

Metacognitive Strategies That Make STAAR Prep Meaningful

Priscilla Barrera, English 1 Lead Teacher, IDEA San Juan
Matt Bardin, Founder, Zinc Learning Labs



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Agenda

A Texas STAAR Success Story
Reading Growth as a Foundation for STAAR Readiness
Zinc's Protocol for Acing STAAR
Zinc STAAR Mastery in Real Life
Q & A



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A STAAR Success Story:

Priscilla, Zinc, and a
Little Teacher Magic



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Priscilla's STAAR Mastery Success in 2024-2025



Priscilla Barrera
English 1 Teacher
IDEA San Juan College Prep
San Juan, TX

Incoming 8th Grade STAAR Scores:

53 Passing

32 Meets

3 Masters

50% received 0 on essay

0 Perfect scores



This year's English 1 STAAR Scores:

90 Passing

75 Meets

17 Masters

18% received a 0 on essay

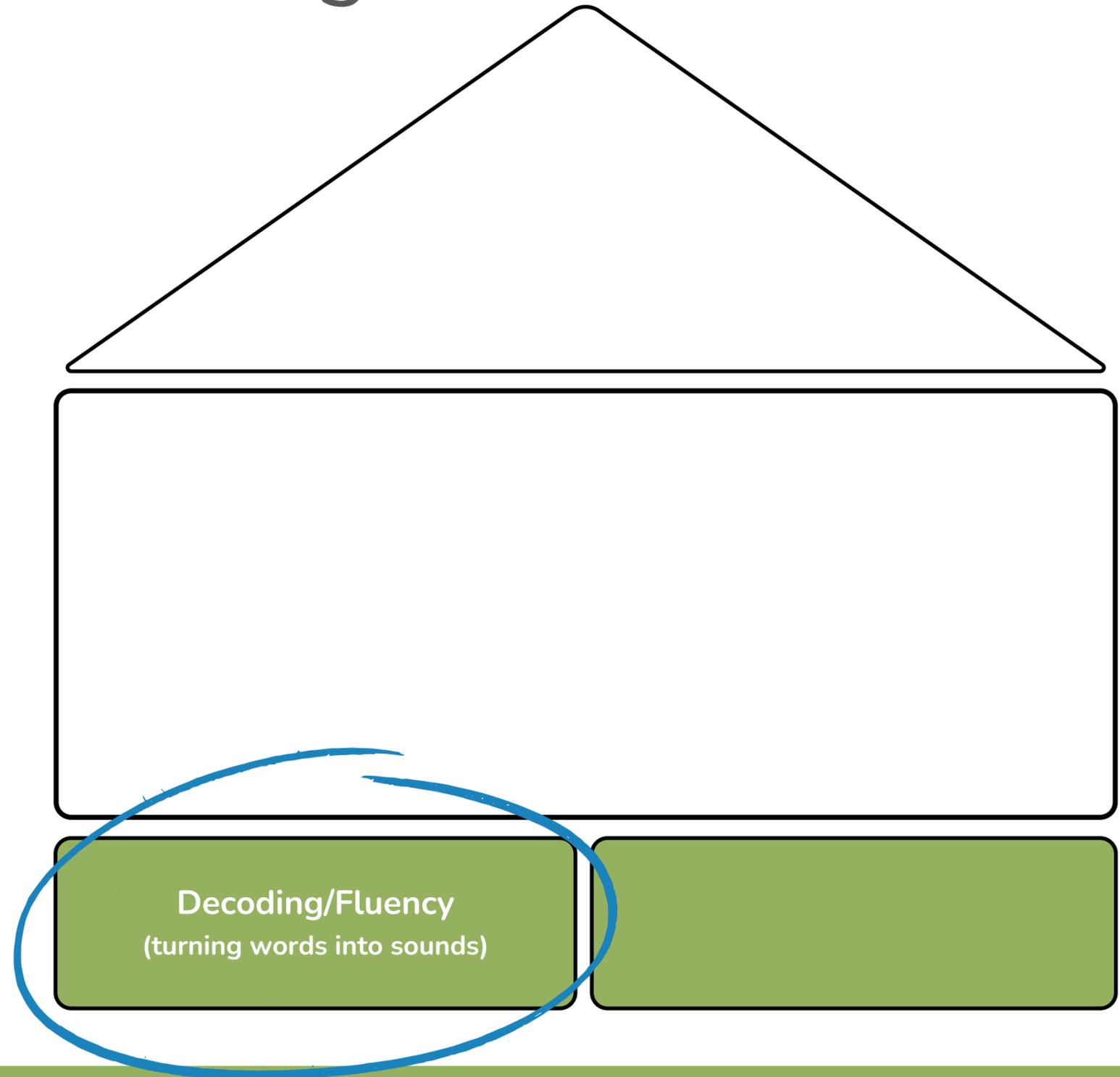
28 perfect scores!

