

Build Background Knowledge

To boost confidence and understanding in your learners



[Just beginning with Newsela? Try our Get Started resources](#)

"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

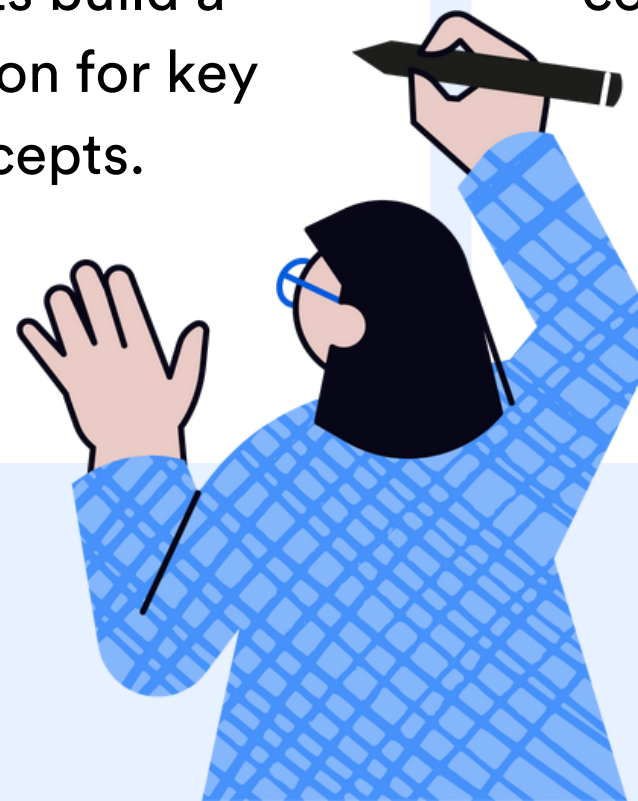
Before a new lesson or unit, share texts and videos that help students build a foundation for key concepts.

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.

