

INQUIRY UNITS IN GRADE TWO

The inquiry units in grade 2 have been designed to foster a community of thinkers, nurture students' inquiry-mindedness, and develop literacy competence. They focus on active learning—reading, writing, drawing, talking, listening, and investigating—which promotes knowledge acquisition, deep understanding, and the ability to put ideas to work in the world. The units integrate learning outcomes from various curriculum areas with the goal of promoting an understanding of “big ideas”—larger concepts, principles, or processes.

The units are based on a model of guided inquiry where students receive support and guidance at critical points as they move through the inquiry process. Guided inquiry allows you to model, guide, and facilitate inquiry, depending upon students' understanding of the inquiry process, their learning needs, and their level of independence. Each unit includes pertinent resources and detailed lesson plans to assist with the launch of a focused inquiry in whole-group sessions. In addition, instructional support is provided to extend the inquiry during Researchers' Workshop in an approach appropriate for you and your learners.

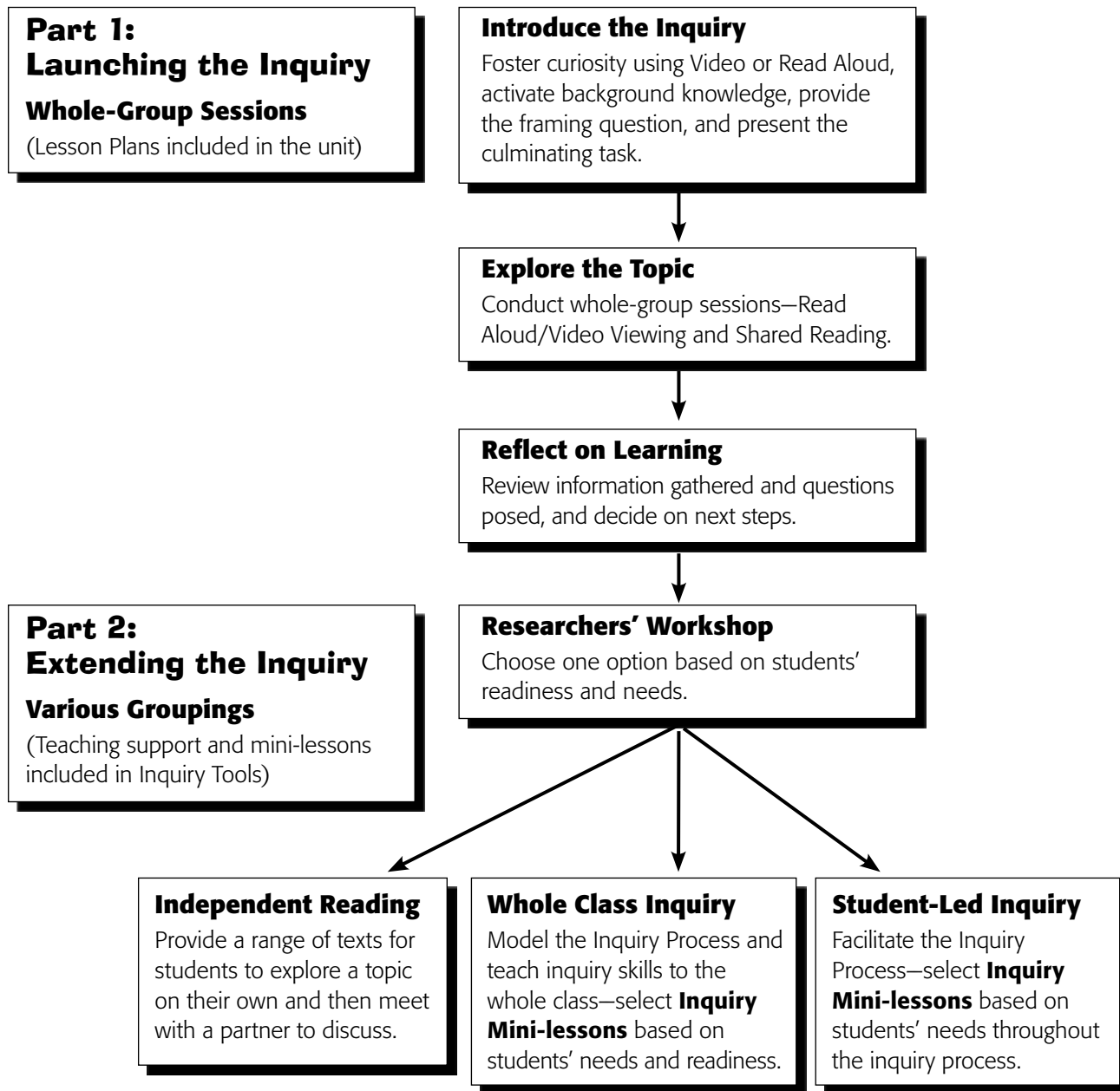
Although a significant emphasis is placed on the development of oral language, reading comprehension, writing strategies, and vocabulary acquisition; lessons equally support critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and information literacy skills—essential 21st century competencies. The language, literacy, and 21st century skills acquired in these units will provide important tools and strategies when students pursue self-initiated inquiries.

