

FIGURE 7.3 Determining Which Background Knowledge to Teach ELs

Background Consideration	Comments	Applicable to ELs or ELs and non-ELs
1. Do non-ELs have background knowledge on the topic?	Teachers must ensure that ELs approach the text with comparable levels of background knowledge that non-ELs already have. If non-ELs already approach the text with certain background knowledge, teachers should make sure ELs have the same information as a matter of equity.	ELs
2. 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. ELs will still need support and scaffolding to gather information from the text itself.	ELs and non-ELs
3. Is the background knowledge about big issues that will help ELs make sense of the text?	Teachers must focus instruction only on the background knowledge that is critical to ELs comprehending the text. ELs don't need to know everything possible related to the topic. For example, when studying the Gettysburg Address, ELs don't need to be pretaught a full biography of Abraham Lincoln's life but will need to know enough about the big issue of the Civil War that will help them unlock the meaning of the text.	ELs and non-ELs
4. Is the background knowledge you'd like to provide to ELs concise?	The more concise the background information is, the better (e.g., you may wish to reconsider taking an entire class period to build ELs' 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.	ELs

Source: Adapted from Staehr Fenner (2013b) (ColorinColorado.org/blog).