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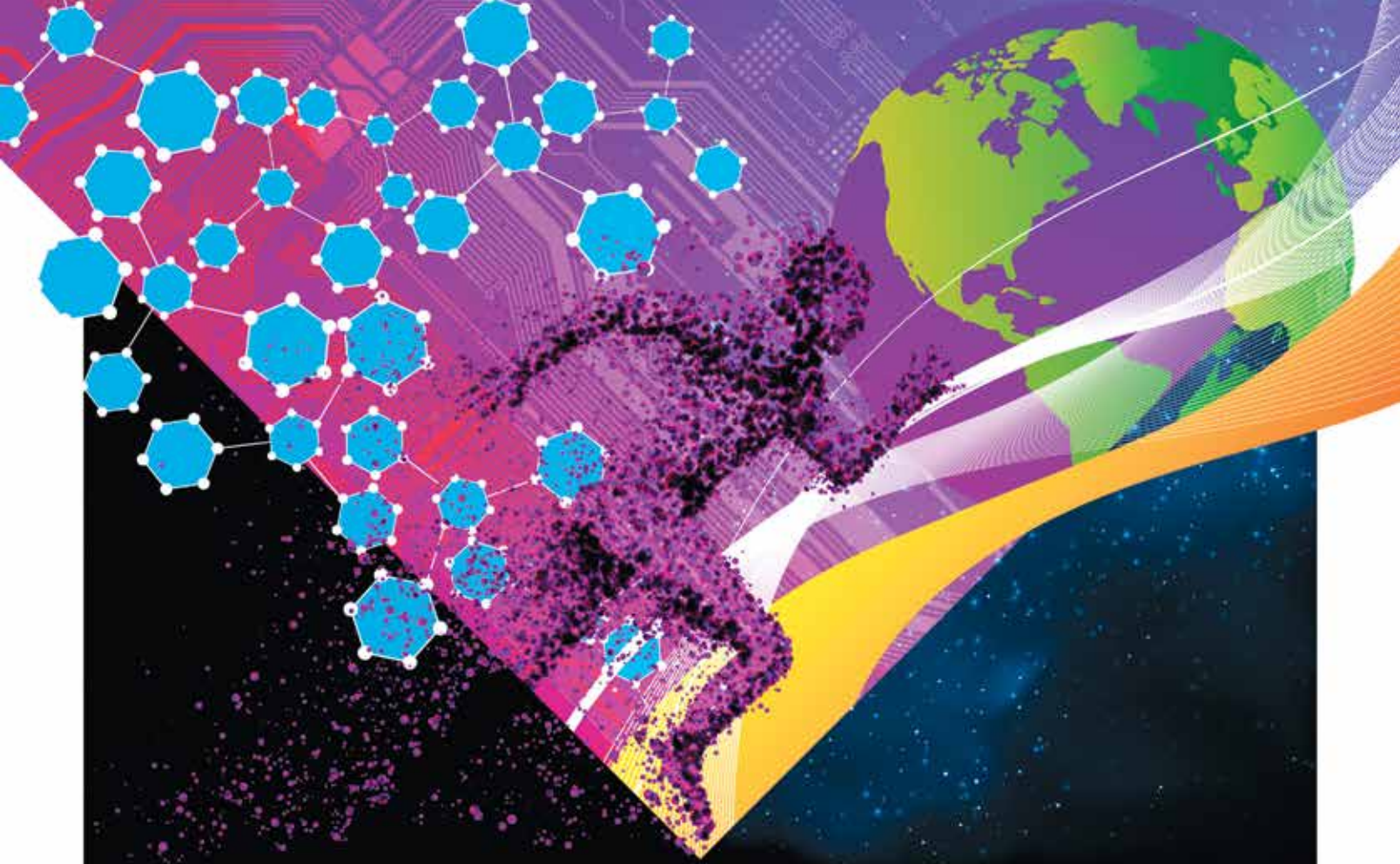
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DISCIPLINARY CORE IDEAS

— RESHAPING TEACHING AND LEARNING —

Edited by
Ravit Golan Duncan
Joseph Krajcik
Ann E. Rivet

NSTApress
National Science Teachers Association



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CONTENTS

FOREWORD by Helen Quinn.....vii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....ix

ABOUT THE EDITORS.....ix

CONTRIBUTORS.....xi

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO DISCIPLINARY CORE IDEAS:
WHAT THEY ARE AND WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT

Joseph Krajcik, Ravit Golan Duncan, and Ann E. Rivet

1



PHYSICAL SCIENCES

9



LIFE SCIENCES

95

CHAPTER 2

CORE IDEA PS1: MATTER AND ITS INTERACTIONS

Kristin Mayer and Joseph Krajcik

13

CHAPTER 3

CORE IDEA PS2: MOTION AND STABILITY:
FORCES AND INTERACTIONS

David Fortus and Jeffrey Nordine

33

CHAPTER 4

CORE IDEA PS3: ENERGY

Jeffrey Nordine and David Fortus

55

CHAPTER 5

CORE IDEA PS4: WAVES AND THEIR
APPLICATIONS IN TECHNOLOGIES FOR
INFORMATION TRANSFER

David Fortus and Joseph Krajcik

75

CHAPTER 6

CORE IDEA LS1: FROM MOLECULES TO
ORGANISMS: STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

Aaron Rogat, Barbara Hug, and Ravit Golan Duncan

99

CHAPTER 7

CORE IDEA LS2: ECOSYSTEMS: INTERACTIONS,
ENERGY, AND DYNAMICS

Charles W. (Andy) Anderson and Jennifer H. Doherty

123

CHAPTER 8

CORE IDEA LS3: HEREDITY: INHERITANCE AND
VARIATION OF TRAITS

Nicole A. Shea and Ravit Golan Duncan

145

CHAPTER 9

CORE IDEA LS4: BIOLOGICAL EVOLUTION:
UNITY AND DIVERSITY

Cynthia Passmore, Julia Svoboda Gouvea, Candice Guy, and Chris
Griesemer

165



EARTH AND SPACE SCIENCES

181

CHAPTER 10

CORE IDEA ESS1: EARTH'S PLACE IN THE
UNIVERSE

Julia D. Plummer

185

CHAPTER 11

CORE IDEA ESS2: EARTH'S SYSTEMS

Ann E. Rivet

205

CHAPTER 12

CORE IDEA ESS3: EARTH AND HUMAN ACTIVITY

Nancy Brickhouse, J. Randy McGinnis, Nicole A. Shea, Andrea
Drewes, Emily Hestness, and Wayne Breslyn

225

CHAPTER 15

CONCLUSION

Ann E. Rivet, Joseph Krajcik, and Ravit Golan Duncan

279

APPENDIX

DISCIPLINARY CORE IDEAS AND THEIR COMPONENTS

283

IMAGE CREDITS.....285

INDEX.....289



ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY, AND APPLICATIONS OF SCIENCE

241

CHAPTER 13

CORE IDEA ETS1: ENGINEERING DESIGN

David E. Kanter and David P. Crismond

245

CHAPTER 14

CORE IDEA ETS2: LINKS AMONG ENGINEERING,
TECHNOLOGY, SCIENCE, AND SOCIETY

Cary Sneider

263

FOREWORD

Helen Quinn

This is not a book about disciplinary core ideas (DCIs) in science. This is a book about teaching science organized around DCIs as defined in *A Framework for K–12 Science Education* (Framework; NRC 2012) and encapsulated in the performance expectations of the *Next Generation Science Standards* (NGSS; NGSS Lead States 2013). As anyone looking at this book knows, the Framework and NGSS stress three dimensions in science learning: Students are not just learning the DCIs but are also engaging in science and engineering practices and understanding and applying a set of crosscutting concepts. Teachers must meld all three of these dimensions together to build effective science lessons, but before they can do that, they need to understand each dimension and the shifts in emphasis around each that are central to the definition and structure of the NGSS.

The Framework was developed based on the best available research knowledge on effective science teaching approaches. Central to effectiveness is the recognition that students must build new knowledge by refining and revising prior knowledge (or their preconceptions, if the topic is new to them). Teaching that ignores what has come before and does not capitalize on research into what makes a topic difficult to learn is at best inefficient and at worst ineffective. Hence, it is important not just to have a science curriculum for the current year but to have one that is designed to build knowledge and deepen understanding progressively across multiple years.

This book, then, is about how the NGSS are structured with regard to DCIs, how these ideas

build across the grade levels, and what aspects are newly emphasized or de-emphasized at each level to achieve continuity and establish a firm base for further learning and use of that knowledge beyond high school. For each DCI, the authors—who are experts in that area of science or engineering learning—discuss how the NGSS expectations at each grade band are structured, stressing shifts in emphasis and explaining some of the reasons for these shifts.

Teachers redesigning their instruction to better support the NGSS will find that the material in this book provides useful background for that effort, but it will not serve as an instruction manual. As every teacher knows, the art of teaching is the art of making choices, of choosing the right strategy at each moment and combining multiple factors in planning units or lessons to achieve desired outcomes. To make these choices well, a teacher needs both a near view (i.e., what are the goals of today) and a far view (i.e., which goals of today fit into and build toward an overall set of larger and longer-term goals). In the far view, the teacher knows both what came before and what comes after the current lesson, and even the current year. This book helps a teacher engaged in developing or using NGSS-oriented curriculum with that view. In combination with other publications that provide a similar overview and perspective on the science and engineering practices and the crosscutting concepts and their development across the K–12 school years, this book provides essential background for those who wish to be effective science teachers in the NGSS context.

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ABOUT THE EDITORS

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CHAPTER 5

CORE IDEA PS4

WAVES AND THEIR APPLICATIONS IN TECHNOLOGIES FOR INFORMATION TRANSFER

David Fortus and Joseph Krajcik

What Is This Disciplinary Core Idea, and Why Is It Important?

Although you may not realize it, and they cannot always be detected without special instruments, waves are *everywhere*. As you read this chapter, there are radio waves going through your body. Stop reading for a minute, close your eyes, and concentrate on your surroundings, your breathing, and your heartbeat. Can you hear anything, or is it completely silent? Most likely there is something you can hear, evidence that you are immersed in a sea of sound waves. Start reading again. How can you read this text? Light waves are being scattered by the page (if you're reading this on paper) or being generated by a screen (if you're reading this on an electronic device) and reaching your eyes. Are there electric apparatuses near you? Every electric device generates electromagnetic waves. Think about cell phones, GPS devices, heat lamps, x-rays, microwave ovens, police radars, lasers, antennas, stereo systems, computer networks, ultrasound imaging devices, and MRI scanners. Think about contact lenses, sunburns, sunglasses, earthquakes, optical fibers, surfing, telescopes, and microscopes. Are these apparatuses and phenomena relevant to you and your

students' lives? Is it important that students have some understanding of how they work? If yes, then waves are important, because waves play a key role in each of these apparatuses and phenomena and in many, many others things as well. In fact, many of the technologies developed in the 20th century and those under development now are dependent on waves. For example, stealth technology is based on waves and uses ideas such as reflection, transmission, absorption, and superposition (which will be described in detail later in this chapter) to render stealth planes nearly invisible to radars. Understanding wave properties and the interactions of electromagnetic radiation with matter is critical to the investigation of nature at all scales, including the invisible world of atoms and molecules and the far away world of stars and galaxies. Wave properties and interactions of electromagnetic radiation with matter explain how information can be transferred over long distances and stored as digital information.

In contrast to the *National Science Education Standards* (NRC 1996) and the *AAAS Benchmarks for Science Literacy* (AAAS 1993), *A Framework for K–12 Science Education (Framework)* (NRC 2012) emphasizes the dependence of modern technologies, especially communications technologies, on

waves. It also highlights the role waves play in transferring energy and information from one location to another. The concepts of wave properties and the interaction of electromagnetic waves with matter explain many important phenomena in our world. We now present the components of the disciplinary core idea (DCI) in the *Framework* that deals with waves.

PS4: Waves and Their Applications in Technologies for Information Transfer provides answers to the question, “How are waves used to transfer energy and information?” This DCI is made up of three component ideas. PS4.A: Wave Properties examines the question, “What are the characteristic properties and behaviors of waves?” PS4.B: Electromagnetic Radiation provides insights into three questions: “What is light?” “How can one explain the varied effects that involve light?” and “What other forms of electromagnetic radiation are there?” Finally, PS4.C: Information Technologies and Instrumentation builds understanding of answers to the question, “How are instruments that transmit and detect waves used to extend human senses?”

PS4.A Wave Properties

PS4.A: Wave Properties describes the properties of waves. It provides an answer to the question, “What are waves?” Think of a simple example that many of us have experienced: a stone thrown into a pond of water. Before the stone hits the pond, the water’s surface is relatively flat and smooth. After the stone hits the water and disappears below the surface, circles centered where the stone hit spread out and away from where they were created (Figure 5.1). These spreading circles and the area between them on the surface of the water are an example of a wave.

FIGURE 5.1

Waves in a Pond



The definition of a wave is a disturbance that propagates—that is, moves or spreads—through space. In the case that we just imagined of a stone being thrown into a pond, the disturbance was the deformation of the water’s surface caused by the entrance of the stone into the water (the stone applied a force to the water, which caused a change in the water’s motion; the water started to move down and away from the stone; see Chapter 3, p. 33, on PS2: Motion and Stability: Forces and Interactions). The spreading out of the circles was the propagation of the disturbance. Because the wave is moving, it has energy (see Chapter 4, p. 55, on PS3: Energy).

Let’s see how this definition works in another case. If you knock on one end of a table with your knuckle, you can feel the knock with your other hand if you place it at the other end of the table, or you can hear the knock if you place your ear on the table. What does this have to do with waves? When your knuckle hits the table, it pushes down on the table, making a small deformation in the table’s surface. Although you can’t see it, this deformation expands out through the table, which is why you can feel and hear it at a distance. The spreading out of the deformation in the table’s surface is a wave.

FIGURE 5.2

Stadium Wave

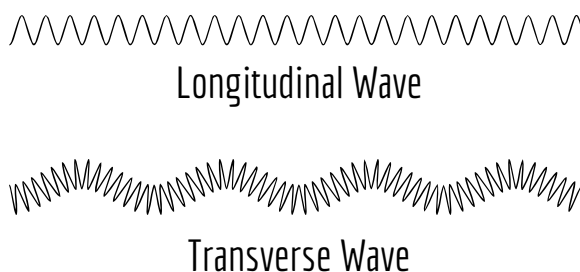
**LONGITUDINAL AND TRANSVERSE WAVES**

When you throw a stone into a pond, the water's surface bobs up and down. (Actually, the movement of any water particle near the surface is a combination of up and down and back and forth motions.) However, the wave generated by this up-down movement of the water's surface moves horizontally. That is, the direction in which the wave moves is perpendicular to the direction in which the disturbance was made. This is called a transverse wave. There are many kinds of transverse waves. All electromagnetic waves are transverse waves. Think about a human wave in a football stadium. People get up and sit down in their seats, but the wave moves horizontally across the stadium (Figure 5.2). This is an example of a transverse wave.

Now imagine a Slinky that is stretched and lying on the floor. One end is held stationary, and the other end is shaken sideways. A wave is generated and propagates through the toy. Try it! Is this a transverse wave? (A demonstration of transverse waves in a Slinky can be found at

FIGURE 5.3

Waves in a Slinky



www.teachertube.com/viewVideo.php?video_id=75927.) Now instead of shaking the Slinky's end sideways, move it back and forth in the direction in which the Slinky is stretched. Once again, a wave is generated in the Slinky; however, this time the direction of the disturbance is the same as the direction in which the wave travels (Figure 5.3). This is called a longitudinal wave (for a demonstration of longitudinal waves in a Slinky, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7qS6SyyrFU). Sound waves traveling through the air are longitudinal waves, with the air molecules moving back and forth in the direction in which the sound wave is traveling. Sound waves moving through solids (like when you knocked on the table with your knuckle) can be both transverse and longitudinal.

WHAT MOVES WHEN A WAVE MOVES?