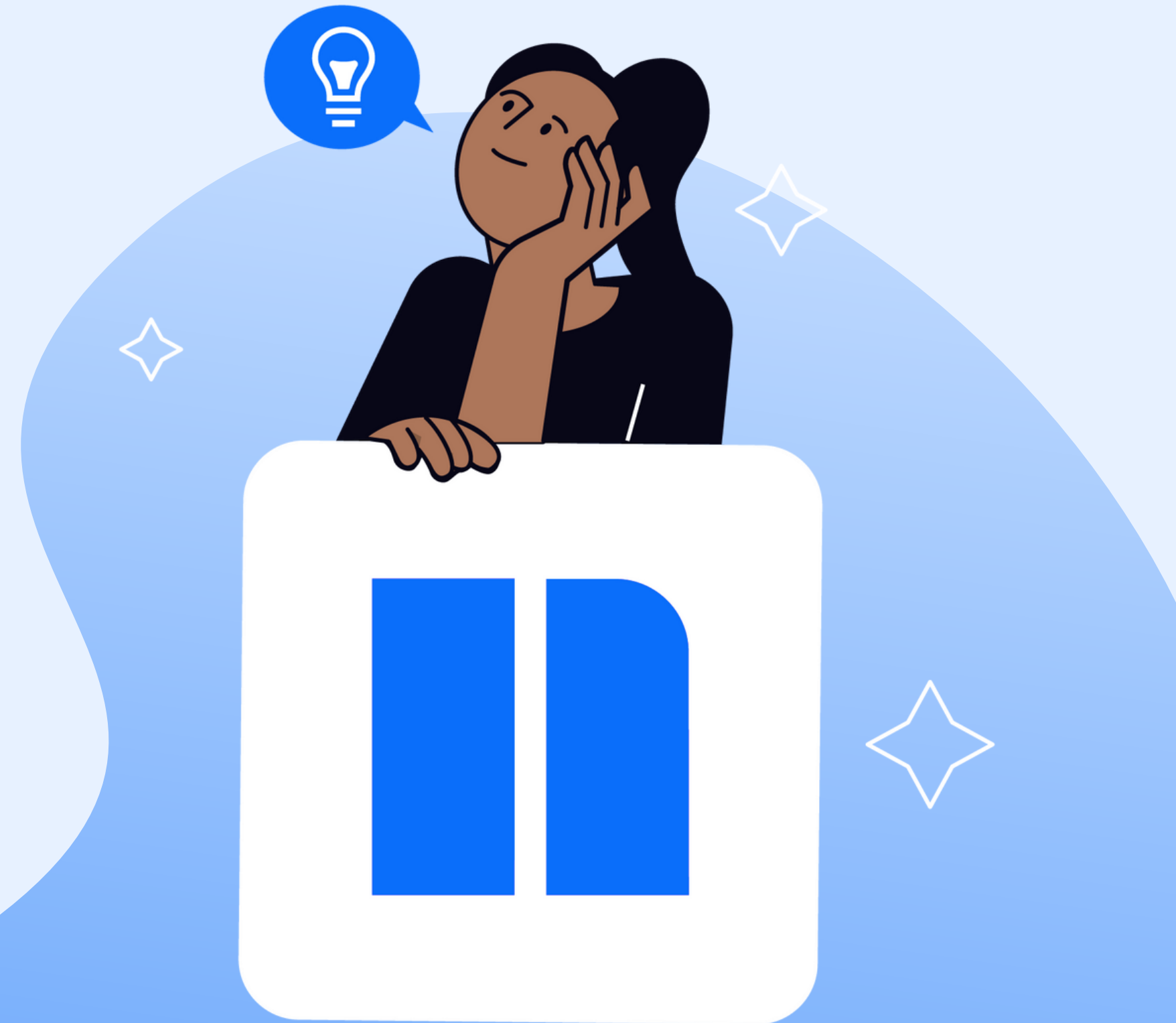


Before you start building...

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.



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 shows the Newsela interface for an article titled "Checkmate: School custodian coaches student chess teams to victory in Maine". The article is by Sydney Page from The Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff. It is recommended for Upper Elementary School to Middle School, has 600 words, a text level of 4, and was published on 6/25/2023. The interface includes a top navigation bar with "newsela" logo, "Educator Center", and user initials "AS". Below the navigation is a search and filter bar. The article title is prominently displayed, followed by language and level dropdowns, and "Assign" and "Print" buttons. A central image shows a man (Mr. Bishop) sitting at a table with several children playing chess. To the left of the article is a vertical toolbar with icons for Share, Save, Hide, Add, Present, Size (S), Count, and Listen. To the right is an "Activities" sidebar with options for Annotations, Write prompt, and Quiz, and a "Review Student Work" button at the bottom.

Checkmate: School custodian coaches student chess teams to victory in Maine

English | 680L | Assign | Print

By Sydney Page, The Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff

RECOMMENDED FOR Upper Elementary School – Middle School

WORDS 600 | TEXT LEVEL 4 | PUBLISHED 6/25/2023

- David Bishop's students often ask him the same question. "Mr. Bishop, what's your favorite chess piece?"
- Bishop, who is a chess coach, answers that the bishop is one of his favorite pieces. But the queen is his very favorite.
- Bishop has a dual relationship with students. He is not only the chess coach, he is also the school custodian. He is in charge of maintaining and cleaning the school building. His teams have done very well.
