
Know the Target, Teach for Meaning (C U KAN)

Teacher Learning Target

Concept: Enduring understandings

Understand that (key principles)

- Teaching to conceptual understandings, as well as facts and skills, helps students make connections and see the relevance in what they are learning.

Know (facts)

- C U KAN lesson framework
- Intentional teaching
- Transparent teaching

Able to do (skills)

- Design learning targets based on the C U KAN framework and state standards and benchmarks.
- Teach transparently.

Now You Get It!

- Design one C U KAN lesson per quarter (see Resources for C U KAN planner) beginning with the units you teach that you know need the most work.
- As you teach the lessons, reflect on what you did that worked and what you would do differently.

If we want all learners to reach the same learning target, it is essential that we begin by designing a focused learning target. A focused learning target guides formative, summative, and student self-assessment and helps us design rigorous, meaningful lessons.

Our lessons become meaningful to students when we teach for understanding, not merely to impart facts and skills. (It's no secret that many students are not excited about learning facts and skills!) If we aren't intentional in showing them how the facts and skills connect to their lives, many students see the learning as irrelevant and become disengaged.

One challenge for us in designing meaningful lessons is that most state or district standards and benchmarks are a series of discrete facts or skills that don't seem to connect to one another. If we struggle to see the connections between these standards and benchmarks, how can we expect students to see the connections? Another challenge for us is today's textbooks. They cover way too much content and can't effectively be used as a guide for designing clear learning targets. However, once we know our target, we can not only see where the textbook can be used as a tool to teach to the target but we can also be open to the many other options from which our students can take in content.

To help create a clear learning target, we have created a lesson design framework we call C U KAN. It ensures that lessons teach for understanding, are rigorous and meaningful, and also reach district standards and benchmarks.

WHAT IS C U KAN?

We like to pronounce it *See you can!* to help us remember the important components of meaningful lessons. C U KAN is an acronym for components that are essential to creating meaningful lessons (see Figure 1.1). When planning a unit or lesson, the C U KAN framework helps us clarify the objectives, or learning targets, for the lesson. Our framework is adapted from the work of Carol Ann Tomlinson and Jay McTighe (2006).

FIGURE 1.1 C U KAN Components

CONCEPT

The **concept** is the big overarching idea of a unit or lesson. The concept is *not* the topic of the lesson, such as "consonant blends" or "subtraction." It is very global, broad, and can be applied across subject areas. The concept is usually one word such as *change* or *relationships*. At the elementary grades, teaching to a concept will allow you to design thematic units.

UNDERSTAND (that)

The **understandings** are the underlying principles embedded within the concepts. Understandings answer the question, "Why is it important to know this?" and help us connect the content to students' lives. When developing understandings for our lessons, adding the word *that* ("Understand that . . .") helps us move away from teaching just facts and knowledge toward teaching the big ideas that are the heart of our subject, such as "Understand that change happens over time."

KNOW

The **know** includes the key facts and key vocabulary that enable students to speak to the understandings. They are often examples of the understandings or facts related to the understanding. The facts are content specific such as, “Michigan has shores on three of the Great Lakes” or “The main characters in *Charlotte’s Web* are Charlotte and Wilbur.”

ABLE TO DO

The **able-to-do** skills are the social skills, production skills, fundamental skills, or skills of the discipline that students need to be able to do as they work toward the understandings. **Able-to-do** objectives might be “able to work in groups,” “able to read a chart,” or “able to create a graphic organizer.”

NOW YOU GET IT!

The **now you get it!** is the way that students demonstrate understanding (transfer) of the targeted learning objectives. The **now you get it!** can occur during and after learning by using exit cards, tests and quizzes, and various performance-based assessments.

WHY C U KAN?

When we use the C U KAN framework, designing engaging and meaningful lessons becomes more effective and efficient. The C U KAN framework lets us begin with the end in mind and helps us do the following:

C U KAN provides a clear, relevant learning target.

For us—The more clear we are about the learning target we need students to reach, the easier it becomes for us to focus on what we want to accomplish. Then we can design lessons that connect to our students and their world. The C U KAN framework helps us point out global applications, underlying principles, and essential information that make learning relevant for students.

For our students—Our students want to know and deserve to know how the content we teach connects to their world. The C U KAN framework allows us to give a meaningful response to the question, “Why do we have to know this?” We will be able to respond to students by explaining things such as, “Good readers have a toolkit of strategies that help them make sense of text. Today, we are going to add another important tool to your toolbox so that you can become a better reader.” With meaningful learning targets, students will know how the learning connects to their lives.