Above we mentioned that a wave is a moving disturbance. In a pond wave, the disturbance is a depression of the surface of the water. When the wave spreads outward, does the water in the pond move outward with it? The answer is no, because otherwise there would be less water left in the area where the wave originated. The water near the top of the pond moves up and down in

a coordinated manner so that the water appears to be moving outward when it is actually only moving up and down. So no water really moves away from the wave's source. You may have seen humans create a wave in a football stadium. As the wave moves across the stadium, do the spectators making the wave actually move horizontally with the wave? No. Every spectator moves up and down in a coordinated manner, but each spectator stays in the place where she began—sitting.

This idea that no material moves permanently from its original location is true for all waves. In a sound wave, for example, the air molecules move a bit back and forth around their original location, but they stay on average where they were before the wave was generated and do not move with the wave. Flap your hand at your ear. You can feel the air that is being forced at your ear by your hand. The air molecules are being moved from their original location toward your ear. Now hold your hand near your ear and snap your fingers. You can clearly hear the snapping sound but not feel any wind moving toward your ear. So the sound wave generated by the snapping of your fingers does not cause the air molecules to move toward your ear. This can be seen very nicely in a simulation from Pennsylvania State University's acoustics program at www.acs.psu.edu/drussell/Demos/waves/Lwave-v8.gif. The simulation shows the propagation of a sound wave. Follow the red particle. You will see that it moves back and forth but does not propagate with the sound wave. Here, too, you can see why sound waves in the air are longitudinal waves: The air particles move back and forth in the same direction in which the wave travels.

Some students consider sound to be an entity that is carried by individual molecules as they move through a medium (Linder and Erickson 1989). Just as particles can have energy, they think

that particles can have sound, that the particle picks up the sound at one place (e.g., a loudspeaker or a tuning fork), carry it from that place to another (e.g., a microphone or an ear), and then release it there. In this view, the more particles that carry the sound, the louder the sound is. This conception of sound is based on the mistaken idea that the particles of the medium actually move along with the wave or that there are special sound particles that differ from the particles that make up the medium. Accordingly, in this scenario, these sound particles are created at the sound's source and destroyed when the sound is heard, which contradicts the law of energy conservation. Another problem with this notion is that there are infinitely different kinds of sound; in what way does the sound carried by the particles in one case differ from the sounds in other cases? Or are there an infinite number of different kinds of sound particles?

A more sophisticated conception than the one above, but still mistaken, is that sound is a physical entity that is transferred from one molecule to another through a medium. In this case, sound is still something carried by the particles of the medium, but instead of moving through the medium, the particles collide with each other and in each collision transfer some sound from one to another.

WAVE DIMENSIONALITY

Some waves spread out in three dimensions throughout space, others spread out in two dimensions over a surface, and others spread out in one dimension. When you speak, you create sound waves. People in front of you, behind you, to your sides, above you, and below you can all hear you. This is lucky because it means that when you are

teaching you needn't repeat yourself 30 times while facing every student in your class. The sound waves you generate spread out in all dimensions, so they are three-dimensional (3-D) waves.

When you knocked on the table, you couldn't hear the sound *in* the table unless you pressed your ear to the table because the sound *in* the table spread out only *in* the table (you could hear the sound of the knocking in the air, but that is because the knocking created a sound wave in the air as well as in the table). The table is relatively thin, so you can say that the sound wave spreads out in the table only horizontally and not vertically, so the sound wave in the table is a two dimensional (2-D) wave.

If you take a pipe or a water hose and speak into it, nobody around you can hear you. However, if somebody holds up the other end of the hose to their ear, they can hear you quite well. In this case, the sound wave traveled in only one direction, along the water hose. Since it propagated in only one direction, we say that it is a one dimensional (1-D) wave.

So a sound wave can be a 1-D, 2-D, or 3-D wave, depending on the structure or configuration of the environment in which it propagates.

Why is the dimensionality of a wave important? It turns out that the dimensionality of a wave determines the rate at which the intensity of the wave decreases. The relation between the rate at which a wave's intensity decreases and its dimensionality is a result of the law of conservation of energy. When 3-D waves spread out, like sound waves disseminating from your mouth, the intensity of the waves decrease as the waves get farther from your mouth. This is why your voice sounds weaker the farther the listener is from you. Close up, it may be loud; far away, it sounds faint. It turns out that all 3-D waves decrease in

intensity at the same rate, regardless of whether they are sound waves or electromagnetic waves or tectonic waves or any other kind of wave. The intensity of all 3-D waves depends on $1/r^2$, where r is the distance of the wave from its source. Thus, as the distance of a 3-D wave from its source doubles, its intensity decreases fourfold.

When a 2-D wave spreads out, its intensity also decreases as it gets farther away from its source. However, the rate at which it decreases is different from the rate at which a 3-D wave decreases. The intensity of all 2-D waves, regardless of what kind they are, decreases at a rate of $1/r$, meaning that when the distance of the wave from its source doubles, the intensity of the wave is halved.

When a wave's dimensionality is 1-D, it does not spread out; it just moves from one place to another. Its intensity does not decrease but remains the same. So the intensity of the sound from your mouth decreases as it gets farther from you unless the sound waves are channeled into a tube where it can travel long distances without getting weaker.

WAVELENGTH

When a stone is thrown into a pond, not just one ripple is made, but several. We see concentric circles traveling outward from the place where the stone hit the water (see Figure 5.1, p. 76). If we look a bit closer, we will see that the distance between the circles is the same and that this distance is maintained as the ripples move outward. The distance between any two ripples is called the wave's wavelength. The Greek letter λ (lambda) is used to represent the wavelength.

Every wave has a wavelength. If you revisit the simulation of a sound wave mentioned on page 78, you will see that there is a constant distance

between the areas of high particle density that move to the right. This distance is the wavelength.

SPEED

Waves also have a speed at which they spread out. Every type of wave has a speed which is dependent on the medium through which the wave is traveling. Thus, the speed of sound is the speed at which sound waves travel through the air. This speed is temperature dependent but is about 300 m/s at room temperature. Look again at the simulation of sound waves—you will see that the air of high density moves to the right at a constant speed. Sound can also travel through other media. The speed of sound in liquids and in most solids is much faster than in air. The speed of sound in helium is different from in air, which is why voices sound funny if one inhales helium and then speaks while exhaling.

FREQUENCY

Waves have a frequency. When a stone is thrown into a pond, the rings that move outward are generated at a certain frequency, that is, every second a certain number of rings are generated. Look again at the simulation of the sound waves. The areas of high particle density are generated on the left at a constant rate. This rate, the number of areas of high density that are generated every second, is called the wave's frequency. Frequencies can be very low, less than one ripple or one high-density area per second, or very high, thousands or millions or even billions of times per second. Frequencies are measured in hertz (Hz). A sound wave with a frequency of 200 Hz has 200 areas of high density generated per second at the sound's source.

There is a mathematical relation between a wave's wavelength, its frequency, and its speed. The relation is true for *all* waves:

$$v = \lambda \cdot f$$

Here v stands for the wave's speed in [m/s], λ stands for the wave's wavelength in meters, and f stands for the wave's frequency in hertz. The relation between the wavelength and frequency of electromagnetic waves is the same as for all other waves.

AMPLITUDE

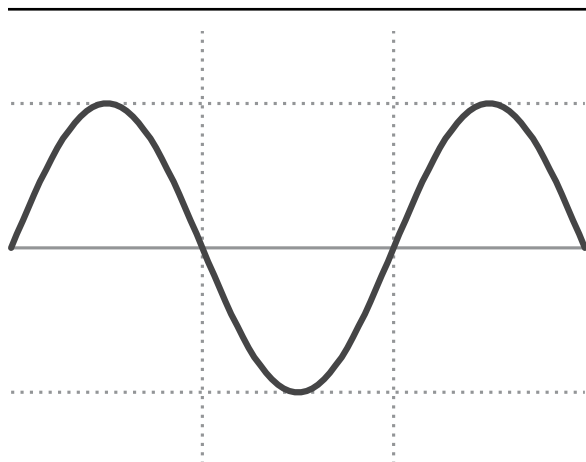
Every wave has an amplitude. The amplitude is the magnitude of the disturbance relative to the situation where there is no disturbance. In the case of the water waves, the amplitude is typically given as the maximum height the water reaches above the height of the water in the pond when there is no wave. In Figure 5.4, the original pond level is the horizontal line through the center of the graph, so the amplitude is the height of the tallest part of the wave where it touches the dotted line above the center line. For a sound wave, the amplitude is the maximum change in the density of the particles, so it is the density of the particles at areas of maximum density minus the density of the particles when there is no sound wave. The square of the amplitude (A^2) is a measure of the intensity of a wave; the greater the amplitude, the stronger the wave. Thus, a loud sound wave will have a larger amplitude and a soft sound wave will have a smaller amplitude.

SUPERPOSITION

When waves of the same kind (for example, two water waves) meet each other, they add up,

FIGURE 5.4

Amplitude and Wavelength

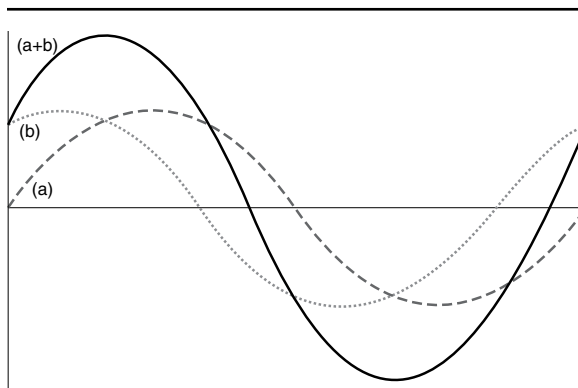


meaning that the height of the surface at any point in the pond will be equal to the height that point would have been if only one of the waves was in the pond *plus* the height of that point if only the second of the waves had been in the pond. Thus, $\text{new height} = \text{height}(1) + \text{height}(2)$. In Figure 5.5, the height of the solid line at the crest of the wave and at the trough of the wave results from the summation of (a) plus (b). This summation of waves is called superposition. Notice, however, that the height of any point on a wave on the surface of the pond goes up and down, so that sometimes it is above the level of the surface of a quiet pond (positive height) and sometimes it is below this level (negative height). So, during the superposition of two waves the height of any point on the pond's surface may be higher or lower than it would have been if there had been only one wave.

Superposition is important because it helps predict what happens when two or more waves meet in various ways. For example, consider two waves with the same height that interact out of phase—that is, when one wave is increasing

FIGURE 5.5

Superposition of Two Waves



while the other is decreasing. If these two identical waves are exactly out of phase, their sum will be zero and they will cancel out. An example of this being applied in real life is noise-canceling headphones. Noise-canceling headphones generate sound waves that are identical to those coming from the outside (the ambient noise) but opposite in phase. Because they are opposite in phase, the incoming noise is canceled out. DVD players provide another everyday example of superposition. Light is reflected from the DVD so that it is at the same phase or at the opposite phase as the wave that reached it. These two waves superimpose, making either a stronger wave ($= 1$) or canceling each other out ($= 0$). Because digital information is encoded as 1s and 0s, this superposition effect enables the digital storage and transfer of information in DVD and CD players. Superposition also allows us to deconstruct complex waves into the sum of many simple waves.

AMPLITUDE DECAY

As was described before in the Wave Dimensionality section (p. 78), the intensity of 2-D and 3-D

waves declines as the waves get farther away from their source. Since the square of a wave's amplitude is related to the wave's intensity, this means that the wave's amplitude gets smaller as the wave gets farther away from its source. If you look at a water wave, you can see that it slowly dies out, so that after a certain distance from the spot where the stone entered the pond, the wave is no longer visible. When someone is far away from you, they need to shout to be heard because the amplitude (and the intensity) of the sound waves they create decrease as they get farther from the person, so by the time sound waves reach you, they are already much weaker than they were to begin with and are therefore harder to hear.

RESONANCE

Every object, or system, has natural frequencies, which are the frequencies at which waves naturally propagate, or spread, through the system. For example, when the stone was thrown into the pond, the waves that were generated had a frequency. Every time you throw another stone, whether it is bigger or smaller, into the same pond, the waves generated will have the same frequency. Thus, this frequency is a natural characteristic of the pond and has little to do with nature of the perturbation, or disturbance, that causes the waves (the stone entering the water). When you strike a tuning fork or pluck a guitar string, regardless of the force used, the sound wave generated always has the same frequency (in music, frequency is also called "pitch"). So, we say that the tuning fork or the guitar string have a natural frequency. However, systems can be forced to oscillate and generate waves at frequencies that are different from the natural frequency of their materials. For example, the membrane

of a speaker in a stereo system has a natural frequency, but the amplifier can force it to vibrate at many different frequencies, generating a range of sound waves with different frequencies. When a system is forced to generate waves at a certain frequency, this is called the forced frequency. Sometimes, intentionally or unintentionally, the forced frequency is identical to the system's natural frequency. When this happens, the waves generated can get larger and larger, even though the magnitude of the perturbation remains small. This situation is called resonance. It can be very useful, but it can also be catastrophic. It is the principle by which radios and musical wind instruments work. It can also cause a bridge to collapse, as happened to the Tacoma Narrows Bridge in 1940 as shown at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tacoma_Narrows_Bridge_\(1940\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tacoma_Narrows_Bridge_(1940)).

INTERACTIONS WITH OBJECTS

All waves, when they reach a boundary between two objects or materials, behave in a combination of ways: They are reflected, transmitted, and absorbed. For example, how do we hear anything? Sound waves are absorbed by the eardrums, which transfers energy to them and makes them vibrate, generating a signal that is transmitted to the brain. How is an echo created? A sound wave is reflected off a large object, such as a cliff, which is far enough away that we hear the reflected echo noticeably later than we hear our original shout. How do we see? Light reflects off materials and onto our retinas, which transmit a message to the brain. Because different materials absorb different frequencies of light, we see light reflected back in different colors. We see a red sweater because the sweater reflects light with red frequencies and absorbs other frequencies. How

does an ultrasound imager work? Ultrasound waves generated in a transducer are transmitted through our bodies and reflected at the interfaces between different tissues.

Allow students to experience simple light phenomena and provide them with relevant data. Next, have students construct models to explain the phenomena. Such experiences provide opportunities for students to make sense of phenomena using the important science practice of modeling and building knowledge of the DCI. This simple model can be expanded as students experience more phenomena and collect additional data.

PS4.B: Electromagnetic (EM) Radiation

PS4.B: Electromagnetic (EM) Radiation explores the question, “What are EM waves?” All electrons create an electromagnetic field in the space around them. When these electrons are forced to move, the electromagnetic field they create changes, first near the electron, then farther away as the change to the electromagnetic field spreads out through space, making an electromagnetic wave. This can occur, for example, when an electric circuit forces electrons to move inside an antenna. If the circuit makes the electrons move at a certain forced frequency, the electromagnetic wave generated can be a radio wave or a microwave, or any other wave in the electromagnetic spectrum. Just as we could see the waves on the surface of a pond or feel or hear the waves in a table, we can detect the electromagnetic waves generated by the electric current. Various instruments such as cell phones or radio receivers can detect and react to certain electromagnetic waves. The water molecules in a piece of food in a microwave can absorb electromagnetic waves created by a microwave. Our eyes, working with our

nervous systems, can detect and react to electromagnetic waves in the visible region. Electromagnetic waves have properties like all waves, such as frequency and wavelength.