- Bishop leads both the chess club and team at George B. Weatherbee Elementary School in Maine. He's been a custodian there for the past six years. He also runs the chess program at Reeds Brook Middle School.
- Bishop began playing chess at age 10. He has been hooked ever since.
- Still, he didn't expect to one day become a coach, or a custodian.

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 shows the Newsela interface for the article "Summer with Papaji". At the top, the Newsela logo is on the left, and "Educator Center" with a user profile icon "AS" is on the right. Below the logo is a navigation bar with "Search", "Browse", "Your Content", "Assignments", and "Binder". The article title "Summer with Papaji" is centered, with "FICTION" above it. Below the title are buttons for "English", "MAX", "Assign", and "Print". A vertical toolbar on the left side of the article contains icons for Share, Save, Hide, Add, Present, Size (S), Count, and Listen. The main content area features an illustration of a woman and two children in a storeroom. Below the illustration is the text: "The storeroom at Papaji's house was a treasure trove. Illustration by: Cornelius Van Wright and Ying-Hwa Hu/Highlights for Children". Below that is the author information: "By Jyoti Singh Visvanath, Highlights for Children, Highlights for Children". A "RECOMMENDED FOR" section lists "Upper Elementary School – Middle School". At the bottom of the article preview, it says "WORDS 850 | TEXT LEVEL 5 | PUBLISHED 9/30/2019". On the right side, an "Annotations" panel is open, showing a green highlight on the text "physical work of farming" and a note by "A. Saedi" asking "Why is this important?". The panel includes "Delete", "Edit", and "Share" buttons.