Reading Growth as a Foundation for STAAR Readiness



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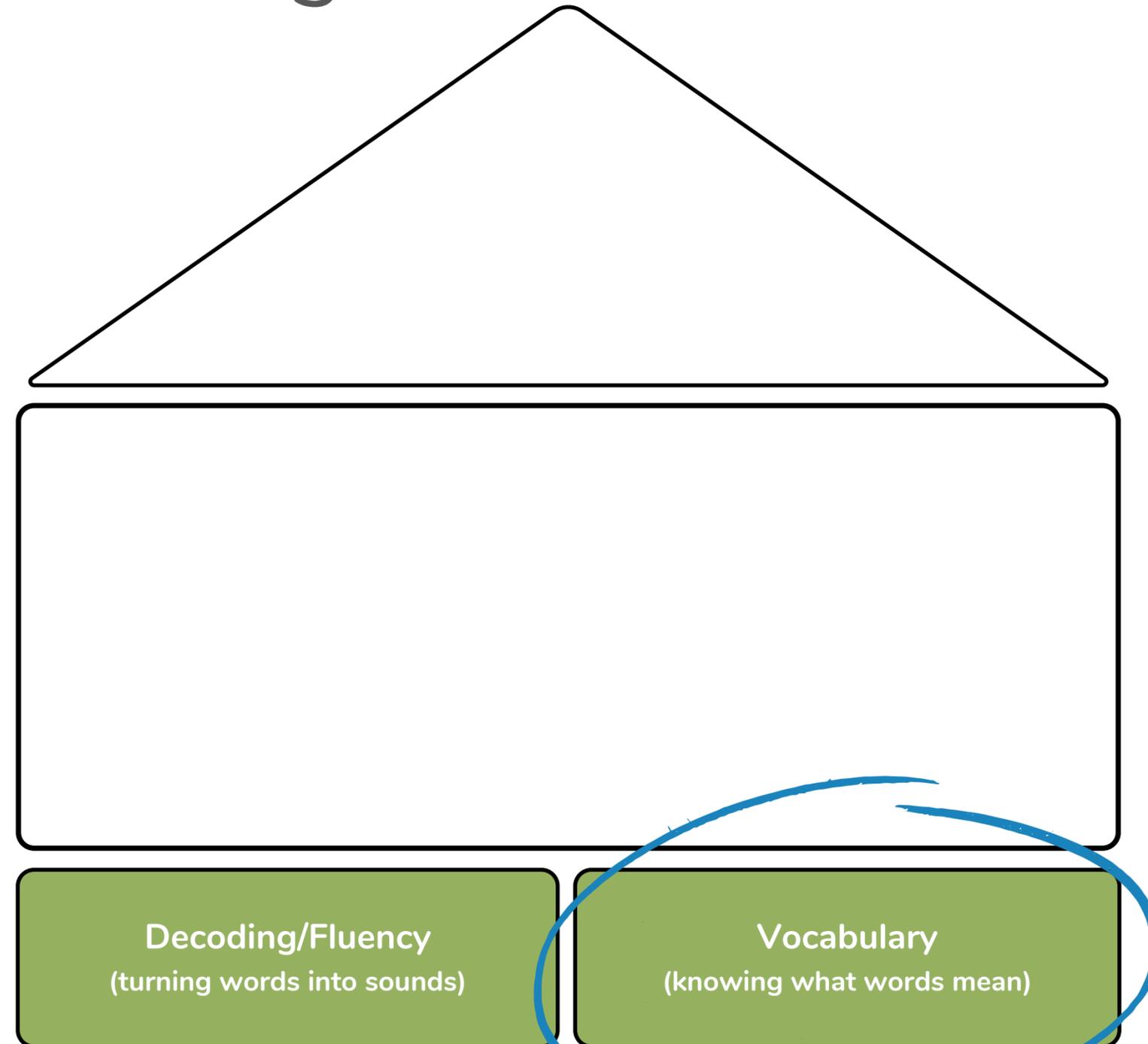
Essential Elements of Reading