THE DIMENSIONALITY OF EM WAVES

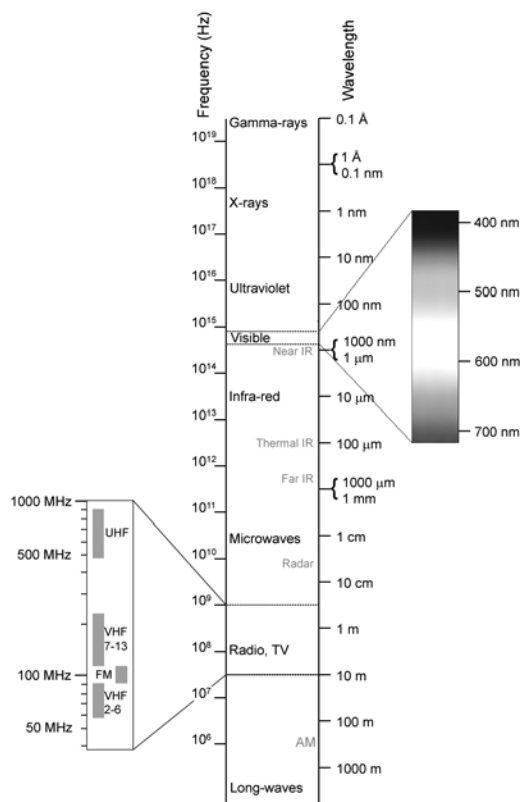
When you turn on a light bulb, it shines in all directions, so the wave that is being generated is a 3-D wave. But what if light is shined into an optical fiber? The light can move through the fiber just as sound can move through a pipe. In this case, light propagates like a 1-D wave. Depending on the circumstances, EM waves can be 1-D, 2-D, or 3-D.

WAVELENGTH OF EM WAVES

EM waves are propagating perturbations—moving or spreading disturbances—of the EM field. If the EM field were “still” (it never is), the strength and direction of the EM field at any point in space would never change. However, because there are waves, the strength and direction of this field changes with time, getting stronger, then weaker, then stronger, then weaker again, and so on, just as any point on the surface of a pond gets higher and lower repeatedly when there is a water wave. EM waves spread out from sources just like water waves, except they typically expand in 3-D, so they expand as ever-increasing spheres rather than as circles. Just as in water waves, where water doesn’t really move from its position but just bobs up and down in a coordinated way, in EM waves, nothing moves; the field just gets stronger and weaker in a coordinated way. Just as in water waves, where there is a constant distance between consecutive circles of the wave (areas where the water surface is high), there is a constant distance between

FIGURE 5.6

The Electromagnetic Spectrum



consecutive spheres of the EM wave (areas of maximum EM field strength). Again, this distance is called the wave's wavelength.

SPEED

EM waves are the only type of wave that does not need a medium to propagate. Their speed in a vacuum, regardless of their wavelength, is the speed of light, which is about 300,000 km/s. When EM waves enter a medium, they move slower than they do in a vacuum, but not by

much. Their actual speed in a medium depends on the type of medium.

FREQUENCY

The Greek letter ν is used instead of f to represent the frequency, and the letter c is used instead of v to stand for the speed, so the relation between an EM wave's speed, wavelength, and frequency is shown in the following equation:

$$c = \lambda \cdot \nu$$

EM waves are grouped into categories according to their wavelengths and frequencies (Figure 5.6). Radio waves have the longest wavelengths and lowest frequencies; gamma rays have the shortest wavelengths and the highest frequencies.

AMPLITUDE

The amplitude of an EM wave is the difference between the maximum strength of the EM field due to the wave and the strength of the field if there were no wave, just as the amplitude of a water wave is the difference between the maximum height of the water's surface due to the wave and the height of the water's surface if there had been no wave. The greater the amplitude of an EM wave, the stronger its intensity.

RESONANCE OF EM WAVES

As described above, every object has natural frequencies, which are the frequencies at which waves naturally propagate through the system. A laser is an example of the resonance of EM waves. The term *laser* is an acronym that stands for "light amplification by stimulated emission

of radiation.” Lasers basically amplify light. EM waves are generated at a frequency identical to the natural frequency of an apparatus called a laser cavity, in which the waves combine and get stronger and stronger until they are released outside as a strong EM wave with a single frequency, called a laser beam. In “The Laser at 50,” Scientific American (2010) provides an overview of the past, present, and potential future of lasers.

INTERACTION WITH MATTER

As with other waves, when EM waves reach a boundary, they can be reflected, transmitted, or absorbed. Light can be reflected in a single direction by a mirror or in many directions (scattered) by any object, which is how we see objects. Light is transmitted through glass, air, and many other substances. Many EM waves are transmitted through concrete, which is how we can use our cell phones inside buildings. Finally, EM waves are often absorbed by substances, which is why cars get hot in the Sun and food gets warm in a microwave oven. Whenever any type of wave is absorbed, some of its energy is transferred to the object absorbing it, and this energy enables something to happen in that object.

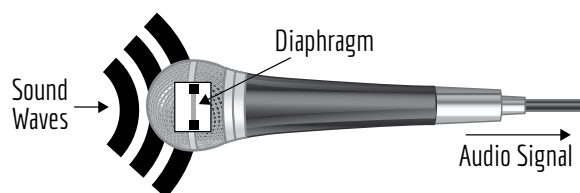
PS4.C: Information Technologies and Instrumentation

PS4.C: Information Technologies and Instrumentation explores the question, “How are instruments that transmit and detect waves used to extend human senses?”

How do you hear things? Your ears detect sound waves. The waves are absorbed by the eardrum, making it vibrate, which in turn generates a signal which is transmitted to the brain. How

FIGURE 5.7

How a Microphone Works



does a microphone detect sound waves? By the same principle: A membrane with a coil attached to it absorbs sound waves, causing it to vibrate, which generates an electric signal (Figure 5.7). For any kind of wave to be detected, it must be absorbed. The absorption of the wave transfers energy from the wave to the object absorbing the wave, and this energy enables something to happen (see Chapter 4, p. 55, on PS3: Energy).

Let's look more closely at how a microphone works. Microphones are devices that convert energy from one form to another. A microphone converts sound waves into electric impulses. All microphones have one aspect in common: They all have diaphragms. A diaphragm is a thin piece of material (such as paper or aluminum) that can vibrate when struck by a sound wave. When the diaphragm vibrates, it causes other parts of the microphone to vibrate as well. These vibrations are converted into electric signals that become the audio signal. A speaker converts the electric signal back into a sound wave. The eardrum is also a diaphragm, that is, a piece of tissue that can vibrate. This idea of a wave being absorbed by a material is fundamental to how materials can detect and transfer information. So hearing is really the detection and conversion of sound waves into some other form of vibrations.

HOW DO YOU SEE THINGS?

How we see works on the same principle as how we hear. It is vibrations of waves—EM waves—being absorbed and then converted into another signal. EM waves (in the form of light) from objects are transmitted to and through your eyes until they reach the retina at the back of the eyes where they are absorbed, generating a signal that is transmitted to the brain. How does a camera detect light waves? Either the light is absorbed by a special chip called a charge-coupled device, which generates an electric signal, or the light is absorbed by a special film, causing a chemical reaction that creates bright and dark areas on the film. Smartphones, like cell phones, detect microwaves (a type of EM wave). An antenna absorbs these waves, making electrons in the antenna vibrate back and forth, thus creating an electric current that can be decoded or converted in audio and visual signals. GPS systems do the same. Similarly, when you put your hand near a heat lamp, your hand absorbs infrared light (a type of EM wave), causing your skin become warm. All information transfer occurs by the absorption and conversion of waves.

GENERATION OF WAVES

As described earlier, any perturbation or disturbance that propagates is a wave, so almost anything has the capacity to generate waves. My tapping on the keyboard of my laptop generates sound waves that travel throughout the laptop and the air (that's how I hear the tapping).

EM waves are generated by two primary mechanisms: (1) Any accelerating electric charge creates an EM wave. A charge that oscillates back and forth (as in an antenna) will generate an EM wave that has the same frequency as that of the charge's oscillations. Atoms and molecules in all

substances are always vibrating randomly. These particles have electric charges, so they emit EM radiation. At room temperature, this EM radiation lies in the infrared range. If it gets hot enough, the radiation will move to the visible range (which is why hot things glow). (2) In the quantum world, every object has possible energy levels. When an object transitions from a high energy level to a lower one, an EM wave is generated. This is how fluorescent lamps work, how solid-state lasers (such as the type in a CD player) work, and how gamma rays are generated; this is the principle underlying the operation of almost all apparatuses that use a single EM frequency.

TRANSMISSION OF INFORMATION USING WAVES

For information to be transmitted by a wave, it needs to be encoded. Information can be encoded in analog or digital form. In analog encoding, a wave is generated that is similar in "shape" (analogous) to the information being encoded. For example, when I say the word *wave*, my body forces the vocal cords in my throat to vibrate in a certain manner. These vibrations of my vocal cords change the density of the air next to them. This change is a perturbation that then propagates away from my vocal cords as a sound wave until ears or microphones or some other object absorbs part of the wave. This continues until it has insufficient energy to continue the perturbation to any measurable extent, or until other objects absorb the energy. If a graph were made of the change in air density over time due to this sound wave, it would look identical to the displacement of my vocal cords over time: They would have the same frequencies.

If you hold two paper cups with a thread stretched tightly between them and speak into

one end, your voice can be heard at the other end. How? The sound waves generated by your vocal cords are absorbed by the base of the paper cup, making it vibrate. The vibrations of the bottom of the paper cup are analogous to those of the sound waves (and therefore analogous to the vibrations of your vocal cords). The vibrations of the paper cup pull and push on the thread, generating a sound wave (again, analogous to the prior vibrations and waves) which propagates along the thread to the other paper cup, and so on. The first paper cup acts like a microphone while the second is similar to a speaker.

Information can also be encoded digitally. In digital encoding, the information is “translated” into a code using on-and-off signals, which are then transmitted analogously. For example, in Morse code, a message is converted into a sequence of short signals, called dots, and long signals, called dashes, separated by short silences. Letters are encoded as unique combinations of dots and dashes. In digital media such as audio CDs, a sound or EM wave can be encoded in a similar way, where bits of information are represented by combinations of zeros and ones.

How Does Student Understanding of This Disciplinary Core Idea Develop Over Time?

One of the key features of DCIs is that they can be taught and learned over multiple grades at increasing levels of depth and sophistication. Let’s see how this progression plays out for waves and what kind of simple experiences that require no special equipment can support them.

In the discussion below, what students should know related to a subcomponent of the core

idea is shown in italics. This is followed by various potential learning tasks that could support students as they develop this understanding. Learning tasks are described only until the end of middle school because most of the ideas that are appropriate for high school require the use of special equipment.

By the End of Grade 2

PS4.A: WAVE PROPERTIES

- *Waves in water spread out in circles.*

Possible tasks: Students should make repeated observations by dropping objects into a tub of water and throwing stones into ponds. Have students look for patterns. Do the sizes of the waves change with the sizes of the rocks? What happens if the same rock is dropped from different heights? Have students make claims based on the patterns they observe. *Safety note:* Make sure students wear eye protection (safety glasses or goggles) for this task. Use caution when dropping objects so as not to injure feet. Immediately wipe up any water spilled or splashed on the floor to prevent a slip or fall hazard.

- *The surface of the water moves up and down while a wave spreads outward.*

Possible tasks: Students can observe this idea by first filling a large pot or tub with water, then tapping at the water near the center of the tub, and finally peering at the water waves with their eyes just a bit above the level of the water. Ask students to describe what pattern they see. They will clearly see the water move up and down. If a little boat is placed on the water, they will see it bob up and down but not move away with the wave. Have

students make claims about the movement of the boat based on their observations. Students are not expected at this stage to understand that the water does not move away with the wave. *Safety note:* Make sure students wear eye protection (safety glasses or goggles) for this task. Immediately wipe up any water spilled or splashed on the floor to prevent a slip or fall hazard.

- *Vibrating solids can make sounds.*

Possible tasks: A plucked guitar string makes a sound. Have students feel the string and describe what they feel. Students will feel it vibrate if they touch it lightly. If they look closely at the string, they will also see it vibrating. What happens if the string is plucked harder? What do they feel then? The same can be done with a tapped tuning fork, music triangle, or cymbal. Students can also use a rubber band (this type of activity does not necessarily require special equipment). Have students stretch the rubber band to different lengths and then pluck it. How does this change the vibrations? What happens if they pluck it hard? Have students describe the patterns they observe.

PS4.B: ELECTROMAGNETIC (EM) RADIATION

- *Light is needed to see an object.*

Possible tasks: Take a shoe box and cut a hole the size of an eye in one end using a utility knife (many shoe boxes already have a round hole in one end). Glue an object inside the box at the far end (away from the hole). With the cover securely fixed on the box, have students peek through the hole and try to see the object inside. Then, open a window on the side of the box near the end where the object is glued so that light can get

inside and have the students look into the box again. (You will need to cut this window using a utility knife. Make sure you only cut on the sides and the bottom so that the window is a flap.) Can they see the object now? What is the difference between the two conditions? You can also shine a light through the hole to provide more light. Have students make claims about what is needed to see. Have them support their claims with evidence. *Safety note:* Make sure students wear eye protection (safety glasses or goggles) for this task. Use extreme caution when working with utility knives. Sharps can puncture or cut skin!

- *Mirrors can redirect light.*

Possible tasks: Darken a room, then turn on a flashlight and aim it at the wall so that students understand that light is coming from the flashlight and traveling to the wall. Next, place a mirror in the path of the beam and move the mirror around so that it reflects the flashlight's beam in different directions. Have students construct a model to explain their observations. *Safety note:* Make sure to move all fragile or sharp items out of the students' path to prevent injury when working in a dark room.

- *Objects that are very hot give off light.*

Possible tasks: Light a burner and hold a wire in the flame until it begins to glow. Take it out of the flame so that the students see that it still glows a bit. Burn a stick of wood under a fume hood and blow out the flame so students can see that the embers still glow. Show the students a video clip of molten metal, molten glass, and lava in a volcano. Have students describe the patterns they see. Have students make claims

based on their observations. *Safety note:* Make sure students wear eye protection (safety glasses or goggles) for this task. Use caution when working with active flames or hot objects. They can seriously burn skin!

- *Some materials let light bounce off them, others let light shine through them fully or partially, and others don't let any light get through them, creating shadows behind them.*

Possible tasks: Obtain a flashlight, a mirror, a sheet of white paper, a piece of clear glass, a clear CD case, and a key. Darken the room and shine a light on a mirror. Have students describe what they see. Students should observe that the light from the flashlight bounces off the mirror. Hold the piece of paper perpendicular to a wall and shine the flashlight on it at a 45° angle. Have students describe what they see now. An illuminated area on the wall will be seen, even though the flashlight is not pointing there, so the light must be bouncing off the sheet of paper. Now shine the flashlight at the glass and the CD case. Have students describe their observations. Students will see that the light goes through the glass and the CD case. Now shine the flashlight at the key. Have students describe what they see. The flashlight cannot be seen from behind the key, so it must be blocking the light; a key-shaped shadow is made. Have students make claims about the behavior of light and support their claims with evidence from their observations. *Safety note:* Make sure to move all fragile or sharp items out of the students' path to prevent injury when working in a dark room.

PS4.C: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES AND INSTRUMENTATION

- *People can detect light with their eyes, sound with their ears, and vibrations with their fingertips.*

Possible tasks: Blindfold students using a good sleep mask that blocks the light, and then turn a flashlight on and off while its beam is aimed at the wall. Ask the students if they can tell when the flashlight is on and when it is off. Have student explain why they can't see anything. Have students cover their ears tightly and turn around so that they're facing the back of the class. Do a few things that make sounds, such as tapping on a table, hitting a tuning fork, and whistling. After the students remove their hands from their ears, have them write down which sounds they heard you make. For feeling vibrations see the former activity on a vibrating string.

- *Many different devices are used to communicate over a distance.*

Possible tasks: Have students discuss in groups and build evidence statements showing that devices such as telephones, cell phones, and walkie-talkies communicate over a distance, without delving into how the devices work. Have students build a string telephone by attaching a 10 ft. string to two paper cups. First, cut a small hole in the bottom of one cup and thread the string through it. Then, secure the string by making a small knot. Next, make a small hole in the other paper cup and thread the string through it. Secure it by tying a knot. Now have students stretch the string. Have one student quietly talk into one of the cups and have the other listen by holding the other cup to his or her ear. Have students make models of how

they can hear each other talking using this method. Have them explore with different types of strings and cups. Have them also see how long a string can be before they can no longer hear each other. *Safety note:* Make sure students wear eye protection (safety glasses or goggles) for this task.

