

# WordWeaver

## Adolescent Word Study Curriculum

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### Curriculum Design Guide

*How Every Component Fits Together — From Daily Routines to Three-Year Scope*

9 Decodable Novels · 9 Companion Nonfiction Texts · 5 Reading Levels  
Asynchronous Professional Learning Course · Aligned Curriculum Materials  
45-Minute Daily Intervention or Core Instruction

# The WordWeaver Ecosystem

Before we get into the daily how-to, it's worth stepping back and looking at how all of this fits together. WordWeaver isn't a single product. It's a system — and each part of the system was designed to reinforce every other part. Pull one piece out and the rest still works, but the real power comes from the way they connect.

## The Four Pillars of the System

**Pillar 1: The Novels.** Nine decodable novels across three years, each written at five reading levels (Lexile 200–1200+). These are the engagement engine. They're what make students actually want to show up. Each novel spans 12 weeks with 20 chapters and is organized around a morphological family progression — foundational academic vocabulary in Year 1, Latin roots in Year 2, Greek roots in Year 3.

**Pillar 2: The Companion Nonfiction.** Nine companion texts, each paired chapter-by-chapter with its novel. These build the background knowledge that makes the fiction comprehensible and the vocabulary sticky. They're designed as browsable field guides — not textbooks — also at five reading levels, with adjusted phonics density for informational text.

**Pillar 3: The Professional Learning Course.** A 7-module, 30-hour asynchronous course covering comprehension, vocabulary, morphology, multisyllable decoding, fluency, and background knowledge. Teachers don't just learn about these pillars — they practice with real texts and walk away with artifacts they can use the next morning. Module 7 integrates everything and requires an actual classroom try-it.

**Pillar 4: The Aligned Curriculum.** The daily instructional materials that live inside the 45-minute block: word sorts, word arrays, syllable mapping, fluency phrases, POSSUM vocabulary, comprehension discussions, written responses, and all the assessment tools. This is the connective tissue that turns the novels and nonfiction into a complete instructional system.

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## How the Pillars Connect

Here's a Monday in Week 7 to show how it works in practice. The teacher — who completed Module 3 (Morphology) of the PL course last month — opens with a word sort where students categorize words from the -VENT-/-VENE- family: invent, prevent, convention, intervene, adventure. Students sort by meaning relationships while the teacher circulates.

Next comes POSSUM vocabulary on “intervene” — all six dimensions, with the morphological breakdown (inter + vene = come between) anchoring the analysis. The teacher uses the scripted instructional dialogue from the POSSUM instructional dialogue.

Students have time to read independent reading of the novel or nonfiction companion. The teacher also has the option to read the text aloud with comprehension check think alouds.

During small groups, Group 1 works on syllable mapping with the multisyllable syllable mapping for “convention.” Group 2 practices fluency phrases that include this week’s vocabulary. Group 3 does a written response connecting the nonfiction content to a prediction about tomorrow’s episode. The closing word array has students arrange invent, prevent, intervene, and convention from “most planned” to “least planned.” Everything connects. Nothing is filler. That’s the Coherence Effect in action. WordWeaver spans three years of middle school — grades 6 through 8 — with three novels per year, each running 12 weeks. The vocabulary, morphological focus, and thematic complexity build cumulatively, so Year 3 assumes and extends everything from Years 1 and 2.

## Year 1 (6th Grade): Finding Your Power

The first year is about identity formation and self-discovery. Students meet characters figuring out who they are — the exact work sixth graders are doing in their own lives. The vocabulary focus is foundational academic words: analyze, examine, compare, evaluate, demonstrate, and their word families.

| Weeks | Novel               | Companion Nonfiction    | Vocab Focus         | Words    |
|-------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|----------|
| 1–12  | MythKeepers Academy | MythKeepers Field Guide | Foundation academic | 96 words |
| 13–24 | Tomorrow Thieves    | Neo-Avalon Archive      | Latin root families | 96 words |
| 25–36 | Memory Merchants    | Memory Market Guidebook | Greek root families | 96 words |

## Year 2 (7th Grade): Navigating Connection

The second year tackles relationships and social systems. The characters are older, the stakes more interpersonal, and the vocabulary more domain-specific. Students explore how people connect, make choices, and navigate systems — academic and otherwise.

