

Inquiry By Design Middle School Curriculum Overview

At middle school, each Inquiry By Design course of study is made up of seven units featuring detailed, flexible lesson plans aimed at building critical, standards-aligned literacy skills. Each unit is built around challenging, grade-appropriate texts and spiraling cycles of work marked by reading, writing, and collaborative small-group and whole-class discussion.

Teaching Focus	Creating a Text-Based Culture	Introduction to Argument: Writing About Literature	Reading and Writing About Informational and Literary Nonfiction	Analysis, Explanation, and Argument: Reading Nonfiction Like a Detective	Writing Across the Types: Narrative, Exposition, and Argument	Reading and Writing About Poetry
Grade 6	Introduction to the Reading and Writing Life	Introduction to Interpretive Work (Bambara and Baxter)	Story and the Brain Dealing With Difficulty (Doyle and Dickinson)	Reading Nonfiction Like a Detective	Reading and Writing Fairy Tales	How Poems Are Built
Grade 7	Exploring the Reading and Writing Life	Introduction to Interpretive Work (Hughes and Jackson)	Texting and Language Change Dealing With Difficulty (Cumings and Dillard)	Investigative Report Writing: Explanations and Arguments	Growing Up: Thinking With Literature	Creating Characters in Poetry: A Study of Two Poets
Grade 8	The Habits of Lifelong Readers and Writers	Introduction to Interpretive Work (Walker and Rivera)	Superstitions, Patterns, and Control Dealing With Difficulty (Reed and Thomas)	Metaphorically Speaking: Reading Nonfiction Like a Cognitive Linguist	Faces of the Essay: An Orientation to the Form	Poems as Puzzles: A Pair of Poets Study

Creating a Text-Based Culture

These foundational studies establish classroom routines that support students in developing the habits of lifelong readers and writers. Topics include setting up literacy notebooks, establishing independent reading projects, and exposing students to the problem-solving strategies and practices of avid readers and accomplished authors.

Introduction to Argument: Writing About Literature

These introductory studies provide students with an in-depth orientation to the development of text-based arguments about literature. Students engage in carefully sequenced cycles of reading, writing, and discussion that culminate in formal, written arguments about engaging short fiction.

Reading and Writing About Informational and Literary Nonfiction

In the first unit, students work with thematically linked pairs of complex informational texts to determine the central ideas, how they unfold, and the methods writers employ to develop content. In the second unit, students work with complex literary nonfiction to develop the skills, tenacity, and mindset that can only be acquired through thoughtful encounters with difficult texts. In both units, students experience sequences of reading, writing, and discussion that culminate in formal writing tasks.

Analysis, Explanation, and Argument: Reading Nonfiction Like a Detective

These units invite students to craft, test and refine “reading below the surface” theories for reading nonfiction. Driven by detective fiction and award-winning reportage, students read and write about texts in ways that push beyond superficial comprehension into the realm of inference, analysis, and inquiry.

Writing Across the Types: Narrative, Exposition, Argument

These writing-intensive units invite students to participate in “conversations” about ideas that matter—whether it’s wrestling with questions about why fairy tales matter, exploring how other people’s stories can shape their own experience of growing up, or investigating how and why authors might choose to reveal or obscure their voice in a text. In addition to text-based argument tasks, students also take on significant writing projects in each study.

Reading and Writing About Poetry

These units center on clusters of poems from different times and traditions. The studies feature sequences of work designed to stimulate collaboration, while, at the same time apprenticing students to the close reading of poetry. In addition, students practice writing text-based arguments about literature and take on poetry writing tasks where they try writing poems like those written by the poets they study.