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

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 "AS" 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. To the right of the search bar is a language dropdown set to "English". Below the search bar is a filter bar with buttons for "All Content Types", "Articles", "Worksheets", "Videos", "Standards", and "Text Sets". The "Articles" button is highlighted with a blue box. Below the filter bar, it says "842 results available" and includes filters for "Reading Level", "Grade Level", and "Reading Skills", along with a "Clear Filters" link. On the right, there is a "Sort By Relevance" dropdown. The main content area displays a grid of article cards. Each card features a thumbnail image, the word "ARTICLE", a title, a date, and an "Assign" button. The first row includes: "An Overview of U.S. Westward Expansion" (04/27/2017), "Westward Expansion: The Louisiana Purchase" (02/20/2017), "Manifest Destiny: The idea behind America's westward expansion" (10/28/2019), and "Westward Expansion, Introduction: Between Atlantic and Pacific" (05/05/2021). The second row includes: "Westward Expansion: Part 1, New Settlers" (04/22/2021), "Westward Expansion Part I: U.S. settlers colonize the West" (04/22/2021), "Westward Expansion II: Mexican Independence" (04/27/2021), and "Westward Expansion II: Changing Borders" (04/27/2021). The bottom of the page shows the start of a third row of article cards.

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.



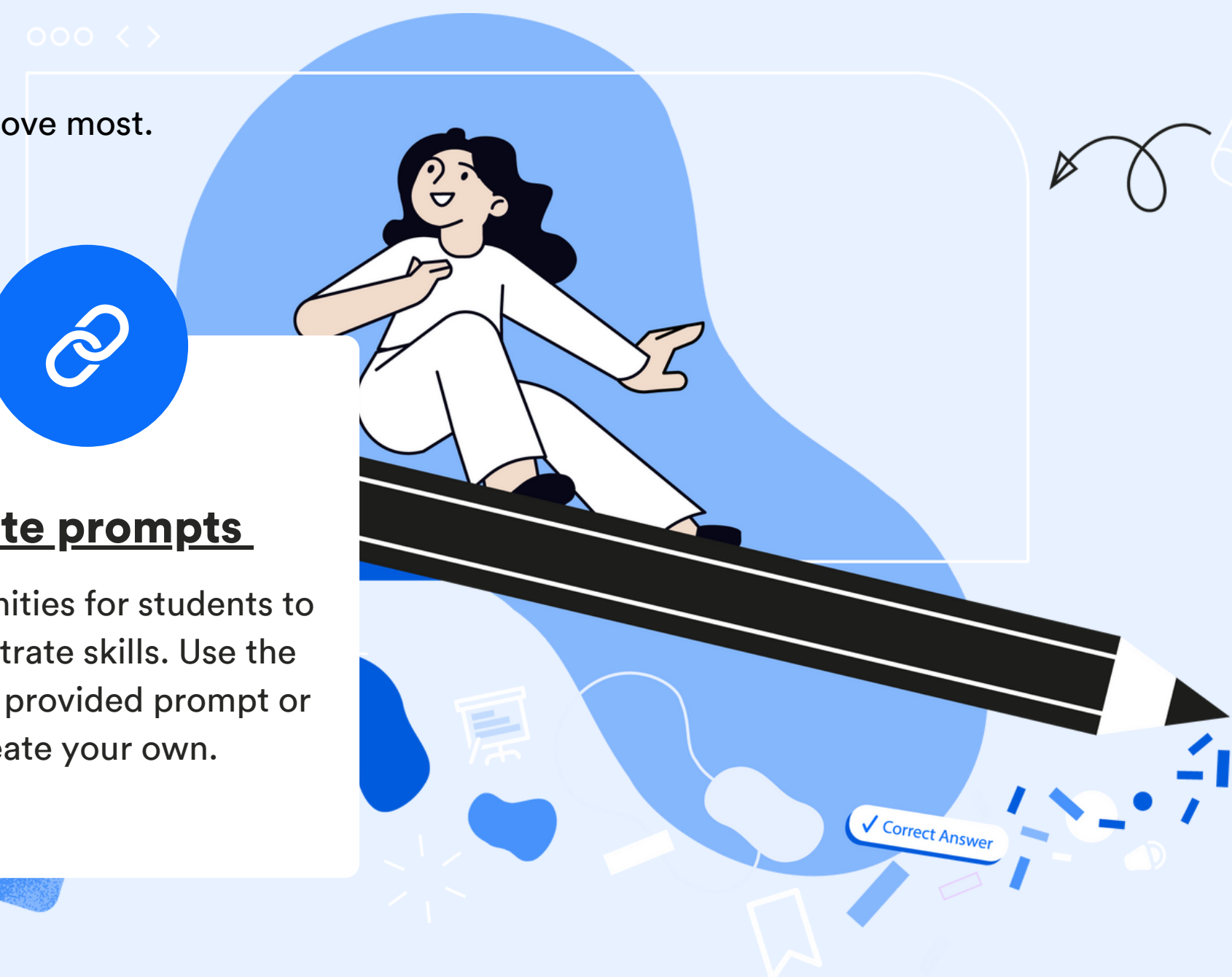
Quizzes

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.