| Weeks | Novel          | Companion Nonfiction       | Vocab Focus          | Words    |
|-------|----------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| 1–12  | Code Breakers  | ChromaCity Codex           | Technical vocab      | 96 words |
| 13–24 | Thread Weavers | The Unity Web              | Social science vocab | 96 words |
| 25–36 | Branch Walkers | Decision Tree Encyclopedia | Philosophical vocab  | 96 words |

## Year 3 (8th Grade): Shaping the Future

The final year emphasizes legacy, purpose, and impact. Eighth graders are preparing to leave middle school, and the series mirrors that transition. Characters face questions about what they’ll leave behind and who they’ll become — questions that resonate deeply with students about to move on.

| Weeks | Novel             | Companion Nonfiction | Vocab Focus            | Words    |
|-------|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------|
| 1–12  | Echo Keepers      | Resonance Files      | Emotional intel vocab  | 96 words |
| 13–24 | Potential Seekers | The Meridian Manual  | Education/career vocab | 96 words |
| 25–36 | Legacy Builders   | Future Atlas         | Leadership vocab       | 96 words |

**Three-year totals:** 9 novels, 9 companion nonfiction texts, 864 deeply learned vocabulary words, 432 narrative episodes, and 1,800 total chapters across all levels.

# The Daily 45-Minute Block

Every day follows the same structure. Students know the rhythm. Teachers know the rhythm. The predictability reduces cognitive load so everyone can focus on what matters — the actual learning.

## The Sacred 45 Minutes

| Minutes | Component                 | What Students Are Doing  |
|---------|---------------------------|--|
| 5       | Word Sort                 | Categorizing 6–8 vocabulary words by patterns. Monday: morphology. Tuesday: semantics. Wednesday: syntax. Thursday: story connections. Friday: student-created categories.   |
| 5       | POSSUM Vocabulary         | Deep exploration of 2 words through all six dimensions: Phonology, Orthography, Semantics, Syntax, Understanding, Morphology. Teacher models expert word analysis while students follow in Visible Thinking Notebooks.                                 |
| 25      | Small Group + Independent | Teacher works with 3 groups (6–8 min each) for targeted instruction in decoding, comprehension, fluency, or vocabulary. Other students rotate through stations: decodable novel reading, written responses, syllable mapping, fluency phrase practice. |
| 5       | Word Array + Wrap-Up      | Students arrange 3–5 related words to show relationships (semantic gradients, morphological families, story connections). Partner discussions. Teacher previews tomorrow’s episode.  |

## Weekly Flow

**Monday: Foundation Building.** The nonfiction companion text sets up the week’s content. Before students can understand Maya’s dragon heritage in the story, they need to know what dragon mythology actually looks like across cultures. Before they can follow the infrastructure collapse in Neo-Avalon, they need to understand how real cities work. Monday’s nonfiction does that heavy lifting.

**Tuesday: Narrative Launch.** The first story episode introduces the week’s conflict and drops essential vocabulary into context. Characters encounter situations where this week’s words matter for survival. The cliffhanger makes sure students show up Wednesday.

**Wednesday: Deepening.** The middle episode raises stakes and adds more vocabulary exposures. What seemed like a simple word on Tuesday becomes plot-essential on Wednesday. Decodable texts reinforce through repetition at every reading level.

**Thursday: Crisis and Resolution.** The week’s final episode brings the vocabulary to a head. Students who’ve mastered the words understand the solution. Those still learning feel the urgency to figure it out. Peer teaching happens naturally.

**Friday: Synthesis and Celebration.** Assessment that continues the story. Students apply the week’s learning to solve character dilemmas. Growth is visible and celebrated. Preview of next week’s adventure maintains momentum.

# Curriculum Components in Detail

## Word Sorts

Two minutes. That’s all it takes for the highest-impact instructional strategy Marzano ever documented. Word sorts ask students to categorize vocabulary words by patterns they discover — and the cognitive demand of justifying those categories is where the magic lives.

Each day offers a different lens. Monday sorts focus on morphological patterns (grouping by roots: construct, instruct, destruct share -STRUCT-). Tuesday explores semantic relationships (positive vs. negative connotations). Wednesday examines syntactic function (which of these can be verbs? nouns? both?). Thursday makes story connections (which words describe Maya’s journey?). Friday hands control to students who create their own categories.

The sorts ship as card sets — 8 words per day, coordinated with the week’s POSSUM vocabulary and narrative content. They’re also available as projection slides for quick whole-class use.

