National Geographic: Reach Higher

Contents

Introduction – From the Publisher

"Reach Higher is a cross-curricular, six-level Elementary program that develops English literacy skills. Reach Higher is a great choice for teachers that see their students for 1.5-2 hours per day and group their students by grade level. Teachers that want embedded phonics and lots of science and social studies reading selections should go with Reach Higher."

The Overall Bottom Line

Section A: Curricular Structure	Section B: Student-Centered Instructional Materials
Alignment to Massachusetts Definition of ESL	Asset-Based Orientation
Curricular Map	Linguistically Responsive
Unit Language Goals	Critical Stance
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Shared Responsibility	Universal Design and Accessibility

Evidence is strong and comprehensive: clear connection to four indicators.

Evidence is present: clear connection to three indicators.

Evidence is present but insufficient: clear connection to two indicators.

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Evidence is not yet sufficiently present: connection to one indicator or less.

Summary of the Bottomline

The National Geographic Reach Higher materials demonstrate strong alignment with the Massachusetts Definition of ESL and integrate language development with content from science and social studies. The curriculum is structured around engaging "big questions" and language genres and functions, offering a variety of texts, activities, and assessments that cater to diverse proficiency levels. The materials prompt scaffolding and suggest differentiated supports, as well as opportunities for student interaction and inquiry.

However, the materials could benefit from clearer unit-level language goals, more consistent inclusion of self-assessment activities, and more consistent and explicit inclusion of Language for Social and Instructional Purposes and Mathematics. Additionally, there's an opportunity to develop more comprehensive guidance for supporting multilingual learners with disabilities and to better leverage students' linguistic assets.

Educator Panel Findings: Materials analysis based on the Next Generation ESL Curriculum Review Rubric

Section A: Curricular Structure

Alignment to Massachusetts Definition of ESL

Materials are designed for dedicated ESL instruction with an explicit, sustained, and systematic focus on language development in the integrated context of grade-level content and the ELD Framework.

Strengths:

The National Geographic Reach Higher materials demonstrate alignment with the Massachusetts Definition of ESL. Each unit employs thematic organization, providing students with contextualized language practice. The curriculum integrates grade level content; for example by incorporating in authentic science and social studies content to foster language and literacy development. For instance, Unit 2 in Level 1A explores "Living and Nonliving Things," illustrating this contextualized approach. The materials align with Key Language Uses, with each unit examining various language functions that connect to overarching themes, as evidenced in the Reach Higher Scope and Sequence. Furthermore, materials attend to varying proficiency levels, as shown by its correlations to the English Language Development Standards.

Challenges:

The units within the materials are predominately built around Social Studies and Science themes while the language for Language Arts are built into the listening, speaking, reading and writing expectations within the units.

Bottomline:

The National Geographic Reach Higher materials effectively align with the Massachusetts Definition of ESL, providing contextualized practice with language development by integrating it in authentic science and social studies content, themes, and topics.

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Curricular Map

Materials contain a clear curricular map with a coherent sequence of units for ESL instruction throughout the year.

Strengths:

The materials provide opportunities for English language knowledge, skill, and use to deepen over time with scaffolding and supports. The materials explicitly lay out language functions, which are then mapped into applicable genres, grammar, phonics, and culminating project. Each unit outlines a "big question" that drives the unit as well as the key language function(s) driving the content.

Looking at the entirety of the scope and sequence, the units incorporate a spiraling approach to language development that revisits each language function in a grade-level appropriate way, with topics that are rigorous and age-appropriate. Key Language Uses and prominent genres of schooling are clearly articulated in the Scope and Sequence. The materials include units of instruction that intentionally support and scaffold learning for students while also maintaining rigor and challenge by requiring students to demonstrate their independent capacities. Scaffolds and supports for a range of proficiency levels are clearly articulated in multi-level strategies within the lessons. Examples of specific scaffolding include language frames and during-reading prompts. Units build over time - for instance, students build a deeper understanding of narrative as a genre by "retelling a story," engaging in a photo essay, and progressing to a personal narrative, with grammar embedded into the exploration of the genre.

Challenges:

While the curricular map of the materials spirals language development, the reviewers noted that at times it was harder to discern lesson objectives that lead to unit goals and build towards annual benchmarks in a coherently connected trajectory of learning at all levels.

