

### Science and history

Our collection of science texts are focused on contemporary topics, including the revolutionary ideas of biologist Rob Dunn, who suggests that our germ-free modern life is at the root of many disorders endemic to the current age. The evolution of scientific understanding is another sub-genre of the Amplify Library, beginning with the curriculum units on brain science and space exploration, and extending through texts students can read independently (such as a story on the 19th-century archaeologist who claimed to have discovered ancient Troy). The independent reading texts also include histories of engineering science, transportation, and architecture. Other history texts include the 10-volume *History of US* series by Hakim Joy, specifically recommended by the CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy as an exemplary informational text.

The library's offerings in the many sub-genres of fiction are vast and inclusive. Some of the most popular contemporary novels for middle schoolers, such as the Lemony Snicket series, take their place alongside the classics: Jules Verne, Agatha Christie, L. Frank Baum, Herman Melville, and many others. A good way to get a sense of the selection is to browse our reading suggestions by using the book lists provided. The titles themselves make the clearest statement of the range, the challenge, and the specific strength of the Amplify Library in the areas prioritized by the CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy.

## Structured Research Collections

### Guided, inquiry-based skill development within the curriculum

#### Should chocolate be part of school lunches?

The question forms the focus of a class debate—but not before students have developed informational literacy skills, learning how to evaluate online sources and avoid plagiarism. And not before they have explored the Amplify Research Collections by means of a scavenger hunt and finally moved beyond the Collections environment to research further in the wide world of the Internet. Only then are they fully prepared to debate the pressing question of whether or not chocolate should be included in school lunches. After the debate, students move on to writing a research paper and creating and presenting a multimedia project.

The work within the Collection units have a particular structure that is designed to introduce, reinforce, and develop research skills. The Collections are focused on a variety of topics, including: the California Gold Rush, the *Titanic*, the Space Race, Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, and the art, history, and science of chocolate. The pattern of the unit stays the same but the level of competence—in planning, evaluating sources, gathering ideas and information, and integrating them into presentations—builds with each experience.

Research, in the California ELA/ELD Framework, is tied to 21st-century learning. Emphasis is placed on the critical thinking required to sift “through the mountains of information made available through technology” (Chapter 2). Perhaps more important, it is tied to the kind of learning that matters in today’s world because it is inquiry-based. In researching, students review texts and images that span time periods, genres, and disciplinary boundaries. In addition, this work involves one of the major new points of emphasis in the revised standards: responding and arguing from textual evidence.

The Amplify Research Collections support this kind of learning with diverse and interdisciplinary materials. The Chocolate Collection, for instance, ranges in history and geography from prehistoric Native American and ancient Aztec civilizations, through colonial West Africa, 18th-century Italy, 19th-century France, and the 20th and 21st-century United States. It takes in labor analysis by William Cadbury, opera by Mozart, and beat literature from Jack Kerouac. Everything but actually eating chocolate is included. In the end, issues including ethics (exploitation), environment, and health are brought to bear on the question of whether school lunches should include chocolate.

## Research archives

### Lapham’s Archives: Collections designed for independent research

Lapham’s Archives are collections of texts and images focused on a theme that were developed in collaboration with the editors at the literary magazine *Lapham’s Quarterly*. There are 17 in all, and they span a wide range of topics, from Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad to Chichén Itzá to Cesar Chavez. Each Archive contains two research-style questions for students to use as guides through their reading and information-gathering. The research questions from the archive on Japanese internment camps during WWII ask, “What happened to individuals who refused to swear loyalty to the US government? Why was choosing allegiance to America over allegiance to Japan such a difficult choice for some Japanese-Americans?” A question from the archive on Cesar Chavez and migrant workers asks, “What methods did farm workers use to protest their unfair treatment, and why were they effective?”

The research skills that students have developed in the Collections curriculum units have provided them with the tools they need to set out on their own and explore the archives. As students continue to hone their researching skills, they start to demonstrate a number of the “capacities of literate individuals” discussed in the California ELA/ELD Framework. They demonstrate:

- Independence.
- Content knowledge.
- An appreciation of evidence.
- Comprehension and ability to critique.