Elementary reading instruction

Essential Elements of Reading

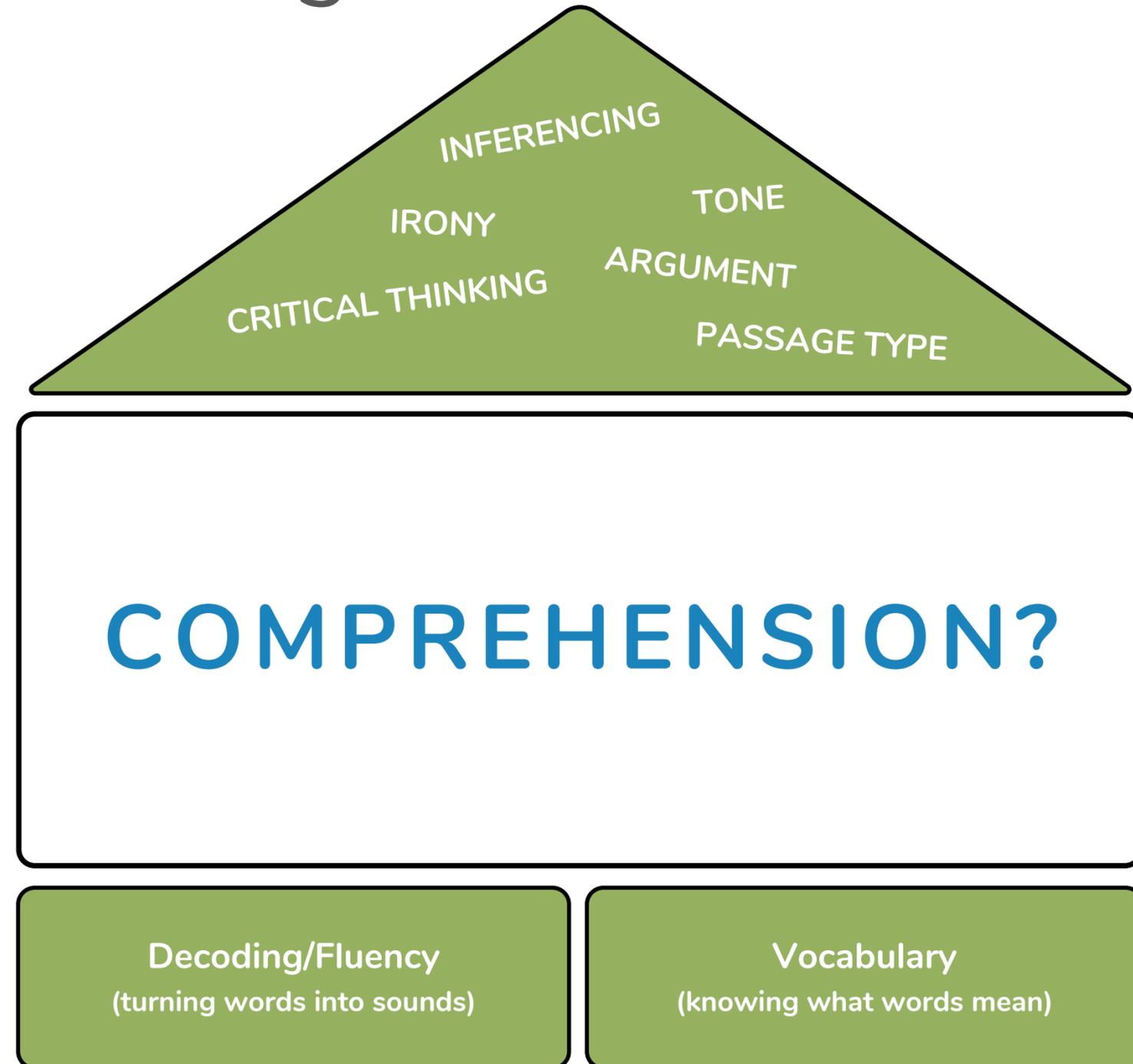
Elementary reading instruction



Essential Elements of Reading

What secondary education programs and ELA curriculum prepare you to teach

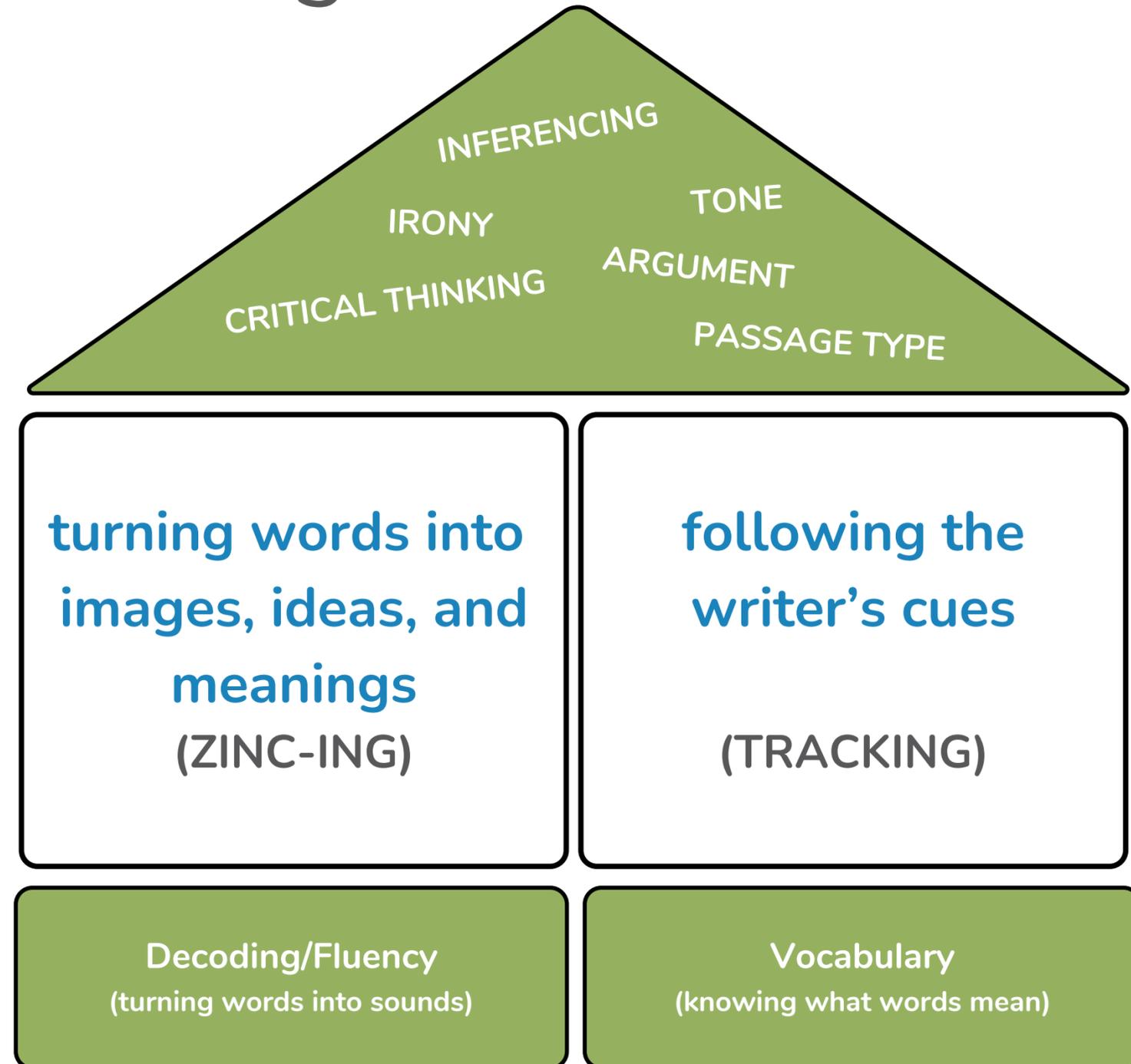
Elementary reading instruction



Essential Elements of Reading

What's missing?