Within the lesson plans, a range of comprehension strategies are integrated into each lesson and a comprehension purpose strategy is highlighted. The strategies consist of: self-monitoring, analyzing, sequencing, making connections, predicting, inferring, evaluating, and synthesizing—strategies used in all *Literacy Place for the Early Years* lessons.

Purpose of the Units:

- encourage curiosity and questioning
- deepen understanding of a topic or issue
- develop the ability to think critically
- use reading comprehension strategies to understand texts at a deeper level
- promote effective listening and speaking skills
- broaden perspective and viewpoint
- extend understanding through writing
- develop research competence
- foster co-operative learning and social skills
- learn strategies and skills transferrable to other inquiry projects

Guided Inquiry Model



The Guided Inquiry Model

The guided inquiry model is a large-group, whole-class approach to inquiry which, potentially, can lead to small-group, partner, or individual inquiry into finer aspects of the topic or issue. This model allows you to initiate, facilitate, and structure the inquiry process for your students; intervening and instructing at critical points in learning. In the guided inquiry approach, inquiry begins with a meaningful framing question that connects students to the world around them, builds on background knowledge, and excites curiosity; however, students' own questions become integrated into the unit as it progresses.

Note: Prior to launching the inquiry with students, review the “Teacher Background” section which outlines big ideas, the framing question, culminating task, unit texts, and literacy skill development in each unit. The “Preparing for the Unit” section provides scheduling, materials, Monitoring Progress, and ELL information important to planning.

Part 1: Launching the Inquiry

Introduce the Inquiry

At the onset of a guided inquiry unit, you establish the focus of the inquiry and encourage curiosity by:

- introducing the topic
- activating students' background knowledge
- providing the framing question
- presenting the culminating task

Depending on the unit, the introduction of the topic may be in the form of a Video Viewing or a Read Aloud text which provides a context for the unit, stimulates curiosity, and fosters exploration. Students' background knowledge is accessed so that new learning can be linked to existing knowledge. Each unit provides an activating organizer (e.g., R.A.N. Chart, KWHLAQ Chart, TLReT-Q Chart) where thinking and initial wonderings can be recorded. These frontloading activities provide a good opportunity to assess the needs of learners.

The framing question is the guiding force behind the unit and focuses students' thinking during the inquiry process. The framing question hooks students into considering big ideas, issues and problems surrounding the topic, and creates a personal connection for them. It frames the unit as a problem or a puzzle to be solved and enables students to connect back to the real world where they can put new understandings to work. When teachers frame powerful questions and expressly teach how to ask good questions, they empower students to drive their own learning.