Bottomline:

The materials scaffold English language development through laying out language functions which are mapped into applicable genres. Units are structured around engaging "big questions" and support diverse proficiency levels with explicit scaffolds. The scope and sequence include rigorous and age-appropriate topics while spiraling language development throughout the year of instruction. The materials occasionally lack clarity in connecting lesson objectives to unit goals and annual benchmarks across all proficiency levels, potentially hindering the establishment of a cohesive learning trajectory.

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Unit Language Goals

Materials articulate clear standards-based unit-level goals for content-driven language instruction.

Strengths:

The materials include clear connections to standards, specifically ELP standards and Common Core State Standards, as evidenced in the ELP Standards Correlation and ELA CCSS Standards Correlation documents. The content connects to science and social studies topics and themes, thereby addressing WIDA Standard 2 (Language for Language Arts), WIDA Standard 4 (Language for Science), and WIDA Standard 5 (Language for Social Studies). Each unit is framed around a "Big Question" and builds towards specific language functions, as shown in the Scope and Sequence. At the end of each unit, students are prompted to revisit the "Big Question." For example, in Unit 8, students reflect on "What Tools Can We Use to Address Our Goals?" Additionally, the student-facing materials include a "unit at a glance" section that outlines goals and specifies the language focus, reading focus, and phonics focus for the unit.

Challenges:

While the materials include "at-a-glance" objectives, clear unit-level language goals were not observed. Additionally, the range of time recommended for each unit was not specified. Although the materials align with content, themes, and topics from Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies, two key areas were underrepresented at the time of review: Language for Social and Instructional Purposes and Language for Mathematics. These areas were neither prominently addressed in the units nor noted in the Common Core correlation documents or scope and sequence.

Bottomline:

The materials demonstrate alignment with ELD and Common Core State Standards, integrating language development with content, topics, and themes from science and social studies. Each unit is structured around a central "Big Question" and progresses through specific language functions, supported by unit goals and comprehensive student-facing materials. However, clear unit-level language goals and specified time ranges for units were not present. Furthermore, the materials lack sufficient coverage of Language for Social and Instructional Purposes and Language for Mathematics.

Lesson Objectives

Materials contain lesson-level language objectives that align to and build towards unit language goals.

Strengths:
The materials feature unit goals at the beginning of each unit, complemented by objectives for each lesson. Each section incorporates embedded objectives, such as "ask for and give advice." Lessons consistently include "checks for understanding" and "assessments" (including oral language rubrics), providing educators with opportunities to monitor progress toward daily objectives. For instance, students demonstrate their learning by identifying past tense in reading passages after studying the concept, and then producing their own past tense sentences (p. 261). Additionally, the teacher's guide and resources offer prompts for educators to monitor student progress and include resources that can be used for students to self-assess.

Challenges:
Despite the presence of lesson level objectives, at times the objectives are not clear and explicit. Although the objectives are written in the teacher's book, they are not included in the student-facing materials. Additionally, the materials do not prompt educators to make the objectives visible to students.

Bottomline:
The materials feature unit-level goals and objectives, with embedded lesson objectives and assessments like oral language rubrics to track progress. They provide opportunities for students to demonstrate learning and include resources for both teacher monitoring and student self-assessment. While objectives are present in the teacher's guide, they are not always explicit or included in student-facing materials. The materials also do not consistently encourage educators to make objectives visible to students.

Assessment

Assessments (pre-, post, interim, unit, lesson, formative) elicit direct, observable evidence of the degree to which a student is increasing language proficiency and using language independently within academic contexts in a range of communication modes.

Strengths:
The materials include a variety of assessments and multiple ways for students to demonstrate their learning. These include informal assessments (such as daily "talk about it" and "write about it" activities), culminating assessments featuring oral and writing projects with options for varying proficiency levels, and supportive elements like language frames and models (for example, "Write to Inform" on page 124 includes a model and analysis). The Teacher's Books provide rubrics with clear assessment criteria, such as the rubric for oral narrative presentations in the Reach Higher Teacher's Book Level 1A. Students are given opportunities for self-assessment, exemplified by the "rate your reading" activity. Throughout the materials, educators are frequently prompted to check for understanding, with each lesson containing Check Understanding sections and each unit concluding with a Wrap Up.