## POSSUM Vocabulary Instruction

The POSSUM instructional dialogue cards are the backbone of vocabulary instruction. Each card scripts the full six-dimension exploration for one word. The teacher doesn’t need to wing it — especially at 7:45 on a Monday morning. The card walks through exactly what to say:

- **Phonology:** “Listen carefully: met-a-MOR-pho-sis. Clap it with me. Where’s the stress?”
- **Orthography:** “Notice the ‘ph’ making an /f/ sound? That signals Greek origins.”
- **Semantics:** “This isn’t just any change — it’s complete, dramatic transformation.”
- **Syntax:** “It’s typically a noun, but watch: ‘The caterpillar will metamorphose.’ Now it’s a verb.”
- **Understanding:** “Every letter has a job. Let’s map those sounds.”
- **Morphology:** “Meta means ‘change,’ morph means ‘form,’ -osis means ‘process.’ Literally: the process of changing form.”

Two words get full POSSUM treatment daily. Students follow along in their Visible Thinking Notebooks, building a cumulative record of every word they’ve studied.

## Syllable Mapping and Multisyllable Decoding

Students use double-sided dry-erase boards for syllable mapping — one side has the Elkonin-style mapping template, the other is blank for word work. The six-step multisyllable routine appears during small group instruction:

- **Step 1:** Display the word clearly.
- **Step 2:** Identify and mark the vowels.
- **Step 3:** Mark syllable divisions using division rules (VC/CV, V/CV, VC/V, V/V, C+LE).

- **Step 4:** Identify each syllable type (closed, open, VCe, vowel team, r-controlled, C+LE).
- **Step 5:** Blend syllables together.
- **Step 6:** Practice with similar patterns — flex the word by changing affixes.

This routine is embedded in the story’s vocabulary, not taught in isolation. When a student maps “in-fra-struc-ture,” they’re decoding a word they actually need to understand what’s happening in the story.

## Fluency Phrases

Three phrases per day, 540 per year. Each day’s set serves a different purpose:

- **Strip 1 — Vocabulary Focus:** Target words in phrase context with syllable breaks marked for decoding support.
- **Strip 2 — Figurative Language:** Idioms, metaphors, and cultural expressions from the narrative episodes.
- **Strip 3 — Fun Elements:** Alliterations, riddles, tongue twisters using vocabulary. Because even fluency practice should make kids smile.

The fluency phrase collections ship as printable strips with a simple rubric for tracking accuracy, rate, and prosody. Students can practice independently, with partners, or in guided groups during station time.

## Written Responses

Writing happens every day — quick writes, paragraph responses, graphic organizer completions, and vocabulary application tasks. The prompts are differentiated across three levels so every student is writing at their challenge level about the same content.

**Below Level:** “Draw Maya using her thunder voice. Write 2 sentences about what happens. Use the word ‘analyze’ in one sentence.”

**On Level:** “Maya must analyze the ancient dragon text to save her friends. Write a paragraph explaining how she uses her powers. Include ‘analyze’ and ‘transform’ in your response.”

**Above Level:** “Compare how Maya and Jamal differently analyze the prophecy based on their unique abilities. How do their different perspectives lead to a more complete understanding? Use at least three vocabulary words from this week.”

## Comprehension Discussions: Micro to Macro

Comprehension instruction in WordWeaver doesn’t live in one component — it’s embedded across the entire block. But the discussion structure moves intentionally through levels of understanding:

- **Word-Level:** Can students define this word in the context where it appeared? (POSSUM, word sorts)
- **Sentence-Level:** Can students explain what a complex sentence means? (Read-aloud think-alouds, decodable comparisons across levels)

- **Paragraph-Level:** Can students identify the function of a paragraph within the episode? (Small group guided reading)
- **Passage-Level:** Can students summarize an episode and identify the main conflict? (Written responses, Friday synthesis)
- **Cross-Text:** Can students connect the nonfiction to the fiction? (Monday-to-Tuesday bridging, word arrays)
- **Self-Monitoring:** Can students identify when they're confused and use a fix-up strategy? (Think-aloud modeling, metacognitive prompts)

The comprehension bookmarks (5 per teacher set) provide quick-reference question stems at each level, so teachers can push comprehension deeper during any component of the block.

## Word Arrays

The three-minute closing ritual. Students arrange 3–5 related words to show relationships — a semantic gradient from weak to strong, a morphological web with a root at center, a timeline showing process, a character connection map. Then they explain their thinking to a partner.