C U KAN guides us to more meaningful instructional methods.

For us—Being clear about the learning target before we write our daily lessons ensures that the activities we design are really hitting our target and are not simply busywork. A clear learning target helps us plan instructional options that reach all our students. For example, we can plan for students who

need information visually, students who learn best through discussions, or students who need language support. The C U KAN framework also frees us from teaching to the book. It helps us discern what parts of the book support the learning target and where other resources would better hit the target. For example, we don't need to teach ten vocabulary terms just because our textbook has printed them in boldface type in Chapter 3. A clear learning target allows us to make better choices about which words our students most need to know in order to deeply understand, apply, and transfer the learning.

For our students—How can students possibly select a learning strategy to help them hit the target when they don't know what the target is? When the learning target is clear, our students can shift their thinking from “What am I supposed to be learning?” to “What is the best way for me to learn this?” A clear learning target allows students to use their time more efficiently by studying in a way that works for them.

C U KAN provides a target for meaningful, ongoing assessment.

For us—Our assessment options become clear when we ask, “How can students best demonstrate that they understand the learning target?” When we know our target and we know our students, we can better determine whether to offer choices, tier our lessons, or let students do independent learning contracts. We can also save ourselves valuable class time by preassessing to determine what our students already know or don't know about the learning target. This information helps us to prioritize our time and focus on what students really need to learn.

For our students—Clear learning targets help our students reflect on and assess their own learning growth. Posting the learning target where students can clearly see it will continually remind them where they are going. When students know where they are going, they can assess what they have mastered and what they have yet to learn.

C U KAN EXAMPLES

Figures 1.2 and 1.3 show examples of the concept, understanding, knowledge, able to do (skills), and now you get it! framework for several different content areas. See Resources for other examples of understandings in various subject areas and grade levels that will serve as models for writing lessons.

Following these charts, you will find a detailed example of a weeklong lesson plan on heroes developed using the C U KAN model (Figure 1.4, page 7). The C U KAN framework can be used for longer projects, like this example, but it can also be used for short one-day lessons, homework, or even ongoing class work. The learning target guides the teacher through each component of lesson planning. It also appears at the beginning of the student handout as a reference and reminder of the learning target (Figure 1.5, pages 7–8).

FIGURE 1.2 Secondary Sample Learning Targets

	Social Studies	Science	Math	Language Arts
<p>CONCEPT <i>The big idea of a unit/lesson, usually one word</i></p>	Systems	Systems	Number Sense	Purpose
<p>UNDERSTAND <i>What is the principle or concept that you want students to understand? (Should be global, relevant, and have broad applications.)</i></p>	Understand that a democratic government maintains a system of checks and balances so that no one way of thinking can take over	Understand that a decrease in habitat contributes to a decrease to the population of local species	Understand that everything is made up of wholes and parts	Understand that writer's use persuasive techniques to convince others of a point of view
<p>KNOW <i>What are the key facts and key vocabulary words that you want students to know?</i></p>	Fascism Hitler Goering Allies Major events and dates that led to WWII	Contributing factors to habitat destruction Habitat conversion Predation Endangerment	Numerator Denominator Equivalent fractions	Types of persuasive communication techniques
<p>ABLE TO DO <i>What basic skills, social skills, production skills, and/or skills of the discipline will students be able to do as a result of this lesson?</i></p>	Read and comprehend text Take notes Work in groups	Research via field study or online investigation Comprehend text Gather data Interpret data	Compare whole numbers and fractions Multiplication Division Work independently	Brainstorming Rough drafts Revision and editing techniques Make a goal and create a plan to follow through
<p>NOW YOU GET IT! <i>How could students demonstrate their understanding?</i></p>	RAFT Plus (see Chapter 6): Role play from the perspective of a historical figure we studied	Choice menu Letter to the editor Data display with conclusions Public service announcement Children's book	Tiered lesson a. Create fraction strips at varying levels of complexity b. Create story problems from your life that show understanding of wholes and parts	Interest-based groups Analyze writing models, then write a persuasive piece