By the End of Grade 5

PS4.A: WAVE PROPERTIES

- *Waves can have different amplitudes or wavelengths and can constructively or destructively interfere with one another.*

Possible tasks: To help students understand that waves have these properties, use a stretched Slinky on the floor. Have one student hold one end fixed and another student move the other end of the Slinky back and forth sideways at a constant frequency. Waves will travel along the toy. Have students describe the pattern they see. The wavelength between consecutive peaks will be clearly visible. Next have the student moving the free end of the Slinky continue to do so at the same frequency but with smaller or larger movements. Ask students to describe the changes they see. The change in the amplitude of the waves will be apparent. Then, have the student shaking the Slinky move the free end back and forth at a higher or lower frequency. What pattern do the students observe now? The faster the free end moves back and forth (i.e., the higher the frequency), the smaller the wavelength will be, meaning that the consecutive peaks will be closer to each other, and vice versa, the slower the free end moves back and forth (i.e., the lower the frequency), the larger the wavelength will be. Have students make claims about the types of waves they observe and have them support their claims with evidence.

Next, have both students move their ends of the Slinky, not back and forth, but only once, creating a single peak that travels along the Slinky (actually two peaks, one from each end, traveling in the opposite direction). The students should create the pulse at the same time, moving their hands in the same direction so that both peaks are on the same side of the Slinky. Ask students to describe what they observe now. When the two peaks meet each other, they pass through each other, but when they are one on top of the other, they combine “constructively” so that the peak generated is the sum of both peaks. This is called constructive interference and is an example of wave superposition. Have the students repeat this exercise, but this time have them move their hands in opposite directions so that the peaks are on different sides of the Slinky. What pattern do students observe this time? When the peaks pass through each other, they combine “destructively” so that the new peak generated is smaller than each individual peak. There will be moments when there is no peak. This is called destructive interference and is another example of wave superposition. *Safety note:* Make sure students wear eye protection (safety glasses or goggles) for this task. Make sure there is a cleared path for Slinky movement on the floor or table top to prevent accidental damage.

PS4.B: ELECTROMAGNETIC (EM) RADIATION

- *Light from an object needs to enter the eye to be seen.*

Possible tasks: Glue a small object in a shoe box so that it is at the opposite end from the finger/eye hole that most shoe boxes have (if the shoe box doesn’t have a hole, cut one into the box using a utility knife, being sure to keep the knife away

from students). Hold the cover tightly on the box so that no light can enter it. Now peer at the object through the hole (see a description of this exercise in the By the End of Grade 2 section for PS4.B, p. 88). Have students describe what they see. Students should not be able to see the object because no light is reaching it, so no light can be scattered by it to their eyes. Now lift the cover of the box just a bit so that a crack of light can enter at the side near the object (or cut a flap in the shoe box near the object). Once again, peer through the hole. This time students should be able to see the object because light is reaching it and being scattered by it to their eyes. Have students construct a model that explains why they can see the object when the flap is open but not when the flap is closed. This model can be extended to explain why we can see through glass and why light reflects off a shiny surface such as that of a mirror. *Safety note:* Make sure students wear eye protection (safety glasses or goggles) for this task. Use caution when using a utility knife. Sharps can puncture or cut skin!

- *The color of an object depends on the color of the light illuminating it and the properties of the object.*

Possible tasks: Take a flashlight, a red apple, a green leaf, and two pieces of clear wrapping paper, one blue and one red. Go into a completely dark room. Place the apple and the leaf side by side. Illuminate them with the flashlight, holding the blue transparent paper between the flashlight and the objects so that both objects are illuminated with blue light. What do you see? What colors do the objects appear to be? Now replace the blue transparent paper with the red paper and repeat. What colors do the objects appear to be now? Have

students make claims and support their claims with evidence. *Safety note:* Make sure students wear eye protection (safety glasses or goggles) for this task. Make sure there is a cleared path where students are moving in the dark to prevent injury.

- *Lenses bend light and can be used to magnify images of objects.*

Possible tasks: In a dark room, using a laser pointer, direct a beam of light at a table at an angle. Now place a lens between the laser pointer and the table so that the beam passes through it. Change the angle of the lens so that the laser reaches it at different inclinations. Have students describe their observations. The spot on the table illuminated by the beam should move around as you tilt the lens, showing that the lens is bending and redirecting the beam. Also, if the lens is thick enough, you should be able to see the beam going through the lens itself and changing directions as it enters and leaves the lens. *Safety note:* Caution students to never look directly at the laser light beam. Never intentionally direct a laser beam toward your eyes or the eyes of others. Direct eye contact can cause serious eye tissue damage! Do not point a laser pointer at a shiny or mirror-like surfaces such as polished metal or glass. The reflected beam can hit you or someone else in the eye. *Some states and school districts do not allow the use of a laser pointer for classroom activities. Check state regulations and school board policies before using a laser pointer.*

PS4.C: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES AND INSTRUMENTATION

- *Information can be digitized and transmitted.*

Possible tasks: Show your students Morse code. Have them translate the sentence “Be my friend” into Morse, and then, using a flashlight, flash this message to other students. Have students invent other simple three-word sentences, encode them into Morse, and send them to others with a flashlight for decoding. This is an example of sending information digitally.

- *Technologies can be used to detect digitized signals.*

Possible tasks: Have students use their cell phones to make videos of their friends sending them Morse-based messages with a flashlight (as described in the former activity). Or, have students call each other on their cell phones, and then have them tap out a Morse-based message on their cell phones. Discuss how the video and wireless technologies in their cell phones have detected digitized signals.

By the End of Grade 8

PS4.A: WAVE PROPERTIES

- *A wave is defined by its amplitude, wavelength, frequency, and medium.*

Possible tasks: Repeat the first set of activities described above about wave properties for the end of grade 5 (p. 90) but use two or three different Slinkys, for example, a metal and a plastic one or two metal ones of different diameters. Have students make claims about the behavior of the Slinky and then support their claims. Different Slinkys can serve as different mediums, leading to different wave velocities. Have students measure the wavelength and the frequency of the waves generated at different frequencies, and from them calculate

the wave velocity for each Slinky. They should be different but almost independent of the wave frequency. *Safety note:* Make sure students wear eye protection (safety glasses or goggles) for this task. Make sure there is a cleared path for Slinky movement on the floor or table top to prevent accidental damage.

- *Waves can be used to probe the Earth’s structure.*

Possible tasks: Bring photos of an embryo made with an ultrasound imager and explain how the ultrasound imager uses high-frequency sound waves that are transmitted through the body and reflected at the surfaces of the different organs. The reflected waves are detected and then decoded to generate a picture of organs or an embryo. Likewise, seismic waves (sound waves traveling through the Earth) can be reflected from different parts and layers in the Earth and then detected by us at the surface. Decoding these waves allows us to learn about the structure of the Earth.

If you have a motion detector, you can use it to determine how far above the ground various objects are. A motion detector uses sonar waves and software to detect the distance of an object. You can use this feature to map the profile of a landscape you create in your classroom. Place boxes and other objects on the floor of the classroom and use the motion detector to trace the profile. Have students draw representations of the observations from the data of the motion detector. *Safety note:* Use caution when working around boxes on the floor. They are potential trip or fall hazards.

PS4.B: ELECTROMAGNETIC (EM) RADIATION

- *When light shines on an object, it is reflected, absorbed, or transmitted through the object,*

depending on the object's material and the frequency (color) of the light.

Possible tasks: Repeat the activities about wave properties and color for the end of grade 5 (pp. 90–92). Explain how the colored plastic wrap “colors” the white light from the flashlight by selectively allowing certain colors (wavelengths) to be transmitted and reflected while others are absorbed. Now explain how the apple and leaf selectively reflect certain colors of light and absorb others, and describe how this makes them appear different colors. Now take an object with a different color and have students explain why it has that color. Look through a prism at the edge of an object that is bright (preferably white) on one side and dark (preferably black) on the other side, such as a sheet of paper that is white on one half and black on the other half. Ask students to describe what they see. The visible spectrum should appear. Explain how all the different colors of light, although they reach the prism in the same direction from the edge of the border, leave the prism in different directions because they are diffracted differently by the prism, which allows us to distinguish among them. *Safety note:* Make sure students wear eye protection (safety glasses or goggles) for this task.

PS4.C: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES AND INSTRUMENTATION

- *Technologies allow us to detect and interpret waves and signals in waves that cannot be detected directly.*

We are immersed in a sea of EM waves but are totally unaware of them. A cell phone can allow us to detect and interpret some of them, as can other

appliances that have or act as antennas, such as ultraviolet beads or an ultraviolet intensity meter.

By the End of Grade 12

As mentioned earlier, learning tasks that can be used to support these understandings are not described here because all the ideas that are appropriate for high school require the use of special equipment. The Acoustics and Vibration Animations website (www.acs.psu.edu/drussell/demos.html) from the University of Pennsylvania acoustics program contains a number of appropriate animations illustrating acoustics, vibration, waves, and oscillation phenomena. The PhET simulations (phet.colorado.edu/en/simulations/category/physics/light-and-radiation) from the University of Colorado also have a number of interactives to illustrate light phenomena. A number of commercial companies also sell light probes that will allow students to explore various wave properties.

PS4.A: WAVE PROPERTIES

- *Waves of different frequencies can be combined to encode and transmit information.*
- *During resonance, waves in phase add up, growing in amplitude. Most objects have specific frequencies at which they resonate. This is the basis for the design of all musical instruments.*

PS4.B: ELECTROMAGNETIC (EM) RADIATION

- *EM radiation can be described as either waves of EM fields or as particles called photons.*
- *We can only identify an object with waves that have a wavelength that is similar to that of the object's size because waves are not much*

disturbed by objects that are small compared with their wavelengths.

- *All EM waves travel through a vacuum at the speed of light. The speed of an EM wave in any medium depends on its wavelength and the properties of the medium.*
- *When EM radiation with a wavelength equal to or longer than that of visible light is absorbed by matter, its energy is generally converted into thermal energy within the matter. EM radiation with shorter wavelengths can ionize atoms and cause damage to living cells. Photovoltaic materials emit electrons when they absorb EM radiation of a high enough frequency.*
- *The atoms of each element and the nuclei of each isotope emit and absorb characteristic wavelengths of EM radiation.*

PS4.C: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES AND INSTRUMENTATION

- *Many modern technologies are based on an understanding of waves and their interactions with matter.*
- *Knowledge of quantum physics has enabled the development of semiconductors, computer chips, and lasers, all of which are now essential components of modern imaging, communication, and information technologies.*

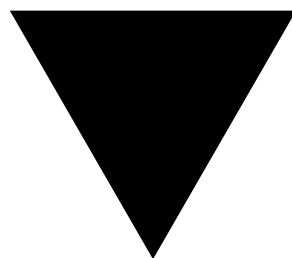
Conclusion

It is important for all students to construct a deep understanding of waves because waves are central to almost all 21st-century technologies and many older technologies. Wave phenomena allow scientists to examine the very small world of atoms or explore galaxies that are very far away. Waves also allow us to communicate large amounts of

information quickly and reliably over long distances. Waves are ubiquitous and play a role in many phenomena. Many of the central issues facing society today cannot be fully appreciated without an understanding of waves. For example, a cell phone company wants to place cell phone antennas at the end of the street near your home. Should you be concerned? Do these antennas pose a health hazard? One cannot understand many aspects of this issue without having a deep understanding of waves. Without this understanding, it is difficult to answer important questions such as these: How does the radiation from the antennae travel to my home? How does this radiation get through the walls in my home? How strong is this radiation when it reaches my family and me? What happens to my body when this radiation reaches it? A person cannot be scientifically literate in this century without a basic understanding of waves. Waves are a big idea of science.

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INDEX

Page numbers in **boldface** type refer to tables or figures.

A

A Framework for K–12 Science Education, vii, 1–8, 279, 281
atomic theory in, 15
biological evolution in, 165, 169, 173, 176, 178
crosscutting concepts in, vii, 1–2, 3, 4–5, 7
disciplinary core ideas in, vii, 1–8, 11, 15, 279
(See also *specific disciplinary core ideas*)
components of, 3, 3, 283–284
development of understanding over time, 1, 2, 6–7, 15
identification of, 2, 4
importance of, 1–8
Earth and human activity in, 225, 226, 228, 230, 235
Earth's place in the universe in, 185, 186–187, 188, 190
Earth's systems in, 205, 206, 207, 210, 222
ecosystems in, 123, 124, 126, 127, 128, 129–130, 131, 135
energy in, 15, 55, 57–58, 71, 72
energy conservation, 63
engineering design in, 252, 263
forces and interactions in, 11
heredity in, 145, 146, 149, 153, 154–155, 159
life science structures and processes in, 108, 118
links among engineering, technology, science, and society in, 263, 264–265, 266, 268, 269, 270, 273, 276
matter and interactions in, 15, 16, 21, 24, 25, 39
science and engineering practices in, vii, 1–2, 3, 4–5, 6, 7, 14
three-dimensional learning in, vii, 1–2, 4–6, 279–281
vision for learning science in, 1, 14
waves in, 75–76
AAAS. See American Association for the Advancement of Science
Acceleration, 35, 37, 38, 46, 48–49, 51, 52
Acid rain, 228, 232
Action and reaction forces, 37
Adaptation (LS4.C), **96**, 168, 169, 171, 172, 178, 179, 284
Aggregates, 17, 18

Ahlgren, A., 264
Air pollution, 235, 265, 266, 267, 265, 266, 267, 273
Alciatore, D. G., 34
Alleles, 148–149, 151–152, 153, 154, 156, 157, 158, 159, 161, **161**, 162
Alternative explanations/ideas, 6
about day/night cycle, 198
about Earth's formation, 193
about energy, 55, 50, 61–62
about gravity, 191
about human impacts on Earth systems, 228
about radioactive decay, 196
Amazon Mission, 257
American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), 237
Benchmarks for Science Literacy, 15, 58, 75, 108, 154, 155, 173, 245, 248, 264
Project 2061, 248
Amino acids, **119**, 146, 147, 154
Amplitude of waves, 80, **81**, 90
amplitude decay, 81–82
electromagnetic waves, 84
Anaerobic respiration, 104–105, 115
Analog encoding of information, 86–87
Anderson, Charles, 97
Antennas, 75, 83, 86, 93, 94
Antibiotic-resistant bacteria, 168
Antibodies, 100
Applied and pure science, 272
ArcGIS Online, 221
Argumentation, 6, 197, 198, 221, 233, 236
Aristotle, 145, 175
Asexual reproduction, 111, 112
Assessment, 280
Asteroids, 39, 188, 191, 192, 196
Atomic theory, 13–14, 15, 22, 25, 145
Atomic–molecular model, 16, 18, 20, 21–24, 28, 30
of ecosystems, 126
subatomic model, 16, 21, 24, 25–26, 30
Attractive and repulsive forces, 13, 15, 26–27, 40, 41, 42, 49, 191, 271

B

Bacteria, 97, 104, 106, 111, 132, 166
antibiotic-resistant, 168
Batteries, 11, 61, 63, 66, 69, 71, 270