This does two things simultaneously: it synthesizes the day's learning into a visual artifact, and it gives the teacher an immediate formative assessment of who understood what. Arrays start teacher-modeled and move toward full student ownership by mid-year.

## The Five-Level Decodable System

This is probably the most innovative piece of the whole curriculum, and it's worth explaining how it actually works under the hood.

In a 500-word daily decodable, you can engineer every single word. Over 20,000 words in a novel? That's not possible without the prose reading like it was written by a committee of robots. So instead of controlling individual words, WordWeaver controls density zones across chapters. And instead of organizing by phonics pattern (one book for vowel teams, one for blends), the books are organized by reading development stage.

Every book contains all syllable patterns. What changes across levels is the ratio of high-frequency words to complex vocabulary, the syllable ceiling, average sentence length, and how much scaffolding surrounds the harder words.

## The Five Levels at a Glance

| Level | Lexile       | Avg Sent. | Word Count     | HFW %  | Syl Ceil.  | Comparable   |
|-------|--------------|-----------|----------------|--------|------------|--------------|
| 1     | 400–600L     | ~7 words  | 600–1,200/ch   | 58–62% | 2–3        | Grades 2–4   |
| 2     | 550–700L     | ~10 words | 900–1,600/ch   | 55–60% | 3–4        | Grades 4–6   |
| 3     | 700–950L     | ~14 words | 1,000–1,800/ch | 48–52% | 4–5        | Grades 5–8   |
| 4     | 900–1,050L   | ~17 words | 1,400–2,400/ch | 42–46% | No ceiling | Grades 7–10  |
| 5     | 1,000–1,200L | ~22 words | 1,800–3,200/ch | 35–40% | No ceiling | Grades 9–12+ |

## Anchor Words: The Hidden Phonics Engine

For each novel, roughly 200 words recur frequently enough to become automatic through exposure. These include character names, location names, recurring objects, key plot terms, and the 96 POSSUM vocabulary words for that series. These anchor words do the heavy lifting of phonics instruction. Everything else just needs to be readable, not perfectly controlled.

In a daily decodable, you repeat target words 3–5 times in 500 words. That’s forced. In a novel, you repeat them 15–20 times across 20,000 words. That’s natural. “Academy” appears in every chapter because it’s where the story happens. “Prophecy” recurs because the characters can’t stop thinking about it. The phonics practice is invisible because it’s driven by narrative necessity.

## How the Nonfiction Companions Differ

Nonfiction naturally runs heavier on specialized vocabulary and lighter on dialogue. That changes the phonics math. Where the novel uses dialogue as the high-control zone, the companion uses three alternative strategies:

- **Visual anchors replace dialogue:** Captions, labels, sidebars, and infographics carry 20–30% of the informational load at Level 1.
- **Domain vocabulary as anchor words:** Terms like “mythology” and “neuroplasticity” become automatic through investment, appearing 25–40 times across the book.
- **Glossary sidebars for hard words:** Every word that exceeds the syllable ceiling gets a sidebar treatment: broken into syllables, defined in plain language, used in a sentence connected to the novel. The sidebar IS the phonics instruction — disguised as world-building.

## The Asynchronous Professional Learning Course

The course is designed to do one thing: make teachers better at adolescent word study instruction. Not in theory. In practice. Every module produces an artifact that a teacher can use the next day.

### Course Architecture

| Mod | Topic                  | Subtitle   | Portfolio Artifact                 |
|-----|------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| 1   | Comprehension          | Micro to Meta: Understanding What Understanding Looks Like | Text analysis + comprehension plan |
| 2   | Vocabulary             | Three Tiers, One Goal: Words That Unlock Understanding     | Complete vocabulary unit plan      |
| 3   | Morphology             | Word Parts That Unlock Meaning                             | Morphology lesson + morpheme audit |
| 4   | Multisyllable Decoding | Breaking the Code on Complex Words                         | Decoding support plan for 10 words |

|   |                         |  |  |
|---|-------------------------|--|--|
| 5 | Fluency                 | Beyond Speed: Accuracy, Rate, and Prosody          | Fluency assessment + activity design               |
| 6 | Background Knowledge    | The Hidden Driver                                  | Knowledge-building plan with text set              |
| 7 | Putting It All Together | Integration, Implementation, and Your Path Forward | Integrated lesson + classroom try-it + action plan |

## The Learning Arc

Every module (1–6) follows the same four-session structure. Consistency matters — teachers shouldn’t have to relearn how the course works every two weeks.