The culminating task is an open-ended possibility for students to respond to their learning and to share their findings in reference to the framing question. It can be completed by the whole class working together or on an individual basis. Students will be given choice about how to present their findings

Explore the Topic

This stage of the guided inquiry model is essential to a successful inquiry. As a class, students explore various texts during whole-group sessions of Read Aloud/Video Viewing and Shared Reading. These introductory sessions help to:

- build new knowledge for students who are unfamiliar with the topic
- establish a shared knowledge base for class discussions
- stimulate curiosity and encourage wonderings and questions that guide inquiry
- create excitement, motivation, and student ownership of the topic

The lesson plans in each unit involve students in listening, reading, discussing, questioning, responding, seeking connections, and identifying patterns as they investigate the topic and connect to the framing question. The Read Aloud/Video Viewing gets students thinking and wondering about the topic and the Shared Reading texts explore aspects of the topic at a deeper level. During exploration of the topic, you will strategically model your wonderings, predictions, and questions and students will wonder and ask questions pertaining to the texts they are reading or viewing.

Reflect on Learning

Taking time to reflect on learning is an important aspect of the inquiry process. In this part of the guided model, you will provide the opportunity for students to dialogue with each other, enabling them to think critically about their background knowledge and the information they have gathered through the whole-group experiences of Read Aloud/Video Viewing and Shared Reading. Students will relate what they have learned to the framing question and add to, delete, or revise initial questions to develop a sense of where the inquiry will lead.

At this point, you and your students can determine next steps for the inquiry. Decisions about which way to proceed depend on a number of things:

- students' readiness and needs
- your level of comfort with facilitating student ownership
- timing of the unit within the school year
- students' prior experiences with inquiry-based learning
- students' interest in the inquiry
- amount of time available to complete an in-depth inquiry

Part 2: Extending the Inquiry

Researchers' Workshop

Included in each guide is a **Researchers' Workshop** that offers three options for extending the inquiry. Each option varies in teacher direction and student independence. Whichever choice you make, you will find teaching support in the form of lesson plans, a Resource List, and blackline masters in each unit plus links to Inquiry Mini-Lessons in the online Inquiry Tools.

a) Independent Reading

As part of the literacy block, students will read independently and respond to their reading. They will choose “just right” texts from a collection of materials about the topic, read on their own, and then meet with a partner to discuss findings.

b) Whole-Class Inquiry

During whole-group sessions, students will gain necessary skills and tools for self-initiated inquiries by being guided through the inquiry process. Often students don't have the necessary background knowledge to pose their own questions or they lack understanding in identifying a question worthy of investigation so a large-group approach is helpful. Also this approach helps to prepare students to work collaboratively, to listen and respond to each other, and to ask good questions. It gradually leads students to independent learning.

c) Student-Led Inquiry

In this option, students make most of the decisions and work collaboratively with partners or in small groups on independent investigations. They select their own questions and co-operatively conduct research and share findings with others. Although inquiry is student-led, it is teacher supported and facilitated through direct instruction of mini-lessons, conferencing with groups and individuals, and monitoring of student progress.

Inquiry Mini-Lessons are brief, focused lessons that help propel students toward greater success with independent efforts. Mini-lessons can be conducted in whole-class sessions or with small instructional groups. Mini-lessons have been included for each stage of the inquiry process and focus on: strategies for reading and understanding (comprehension), for working with others (collaboration), and for doing research (inquiry).

Facilitate students' learning by teaching mini-lessons as required by the students while they conduct their inquiry. Embedding instruction in the context of ongoing inquiry helps students see the purpose of their learning and gives them the opportunity to apply it immediately in an authentic context.

The Inquiry Process

The Inquiry process outlines a five stage process of investigation. Although cyclical in nature, students can re-enter the process at any stage as their initial questions are redefined and their plans are revised. This process can be modelled during Guided Inquiry with the whole class or facilitated with small groups of researchers. See the **Inquiry Process for Student Investigations**.