Benchmarks for Science Literacy, 15, 58, 75, 108, 154, 155, 173, 245, 248, 264
"Best of Bugs" unit, 268, 269–270, 277
Big bang theory, 8, 185, 186–187, 192, 194–195, **195**, 196, 200
Biodiversity, 140, 142, 165–166, 173, 179, 180, 232, 266, 268
Biodiversity and Humans (LS4.D), **96**, 168, 170, 171, 173, 178, 179, 284
Biogeology (ESS2.E), **182**, 214–215, 284
Biological Evolution: Unity and Diversity (LS4), 97, 165–180, 268
approaches to teaching about, 176–180
building competence over time, 176
building from student ideas in early grades, 177–178
refining intuitions in middle and high school, 178–180
teaching ideas, 176–177
comparison to prior standards, 173
components of, **96**, 167–182, 284
Adaptation (LS4.C), 168, 169, 171, 172, 178, 179, 284
Biodiversity and Humans (LS4.D), 168, 170, 171, 173, 178, 179, 284
core explanatory mechanisms, 168–172
Evidence of Common Ancestry and Diversity (LS4.A), 167, **171**, 171–172, 179, 284
Natural Selection (LS4.B), 168, 169, **169**, 179, 171, 179, 284
patterns of unity and diversity, 167–168, **168**
connections to other life science disciplinary core ideas, 172–173
development of understanding over time, 174–175
importance of, 165–166
why evolution is a disciplinary core idea in life sciences, 166
Biology Guided Inquiry Learning Environment Project (BGulLE), 179
Biomedical engineering, 269, 272
Blizzards, 227, 231
Blood cells, 22–23
Blood sugar, in diabetes, 100–101, **101**
Blood types, 160

INDEX

Boiling of water, 2, 13, 24, 48
 Boiling point, 13, 52, **52**
 Bonding and energy, 15, 26–27
 Brain, 103, 106, 107, 108, 117, 111, 114, 115
 of cloned sheep, 150
 hearing and, 82, 85
 vision and, 82, 86
BRCA genes and cancer, 145, 148, 153
 Breast cancer, 145, 148, 153
 Breathing, 97, 104, 111, 118, 121, 126, 135, 215
 Brickhouse, Nancy, 183
 Bromine, 18
 Bubbles, 23–24
 Butterfly life stages, 102

C

Calcium, 127
 Calcium carbonate, 28
 Calcium chloride, 28
 Cancer-causing genes, 102, **102**, 114, 121, 145, 148, 153, 159
 Cannibalism, 130
 Car engines, 67, 68
 Carbon, 14, 23, 68, 104, 115, 126, 127–128, **131**
 Carbon cycle, 97, **127**, 127–128, 131, 133, 215, 229
 middle and high school students'
 understanding of, 133–134, **134**
 Carbon dioxide, 20, 21, **21**, 24
 atmospheric, 126, **127**, 127–128, 220
 global climate change and, 226, 229, 232, 235
 greenhouse effect and, 212–213
 ocean acidification due to, 226
 on Venus, 212
 boiling point of, 13
 in photosynthesis, 105, **105**, 109, 113, 119, **120**, 126, 130, 135, 214
 produced by cellular respiration, 104, 135
 produced by light bulbs, 72
 released in combustion reactions, 14, 68
 Carbon footprint calculator, 237
 Careers in science, 3, 247, 268
 Carson, Rachel, 265, 266
 CD players, 81, 86, 87
 Cell phones, 11, 43, 75, 83, 85, 86, 89, 92, 93, 94, 273
 Cells, 99–103
 division of, 102–103, 272
 stem, 99, 103, 107, 114, 145, 150, 157
 structure and function of, 100–101
 Cellular respiration, 69, 70, 104, **104**, 105, 107, 113, 115, 118, 120, 126, 128, 131, 133, 135
 Center of gravity (center of mass), 36, 42
 Chemical bonds, 26–27, 67
 Chemical energy, 39, 57, 66, **104**, 105, 109, 127, 135
 Chemical Reactions (PS1.B), **10**, 15, 283

development of understanding over time, 15
 grades K–2, 16, 17
 grades 3–5, 17, 20–21, **21**
 grades 6–8, 23–24
 grades 9–12, 25, 26–27
 Chemotaxis, 106
 Chlorine, 24
 Chromosomes, 97, 147–148, 149–150, **150**, 151, 152, 155, 158, 160, 161, **161**
 Cladogram of primates, **171**, 172
 Climate change. *See* Global climate change;
 Weather and climate
Climate Change from Pole to Pole, 236
 Cloning, 114, 150, **151**, 154
 Coal, 53, 67, 68, 128, 208, 231
 Cobalt chloride test paper, 24
 Colliding objects, 34–35, 38, 45, 46, 51, 56, 57, 64, 65, 66, **70**, 71
 Colors of light, 23, 82, 91, 93
 Combustion reactions, 11, 14, 226, 233
 Comets, 191, 192, 196
 Community ecology, 125, 126, 128–130
 approaches to teaching about, 140–142
 development of understanding over time,
 130, 135–140
 elementary school, 136–137
 middle and high school, 137–140
 Compact fluorescent (CFL) bulbs, 72
 Competition for food, 130
 Components of disciplinary core ideas, 3, 3, 283–284
 for Earth and space sciences, **182**, 182–183, 284
 for engineering, technology, and applications
 of science, **242**, 242–243, 284
 for life sciences, **96**, 283–284
 for physical sciences, **10**, 11–12, 283
 Concord Consortium, 26, 28
 Boiling Point simulation, 52, **52**
 Electric Charge simulation, 50, **50**
 Interactions curriculum, 29, **30**, 50, 52–53
 Leaf Photosynthesis simulation, 119–120, **120**
 Molecular View of a Gas simulation, 28, **28**
 Molecular View of a Liquid simulation, 28, **28**
 Next-Generation Molecular Workbench, 28, 29, **30**, 52, **52**
 Temperature-Pressure Relationship
 simulation, 29
 Condensation, 213, 217, 280
 Conservation of energy, 11, 55–57, 217, 219, 264, 283
 Conservation of Energy and Energy Transfer (PS3.B), **10**, 58, 61–64, 283
 common prior conceptions of, 61–62
 development of understanding over time,
 61–63
 by end of grade 5, 64
 by end of grade 8, 64
 by end of grade 12, 64
 as a scientific idea, 62–63
 wave dimensionality and intensity resulting
 from, 79
 Conservation of mass, 20, 21, **21**, 22
 Conservation of matter, 128, 133
 Contact forces, 40, 41–42, 52, 65, 66
 Copernicus, 276
 Copper sulfate, 23
 Coulomb's law, 51–52
 Crismond, David, 243
 Crosscutting concepts, vii, 1–2, 3, 4–5, 7, 14, 279–281
 biological evolution, 176
 change, 206
 energy, 15, 19, 57, 58, 280
 in ecosystems, 123, 126, 143
 related to Earth and space sciences, 182, 186
 related to Earth's systems, 206, 217
 weather and climate, 211
 related to engineering design, 255, 259, 260
 related to links among engineering,
 technology, science, and society, 267, 269, 270, 271–272
 scale, proportion, and quantity, 22
 structure and function, 100, 107, 147, 154, 271
 systems, 44, 100
 Cycles of Matter and Energy Transfer in
 Ecosystems (LS2.B), **96**, 126, 284

D

Darwin, Charles, 123–124, 125, 128, 140, 166–167, **167**, 168, **169**, 169–170
 On the Origin of Species, 123, 166
 studies of Galápagos finches, 168, 170, 179
 Day–night cycle, 190, 198
 DDT (pesticide), 102
 Deep time, 190, 193, 227, 228
 Defining and Delimiting an Engineering Problem (ETS1.A), **242**, 246, 248–249, 284
 teaching strategies for, 258
 Definitions of Energy (PS3.A), **10**, 58, 283
 common prior conceptions of, 59
 development of understanding over time,
 59–61
 by end of grade 5, 60
 by end of grade 8, 60
 by end of grade 12, 61
 energy as a scientific idea, 59–60
 "Designing Environmental Solutions" module,
 267, 273, 277
 "Designing Mixtures" unit, 267, 273, 276
 Developing Possible Solutions (ETS1.B), **242**,
 246, 248, 249–251, 284
 teaching strategies for, 258

- Development of understanding over time, 1, 2, 6–7, 15, 280–281. *See also specific disciplinary core ideas*
 - Diabetes, 7, 100–101, **101**, 160
 - Digestion, 58, 104, **104**, 113, 118, 126
 - Digital encoding of information, 86–87
 - Digital geographic mapping tools, 221
 - Dimensionality of waves, 78–79
 - electromagnetic waves, 83
 - Disciplinary core ideas (DCIs), vii, 1–8, 11, 15, 279–282. *See also specific disciplinary core ideas*
 - common characteristics of, 3
 - components of, **3**, 3, 283–284
 - determining when to teach, 4
 - development of understanding over time, 1, 2, 6–7, 15, 280–281
 - difference from science concepts, 3–4
 - in Earth and space sciences, **182**, 182–237, 284
 - Earth and Human Activity (ESS3), 225–237
 - Earth's Place in the Universe (ESS1), 185–201
 - Earth's Systems (ESS2), 205–222
 - in engineering, technology, and applications of science, **242**, 242–276, 284
 - Engineering Design (ETS1), 245–260
 - Links Among Engineering, Technology, Science, and Society (ETS2), 263–276
 - identification of, 2, 4
 - importance of, 1–8
 - in life sciences, **96**, 96–180, 283–284
 - Biological Evolution: Unity and Diversity (LS4), 165–180
 - Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics (LS2), 123–143
 - Heredity: Inheritance and Variation of Traits (LS3), 145–162
 - From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes (LS1), 99–121
 - list of, **3**
 - in physical sciences, **10**, 10–94, 283
 - Energy (PS3), 55–73
 - Matter and Its Interactions (PS1), 13–31
 - Motion and Stability: Forces and Interactions (PS2), 33–53
 - Waves and Their Applications in Technologies for Information Transfer (PS4), 75–94
 - Dissolving, 24, 28, 210, 211, 219–220
 - Distance
 - between atoms, 27, 29, **30**
 - between celestial objects, 52, 187, 189, 190, 192, 194, 198, 199
 - forces that act at a, 40–42, 271
 - electric forces, 40, 41, 49
 - gravitational forces, 42, 60
 - magnetic forces, 42, 47, 49, 270
 - through mediation of fields, 42–43, 50, 67, 271
 - information transfer over, 75, 89, 94
 - motion detector data on, 92
 - wave intensity and, 79, 82
 - between waves, 79–80, 83–84
 - electromagnetic waves, 84
 - DNA, 4, 97, 100, 115, 153, 154, 155, 157, **157**, 158, 160, 161, **161**, 166, 167, 172, 179
 - Dobzhansky, Theodosius, 166
 - Doherty, Jennifer H., 97
 - Dolly, the cloned sheep, 150, **151**
 - Down syndrome karyotype, 149, **150**
 - Droughts, 124, 137, 139, 153, 168, 170, 179, 205, 212, 226, 227, 228, 230
 - Dry ice, 20–21, **21**
 - Duncan, Ravit Golan, 96, 97
 - DVD players, 81
 - Dwarfism, 149
- E**
- Earth and Human Activity (ESS3), **3**, 4, 182, 183, 194, 225–237
 - approaches to teaching about, 234–237
 - in Influence of Engineering, Technology, and Science on Society and the Natural World, 265, 266–268
 - comparison to prior standards, 226
 - components of, **182**, 183, 226–230, 284
 - Global Climate Change (ESS3.D), 226, 229–230
 - Human Impacts on Earth Systems (ESS3.C), 226, 228–229
 - Natural Hazards (ESS3.B), 226, 227–228
 - Natural Resources (ESS3.A), 226, 227
 - development of understanding over time, 230–234
 - global climate change example, 232–234
 - high school, 231–232
 - lower elementary grades, 230–231
 - middle school, 231
 - upper elementary grades, 231
 - importance of, 225–226
 - Earth and space sciences disciplinary core ideas, **3**, 182–237
 - components of, **182**, 182–183, 284
 - Earth and Human Activity (ESS3), 225–237
 - Earth's Place in the Universe (ESS1), 185–201
 - Earth's Systems (ESS2), 205–222
 - Earth and the Solar System (ESS1.B), **182**, 186, 187–188, 284
 - Earth Materials and Systems (ESS2.A), **182**, 206–207, 284
 - Earthquakes, 10, 75, 182, 188, 189, 190, 200, 207, 208, 209, 216, 217, 219, 226, 227, 228, 231
 - Earth's Place in the Universe (ESS1), **3**, 182, 185–201
 - approaches to teaching about, 197–201, **199**
 - components of, 182, **182**, 185, 186–188, 284
 - The Earth and the Solar System (ESS1.B), 186, 187–188
 - The History of Planet Earth (ESS1.C), 186, 188
 - The Universe and Its Stars (ESS1.A), 182, 185, 186–187
 - development of understanding over time, 188–196
 - grades K–2, 188–189
 - grades 3–5, 189–190
 - high school, 193–196
 - middle school, 190–193
 - importance of, 185–186
 - Earth's Systems (ESS2), 2, **3**, 182–183, 188, 205–222
 - approaches to teaching about, 220–222
 - comparison to prior standards, 206
 - components of, **182**, 183, 206–215, 284
 - Biogeology (ESS2.E), 214–215
 - Earth Materials and Systems (ESS2.A), 206–207
 - Plate Tectonics and Large-Scale System Interactions (ESS2.B), 207–210, **209**
 - The Roles of Water in Earth's Surface Processes (ESS2.C), 210–211
 - Weather and Climate (ESS2.D), 211–214, **213**
 - development of understanding over time, 215–220
 - grades K–2, 215–216
 - grades 3–5, 216–217
 - high school, 218–220
 - middle school, 217–218
 - importance of, 205–206
 - sample performance expectation for, 279–280
 - Echoes, 82
 - EcoMUVE curriculum, 142
 - Ecosystem Dynamics, Function, and Resilience (LS2.C), **96**, 126, 129, 284
 - Ecosystem science, 126–128
 - approaches to teaching about, 140–142
 - in elementary school, 140–141
 - in high school, 142
 - in middle school, 141–142
 - development of understanding over time, 130–135
 - elementary school, **131**, 131–133