**Activate:** Hook into the topic. Surface assumptions. Create the “wait, really?” moment that makes people lean in.

**Build:** Core content. Research, frameworks, examples, and demonstration. The what and the why before the how.

**Apply:** Hands-on practice. Participants plan instruction, analyze student work, and build with real texts from their own classrooms.

**Reflect:** Step back. Connect to other pillars. Self-assess. Share work for peer feedback. Set intentions for what’s next.

Each session includes 2–3 video segments (8–12 minutes each), curated research readings, interactive activities, discussion prompts, and a practice task. Module 7 breaks the pattern with five sessions focused entirely on integration, classroom implementation, and building a personal action plan.

## Assessment and Progress Monitoring

Assessment in WordWeaver continues the story. It doesn’t interrupt it.

### The Assessment Ecosystem

| Assessment          | Frequency                  | What It Tells You  |
|---------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Daily Observation   | Every day                  | Engagement, vocabulary use in discussion, comprehension during think-alouds, sort accuracy, array quality. The most valuable data you’ll collect.                            |
| Vocabulary Quests   | Weekly (Friday)            | Can students apply this week’s words in context? Do they recognize them in new situations? Production over recognition.  |
| Module Milestones   | Every 4 weeks              | Comprehensive check of fluency, comprehension, phonics, and vocabulary. Informs small group regrouping.  |
| Series Challenges   | End of each 12-week series | Culminating assessment requiring all 96 vocabulary words from the series. Framed as story missions: “Decode the Mythkeeper Prophecy,” “Reprogram Neo-Avalon’s Dream Matrix.” |
| Pre/Post Assessment | Start and end of year      | Cumulative growth measurement across all six pillars. The data that tells the growth story to administrators and families.   |

## Differentiation That Dignifies

Traditional differentiation often broadcasts who's struggling — through different materials, separate locations, or modified assignments that scream “less capable.” WordWeaver’s approach makes differentiation invisible to students while powerful in practice.

- **Novels and Nonfiction:** Same story, five levels. A student reading at Level 1 and one at Level 5 discuss the same plot, characters, and ideas. Nobody knows who's reading which level unless they check.
- **Small Groups:** Fluid and needs-based, not fixed ability tracks. A student might be in the phonics-focused group on Monday and the comprehension group on Wednesday. Groups change as data changes.
- **Written Responses:** Three tiers of prompts for every assignment. Same topic, different cognitive demand. The below-level prompt isn't easier — it's more scaffolded.

## Meeting Specific Populations

**English Learners:** Cognate connection charts for Spanish/English are embedded in every series. Characters code-switch naturally between languages. The POSSUM method's morphological dimension is especially powerful for multilingual students — Latin roots connect English to Spanish, French, and Portuguese. Home languages are positioned as cognitive assets, never barriers.

**Students with Dyslexia:** Systematic morphology instruction provides the explicit, structured approach dyslexic learners need. Breaking “metamorphosis” into meta+morph+osis makes decoding manageable. The 14+ exposures per word ensure deep learning through varied contexts, not drill repetition. The narrative context provides memory hooks that bypass phonological processing challenges.

**Neurodivergent Learners:** Predictable daily routines reduce anxiety and cognitive load. Characters like Cyrus (autistic coder), Luna (ADHD/synesthesia), and Kai (autistic, selective mutism) provide representation without tokenism. The program's structure provides security while the stories provide stimulation.

## What This All Adds Up To

Here's the thing about WordWeaver that's hard to communicate in a table or a scope-and-sequence chart: it's a system where every single piece was designed to make every other piece work better. The novels create the engagement that makes vocabulary instruction stick. The nonfiction builds the knowledge that makes the novels comprehensible. The professional learning equips teachers to use the curriculum materials with precision and confidence. And the daily curriculum provides the structured practice that turns exposure into ownership.

864 deeply learned vocabulary words across three years. 1,800 decodable chapters at five reading levels. 1,620 fluency phrases. Nine fantasy series with characters who look, think, and struggle like the students reading them. A 30-hour professional learning course that actually changes practice. And a daily 45-minute block where everything connects to everything else. And it all starts with a seventh-grader named Maya whose voice erupts with dragon thunder during math class — because sometimes the best way to teach a kid to read is to give them a story they can't put down.