**SECONDARY
READING
INSTRUCTION**



Zinc-ing:

Use Your Senses:

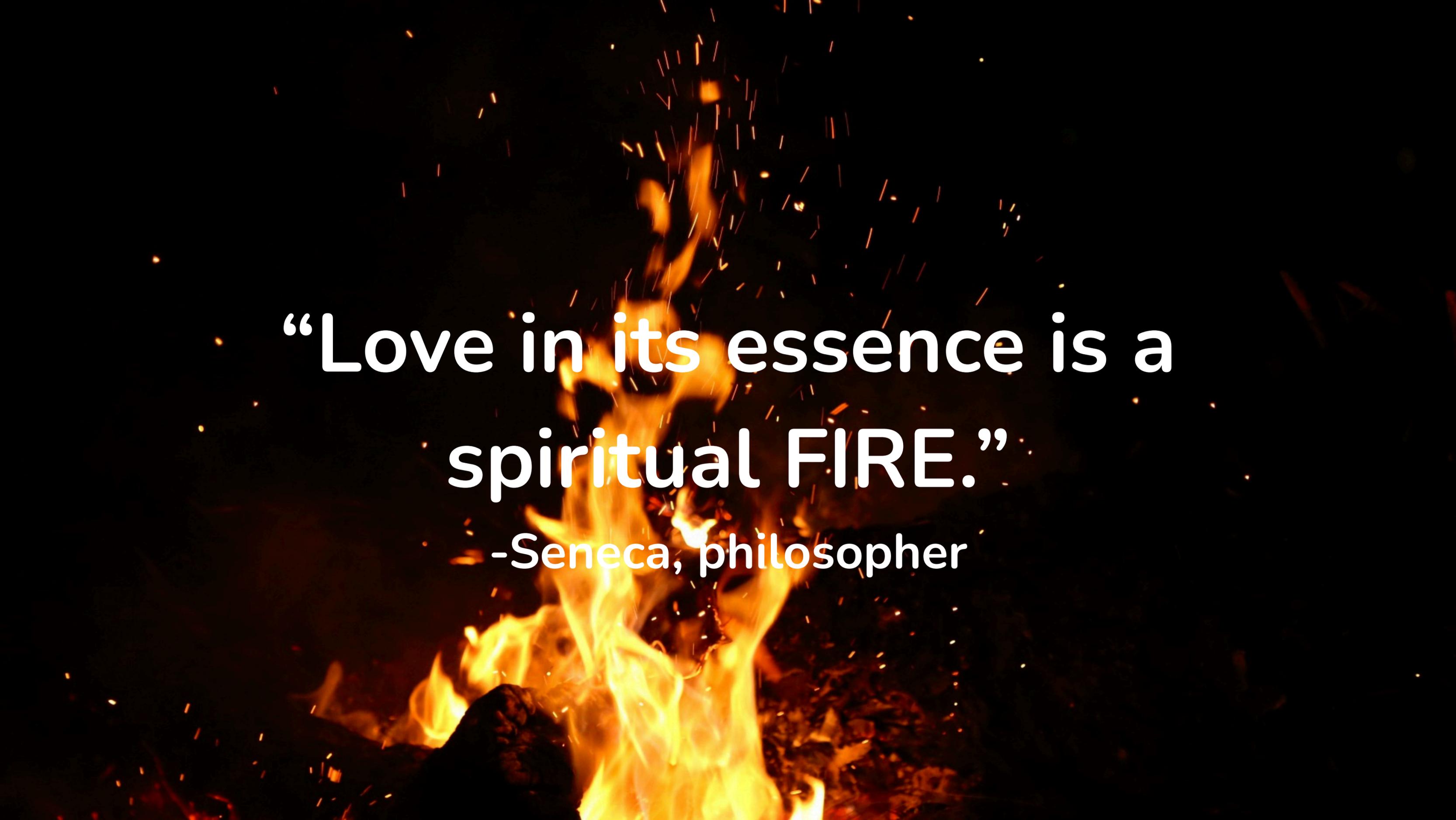
Your students' first way in to
complex texts.



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**“Love in its essence is a
spiritual fire.”**

-Seneca, philosopher



“Love in its essence is a
spiritual FIRE.”

-Seneca, philosopher

wild

uncontrollable

hot

“Love in its essence is a
spiritual FIRE.”

-Seneca, philosopher

**generates
power**

dangerous

COZY

**needs
tending**

Zinc-ing: Make It Real:

You can't "make the movie" of
the US Constitution...



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**“LOVE in its essence is a
spiritual fire.”**