INDEX

- middle and high school, 133–135, **134**
- energy flows, **127**, 127–128
- matter cycles, 126–127, **127**
- Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics (LS2), 97, 105, 123–143
 - community ecology, 125, 126, 128–130
 - development of understanding over time, 130, 135–140
 - components of, **96**, 125–126, 283–284
 - Cycles of Matter and Energy Transfer in Ecosystems (LS2.B), 126
 - Ecosystem Dynamics, Function, and Resilience (LS2.C), 126
 - Interdependent Relationships in Ecosystems (LS2.A), 126
 - Social Interactions and Group Behavior (LS2.D), 126
 - ecosystem science, 126–128, **127**
 - development of understanding over time, 130–135
 - ecosystems and ecosystem models, 125–126
 - importance of, 124–125
- Egg drop challenge, 246, 250–251
- Eggs, 97, 103
 - bird, 102
 - chromosomes of, 149, 152
 - fertilization of, 99, 103, 117, 149, 152, 161
- Einstein, Albert, 39, 55
- Elastic potential energy, 39–40, **40**, 66
- Electric circuits, 60, 64, 67, 83, 256, 270
- Electric forces, 40, 41–42
- Electric turbines, 67
- Electrical energy, 39, 266, 273
 - generation of, 67
- Electrical interactions, 2, 11, 18, 49, 52, **52**
- Electrolysis, 24
- Electromagnetic (EM) fields, 41, 65, 83–84, 93
- Electromagnetic forces, 33, 40–42, 66, 271
- Electromagnetic (EM) radiation, 12, 63, 65, 75, 76, 83, 86, 88–94, 196
- Electromagnetic Radiation (PS4.B), **10**, 76, 83–85, 196, 283
 - development of understanding over time
 - by end of grade 2, 88–89
 - by end of grade 5, 90–91
 - by end of grade 8, 92–93
 - by end of grade 12, 93–94
 - properties of electromagnetic waves, 83–85
- Electromagnetic spectrum, 83, **84**, 93
- Electromagnetic (EM) waves, 63, 75, 76, 77, 79, 80, 83–85
 - amplitude of, 84
 - dimensionality of, 83
 - frequency of, 84
 - generation of, 86
 - interaction with matter, 85
 - resonance of, 84–85
 - speed of, 84
 - wavelength of, 83–84, 93–94
- Electrons, 21, 25–26, 40, 66, 67, 83, 86, 94, 196
- Electrostatic forces, 15, 25–26, 52, 192, 198
- Elementary Science Studies, 256
- Energy
 - bonding and, 15, 26–27
 - chemical, 39, 57, 66, **104**, 105, 109, 127, 135
 - conservation of, **10**, 11, 55–57, 58, 61–63, 79, 217, 219, 264, 283
 - as crosscutting concept, 15, 19, 57, 58, 280
 - difference between forces and, 39–40
 - difficulties in understanding concept of, 55
 - kinetic, 19, 56–57, 58, 60, 61, 62, 65, 66, 67, 71–72
 - “lost,” 68
 - nuclear, 27, 57, 66, 265
 - obtained from food, 104, 113, 127
 - potential, 15, 27, 39, 50, 58, 60, 61, 62, 65–67, 68, 70.71
 - thermal, 56, 58, 61, 63, 66, 67–68, 69, 94
 - “used,” 68
- Energy (PS3), 4, 10, 11, 55–73
 - approaches to teaching about, 70–72
 - by end of grade 5, 70–71, **71**
 - by end of grade 8, **71**, 71–72
 - by end of grade 12, 72
 - in Influence of Engineering, Technology, and Science on Society and the Natural World, 265–266
 - components of, **10**, 11, 58, 283 (See also *specific components*)
 - Conservation of Energy and Energy Transfer (PS3.B), 58, 61–64
 - Definitions of Energy (PS3.A), 58, 59–61
 - Energy in Chemical Processes and Everyday Life (PS3.D), 58, 67–70
 - Relationship Between Energy and Forces (PS3.C), 58, 64–67
 - development of understanding over time, 59–70
 - Conservation of Energy and Energy Transfer, 61–64
 - Definitions of Energy, 59–61
 - Energy in Chemical Processes and Everyday Life, 67–70
 - Relationship Between Energy and Forces, 64–67
 - in *Framework* and NGSS, 57–58
 - importance of, 55–56
 - use of energy concept in different disciplines, 56–57
- “Energy and Electromagnetism” module, 270–271, 277
- Energy conversion diagram, **71**, 72
- Energy for You*, 237
- Energy in Chemical Processes and Everyday Life (PS3.D), **10**, 58, 67–70, 283
- common prior conceptions of, 67
- development of understanding over time, 67–70
 - by end of grade 5, 69
 - by end of grade 8, 69
 - by end of grade 12, 69–70
- “Energy lens,” 70
- Energy resources, 55, 67–68, 69, 70, 229, 233, 237, 265
 - alternative, 228
 - biofuels, 11
 - climate change and, 236
 - to drive power plants, 53, 265–266, 280
 - fossil fuels, 53, 67, 68, 128, 183, 212–213, 227, 229, 233, 234, 265
 - identifying in students’ communities, 237
 - renewable and nonrenewable, 229, 231, 265
 - wind turbines, 67, 266, 273
- Engineering, technology, and applications of science disciplinary core ideas, **3**, 242–276
 - components of, **242**, 242–243, 284
 - Engineering Design (ETS1), 243, 245–260
 - importance of, 242–243
 - Links Among Engineering, Technology, Science, and Society (ETS2), 263–276
 - Engineering Design (ETS1), **3**, 242–243, 245–260, 258–259
 - approaches to teaching about, 256–259
 - applying scientific investigation, 259
 - engineering design challenges that work in the science classroom, 246, 250–251, 256–258
 - teaching strategies, 258–259
 - comparison with prior standards, 245, 247–248
 - components of, **242**, 242–243, 246, 248–251, 284
 - Defining and Delimiting an Engineering Problem (ETS1.A), 246, 248–249
 - Developing Possible Solutions (ETS1.B), 246, 248
 - Optimizing the Design Solution (ETS1.C), 246, 248, 251
 - definition of, 245
 - development of understanding over time, 252–256
 - elementary school, 252
 - high school, 254
 - middle school, 252–254, **253**
 - students’ challenges for, 255–256
 - importance of, 246–247, **247**, 259–260, 263
 - process of, 246, **246**, 248, **249**, 263
- “Engineering in Healthcare: A Hemodialysis Case Study” module, 272
- Engineering is Elementary curriculum, “Best of Bugs” unit, 268, 269–270, 277
- Engineering Projects in Community Service (EPICS) curriculum, 267–268, 274, 277

Environmental education, 265
 Ephemeris, 52
 Erosion, 11, 182, 190, 196, 200, 205, 206, 210, 216, 218, 219, 221, 227
 Ethanol, 18, 19, 23
 Evaporation, 16, 27, 30, 210, 213, 217, 218, 280
Everyday Engineering activities, 268, 271
 Evidence of Common Ancestry and Diversity (LS4.A), **96**, 167, 171–172, 179, 284
 cladogram of primates, **171**, 172
 Evolution. *See* Biological evolution
Excellence in Environmental Education: Guidelines for Learning, 265
 Extinction, 3, 96, 129, 139, 153, 167, 168, 170, 171, 172, 175, 179, 180, 193, 228, 231, 267
 due to habitat loss, 170
 Eyes
 laser damage to, 91
 vision and, 83, 86, 89, 90–91, 100

F

Fastener options design choices, **253**, 254
 Fertilization of egg by sperm, 99, 103, 117, 149, 152, 161
 Feynman, Richard, 13, 59–60
 Flarend, Alice, 199
 Floods, 97, 227, 232, 234
 Fluorescent lamps, 44, 86
 Food chains, 132, 133, 136, 137, 141, 142
 Food webs, 125, 126, 132, 133, 135, 137, 138, 139, 142
 Force fields, 40–42
 Force probes, 48
 Forces
 attractive and repulsive, 13, 15, 26–27, 40, 41, 42, 49, 191, 271
 contact, 40, 41–42, 52, 65, 66
 electric, 40, 41–42
 gravitational, 11, 40, 41, 42
 magnetic, 40, 41, 42
 nuclear, 40, 41
 relationship between energy and, 58, 64–67
 that act at a distance, 40
 through mediation of fields, 42–43, 50, 67, 271
 Forces and Motion (PS2.A), 33, 34–40, 283
 applicability of Newton's laws of motion, 38–39
 definition of forces, 34
 development of understanding over time
 by the end of grade 2, 45
 by the end of grade 5, 46–47
 by the end of grade 8, **48**, 48–49
 by the end of grade 12, 51
 difference between forces and energy, 39–40, **40**
 example of bat hitting a ball, **34**, **34**
 force during an impact is inversely

 proportionate to duration of impact, 38
 forces can make objects change their
 rotation, 35–36, **36**
 forces can start, stop, or change motion, 34–35
 forces in equal and opposite pairs, 36–38, **37**
 influence a force has on an object's change in motion is inversely related to the object's mass, 38
 only external forces acting on an object influence its change in motion, 36
 total momentum is conserved in isolated systems, 39
 Fortus, David, 11
 Fossil fuels, 67, 68, 128, 183, 227, 228, 234
 burning of, 212–213, 233
 to drive power plants, 53, 265
 reducing use of, 229
 Fossil record, 165, 167, **168**, 172, 178, 179, 188, 190, 193, 200, 208, 217
 Freeman, Morgan, 138
 Freezing of water, 7, 17–18, 27, 210–211, 219–220
 Frequency of waves, 80, 82, 90
 electromagnetic waves, 84, 94
 Friction, 40, 43, 45, 47, 65, 252, 266
 kinetic, 43
 static, 43
 From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes (LS1), 96–97, 99–121
 approaches to teaching about, 118–120
 models, 118–119
 simulations and multiple representations, **119**, 119–120, **120**
 centrality in biology, 107
 comparison to prior standards, 108
 components of, **96**, 99–100, 283
 Growth and Development of Organisms (LS1.B), 99, 101–103
 Information Processing (LS1.D), 100, 105–106
 Organization for Matter and Energy Flow in Organisms (LS1.C), 100, 103–105
 Structure and Function (LS1.A), 99, 100–101
 development of understanding over time, 108–115, **116**
 grades K–2, 110
 grades 3–5, 110–112
 grades 6–8, 112–114
 grades 9–12, 114–115
 importance of, 99
 students' commonly held ideas about, 115–118
Fuel for Thought, 236
 Fuels, 66, 67

biofuels, 11
 burning of, 67, 69–70, 233
 atmospheric effects of, 212–213
 to drive power plants, 53, 265, 266
 fossil, 53, 67, 68, 128, 183, 212–213, 227, 229, 234
 Full Option Science System (FOSS) curriculum, 268, 270
 “Energy and Electromagnetism” module, 270–271, 277
 Fungi, 111, 125, 130, 132, 136, 137, 140, 166

G

Galaxies, 75, 94, 186, 187, 192, 194–196, **195**, 200
 Milky Way, 192–193
 Galileo, 35, 274–276, **275**
Galileo's Daughter, 276
 Gases, 17, 19, 20, 22, 27, 29, 36, **37**, 67, 132.
 See also Structure and Properties of Matter (PS1.A)
 atmospheric, 134, 212
 greenhouse gases, 212, 214, 218, 220, 226, 227, 229
 model of particles in, 28, **28**
 solar system, 192
 Gene mutations, 97, 152, 153, 155, 156, 157, **157**, 158
 beneficial, 152, 153, 157, **157**, 160
 cancer-causing, 102, **102**, 153
 causes of, 153
 radiation-induced, 153
 in sickle cell anemia, 148, 152, 153
 Gene therapy, 146, 162
 Genes, 7. *See also* Heredity: Inheritance and Variation of Traits
 alleles for, 148–149, 151–152, 153, 154, 156, 157, 158, 159, 161, **161**, 162
 cancer-causing, 102, **102**, 114, 121, 145, 148, 153, 159
 challenges to students' understanding of, 158–159
 on chromosomes, 147–148, 161 (*See also* Chromosomes)
 development of understanding over time, 156–158, **157**
 differential expression of, 103
 on a DNA strand, 161, **161**
 interaction with environmental factors, 7, 97, 151, 152–153, 155
 natural selection and, 145–146, 170
 protein regulation by, 4, 7, 103, 146–150, 154–155, 156, **157**, 158–159
 shared between humans and other species, 167
 traits and, 7, 97, 146–154, 159, 160
 Inheritance of Traits (LS3.A), 146–151
 Variation of Traits (LS3.B), 151–154

INDEX

- transcription and translation of, 146
- Genetic testing, 145
- Genetically modified organisms, 145, 147
- Geographic scale, 228
- Glacial ice volume, 229, 234
- Global climate change, 4, 8, 97, 125, 182, 211–214, 220, 226–236, 263, 266
- definition of, 212, 220
 - ecosystem responses to
 - biodiversity effects, 180
 - feral pigs on Channel Islands, 170–171
 - pine beetles and penguins, 140
 - pine tree growth in Colorado, 139
 - projection of, 124
 - effect on food production, 107
 - human effects of, 228–229
 - mitigation of, 229, 230, 232, 233, 234, 237
 - observation and monitoring of, 142
 - orbital motions and, 194
 - as a press disturbance, 128, 140
- Global Climate Change (ESS3.D), **182**, 183, 220, 226, 229–230, 233, 236, 284
- approaches to teaching about, 235, 236
 - development of understanding over time, 230, 232–234
 - elementary school, 232–233
 - high school, 234
 - middle school, 233–234
- Global Systems Science, 266, 277
- “Energy Use” unit, 273–274
- Glucose, 113, 119, 127, 135
- breaking and reassembling of, 104
 - in digestive process, **104**
 - in diabetes, 100–101, **101**
 - energy stored in, 68
 - produced by photosynthesis, 105, **105**, 109, 113
- The Go-To Guide for Engineering Curricula*, 257
- Goals for science learning, vii, 4, 6, 281. *See also specific disciplinary core ideas*
- Google Earth, 221
- Gouvea, Julia Svoboda, 97
- GPS systems, 75, 86
- Grand Canyon, 189
- Grant, Peter, 170
- Grant, Rosemary, 170
- Gravitational forces, 11, 40, 41, 42
- Gravitational potential energy, 39–40, 60, 62, 65–66, 67, 71
- Great Energy Debate*, 236
- Greenhouse effect, 212, **213**, 214, 215, 230
- Greenhouse gases, 212, 214, 218, 220, 226, 227, 229
- Griesemer, Chris, 97
- Growth and Development of Organisms (LS1.B), **96**, 99, 101–103, **102**, 115, 283
- development of understanding over time
 - grades K–2, 110
 - grades 3–5, 111
 - grades 6–8, 112–113
 - grades 9–12, 114
- Guy, Candice, 97
- ### H
- Habitat loss, 170
- Harris, C., 141
- Hearing, 82, 85
- Heart, 100, 107, 109, 117, 150
- Heartbeat, 75, 100, 109, 117, 150, 158
- Heliotropism, 51
- Helium, 80, 186, 194, 195
- Hemodialysis, 272
- Hemoglobin, 100, 146, 147–148
- in sickle cell anemia, 7, 147, 148, 152
- Heredity: Inheritance and Variation of Traits (LS3), 2–3, 4, 97, 145–162
- approaches to teaching about, 160–161
 - components of, **96**, 146–154, 284
 - Inheritance of Traits (LS3.A), 146–151
 - Variation of Traits (LS3.B), 151–154
 - concepts in new and old standards, 154–155
 - development of understanding over time, 155–158, **157**
 - challenges to students’ understanding, 158–159
 - grades K–2, 155–156
 - grades 3–5, 156
 - high school grades, 158
 - middle school grades, 156–157
 - importance of, 146
- Hippocrates, 145
- The History of Planet Earth (ESS1.C), **182**, 186, 188, 284
- HIV infection, genetic resistance to, 145, 160
- Hug, Barbara, 96
- Human Impacts on Earth Systems (ESS3.C), **182**, 226, 228–229, 236, 267, 284
- Hurricanes, 52, 153, 183, 205, 227, 228, 230, 231, 234
- Hydrocarbons, 68
- Hydrogen, 14, 23, 24, 28, 68, 115, 186, 194, 195
- ### I
- I, Bio design challenge*, 257
- Ice caps, 212, 226
- Implementation of NGSS, 281–282
- Impulse-momentum formula, 250
- Incandescent light bulbs, 72
- INcreasing Student Participation, Interest, and Recruitment in Engineering and Science (INSPIRES) curriculum, 269
- “Engineering in Healthcare: A Hemodialysis Case Study” module, 272, 277
- Influence of Engineering, Technology, and Science on Society and the Natural World (ETS2.B), **242**, 264, 265–268, 284
- connecting with Interdependence of Science, Engineering, and Technology, 274–276
 - development of understanding over time, 273
 - elementary school, 273
 - high school, 273
 - middle school, 273
 - Earth and human activity example of, 265, 266–268
 - early elementary curricula for teaching about, 266–267
 - high school curricula for teaching about, 267–268
 - middle school curricula for teaching about, 267
 - energy example of, 265–266
 - high school curricula for teaching about, 266
 - middle school curricula for teaching about, 266
 - upper elementary school curricula for teaching about, 265–266
- Information Processing (LS1.D), **96**, 100, 105–106, 283
- comparison to prior standards, 108
 - development of understanding over time, **116**
 - grades K–2, 110
 - grades 3–5, 111–112
 - grades 6–8, 114
 - grades 9–12, 115
- Information Technologies and Instrumentation (PS4.C), **10**, 76, 85–87, 283
- development of understanding over time
 - by end of grade 2, 89–90
 - by end of grade 5, 91–92
 - by end of grade 8, 93
 - by end of grade 12, 94
 - generation of waves, 86
 - how microphones work, 85, **85**
 - how we see things, 86
 - transmission of information using waves, 86–87
- Infrared radiation, 63, 86
- Inheritance of Traits (LS3.A), 4, **96**, 146–151, **147**, **150**, **151**, 284, 146–151
- development of understanding over time, 155, 156, **157**
- Insects, 97, 102, 113, 123, 127, 129, 136, 137, 140, 141, 268, 269–270
- Insulin, 7, 101, **101**
- Interbreeding, 170
- Interdependence of Science, Engineering, and Technology (ETS2.A), **242**, 264–265, 284
- brief history of, 264–265
 - connecting with Influence of Engineering, Technology, and Science on Society and the Natural World, 274–276

development of understanding over time, 269–272
 high school, 272
 lower elementary school, 269–270
 middle school, 271–272
 upper elementary school, 270–271
 Interdependent Relationships in Ecosystems (LS2.A), **96**, 126, 129–130, 283
 Interdisciplinary Teaching about Earth for a Sustainable Future (InTeGrate), 237
 International Technology and Engineering Educators Association, 265
 Intestines, 102–103, **104**, 111
 Invasive species, 128, 129
Invent a Wheel, 252
 Investigating and Questioning Our World Through Science and Technology (IQWST) curriculum, **71**, 71–72, 266