Challenges:
While assessment criteria are provided, there are limited models and exemplars, particularly for the culminating project.

Bottomline:
The materials offer a variety of assessments, including informal checks like discussions and writing tasks, and formal assessments such as oral and writing projects. They provide rubrics for clear assessment criteria and opportunities for student self-assessment. Educators are prompted to monitor understanding regularly. The materials would benefit from additional models and exemplars, particularly for culminating projects, to provide students with clearer guidance and expectations for assessment tasks.

Functional Approach

Materials take a functional approach to language development focused on grade-level disciplinary learning.

Strengths:

The materials provide opportunities for students to understand the broader context of a functional approach to language development. Each unit explores common language patterns corresponding to its genre and includes a word work section that helps language users understand commonalities. The materials also offer some opportunities for exploring language as a dynamic set of choices and include examples of metalanguage use (such as focusing on synonyms and shades of meaning to discuss choices language users make).

The materials explore all three dimensions of language (discourse, sentence, and word/phrase), guiding students through a range of texts, tasks, interactions, and disciplinary meaning-making activities to synthesize their learning (for instance, "talk together" questions that encourage students to synthesize new skills). The lesson sequences are well-structured, with opportunities for text analysis connected to grammar exploration and application, such as producing texts modeled on the lesson. For example, each unit's grammar and spelling lesson directly connects to presented texts and asks learners to identify patterns within them.

All components of the lessons are well-connected: text analysis is linked to grammar exploration, and students are asked to produce similar texts modeled on the lesson, providing opportunities for application. There are some examples of metalanguage use, such as discussions on shades of meaning.

Challenges:

While the materials provide opportunities for students to analyze word choices, these opportunities are limited and inconsistently integrated. Additionally, although the materials include some instances of metalanguage usage (e.g., discussing shades of meaning), there are missed opportunities to consistently explore metalanguage throughout the units (e.g., asking students to make connections to their own language).

Bottomline:

The materials promote a functional approach to language development by exploring common language patterns and promoting an understanding of language choices through metalanguage and text analysis. They integrate discourse, sentence, and word/phrase dimensions of language with tasks that encourage the synthesis and application of new skills. However, opportunities for analyzing word choices and the consistent use of metalanguage throughout the units could be more comprehensive and better integrated into the materials.

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<table>
<tr><td>Shared Responsibility
Materials promote shared expertise, responsibility, and accountability for students in the program.</td></tr>
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Strengths:

The materials contain some resources that can be shared with other educators, such as the Cooperative Learning Strategies and the Stages of Language Acquisition, which provide teaching strategies for different levels of language acquisition.

Challenges:

Although the materials include some resources that could be shared with other educators, no explicit connections to collaboration were identified. Based on the materials provided, there is no systematic approach to collaborative monitoring of student progress. While the integration of science and social studies topics offers opportunities for collaboration, it does not explicitly encourage collaboration between the ESL educator and content educator, nor does it provide tools and processes for collaborative planning.

Bottomline:

The materials include useful resources, such as Cooperative Learning Strategies and Stages of Language Acquisition, which can be shared with other educators working with the same students. However, the materials do not clearly highlight opportunities for collaboration, especially in terms of monitoring student progress and facilitating collaborative planning between ESL and content educators.

Section B: Student-Centered Instructional Materials

> **Asset-Based Orientation**
>
> Materials prompt educators to know and understand students, the assets they bring (e.g., cultures, languages, funds of knowledge), what students can do, and what motivates and engages students in learning.

Strengths:

The materials reflect a diversity of perspectives, voices, and narratives through a range of texts and activities like "Share What You Know" and "Talk Together," which prompt students to share and reflect with partners. Examples of this integration can be seen in units like Families in 1 and The Power of Choice in 6A, both of which provide opportunities for students to bring their diverse perspectives to the surface. Additionally, the teacher materials include "Cultural Perspectives," encouraging students to share their experiences and make connections. Family Newsletters are also included in the teacher materials. Furthermore, the materials explore a variety of texts, including Chinese folktales and an Aztec story.

Challenges:

Although the materials reflect a diverse student body, the connection to students' linguistic backgrounds is not as robust. Additionally, while family newsletters are included, they are written in English. This could pose a challenge in connecting with families and community members who read and write in languages other than English.

