**Checklist for Providing Background Knowledge to ELLs in CCSS-Based Instruction**

**Note:** These tools build upon a rubric that Diane August created as part of her ongoing Common Core work in New York State.

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| **Background Knowledge Considerations** | **Comments** |
| Do non-ELLs have background knowledge on the topic? | Teachers must ensure that ELLs approach the text with comparable levels of background knowledge that non-ELLs already have. If non-ELLs already approach the text with certain background knowledge, teachers should make sure ELLs have the same information. However, non-ELLs (as well as ELLs) will also need background knowledge to comprehend some texts. |
| Does the background provide information in place of what the author is going to provide in the text? | The background information provided can’t give away the text. (No spoilers!) Students must gather information from the text itself instead of learning it from background knowledge the teacher provides. ELLs will still need support and scaffolding to gather information from the text itself. The next two considerations can help both groups of students. |
| Is the background knowledge about big issues that will help students make sense of the text? | Teachers must focus instruction only on the background knowledge that is critical to ELLs comprehending the text. ELLs don’t need to know everything possible related to the topic. For example, ELLs don’t need to be pre-taught all the vocabulary they will encounter in a text but will need to know key vocabulary that will help them unlock the meaning of the text. |
| Is the background knowledge you’d like to provide concise? | The more concise the background information is, the better (e.g., you may wish to reconsider taking an entire class period to build ELLs’ background knowledge).For example, you could provide some background knowledge via homework that students complete prior to class time and briefly discuss the background the next day of class. |

Another way to work through how much background information to teach to ELLs prior to reading a text is to use the flow chart below.