J
 Jones, John Stephen, 145
 Jupiter, 276

K
 Kanter, David, 243
 Keeling curve, 127, **127**
 Kepler, Johannes, 275
 Kidney cells, 102–103
 Kidney failure, 272
 Kinetic energy, 19, 56–57, 58, 61, 62, 5, 66, 67, 71–72
 calculation of, 60
 Krajcik, Joseph, 10, 11
 Kuiper belt objects, 192

L
 Laboratory safety practices, 8
 Landslides, 227
 Lasers, 75, 84–85, 86, 91, 84–85
 Leaf Pack Network, 141
Leaf Photosynthesis simulation, 119–120, **120**
 Learning, 96, 106
 Learning goals, vii, 4, 6, 281. *See also specific disciplinary core ideas*
 Lehrer, R., 141
 Life cycles
 of organisms, 102, 111, 113, 137
 of stars, 185, 187, 194
 Life sciences disciplinary core ideas, **3**, 96–180
 Biological Evolution: Unity and Diversity (LS4), 165–180
 components of, **96**, 283–284
 development of understanding over time, 7
 Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics (LS2), 123–143
 Heredity: Inheritance and Variation of Traits (LS3), 145–162
 From Molecules to Organisms: Structures

and Processes (LS1), 99–121
 Light, 4, 11–12, 60, 132
 absorption of, 23, 89, 92–93
 from celestial objects, 187, 188, 191, 195–196, 200
 colors of, 23, 82, 91, 93
 in early universe, 195
 energy transfer via, 63, 64, 66
 from a flashlight, 61, 63, 88, 89, 91–92, 93
 given off by hot objects, 88–89
 infrared, 86
 interactions with matter, 22, 85, 89, 92–93
 laser amplification of, 84–85, 91
 for plant growth, 68, 69, 105, **105**, 109, 110, 132, 135
 redirection by mirrors, 85, 88, 89
 reflection of, 82, 85, 89, 91, 92–93
 to see an object, 86, 88, 90–91, 100
 shadows and, 89
 speed of, 38, 39, 51, 60, 84, 94
 from the Sun, 67, 68, 69, 105, 212
 Light bulbs, 61, 72, 83, 266, 270
 Light-emitting diode (LED) bulbs, 72
 Light probes, 93
 Light waves, 63, 75, 76, 81, 82–83, 86, 93
 Links Among Engineering, Technology, Science, and Society (ETS2), 242, 243, 263–276
 components of, **242**, 264–268, 284 (*See also specific components*)
 Influence of Engineering, Technology, and Science on Society and the Natural World (ETS2.B), 264, 265–268
 Interdependence of Science, Engineering, and Technology (ETS2.A), 264–265
 development of understanding over time, 268–276
 connecting the two components, **274**, 274–276, **275**
 curriculum materials for, 276–277
 teaching Influence of Engineering, Technology, and Science on Society and the Natural World, 273
 teaching Interdependence of Science, Engineering, and Technology, 269–272
 Linnaeus, Carolus, 166
Lion King, 136, 137
 Liquids, 6, 15–18, 21, 22, 24, 27, 132, 133, 210.
See also Structure and Properties of Matter (PS1.A); Water
 adding food coloring to, 15, 19
 model of particles in, **28**, **28**
 speed of sound in, 90
 Lithium, 195
 Liver cells, 102–103
 Logan, Jesse, 129

Longitudinal waves, 77, **77**
 Lunar phases, 51, 186, 187, 190
 Lungs, 102, 108, 111, 150, 174

M
 Magma, 208, 209, 211, 220
 Magnesium, 14, 24, 28
 Magnetic forces, 40, 41, 42. *See also* Electromagnetic forces
 MapMaker Interactive tool, 221
March of the Penguins, 136, 137–138
 Mass
 center of, 36
 conservation of, 20, 21, **21**, 22
 gravitational force and, 41, 42, 43, 49, 50, 191, 192
 influence a force has on an object's change in motion inversely related to, 38
 measurement of, 132
 before, during, and after phase changes, 20–22, 27
 for gases, 19, 20
 momentum and, 39
 impulse-momentum formula, 250
 of solar system objects, 198, 199
 low-mass elements in universe, 195
 of solids, liquids, and gases, 16, 17–22
 sugar and water mixture, 24
 speed and, 39, 51, 62
 kinetic energy related to, 56, 60, 71
 Matter and Its Interactions (PS1), 10–11, 13–31, 267
 approaches to teaching about, 27–29
 elementary school, 27–28, **28**
 high school, 29, **30**
 middle school, 28–29, **29**
 components of, 10, 11, 14–15, 283 (*See also specific components*)
 Chemical Reactions (PS1.B), 15, 17, 20–21, **21**, 23–24, 26–27
 Nuclear Processes (PS1.C), 15, 25, 27
 Structure and Properties of Matter (PS1.A), 14–15, 16–17, 18–20, **19**, 22–23, 25–26
 development of understanding over time, 6–7, 15–27, 30–31
 grades K–2: systematic study of materials, 16–17
 grades 3–5: study of materials and particle model, 17–21
 grades 6–8: atomic-molecular model, 21–25
 grades 9–12: subatomic model, 25–27
 importance of, 13–15
 Matter cycles and energy flows, 107, 126–127, **127**, 131, 206, 207
 development of understanding over time, 133–135, **134**, 141, 142, 217

INDEX

Mayer, Kristin, 10
 Mayr, Ernst, **169**, 170
 Meiosis, 97, 103, 117, 149, 151, 152, 155, 157, 158, 159, 161, 162
 Melanin, 4, 153
 Melanoma, 102
 Melting
 of ice, 6, 11, 17–18, 21, 27, 48, 210–211
 glaciers, 229
 polar ice, 213
 of magma, 208, 210, 220
 Memory formation, 106, 111, 114
 Mendel, Gregor, 148, 160, 166
 Menthol, 18
 Mercury, 196, 212
 Messenger RNA (mRNA), 147
 Microphones, 78, 85, **85**, 86, 87
 Microwaves, 46–47, 75, 83, 85, 86
 cosmic microwave background radiation, 187, 195, 200
 Milky Way galaxy, 192–193
 Mirrors, 85, 88, 89, 275
 Mitochondria, 100, 112, 166
 Mitosis, 102, 103, 109, 112, 117, 120, 159
 Model bridge challenge, 246, 251
 Momentum, 39, 41
 conservation in isolated systems, 39, 51
 impulse-momentum formula, 250
 of solar system, 39, 192
 Monteverdi, J. P., 214
 Moon, 187–192, 196, 197, 214, 274
 effects of Earth's gravity on, 40, 65
 Galileo's observations of, 275, **275**, 276
 phases of, 51, 186, 187, 190
 Motion and Stability: Forces and Interactions (PS2), 2, 10, 11, 14, 15, 33–53, 271
 components of, **10**, 11, 33, 283 (*See also specific components*)
 Forces and Motion (PS2.A), 33, 34–40, 46–47, 48–49, 51
 Stability and Instability in Physical Systems (PS2.C), 33, 44, **44**, 47–48, 50–51
 Types of Interactions (PS2.B), 33, 40–43, 47, 49–50, 51–53
 development of understanding over time, 45–53
 by the end of grade 2, 45–46
 by the end of grade 5, 46–48
 by the end of grade 8, 48–51
 by the end of grade 12, 51–53
 importance of, 33
 MRI scanners, 75
 Muscle cells, 100, 103, 104–105, 117
 Muscle contraction, 100, 107, 115, 154
 Muscle pain, 104–105
 Muscle proteins, 150
 Mutations. *See* Gene mutations

Mutualism, 130, 137, 139

N

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), 198, 235
 National Center for Case Study Teaching in Science, 236
 National Geographic Society, 221, 236
 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Global Climate Dashboard, 235
 National Research Council (NRC)
 A Framework for K–12 Science Education, vii, 1–8, 279, 281
 National Science Education Standards, 58, 75, 108, 124, 154, 226, 245
 National Science Education Standards (NSES), 58, 75, 108, 124, 154, 226, 245
 National Science Teachers Association (NSTA), 7, 236
 Natural gas, 68, 128, 208
 Natural hazards, 189, 225–226. *See also specific types*
 mitigating effects of, 226, 228, 231, 234
 Natural Hazards (ESS3.B), **182**, 226, 227–228, 236, 284
 Natural Resources (ESS3.A), **182**, 226, 227, 236, 284
 Natural selection, 96, 97, 139, 145–146, 169–170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 176, 178, 179, 215
 Darwin's model of, 169
 Mayr's model of, **169**, 170
 Natural Selection (LS4.B), **96**, 168, 169, 170, 171, 179, 284
 Nerve cells, 99, 100, 103, 106, 114
 Nervous system, 83, 99, 105–106, 108, 115
 NetLogo simulations, 179
 Neurons, 99, **116**
 Neutrinos, 41, 56
 Neutrons, 21
 Newton, Sir Isaac, 36
Newton's Cannon simulation, 199, **199**
 Newton's law of universal gravitation, 51–52
 Newton's laws of motion, 35, 38–39, 51, 38–39
 second law, 38, 51, 67, 250
 third law, 36–37, 48
Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), vii, 2, 4, 279–282
 atomic-molecular theory in, 15, 29
 biological evolution in, 165, 176
 ecosystems in, 124, 131, 135
 energy in, 57–58, 59, 62, 63, 70, 72
 energy conservation, 63
 engineering design in, 245, **246**, 247–248, 251, 252, 255, 259, 260
 practice of using mathematics and computational thinking, 253, 254
 heredity in, 145, 146, 149, 154, 155, **157**

implementation of, 281–282
 life science structures and processes in, 107, 108
 performance expectations in, vii, 149, 279–281
 assessment and, 280
 Nitrogen, 126, 139, 146
 Noise-canceling headphones, 81
 Nordine, Jeffrey, 11
 North American Association for Environmental Education, 265
Now You're Cooking: Designing Solar Ovens, 252
 NRC. *See* National Research Council
 Nuclear decay, 27, 41
 Nuclear energy, 27, 57, 66, 265
 Nuclear forces, strong and weak, 40, 41
 Nuclear Processes (PS1.C), **10**, 15, 285
 development of understanding over time, 15, 194, 196, 201, 283
 grades 6–8, 21, 25
 grades 9–12, 25, 27

O

Ocean currents, 218
 Oceans
 acidification of, 226
 sea-level rise, 53, 219, 226, 227, 229, 234
 temperature of, 218
 Oil, 68, 208, 231
 Oil spills, 265, 267, 273
 Oleic acid, 23
On Burning Mirrors and Lenses, 275
On the Origin of Species, 123, 166
 Ong, Yann Shiou, 199
 Optimizing the Design Solution (ETS1.C), **242**, 246, 248, 251, 284
 teaching strategies for, 258–259
 Organelles, 100, 112, 166
 Organization for Matter and Energy Flow in Organisms (LS1.C), **96**, 100, 103–105, **104**, **105**, 115, 283
 development of understanding over time
 grades K–2, 110
 grades 3–5, 111
 grades 6–8, 113
 grades 9–12, 114–115
 Ovarian cancer, 145
 Oxygen, 23, 115, 118, 124, 135
 for cellular respiration, 104–105
 in combustion reactions, 14, 68, 14, 68, 70
 magnesium or hydrogen gas reactions with, 28–29
 produced by electrolysis, 24
 produced by photosynthesis, 105, **105**, 113, 215, 220
 transported by red blood cells, 100, 118, 146
 Oxygen–carbon dioxide cycle, 133–134, **134**
 Ozone layer, 214, 232, 242, 266

P

Palma, Christopher, 199
Pangaea, 209
Paper tower challenge, 246
Particle model of matter, 6, 16, 17–21, 22, 27–28, 30
Passmore, Cynthia, 97
Pasteur's Quadrant, 272
Pathways Project biodiversity curriculum, 142
Pendulums, 44, **44**, 51, 58, 62–63, 64
Penguins, 136, 137–138, 139, 140
Performance expectations in NGSS, vii, 149, 279–281
 assessment and, 280
Periodic table, 25
Personal protective equipment, 8
Pesticides (DDT), 102
Phase changes. *See* Chemical Reactions
Phenology national database, 142
PhET simulations, 93, 179, 199
Phosphorous, 127
Photons, 93
Photosynthesis, 10, 11, 68, 69, 105, **105**, 107, 108, 109, 113, 117, 119–120, **120**, 126, 128, 130, 131, 132, 133, 135, 167, 213, 215
Photovoltaic cells, 67, 68, 94
Physical sciences disciplinary core ideas, **3**, 10–94
 components of, **10**, 11–12, 283
 development of understanding over time, 6–7, 14
 Energy (PS3), 55–73
 Matter and Its Interactions (PS1), 13–31
 Motion and Stability: Forces and Interactions (PS2), 33–53
 Waves and Their Applications in Technologies for Information Transfer (PS4), 75–94
PIES teaching approach, 258
Pine bark beetles (*Dendroctonus ponderosae* Hopkins), 129, **129**
Pitch, 82
Planetary nebula, 194
Planetesimals, 199
Planets, 182, 192
 Earth and Human Activity (ESS3), 4, 225–237
 Earth's Place in the Universe (ESS1), 185–201
 Earth's Systems (ESS2), 2, 205–222
 formation of, 192–193, 198–199
 gravitational forces applied by, 39, 49, 191
 orbiting around the Sun, 44, 49–50, 51, 52, 190, 191, 199
 tangential velocity of, 191
 telescope observation of, 188, 275
Plate tectonics, 11, 33, 183, 196, 211, 216, 217
Plate Tectonics and Large-Scale System

Interactions (ESS2.B), **182**, 188, 207–210, **209**, 227, 231, 284
Plummer, Julia, 182, 199
Poles of magnets, 42, 49
Policy issues, 281
Polito, E., 214
Pollination, 113, 117, 130, 178, 268, 269–270
Pollution, 68, 124, 168, 169, 180, 228, 231, 232, 235, 265, 266, 267, 268, 273
Pond waves, 76, **76**, 77–78, 79, 80–81, 82, 87–88
Pop-up turkey timer, 271
Population dynamics, 128–129, 139
Population growth, 266
Potential energy, 15, 27, 39, 50, 58, 61, 62, 68, 70, 71
 calculation of, 60
 chemical, 39, 57, 66, **104**, 105, 109, 127, 135
 elastic, 39–40, **40**, 66
 gravitational, 39–40, 60, 62, 65–66, 67, 71
 relationship between forces and, 65–66
Precipitation, 210, 212, 213, 216, 217, 234, 280
Press disturbances, 128, 140
Primates, cladogram of, **171**, 172
Project BudBurst, 142
Protein folding, 2, 13, 27, 52, 146
Protein receptors, 100, 101, 106, 107, 154
Proteins, 99–101, 114, 115, 146–160
 from food, **104**, **119**
 gene coding for, 4, 7, 103, 146–150, 154–155, 156, 158–159
 in cloned sheep, 150
 genetic disorders and, 147, 150
 genetic traits and, 147, 151–153, 154, 156, **157**, 158
 mutations of, 152–153, 156
 hemoglobin, 7, 100, 147, 148
 in muscle cells, 104
 structure and functions of, 99–101, 103, 109, 117, 146, 147, 154
 tools for visualization of, 161
Protons, 21, 25, 26, 40, 41, 66
Pure and applied science, 272