Bottomline:

The materials feature diverse perspectives through a variety of texts and activities like "Share What you Know" and "Talk Together," encouraging reflection and discussion among students. The materials reflect diverse cultural perspectives and include texts from a range of cultural backgrounds. While the materials reflect diverse cultures, there is room to better connect with students' linguistic backgrounds. The family newsletters, written only in English, may limit engagement with families who speak and read other languages.

Linguistically Responsive

Materials support the asset-based learning, development, and engagement of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Strengths:

The units are aligned with English Language Development standards and incorporate language frames (referenced on pages 116/117) to offer support for students throughout each unit. The language functions are integrated in a spiraling manner within the materials, facilitating progressively complex student interactions with language, as demonstrated in the Scope and Sequence Document. Moreover, the materials promote metalinguistic and metacognitive strategies. For example, page 124 emphasizes synonyms and shades of meaning to discuss the choices made by language users. Each unit also includes a word work section that aids language users in deepening their understanding of choices language users make.

Challenges:

While the materials include some opportunities for analyzing word choice and language use, there are limited opportunities for prompting educators to encourage students to utilize their full linguistic repertoires. For example, the "shades of meaning" exercise could easily prompt students to think about how this is reflected, or not reflected, in their own language. At the time of review, the panel did not observe evidence of prompting for educators to address and to leverage the different language skills that students bring into the classroom from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Bottomline:

The materials align with English Language Development standards, featuring differentiation supports such as through language frames and spiraling language functions that increase in complexity. They include some opportunities for developing metalinguistic and metacognitive strategies and include word work sections. However, there is room for growth in leveraging the linguistic assets that students bring from their diverse backgrounds.

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> Critical Stance
> Materials highlight and support student criticality, agency, and identity.

Strengths:
The materials evidently student inquiry and communication about various issues. They prompt students to use language as a tool for learning and self-expression in diverse ways, particularly through 'Turn and Talks' and culminating projects. Opportunities are created for students to use language to foster autonomy, as seen in Unit 6A where students have the freedom to create their final projects.

Additionally, the materials encourage the formation and maintenance of relationships, not only through consistent 'Turn and Talk' opportunities but also through activities like peer editing. Students are guided to examine issues from multiple perspectives, such as in Unit 6A (p. 132) where the 'Turn and Talk' activity facilitates communication around the issue of survival from various viewpoints. Moreover, the materials enable students to explore a wide range of issues, including Civil Rights and World Hunger.

Challenges:
Although the topics and themes explored encourage students to question and when necessary, act upon issues important to them, at times this was not as consistently present in the materials.

Bottomline:
The materials foster student inquiry and communication on a variety of issues through activities such as Turn and Talks and culminating projects. They promote the use of language as a tool for learning, self-expression, and the creation of autonomous projects, while also facilitating relationship-building. Students are given the opportunity to delve into diverse perspectives on issues, including Civil Rights and World Hunger. However, the materials could place a stronger emphasis on encouraging students to question and take action on issues of importance, an aspect that was not consistently evident.

> ### Oral Language Development
> Materials provide daily opportunities for all students to engage in discussions and interactions with peers and teachers around challenging content activities.

Strengths:

The materials offer daily opportunities for students to participate in discussions and interactions with their peers and teachers. The inclusion of embedded 'Turn and Talks' enables students to communicate about the central issue or topic. Additionally, the materials incorporate oral questions paired with readings, which serve to prompt students to establish connections, reinforce reading strategies, and support future writing tasks.

Supports for oral interactions, such as language frames included in the 'Talk Together' section and the incorporation of learned language like 'Key Words', are also embedded in the materials. Additionally, the Professional Development Resources provide materials to guide educators, including cooperative learning routines, speaking and listening routines, and routines embedded in the teacher's book.

Challenges:

While the materials incorporate prompts that encourage students to draw upon their previous experiences and knowledge, they do not fully leverage students' complete linguistic repertoires. This suggests an opportunity for further enhancement of the materials to more effectively tap into the diverse linguistic resources that students bring to the learning environment.