-Seneca, philosopher

**“LOVE in its essence is a
SPIRITUAL fire.”**

-Seneca, philosopher

STAAR MASTERY TEST

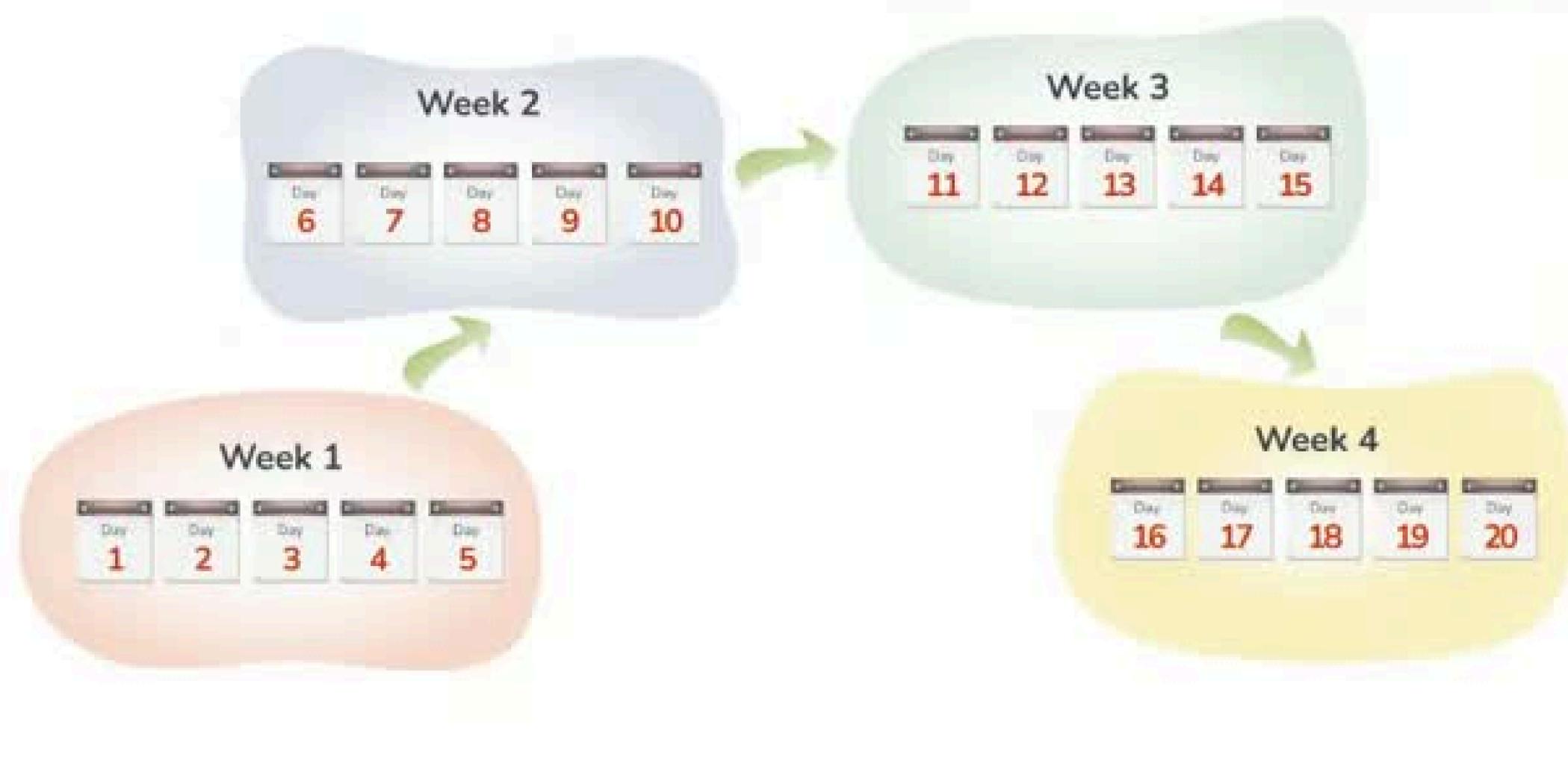
SCORES

Assigned by
L. Gray

Assigned on
Dec 23, 2025

Day 1 - Mixed Skills (Next Activity)

START



Zinc's Protocol for Acing STAAR



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Zinc's Protocol for Acing STAAR



Read + Predict

THINK CRITICALLY

Come up with your own answers and then find the best match



Maybe or No

FIND THE BEST CHOICE

Mark each answer choice with maybe or no as potential responses.



Every Word Matters

IDENTIFY NUANCE

Examine each word and eliminate answers that are too extreme



Skip and Come Back

SAVE TIME

Alleviate anxiety and make the test more enjoyable

Read the selection and choose the best answer to each question.

Listen Up! Audiobooks for the Win

1 Each year, millions of people don headphones or pair their mobile devices to their cars' speakers so they can listen to audiobooks. Why are so many people choosing to listen rather than read? The answer is simple: audiobooks provide people with a way to learn something new and enjoy a good story in a fast-paced world.

2 In today's busy, mobile world, audiobooks give people a way to "read" while also commuting, traveling, or exercising. According to Paul Roberts, deputy director of the University of Western Australia's Centre for Road Safety Research, traversing open, monotonous roads causes a phenomenon known as "passive fatigue." This is when people feel tired because their brain is not fully engaged. Listening to an audiobook

GUEST, GUEST

In paragraph 5, what does the word *refutes* mean?

- (A) Gives rise to
- (B) Overlaps with
- (C) Makes clear
- (D) Argues with

1. Read



Current Skill: [Zinc-ing > Use Your Senses](#)

9%



Exit exercise

Growing Food, Growing Hope [Day 11 - Nonfiction]

by Zinc

3 OF 3

1 In the 1940s, many Americans turned their **backyards**, **parks**, and even **rooftops** into **small farms**. These “Victory Gardens” were planted during World War II to help with food shortages and support the **war effort**. At a time when many **supplies** were limited, **growing food** at **home** became a way for ordinary people to help their country. It wasn’t just about **vegetables** — it was about **hope**, teamwork, and **national pride**.

2 When the United States entered the war in 1941, much of the country’s food was sent to feed soldiers overseas. Items like canned goods, sugar, and meat were rationed, meaning people could only buy small amounts at a time. The government encouraged citizens to grow their own fruits and vegetables to ease pressure on the food supply. Posters and radio messages told Americans that “Food Will Win the War,” and that gardening was a patriotic duty.

3 The idea caught on quickly. By 1943, more than 20 million Victory Gardens had been planted across the country. People grew tomatoes, carrots, lettuce, beans, and



Click on three words or phrases you can easily imagine with your senses.

backyards,

vegetables

small farms.

Correct answers: 3 of 3



Next

2. Predict



59%



Exit exercise

Growing Food, Growing Hope [Day 11 - Nonfiction]

by Zinc

- 5 According to historian Rose Hayden-Smith, Victory Gardens gave people a sense of control during an uncertain time. “It allowed individuals to feel empowered,” she explains, “and to do something meaningful when much of the world felt out of their hands.” The gardens also helped families stretch their ration points and eat more fresh food.
- 6 The government published booklets on how to plant and harvest, often with cheerful illustrations and simple advice. Families were encouraged to “Grow What You Can. Can What You Grow.” Home canning became another popular skill, as people learned how to preserve their crops for the winter months.