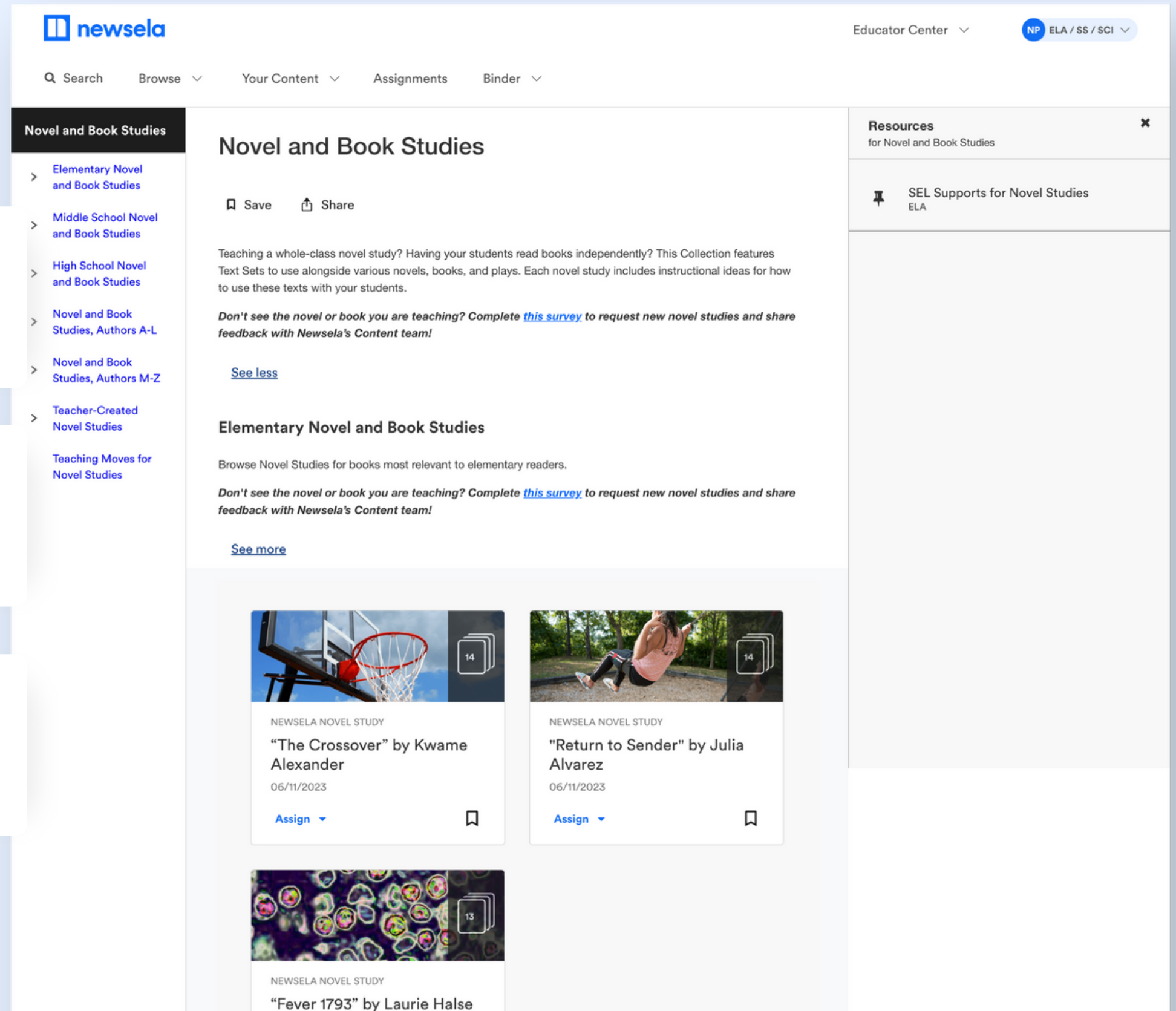
Curriculum Complements

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.

*Available to Newsela ELA users



The screenshot shows the Newsela website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Newsela logo, search, browse, and content management options. The main content area is titled "Novel and Book Studies" and includes a sidebar with a list of sub-categories: Elementary Novel and Book Studies, Middle School Novel and Book Studies, High School Novel and Book Studies, Novel and Book Studies, Authors A-L, Novel and Book Studies, Authors M-Z, Teacher-Created Novel Studies, and Teaching Moves for Novel Studies. The main text area provides an overview of the collection, explaining that it features Text Sets for use alongside various novels, books, and plays. It includes a call to action: "Don't see the novel or book you are teaching? Complete this survey to request new novel studies and share feedback with Newsela's Content team!" and links to "See less" and "See more". Below the text, there are three featured novel study cards. The first card is for "The Crossover" by Kwame Alexander, dated 06/11/2023, with an "Assign" button and a bookmark icon. The second card is for "Return to Sender" by Julia Alvarez, dated 06/11/2023, with an "Assign" button and a bookmark icon. The third card is for "Fever 1793" by Laurie Halse, with an "Assign" button and a bookmark icon. On the right side of the page, there is a "Resources" sidebar with a search icon and a list of resources, including "SEL Supports for Novel Studies ELA".



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

The screenshot shows the Newsela website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'newsela' logo, 'Educator Center', and 'ELA / SS / SCI'. Below that, there are tabs for 'Search', 'Browse', 'Your Content', 'Assignments', and 'Binder'. The main content area is titled 'Review: Key Concepts and Skills'. It includes a 'Save' and 'Share' button, a paragraph of introductory text, and a 'Social Studies Skills' section with 'Student Objectives'. Below this, there are three instructional set cards, each with a thumbnail, title, date (07/08/2022), and an 'Assign' button. The cards are: 'Social Studies Skills: Designate Time Periods', 'Social Studies Skills: Interpret Models', and 'Social Studies Skills: Discern Between Real and Fake News'. A 'See more in Social Studies Skills' link is at the bottom right of the cards section. Below the cards, there's another section for 'Civics Core Knowledge' with similar text and objectives.

Science curations* that support background knowledge

[Review: Science Core Ideas](#)

Building blocks of science at progressive levels of depth and complexity with activities.