FIGURE 1.3 Elementary Sample Learning Targets

	Social Studies	Science	Math	Language Arts
CONCEPT <i>The big idea of a unit/lesson, usually one word</i>	Community (Second grade)	Force (Fifth grade)	Time (First grade)	Language (Kindergarten)
UNDERSTAND (that) <i>The underlying principle that connects the content to students' lives</i>	Understand that in a community there is an interaction between the people and the natural environment	Understand that humans study how nature works and use that knowledge to create things that make life easier for humans	Understand that people made up the idea of time as a way to measure how long events or actions take place and so they could organize and plan	Understand that humans created a system of sounds and symbols so that they could communicate effectively
KNOW <i>The key facts and key vocabulary words that support the understandings</i>	The natural and human characteristics of where we live	Six types of simple machines Force, distance, work	Hour Half hour Half past the hour	Each letter of the alphabet produces its own sound The sound of each letter is the code that allows humans to communicate
ABLE TO DO <i>The basic skills, social skills, production skills, and/or skills of the discipline students will be able to do to work toward the understandings</i>	Use graphic aides like maps or pictures Gather data about our community	Create a compare /contrast chart that shows the different types of simple machines Calculate the amount of work ($F \times D = W$)	Tell time to the hour and half hour	Identify the letters of the alphabet and their sounds
NOW YOU GET IT! <i>How students demonstrate their understanding of the above learning objectives</i>	RAFT Plus: Role play a person from the community and tell how you interact with the environment	Centers: Students rotate through six centers, one on each machine. They complete activities and the compare/contrast chart.	Tiered lesson: Tier 1: Students work on telling time with a digital or analog clock Tier 2: Students create a daily schedule for a typical school day	Choice: Students choose one activity/center from a choice menu that is posted on the whiteboard for them to see

FIGURE 1.4 C U KAN Lesson Design

C U KAN Lesson Design	
Name:	Grade Level of Lesson:
CONCEPT: Relationship TOPIC: Heroes	
As a result students should. . .	
<p>Understand that (key principles)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We learn about how we want to lead our lives by studying the lives of people who have had a positive impact in the world. 	
<p>Know (facts)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hero characteristics • Heroes—past and present 	
<p>Able to do (skills/be able to. . .)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select someone who is a hero to you. • Collect characteristics of that person that you admire. • Present information about your hero. 	
<p>Preassess: How will you determine students' readiness, interests, or learning profiles before starting your lesson/unit?</p> <p>Quick Write Exit Card—Do you have a person that you admire or look up to? If yes, who is that person, and what do you admire about them? If no, list qualities you respect or admire in others.</p>	

FIGURE 1.5 Sample Student Handout

Hero Choice Menu
Concept: Relationship
<p>Understand that (key principles)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We learn about how we want to lead our lives by studying people who have had a positive impact in the world.
<p>Know (facts)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hero characteristics • Heroes—past and present
<p>Able to do (skills/be able to . . .)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select someone who is a hero to you. • Collect characteristics about that person that you admire. • Choose a way to present information about your hero and your hero's impact on your life.

(Continued)

FIGURE 1.5 (Continued)

Present a skit or video about your hero and how that person impacted life.	Write a story about how you changed your life because of what you learned from your hero.
Make a chart comparing your future life with your hero's life.	Create a PowerPoint presentation about your hero's impact on your life.
Write and illustrate a book for younger children about your hero.	Write a rap/poem/song about your hero.

HOW TO WRITE A C U KAN

Below are some questions we can ask ourselves to guide the lesson-designing process using the C U KAN framework. The questions are a guide to help determine clarity as we create a concept, an understanding, facts (know), skills (able to do), or assessment (now you get it!).

When designing a *concept*, ask—

- Is the concept written in one or two words? (Concepts are one or two words, not phrases or sentences: for example, *patterns*, *systems*, *inter-relationships*, *communication*.)
- Is this a concept or a topic? Topics are specific to what is being taught: a life cycle, fractions, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the American Revolution. Concepts are big, global ideas that could be taught again and again, such as patterns, relationships, systems, or communication.

When designing the *understanding*, ask—

- Could this idea be taught and used in several contexts in my content area? For example, in math, you might have the following understanding:
 - *Understand that everything in the world is made up of wholes and parts and mathematicians have found numerical ways to represent this that can be used in real-life applications.*
 - This understanding could be used over and over again when teaching fractions, decimals, ratios, percentages, and more.
- Is there an example of this idea that could be applied to other content areas? For example, “Understand that change happens over time. This *understanding* could be connected and taught in any subject area at any grade level because change happens in science, math, social studies, language arts, and other areas of learning.
- Is this a global statement that could be connected and made relevant to students' lives? For example, when teaching about how change happens

over time, we can begin the unit by making connections to how the students themselves or their work is changing over time.