1 Step 2: Predict

Which statement expresses an idea about society found in the selection?

A Families must rely only on themselves to survive during war.

B Citizens can unite to support their nation during difficult times.

C Leaders are the only ones who can solve national problems.

D People depend too much on grocery stores for food.



What should the right answer to this question be? What IS the passage saying about society? Type your prediction in the chat.

My prediction

Submit

3. Maybe or No



63%

Exit exercise

Growing Food, Growing Hope [Day 11 - Nonfiction]

by Zinc

- 1 In the 1940s, many Americans turned their backyards, parks, and even rooftops into small farms. These “Victory Gardens” were planted during World War II to help with food shortages and support the war effort. At a time when many supplies were limited, growing food at home became a way for ordinary people to help their country. It wasn’t just about vegetables — it was about hope, teamwork, and national pride.
- 2 When the United States entered the war in 1941, much of the country’s food was sent to feed soldiers overseas. Items like canned goods, sugar, and meat were rationed, meaning people could only buy small amounts at a time. The government encouraged citizens to grow their own fruits and vegetables to ease pressure on the food supply. Posters and radio messages told

1 Step 3: Maybe or No

Which statement expresses an idea about society found in the selection?

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| A Families must rely only on themselves to survive during war. | Change to No |
| B Citizens can unite to support their nation during difficult times. | Maybe
No |
| C Leaders are the only ones who can solve national problems. | Maybe
No |
| D People depend too much on grocery stores for food. | Maybe
No |



Step 3: Maybe or No. Here's what you predicted the answer should be:

Go through each answer choice and give it a quick "maybe" or "no." Try not to overthink it in Step 3. If you're not sure, choose "maybe." Only choose "no" for answers that are definitely wrong. Click the button below when you're ready to move on to Step 4.

Start Step 4

3. Maybe or No



Growing Food, Growing Hope [Day 11 - Nonfiction]

by Zinc

- 5 According to historian Rose Hayden-Smith, Victory Gardens gave people a sense of control during an uncertain time. “It allowed individuals to feel empowered,” she explains, “and to do something meaningful when much of the world felt out of their hands.” The gardens also helped families stretch their ration points and eat more fresh food.
- 6 The government published booklets on how to plant and harvest, often with cheerful illustrations and simple advice. Families were encouraged to “Grow What You Can. Can What You Grow.” Home canning became another popular skill, as people learned how to preserve their crops for the winter months.

63%



Exit exercise

1 Step 3: Maybe or No

Which statement expresses an idea about society found in the selection?

- (A) Families must rely only on themselves to survive during war. Change to No
- (B) Citizens can unite to support their nation during difficult times. Change to No
- (C) Leaders are the only ones who can solve national problems. Change to Maybe
- (D) People depend too much on grocery stores for food. Maybe No



Step 3: Maybe or No. Here's what you predicted the answer should be:

My prediction

Go through each answer choice and give it a quick "maybe" or "no." Try not to overthink it in Step 3. If you're not sure, choose "maybe." Only choose "no" for answers that are definitely wrong. Click the button below when you're ready to move on to Step 4.

Start Step 4

4. Every Word Matters



Growing Food, Growing Hope [Day 11 - Nonfiction]

by Zinc

- 5 According to historian Rose Hayden-Smith, Victory Gardens gave people a sense of control during an uncertain time. “It allowed individuals to feel empowered,” she explains, “and to do something meaningful when much of the world felt out of their hands.” The gardens also helped families stretch their ration points and eat more fresh food.
- 6 The government published booklets on how to plant and harvest, often with cheerful illustrations and simple advice. Families were encouraged to “Grow What You Can. Can What You Grow.” Home canning became another popular skill, as people learned how to preserve their crops for the winter months.

72%

Exit exercise

1 Step 4: Every Word Matters

Which statement expresses an idea about society found in the selection?

A Families must rely only on themselves to survive during war.

Change to No

B Citizens can unite to support their nation during difficult times.

C Leaders are the only ones who can solve national problems.

D People depend too much on grocery stores for food.



Start with this one. “Families must rely only on themselves to survive during the war.” Which word or phrase, if any, makes this answer choice wrong?

Which word or phrase, if any, makes this answer choice wrong?

“Families must rely only on themselves”

“Survive during war”

Neither. This answer choice could be right.

Skip and Come Back



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SS



Read the selection and choose the best answer to each question.

Growing Food, Growing Hope

1 In the 1940s, many Americans turned their backyards, parks, and even rooftops into small farms. These “Victory Gardens” were planted during World War II to help with food shortages and support the war effort. At a time when many supplies were limited, growing food at home became a way for ordinary people to help their country. It wasn’t just about vegetables—it was about hope, teamwork, and national pride.

2 When the United States entered the war in 1941, much of the country’s food was sent to feed soldiers overseas. Items like canned goods, sugar, and meat were rationed, meaning people could only

Which statement best explains the organization of the article?

My Prediction: explain what and why

Strikethrough

Mark For Review

NEXT

- A The history of Victory Gardens and their purpose are explained.
- B Home life before and after the war is analyzed.
- C The types of vegetables grown in Victory Gardens are presented.
- D The events of World War II are presented in order.



Zinc's AI Writing Coach: SCR/ECR Practice



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Guided 3-Step Drafting Process



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1

Nature's Navigators

2 Pigeons have an incredible natural skill: they can find their way home over long distances, even from places they've never been before. Scientists think they do this using both a "compass sense," which relies on cues like the Earth's magnetic field and the position of the sun, and a "map sense," which may use familiar smells and landmarks. This ability made them perfect for delivering messages, a talent recorded as far back as ancient Egypt and Rome, where pigeons carried news of victories, emergencies, and even Olympic results.

