School Physical Science', 'NGSS Middle School Earth and Space Science', 'NGSS High School Biology', and 'NGSS High School Earth and Space Science'. An 'Accessibility Note' mentions that PDF versions of lessons can be printed. A 'See less' link is present. Below this is a section for 'Physical Science' with another 'Instructional Note' detailing the domain's focus on forces, motion, energy, collisions, waves, matter, and chemical reactions. A 'See more' link is also provided. At the bottom, three unit cards are displayed: 'Interacting Forces' (3 units), 'Energy, Motion, and Collisions' (3 units), and 'Transfer of Energy and Information' (4 units).

*Available to Newsela Science users

Appendix

Contents

- [View our other Newsela Guides](#)
- [Links to How-To Videos](#)
- [Link to Companion Guide](#)



Enhance your instruction with Newsela with these professional learning options

Practice literacy skills

Drive achievement and reading comprehension by exploring this set of goal-focused resources.

[View Resource](#)

Get started with Newsela

Learn the basics for long-term Newsela success with this collection of curated resources.

[View Resource](#)

Include diverse perspectives

Create a more lively and inclusive classroom using this selection of dedicated resources

[View Resource](#)

Looking for more help? Check out these additional resources.

 [What is Newsela?](#)

 [How to find and save content on Newsela](#)

 [How to assign Newsela articles to students](#)

 [How to use article tools & activities](#)

 [How to annotate text in articles for students](#)

 [How to review student assignments on Newsela](#)

 [The student experience on Newsela.com](#)

 [How to track student progress in your Newsela Binder](#)

 [How to assign content to small groups of students](#)

 [How to use Lesson Sparks](#)

 [How to find and use text sets with your class](#)

 [How to use and edit write prompts in your assignments](#)

 [Download Companion Guide](#)