- Did I write the topic for my lesson into the understanding? If so, it's not global enough. For example, if you write, "Understand that fractions are a way to represent wholes and parts," you can use that *understanding* only during a unit on fractions. The scope is too limited, and that limits the connections you can make.
- Does the understanding guide students to think like scientists, mathematicians, writers/readers, or historians?
- Would I more likely need to evaluate this part of the learning target by asking students to do a performance-based assessment, such as an essay question, project, or simulation? *Understandings* do not usually lend themselves to true/false or multiple-choice questions.
- Is the statement written, "understand that" rather than "understand why" or "understand how"?

When designing the *know*, ask—

- Is this a specific fact?
- Is this a key vocabulary word?
- Is this an example of something?
- Could I test this information with a true/false, multiple-choice question?

When designing the *able to do*, ask—

- Is there an action involved?
- Would students have to do something?
- Would students benefit from having something demonstrated to them in order to do this?
- Would I assess this by asking students to do or demonstrate a skill?

When designing the *now you get it!* ask—

- Are students being asked to show or demonstrate what they have learned?
- Is this a formative or summative activity?
- Are students expected to self-reflect or self-assess?

C U KAN AND PRIMING THE BRAIN: MAKING CONNECTIONS

Once we have designed a clear learning target, we can begin our units by connecting what we are about to teach to students' lives. Using the language of brain research, we can *prime* students' brains to get them ready to learn the new content since the learning brain always seeks to make connections (Jensen, 1994).

For example, in the sample lesson on heroes, the *understanding* reads, “Understand that we learn about how we want to lead our lives by studying the lives of people who have had a positive impact in the world.” To help students connect to this understanding, we may choose to prime their brains by sharing examples of our personal heroes, explaining why we admire those heroes, what we learned from them, and how that has impacted our life choices. This connection to our own lives helps students make connections to the heroes in their lives. If an *understanding* in language arts is, “Understand that writers have a toolkit of strategies they use to communicate effectively. The greater the toolkit of strategies, the more choices the writer has for reaching varied audiences,” we could begin our lesson on the importance of punctuation marks by reading the book, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: Why Commas Really Do Make a Difference!* by Lynne Truss (2006). This *prime* makes a point by using humorous examples that connect readily to students’ lives.

We can prime students’ brains with video clips, PowerPoint presentations, models, and real-life examples. When we take the time to prime students’ brains and set the stage for what’s to come, we keep a sense of curiosity and wonder alive in our classrooms.

C U KAN AND ONGOING ASSESSMENT

Beginning with a clear learning target also guides assessment, from preassessment through formative assessment to summative assessment.

When we preassess, we determine whether it would be helpful to have information about the understand, know, or able-to-do part of our learning target. For example, in the hero lesson, we would probably want to know if students have heroes and if they can name traits they admire. This gives us information about students’ understanding of the idea of heroes and what they know of hero characteristics. When preassessing a unit on adding fractions, we would most likely want to pretest students’ able-to-do skills.



Because we are clear on our target at the beginning of our units, we are clear regarding what we need to formatively assess throughout the unit. We can also share the target with students and have them self-assess throughout the learning process. For example, once students are working on their chosen projects for the hero lesson, we can ask them to complete exit cards to reflect on how well they have included the required learning targets in their project and what they still need to include (see Figure 1.6). The exit card helps the students own their responsibility for working toward the learning target and allows us to formatively assess student progress along the learning path. We can then provide additional support or additional challenge for students as needed.

Finally, starting with a clear C U KAN learning target helps us determine what the summative assessment should look like and what it should include. For example, when designing the hero lesson project, the summative assessment is the project. Based on the learning target, there is no need for a traditional test or quiz because that is not the desired outcome for the lesson. However, when assessing a skill like adding fractions, a quiz or test makes the most sense. From a clear target it becomes easier to see what we could learn with a traditional test or quiz or what would be better assessed through something like an essay question or

FIGURE 1.7 (Continued)

Expectations	Excellent	Good	Okay	Needs Improvement
Knows facts about a hero's life ___ Points				
Quality work (As self-defined) ___ Points				
Questions and notes ___ Points				
Two ways I/we will do quality work for our project 1. _____ 2. _____				
What I did that was quality work: _____				
What I could do better next time: _____				
Teacher comments: _____				

FIGURE 1.8 Elementary Hero Lesson Rubric

Hero Rubric		
Name: _____		
Project Choice: _____		
How I Did		
Understands that we learn how to be a good person by studying other good people		
Knows what good things you admire about a hero		
Good project (Quality Work)		
What I did that I am really proud of: _____		
What I could do better: _____		
Teacher comments: _____		

HOW C U KAN WILL HELP US DIFFERENTIATE

The C U KAN framework helps us differentiate because it provides a clear map for what we want our students to understand, know, and be able to demonstrate. C U KAN also helps us design an aligned rubric that focuses on the essential learning points. We know what we are looking for and what it looks like when students get there.