3 For hundreds of years, pigeons have been trained to carry tiny scrolls of paper tied to their legs. These birds were often raised in a coop, which is a shelter where pigeons live and nest, at the home of their owner. When taken far away and released, pigeons would fly straight back to their home soon after.

Step 1: Look & Take Notes
Take notes

Step 2: Organize
Add argument and evidence

Step 3: Write
Draft your response

Step 2: Organize Your Ideas

Write a sentence that sums up your argument. Then, list your evidence.

In Step 1 you wrote:

come back from far away
map sense
used for hundreds of years
used in army

Write your argument: [Show me an example](#)

Type your argument here.



Targeted AI Feedback



1

The Winged Messenger

by Rodney Hanley

1 A gray pigeon flaps across the sky, a small metal canister strapped to its leg. Inside the container is something that could save lives—a message. Long before phones and the internet, these birds helped people send important information, even during war. They were trusted in moments when a single message could mean the difference between rescue and disaster.

Nature's Navigators

2 Pigeons have an incredible natural skill: they can find their way home over long distances, even from places they've never been before. Scientists think they do this using both a "compass sense," which relies on cues like the Earth's magnetic field and the

One example from the article is Cher Ami. Cher Ami helped save almost 200 soldiers who were trapped. Even though he was badly hurt, he still flew to deliver the message. This shows he was very brave. If he didnt finish the job, the soldiers could have been hurt or killed.

Pigeons didnt ask to be part of wars, but they still helped. They were loyal and always tried to get home. Even though they were small birds, they made a big diffrence in history, and that is why they should be remembered as war heros.

153 words

EDIT RESPONSE

Feedback:

Thanks for the draft, I would score this as a 5 out of 5. Here are the top things you can do to make your answer even stronger:

- Statement of Argument: Try to make your thesis statement more specific and clear by including the main reasons why messenger pigeons should be remembered as war heroes.
- Organization: Consider starting with a stronger opening sentence that introduces the topic and your stance on it.
- Conventions: Proofread your essay to catch and correct spelling mistakes.



Zinc STAAR Mastery in Real Life



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How Zinc STAAR Mastery Works:



Mini Lessons

Facilitate ready-to-deliver, but editable Test-Prep, Reading Skills, and STAAR Skills Mini Lessons.



Ignition Warm-ups

Reinforce strong reading skills with quick and easy warm-ups that teach students what to do when they read complex texts.



Test Prep Experiences

Build confidence and eliminate test anxiety with Zinc's 4-step method delivered through authentic, guided reading experiences.



Passage Quizzes

Each week targets a variety of genres, skills, and standards with multiple-choice quizzes and guided AI feedback for SCRs and ECRs.



Review Data and Reteach

Every day gives you an actionable data set. Support students in small groups while the full class stays learning and engaged.

Zinc's STAAR Mastery

STAAR MASTERY TEST | SCORES

Assigned by L. Gray | Assigned on Dec 23, 2025

Day 1 - Mixed Skills (Next Activity)

Week 1: Day 1, Day 2, Day 3, Day 4, Day 5

Week 2: Day 6, Day 7, Day 8, Day 9, Day 10

Week 3: Day 11, Day 12, Day 13, Day 14, Day 15

Click on a day to get started.

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Workload Preview

Grade 8

Week	Day	Activities
Week 1	Day 1	4G: Details & Key Ideas The Rise of Esports 1. Passage Quiz 2. Mini Ignition
	Day 2	7E: Characteristics of Argumentative Texts The Rise of Esports 1. Passage Quiz 2. Mini Ignition
	Day 3	2B: Connotative & Denotative Meaning The Rise of Esports 1. Passage Quiz 2. Mini Ignition
	Day 4	4F: Inference The Rise of Esports 1. Passage Quiz 2. Mini Ignition
	Day 5	9C: Revising Drafts Never Too Late 1. Passage Quiz with SCR Practice 2. Mini Ignition
Week 2	Day 6	8F: Mood, Voice, & Tone Wings Over Kitty Hawk 1. Test Prep Experience 2. Passage Quiz 3. Power Up Activities (Optional)
	Day 7	6B: Characters in Fiction 6C: Plot Development Wings Over Kitty Hawk 1. Passage Quiz 2. Power Up Activities (Optional)
	Day 8	10B: Writing Informational Texts Wings Over Kitty Hawk 1. SCR Practice 2. Power Up Activities (Optional)
	Day 9	10B: Writing Informational Texts Wings Over Kitty Hawk 1. ECR Practice 2. Power Up Activities (Optional)
	Day 10	Mixed Skills The Underground City of Derinkuyu 1. Passage Quiz 2. Power Up Activities (Optional)
Week 3	Day 11	7D: Characteristics of Informational Texts 5D: Paraphrase & Summarize A Sweet Revolution 1. Test Prep Experience 2. Passage Quiz 3. Power Up Activities (Optional)
	Day 12	2B: Connotative & Denotative Meaning 4F: Inference The Thrill of Creation 1. Passage Quiz 2. Power Up Activities (Optional)
	Day 13	4H: Paired Texts (Reading) A Sweet Revolution / The Thrill of Creation 1. SCR Practice 2. Power Up Activities (Optional)
	Day 14	5B: Paired Texts (Writing) A Sweet Revolution / The Thrill of Creation 1. ECR Practice 2. Power Up Activities (Optional)
	Day 15	9B: Developing Drafts 9D: English Conventions A Day at Willow Creek 1. Passage Quiz 2. Power Up Activities (Optional)
Week 4	Day 16	8D: Author's Use of Language The Village Blacksmith 1. Test Prep Experience 2. Passage Quiz 3. Power Up Activities (Optional)
	Day 17	10B: Writing Informational Texts The Village Blacksmith 1. SCR Practice 2. Power Up Activities (Optional)
	Day 18	Mixed Skills The Art of the Beekeeper 1. Passage Quiz 2. Power Up Activities (Optional)
	Day 19	8A: Author's Purpose, Audience, Message 5C: Using Text Evidence The Psychological Impact 1. Passage Quiz 2. Power Up Activities (Optional)
	Day 20	10C: Writing Argumentative Texts The Psychological Impact 1. ECR Practice 2. Power Up Activities (Optional)