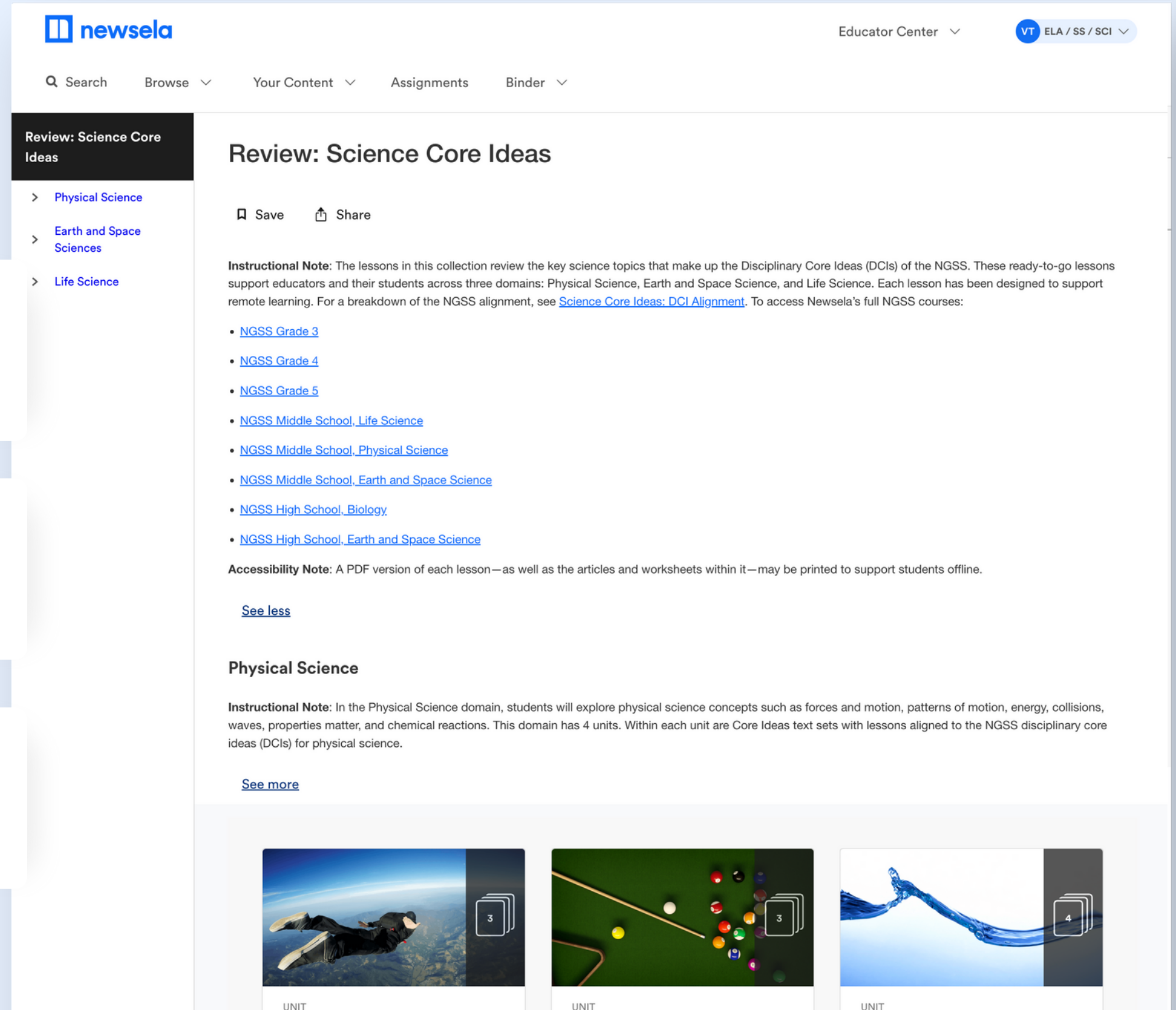
[Science Videos](#)

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.

*Available to Newsela Science users



newsela Educator Center VT ELA / SS / SCI

Search Browse Your Content Assignments Binder

Review: Science Core Ideas

Save Share

Instructional Note: The lessons in this collection review the key science topics that make up the Disciplinary Core Ideas (DCIs) of the NGSS. These ready-to-go lessons support educators and their students across three domains: Physical Science, Earth and Space Science, and Life Science. Each lesson has been designed to support remote learning. For a breakdown of the NGSS alignment, see [Science Core Ideas: DCI Alignment](#). To access Newsela's full NGSS courses:

- [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](#)
- [NGSS High School, Earth and Space Science](#)

Accessibility Note: A PDF version of each lesson—as well as the articles and worksheets within it—may be printed to support students offline.

[See less](#)

Physical Science

Instructional Note: In the Physical Science domain, students will explore physical science concepts such as forces and motion, patterns of motion, energy, collisions, waves, properties matter, and chemical reactions. This domain has 4 units. Within each unit are Core Ideas text sets with lessons aligned to the NGSS disciplinary core ideas (DCIs) for physical science.

[See more](#)

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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](#)

[← Back to Start](#)

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](#)