R

Radio waves, 75, 83, 84
Recycling, 228, 229, 231, 233, 267
Red blood cells, 23, 100
 sickled, 147, **147**, 152
Refraction, 275
Relationship Between Energy and Forces (PS3.C), **10**, 58, 64–67, 283
 common prior conceptions of, 64
 development of understanding over time, 64–67
 by end of grade 5, 66
 by end of grade 8, 66
 by end of grade 12, 67

forces and energy transfer processes, 65
 potential energy and forces, 65–66
Reproduction, 96, 99, 101, 102–103
 asexual, 111, 112
 between closely related species, 130
 sexual, 103, 111, 112, 117, 130, 155, **157**
 speciation and interbreeding, 170
Resonance of waves, 82
 electromagnetic waves, 84–85
Rivet, Ann E., 182
RNA
 messenger (mRNA), 147
 transfer (tRNA), 147, 162
Rock cycle, 205, 207, 216, 217
Rocks, 67, 186, 188, 190, 193, 200, 207–211, 214–217, 220
Rocky objects in solar system, 192, 196
Rogat, Aaron, 96
The Roles of Water in Earth's Surface Processes (ESS2.C), **182**, 210–211, 284
Rotation of Earth, 186, 189, 190, 194, 195, 197, 198, 209, 212
Rotation of objects, forces causing changes in, 35–36, **36**
Rotational kinetic energy, 56
Rube Goldberg machines, 69, 266
Rubin, KeriAnn, 199
Rust, 13, 20, 21
Rutherford, Ernest, 26
Rutherford, F. J., 264

S

Safety in the Science Classroom, Laboratory, or Field Sites, 7
Safety practices, 8. *See also* specific tasks
Sahl, Ibn, 275
San Andreas Fault, 208
Schauble, L., 141
Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers, 247, 268
Science and engineering practices, vii, 1–2, 3, 4–5, 6, 7, 14, 118, 143, 176, 279, 281
 related to Earth's Place in the Universe, 186, 197, 200
 related to Energy, 58, 59
 related to Engineering Design, 247, **247**, 251, 255, 257, 259, 260
 related to Heredity, 160
 related to Links Among Engineering, Technology, Science, and Society, 267, 269
Science for All Americans, 264, 266
Scientific argumentation, 6, 197, 198, 221, 233, 236
Scientific models, 5–6
Sea-level rise, 53, 219, 226, 227, 229, 234
Seasonal changes, 51, 142, 186, 187–191, 214

INDEX

- in Sun's path, 189, 191
 - in temperature, 190, 194, 197
 - Seeds of Science / Roots of Reading curriculum, "Designing Mixtures" unit, 267, 273, 276
 - Seismic waves, 92, 208
 - Sensory cells, 106
 - Sex cells, 97, 103, 107, 114, 149, 151, 152, 153, 154, 156, 157, 159, 162
 - Sexual reproduction, 103, 111, 112, 117, 130, 155, 157
 - Shadows, 89, 190, 197
 - Shea, Nicole A., 97
 - Sickle cell anemia, 7, 147, 147, 148–149, 152, 153, 160
 - Sidereus Nuncius (The Starry Messenger)*, 273
 - Silent Spring*, 265
 - Skin cancer, 102, 145
 - Skin cells, 101, 102, 103, 150
 - Slinky, waves in, 77, 77, 90, 92
 - Smell perception, 19–20, 106, 111, 116, 121
 - Sneider, Cary, 243, 257
 - Social Interactions and Group Behavior (LS2.D), 96, 126, 130, 284
 - Sodium bicarbonate, 28
 - Sodium chloride, 28
 - Solar system, 182
 - approaches to teaching about, 197–201
 - conservation of momentum in, 39
 - determining age of, 196
 - development of understanding over time
 - high school, 193–196
 - middle school, 191–193
 - upper elementary school, 190
 - Earth and the Solar System (ESS1.B), 182, 186, 187–188, 284
 - gravitational forces in, 39, 41, 49–50, 191
 - The History of Planet Earth (ESS1.C), 182, 186, 188, 284
 - Solids, 6, 16–17, 18, 22, 132, 133, 271. *See also* Structure and Properties of Matter (PS1.A)
 - sound waves moving through, 77, 80, 88
 - Sound, 11, 12, 60
 - energy transfer via, 65, 69
 - hearing of, 85, 89
 - information processing of, 111
 - particles conception of, 78
 - speed of, 80
 - Sound waves, 56, 75, 77–79
 - absorption by eardrums, 82, 85
 - amplitude of, 80
 - amplitude decay, 82
 - digital encoding of, 87
 - dimensionality of, 78–79
 - frequency (pitch) of, 80, 82
 - generation of, 86
 - by noise-canceling headphones, 81
 - by vibrations, 63, 64, 85–86, 88, 89
 - by vocal cords, 86, 87
 - interactions with objects, 82
 - longitudinal and transverse waves, 77
 - microphone detection of, 85, 85, 86
 - reflection of, 82
 - resonance of, 82
 - seismic waves, 92, 208
 - simulation of propagation of, 78
 - speed of, 80
 - transmission of, 86
 - used by ultrasound imager, 92
 - wavelength of, 79–80
 - Speciation, 170, 171, 172
 - Speed
 - applicability of Newton's laws of motion related to, 38–39, 51
 - energy related to, 56, 60, 62, 64, 65, 69, 71
 - forces that cause changes in, 35, 45, 46
 - velocity and, 35
 - of waves, 80
 - earthquake waves, 219
 - electromagnetic waves, 84, 94
 - sound waves, 80
 - Sperm, 97, 103, 117, 149, 152
 - Spinal cord, 106
 - Stability and Instability in Physical Systems (PS2.C), 33, 44, 283
 - dependence on balance of competing effects, 44, 44
 - development of understanding over time
 - by the end of grade 2, 45
 - by the end of grade 5, 47–48
 - by the end of grade 8, 50–51
 - stable vs. unstable systems, 44
 - systems do not need to be static to be stable, 44
 - Stadium wave, 77, 77, 78
 - Stars, 41, 75, 185–190, 192, 194, 195, 197, 199
 - life cycles of, 185, 187, 194
 - nuclear fusion in, 25
 - release of energy from, 15, 25
 - The Universe and Its Stars (ESS1.A), 182, 185, 186–187
 - white dwarf, 194
 - Stellarium* simulation, 197
 - Stem cells, 99, 103, 107, 114, 145, 150, 157
 - Stereo systems, 75, 82
 - Stomach, 102, 104, 111
 - Stream invertebrates study, 141–142
 - Structure and Function (LS1.A), 96, 99, 100–101, 115, 283
 - development of understanding over time
 - grades K–2, 110
 - grades 3–5, 110–111
 - grades 6–8, 112
 - grades 9–12, 114
 - Structure and Properties of Matter (PS1.A), 10, 14–15, 283
 - development of understanding over time, 14–15
 - grades K–2, 16–17
 - grades 3–5, 17, 18–20, 19
 - grades 6–8, 21, 22–23
 - grades 9–12, 25–26
 - Subatomic model, 16, 21, 24, 25–26, 30
 - Sun, 186–197
 - apparent motions in sky, 186, 187, 189, 190, 191, 195, 197–198
 - energy released from, 15, 25, 69–70
 - for plant growth, 105, 113, 132, 177
 - weather, climate and, 212–214, 217, 218, 219
 - formation of, 193, 194, 196, 198
 - gravitational forces applied by, 39, 49–50, 191
 - orbiting of planets around, 44, 49, 51, 52, 191, 192
 - size and distance from Earth to, 187, 189–190, 192, 198
 - using physical models of, 197–198
 - Supernova, 57, 194
 - Superposition of waves, 80–81, 81
- ## T
- Tacoma Narrows Bridge collapse, 82
 - Tanner, K. D., 214
 - Tanner, Roberta, 72
 - Taste perception, 106, 111
 - Technology in Practice: Applications and Innovations curriculum, "Designing Environmental Solutions" module, 267, 273, 277
 - Telephones, 89
 - cell phones, 11, 43, 75, 83, 85, 86, 89, 92, 93, 94, 273
 - Telescopes, 75, 188, 189, 264, 274–276, 275
 - Temperature, 60, 61, 64, 69, 132
 - of body, 114, 115
 - boiling point of different substances, 13, 52, 52
 - of celestial objects related to distance from the Sun, 192, 212
 - changes in gas particle motion with, 29, 29
 - climate, weather and, 209, 211, 212, 218
 - detection by pop-up turkey timer, 271
 - in early universe, 187, 195
 - energy transfer and, 63
 - global increase in, 214, 229–230, 231, 233, 234
 - kinetic energy and, 19, 57, 67
 - of oceans, 218
 - seasonal changes in, 188, 190–191, 194, 197
 - species-specific tolerance for, 137
 - speed of sound related to, 80
 - Tetherballs hanging from a pole, 45–46
 - Theory of refraction, 275

Thermal energy, 56, 58, 61, 63, 66, 67–68, 69, 94
 Thermodynamic equations, 57
 Thermodynamic systems, 55
 Three-dimensional learning, vii, 1–2, 4–6, 279–281
 Tissue Engineering Research Center (TERC), 70
 Transfer RNA (tRNA), 147, 162
 Transfers of energy. *See* Conservation of Energy and Energy Transfer (PS3.B)
 Transverse waves, 77, 77
 Trisomy 21, 149, 150
 Tsunamis, 226, 231
 Tuning fork, 78, 82, 88, 89
 Twins, 97, 151

Types of Interactions (PS2.B), 33, 40–43, 283
 all forces are forces that act at a distance, 40
 contact forces and forces that act at a distance, 40
 development of understanding over time
 by the end of grade 2, 45
 by the end of grade 5, 47
 by the end of grade 8, 49–50, 50
 by the end of grade 12, 51–53, 52
 forces act at a distance through mediation of fields, 42–43
 kinds of friction, 43
 mediation of forces by four fundamental force fields, 40–42
 electric forces, 40, 41–42
 gravitational forces, 40, 41, 42
 magnetic forces, 40, 41, 42
 strong and weak nuclear forces, 40, 41, 43

U

Ultrasound imager, 10, 75, 83, 92
 Understanding Evolution website, 178
 Universe
 big bang theory of, 8, 185, 186–187, 192, 194–195, 195, 196, 200
 cosmic microwave background radiation release and, 187, 195, 200
 deep time and age of, 227
 Earth's Place in the Universe (ESS1), 3, 182, 185–201, 227
 four fundamental forces in, 40–41, 43, 65
 Galileo's observations of, 276
 nuclear fusion and, 25
 The Universe and Its Stars (ESS1.A), 182, 186–187, 284
 development of understanding over time, 187
 University of Colorado PhET simulations, 93, 179, 199

V

Variation of Traits (LS3.B), 96, 146, 151–154, 284

development of understanding over time, 155, 157, 157
 Velocity, 35, 38–39
 momentum and, 39, 250
 of planets in stable orbit, 191, 199
 Venus, 65, 212
 Vibrations, sound waves generated by, 63, 64, 85–86, 88, 89
 Vision, 83, 86, 89, 90–91, 100
 Vision for learning science, 1, 14
 Volcanoes, 88, 127, 189, 193, 200, 207, 208, 209, 211, 213, 216, 217, 219, 226, 227, 231, 233

W

Walkie-talkies, 89
 Water, 16, 20, 134, 135, 137. *See also* Oceans
 absorption, storage, and release of energy by, 210, 211
 adding food coloring to, 19
 boiling of, 2, 13, 24, 48
 dissolving in, 24, 28, 210, 211, 219–220
 electrolysis of, 24
 evaporation of, 16, 27, 30, 210, 213, 217, 218, 280
 filling and emptying swimming pool, 47
 freezing of, 7, 17–18, 27, 210–211, 219–220
 heating in microwave oven, 47, 83
 heating into steam, 67
 melting frozen things in, 48
 mixing with ethanol, 18, 19
 molecules of, 23
 in photosynthesis, 68, 105, 105, 109, 113, 119, 120, 130, 135
 for plant growth, 110, 111, 131, 177, 214
 polarity of, 211
 pollution of, 228, 235
 produced in combustion reactions, 14, 68
 role in Earth's processes, 182, 183, 205, 206, 210–211, 212, 215, 217–219, 280, 281
 transmission of sunlight, 219
 weather and climate, 217–218
 salinity of, 218
 waves in, 76–78, 83, 87–88
 amplitude of, 80, 84
 Water cycle, 205, 207, 213, 216, 217, 229, 279–280, 281
 Water resources, 124, 216, 225, 227, 228, 230, 232, 235, 263, 266, 273
 conservation of, 231
 distribution of, 281
 pollution of, 235
 Water vapor, 24, 212, 218
 Watershed, 142
 Watts, Michael, 59
 Wave Properties (PS4.A), 10, 76–83, 283
 amplitude, 80, 81
 amplitude decay, 81–82

definition of a wave, 76
 development of understanding over time
 by end of grade 2, 87–88
 by end of grade 5, 90
 by end of grade 8, 92
 by end of grade 12, 93
 frequency, 80, 82
 interactions with objects, 82–83
 longitudinal and transverse waves, 77, 77
 pond waves, 76, 76, 77–78, 79, 80–81, 82, 87–88
 resonance, 82
 speed, 80
 stadium wave, 77, 77, 78
 superposition, 80–81, 81
 wave dimensionality and intensity, 78–79
 wavelength, 79–80, 81
 waves in a Slinky, 77, 77, 90, 92
 what moves when a wave moves?, 77–78
 Wavelength (λ), 79–80, 81
 of electromagnetic waves, 83–84, 93–94
 Waves and Their Applications in Technologies for Information Transfer (PS4), 10, 11–12, 75–94
 components of, 10, 12, 76, 283 (*See also specific components*)
 Electromagnetic Radiation (PS4.B), 76, 83–85, 88–89, 90–91, 92–94
 Information Technologies and Instrumentation (PS4.C), 76, 85–87, 89–90, 91–92, 93, 94
 Wave Properties (PS4.A), 76–83, 87–88, 90, 92, 93
 development of understanding over time, 87–94
 by end of grade 2, 87–90
 by end of grade 5, 90–92
 by end of grade 8, 92–93
 by end of grade 12, 93–94
 importance of, 75–76
 Weather, 2, 33, 140, 177, 182–183, 189, 197, 205, 206, 207, 209
 Weather and Climate (ESS2.D), 182, 188, 211–214, 213, 231, 284. *See also* Global climate change
 challenges in understanding, 214
 definitions of, 211
 greenhouse effect and, 212, 213, 214, 215, 230
 nature and causes of climate change, 212–214
 Weathering, 190, 205, 216, 218, 219
 chemical, 210
 mechanical, 210, 219
 Web-based Inquiry Science Environment's (WISE) curriculum, 120
 Weights hanging from string, 46, 48–49, 50
 Welty, Ken, 257
 WestEd's SimScientists, 119, 119

INDEX

"Whispers of Willing Wind" unit, 265, 273, 277
Wildfires, 227
Wind, 68, 214, 215, 216
Wind turbines, 67, 266, 273

Wisconsin Fast Plants, 160

X

X-rays, 10, 75, 153

Y

Yager, Robert E., 265

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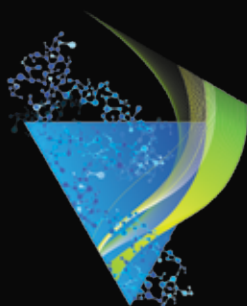
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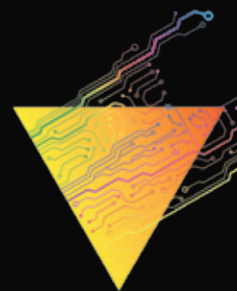
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