Data to Inform Next Steps

Home Assign Activities View Classes & Reports

Taisha's Classes

STAAR Mastery Report - Testing

Change Class Change STAAR Mastery Test Change Activity

Test: English 1

Assign Review Writing Prompts Show All Previous Assignments Cancel Assignments

Overall Progress Week 1 Week 2 Week 3 Week 4 Standards Report

Class STAAR Mastery Summary Report

Show Power Ups Print

Students	Assigned By	Pre-Layed Placement	Weeks																				Actions
			Week 1					Week 2					Week 3					Week 4					
			1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Eldridge Arias	You on Sep 17	Level 5	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	View Report
James Crosby	You on Sep 17	Not Started	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	View Report
Genova Gates	You on Sep 17	Level 5	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	View Report
Alberto Gonzalez	You on Sep 17	Not Started	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	View Report
Maria Griffin	You on Sep 17	Level 5	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	View Report
Jane Haartman	You on Sep 17	Not Started	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	View Report
Ted Harvey	You on Sep 17	Level 5	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	View Report
Alfonso Jermen	You on Sep 17	Not Started	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	View Report

Taisha's Classes

STAAR Mastery Report - Testing

Change Class Change STAAR Mastery Test Change Activity

Test: English 1

Assign Review Writing Prompts Show All Previous Assignments Cancel Assignments

Overall Progress Week 1 Week 2 Week 3 Week 4 Standards Report

Class Standards Summary Report

Show Power Ups Print

Students	Assigned By	Work	Comprehension	Meaning	Point	Literary	Structure	Author	Reading & Editing	Informational Argumentation										
											Class Average	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%			
Eldridge Arias	You on Sep 17	50%	60%	100%	40%	60%	70%	50%	40%	30%	70%	50%	60%	50%	40%	60%	80%			
James Crosby	You on Sep 17	-	-	100%	50%	-	50%	-	-	70%	-	50%	100%	-	60%	50%	-	100%	-	
Genova Gates	You on Sep 17	100%	60%	60%	-	60%	-	50%	40%	-	70%	-	100%	60%	50%	-	20%	-	100%	
Alberto Gonzalez	You on Sep 17	60%	-	-	50%	60%	60%	-	60%	70%	100%	-	60%	-	-	100%	50%	-	60%	70%
Maria Griffin	You on Sep 17	50%	60%	20%	-	60%	-	-	40%	30%	30%	50%	-	20%	-	60%	30%	-	20%	-
Jane Haartman	You on Sep 17	-	-	100%	50%	-	60%	-	-	70%	-	50%	100%	-	60%	40%	50%	-	100%	-
Ted Harvey	You on Sep 17	100%	60%	60%	-	60%	-	50%	40%	-	70%	-	100%	60%	50%	-	20%	-	100%	-
Alfonso Jermen	You on Sep 17	60%	-	-	50%	60%	60%	-	60%	70%	100%	-	60%	-	-	100%	50%	-	60%	70%

Review Student Writing + AI Feedback / Scores

Response Type: STAAR ECR Informational
Passage Title: My *Ántonia*

 Writing Prompt 

 Final Response

Final Response AI Feedback on Final Response

Gaston Cleric affects Jim's life by being different from other professors. He is sometimes moody and sometimes talks a lot. This makes Jim curious about him.

Cleric sometimes gives confusing lectures, but when he is interested they are wonderful. Jim notices this and thinks he almost could have been a great poet. This shows that Jim admires him but also sees his flaws.

They spend time together talking about Italy and poetry. Jim listens to his stories about staying out all night and getting sick. This affects Jim because he learns about Cleric's life.

Overall, Cleric changes Jim by giving him someone interesting to watch and learn from.

AI Suggested Score

First Draft	Final Draft
4/5	4/5

Teacher Scoring Reset

Use the scoring mechanism below to override the AI-suggested score.

[Scoring Rubric](#)

Organization and Development of Ideas 0-3 points

0	1	2	3
---	---	---	---

Conventions 0-2 points

0	1	2
---	---	---

AI Suggested Score: 4/5 Teacher Override Score: 0/5

[Save Updated Score](#)



Priscilla's Student Progress in 2025-2026

This past fall:

On August 29, 2025:

- 86% below grade level
- 60% below 4th grade level

On November 17, 2025:

- 53% up at least one grade level
- 30% up by at least TWO grade levels

Beginning of year assessment: **31% approaches**

October benchmark assessment: **71% approaches**



Priscilla Barrera
English 1 Teacher
IDEA San Juan College Prep
San Juan, TX

January 2026 - 59/84 students - 70%
have met or exceeded their growth goal

Q & A

A Texas STAAR Success Story
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Priscilla Barrera
English 1 Teacher
IDEA San Juan College Prep
San Juan, TX

Thank you for attending today.



bit.ly/4rjDGBY

Zinc Learning Labs will give you FREE Zinc licenses* for all of your students.

Simply complete the survey using the QR code and we'll get those accounts set up in one week!

*Free licenses will be active for 45 days to allow all students to get ready for STAAR with Zinc STAAR Mastery.



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