C U KAN gives us the road map to begin differentiating:

1. How students take in the C U KAN information (*Chunk*)
2. How students process the C U KAN information (*Chew*)
3. How students demonstrate their understanding of the C U KAN (*Check*)

We can readily convey the importance of content to our students when we have a clear learning target to aim toward and when we make real-life connections

to that target. Sharing the learning target encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning. They are able to self-reflect; they know when they are getting or not getting the targeted objectives. Starting with a clear learning target also allows us to think of alternative options for assessing and reporting students' progress toward learning outcomes.

C U K A N helps us make our teaching more intentional and transparent (see Figure 1.9). Intentional teaching is when we know why we are teaching what we are teaching. Teachers who are clear on their learning target can be more intentional because they can use the target to guide them as they make choices about what is most important to teach, and why. For example, Gayle was really excited and ready to teach students through varying multiple intelligences, so she designed a lesson in which her seventh-grade students could get in

FIGURE 1.9 Intentional and Transparent Teaching

Intentional	Transparent
<p>You collect data on a survey about your students' learning styles or multiple intelligences <i>because</i> you want to find out how your students learn best so you can design lessons that work for them.</p>	<p>You explain to students that you will be teaching vocabulary to varying learning styles, so they can self-assess which learning style works best for them in order to be more effective at studying and learning.</p>
<p>You model quality use of sustained silent reading (SSR) time <i>because</i> you believe in the value of reading with your students. You get excited about the book you are reading. Read intently. Share and talk about books students are reading.</p>	<p>You ask students to create a list of quality uses of SSR time versus poor uses of SSR time. Then students create a bulletin board of pictures of students modeling quality versus poor behaviors. You explain to students that they must ultimately own their own reading lives and they can develop behaviors that develop lifelong reading.</p>
<p>You give a performance-based assessment rather than a test to have students show their understanding of the similarities and differences between the cultures in Asia and in America today <i>because</i> you know this will assess for a deeper understanding than you would see on a test or quiz.</p>	<p>You explain to students that the reason you will assess using a performance-based project rather than a test is that you want to see their understanding of cultural connection, not just their knowledge of the facts.</p>
<p>When checking homework in math, you have several students think aloud the varying ways they got to the correct answer because you want students to model for each other that there is more than one way to get a correct answer in math.</p>	<p>When students share another way to get to the correct answer, you note it out loud to the class. "Great, Amir, that is indeed another way to get to the same answer. How many of you can see how Amir came up with his answer?"</p>

multiple-intelligence groups and use their intelligence strength to learn the major bones in the body. However, if Gayle had planned her C U KAN first, using district standards and benchmarks for seventh grade, she would have realized that there is no benchmark that requires students to know the bones in the body. However, they do need to be able to demonstrate how bones are part of an interconnected system. Because she didn't have a clear learning target, she wasn't intentional. Her lesson would have been engaging for students, but it was not rigorous. Because she wasn't being intentional, Gayle's lesson was essentially busy work.

Transparent teaching is when *the students* know why we are teaching what we are teaching. Transparent teaching is teaching *with* the students, not *at* them. For example, an able-to-do skill that Heather has in her C U KAN target is on gathering information and determining important from interesting information. When Heather teaches a new processing (chew) strategy to her students, she always explains to students why she is teaching them the strategy and how the strategy can help them in school and in life. For example, when she teaches a note-taking technique, she first talks to students about how important note taking is as a lifelong learning tool for helping learners to gather and process (chew) their learning. She explains how they will not only need to be note takers throughout their schooling, but they also will be taking notes as adults when they are building a house or buying a car or planning a wedding. She explains to them that she will be taking time to think aloud, model, and scaffold the instruction of a note-taking technique that they will be using throughout the year so that when they leave her class, they will own a note-taking technique that they can use for the rest of their lives if they choose. Transparent teachers, like Heather, help students see the ownership and accountability they have in the learning process.

Designing lessons using the C U KAN framework may seem challenging initially, but once we use it consistently, we find that it ultimately makes our teaching more efficient and effective.