Bottomline:

The materials feature daily opportunities for student discussions and interactions, supported by embedded 'Turn and Talks' and oral questions that enhance reading comprehension and writing preparation. They include supports like language frames and contain professional development resources for educators on cooperative learning and speaking/listening routines. The materials could more effectively draw upon students' comprehensive linguistic repertoires and encourage the application of skills from other languages. This approach would not only enrich the learning experience but also affirm and value the diverse linguistic resources that students bring to the classroom.

Materials support educators and students to interact throughout lessons, prompting collection and interpretation of evidence of learning – thus enabling teachers and students to notice growth and reflect on the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Strengths:

The materials incorporate opportunities for formative assessment of student learning. The assessment section on the website includes a variety of formative assessments designed to monitor student progress in areas such as reading strategies, word knowledge, unit knowledge, and think and respond. The Teacher's Guide features a 'Check for Understanding' at the conclusion of most lessons, including rubrics and guidance. Additionally, the culminating writing project provides editing suggestions, frames for partner peer editing, and spelling suggestions, thereby supporting students in refining their written work.

Challenges:

While the materials provide opportunities for students to reflect on their learning, such as through writing reflections, there appears to be a lack of consistent opportunities for student reflection on learning, self-assessment, and self-monitoring in the areas of listening, speaking, or reading. This suggests an opportunity for further enhancement of the materials to more effectively support students in these critical areas of language learning.

Bottomline:

The materials offer various formative assessments throughout lessons and the Teacher's guide, supporting ongoing monitoring of student learning and progress. They include rubrics, editing tools, and peer editing frames for culminating writing projects. While the materials provide certain opportunities for learning reflection, they could benefit from more consistent inclusion of self-assessment and self-monitoring activities specifically targeting listening, speaking, and reading skills. This would further support students in their language development journeys by fostering greater self-awareness and autonomy.

> ### Scaffolds and Supports
> Materials prompt teachers to differentiate, support, and scaffold learning in tandem with the planned yearlong trajectory of materials.

Strengths:

The materials suggest scaffolding practices and provide consistent support, along with suggestions for varied assistance at different proficiency levels. Additionally, the materials feature a variety of embedded supports, such as language frames, the incorporation of learned language, and writing assignments that include models. Moreover, the texts include defined vocabulary, visuals, and question prompts that emphasize reading strategies (p. 285). Furthermore, the professional development materials offer resources to assist educators in scaffolding instruction to meet the diverse needs of students.

Challenges:

None noted.

Bottomline:

The materials suggest scaffolding practices and consistent support for students across varying proficiency levels. Key features include embedded supports such as language frames, opportunities to use learned language, and writing assignments with accompanying models. Texts are enriched with defined vocabulary, supportive visuals, and reading strategy prompts to enhance comprehension and engagement. Additionally, professional development resources are provided to support educators with applying effective scaffolding techniques to meet diverse student needs.

Universal Design and Accessibility

Materials provide varied means for accessing the content and demonstrating learning, helping teachers meet the diverse needs and abilities of a variety of students, including those with disabilities and those working above or below grade-level.

Strengths:

The materials include a variety of ways for students to access the content and to demonstrate their learning. They incorporate a blend of texts and resources such as photos, stories, and videos. These materials are available in print, digital, or blended formats, such as projecting student materials and reading aloud. The "answering the big question" component at the end of each unit provides multiple avenues for students to showcase their understanding. Furthermore, the materials offer flexibility through options like culminating projects with varied approaches and reading selections that cater to different reading levels (as seen in Teacher's Guide Unit 1A, p. 34). The teacher's guide also includes prompts with suggestions for supporting the individual needs of Multilingual Learners.

Challenges:

Although the materials include some guidance and suggestions for supporting individual student needs, the panelists noted a need for additional guidance and support around supporting the individual needs of multilingual learners with disabilities.

Bottomline:

The materials offer diverse ways for students to engage with content and demonstrate learning, incorporating texts, photos, stories, and videos in print, digital, and blended formats. Culminating projects and varied reading options support different proficiency levels and learning styles. The teacher's guide includes prompts to support individual needs of multilingual learners, promoting differentiation. These features create a flexible learning environment adaptable to various classroom contexts. While the materials provide a foundation for diverse learners, there is an opportunity to develop more comprehensive guidance for supporting multilingual learners with disabilities, which would further strengthen the curriculum's inclusivity.

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