Part **one**

Unlocking the Power of Informational and Literary Texts

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Part one

Introduction

Students in Julia St. Martin's tenth-grade English class at the Springfield Renaissance School in Springfield, Massachusetts, are seated in concentric rings of desks, engaged in a student-led discussion about two guiding questions: "Why read?" and "What is a world without books?" They have been reading Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and, in order to further explore the themes raised in the book, they have also read a series of articles about literacy. They are engaged in a fishbowl protocol—the inner ring of students in conversation with each other, citing evidence from their texts that supports their thinking about the guiding questions, and the outer ring observing and taking notes on both content and their peers' speaking and listening skills.

"When I pick informational text for kids, I'm thinking about two things—relevance and complexity," St. Martin says. "One of the informational texts that kids used today was a pretty complex text. Kids were really pushed to use data—numbers and percentage—to really rationalize and prove their arguments. I also chose a less complex text so that all kids could participate and feel smart about the dialogue."

Before the fishbowl begins, St. Martin sets the tone for the group: "I expect for us to be really smart and articulate about using this expert text. . . . I'm also hoping that today you can use *Fahrenheit 451* to really push us to have a smart conversation about 'Why read?' and 'What is a world without books?'"

In round one of the protocol a student references the article "New York Disconnected Youth Literacy Initiative," citing the rising rates of television watching and the low academic test scores for youths in New York

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City. Her peer responds with "I connected that to 'Why read?' because if we don't read we won't have the knowledge we need to go out in the world and do other things." At this point St. Martin refocuses the students reminding them to have smart conversations about specific texts, naming the article, and citing quotes. In response one student sets a new tone: "I took an example from 'From the Streets to the Libraries . . .'"

At the end of the round she reminds the outer ring of their responsibility to respond, build, and hold everyone accountable for using the expert texts. Olivia responds to this important role with: "Something people could work on is trying to put in the vocabulary words that we used."

In round two of the protocol a student references the article "Ray Bradbury: A Warning to Future Generations," further building the argument that turning away from books and toward television is bad for our society. Her peer brings the discussion back to *Fahrenheit 451*, reminding the group that the only reason the people in Bradbury's dystopian world thought books were bad was that the firemen were telling them so.

An expert—a librarian—had recently visited the class and students begin to use their notes from her visit as another informational text to cite during the fishbowl: "I connected 'Why read?' and 'What is a world without books?' to Ms. Pfiefer, the expert that came in—the librarian, . . ." she begins.

"We used a fishbowl protocol today to really allow students both in the inner circle and outer circle to feel accountable for the conversation and discussion," St. Martin says. She holds the students in the outer circle accountable by instructing them to listen closely and to write on their sticky notes when they hear their peers use evidence from the text to move their logic. After each round students in the outer circle provide feedback to the inner circle. After round two, Olivia, who had moved to the inner circle, receives words of praise: "Olivia automatically jumped in and connected it to the novel very well," her peer says.

Later, during the debrief, students are reflective about the value of this protocol. One student shares, "I like the feedback that the people in the outside circle gave because it gave groups after the ones that had already gone something to have in mind for what they should do or improve on." One student notes that the final group did the best because they used the "power words" and everyone participated in what felt like a "real conversation."

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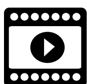
All told, St. Martin was pleased with the fishbowl: "What I was most impressed with in our students was their ability to support their ideas with a great sound body of evidence and kids were also moving themselves toward using events in the novel to support their ideas as well." You can view this fishbowl discussion in the accompanying video, "Students Cite Evidence from Informational and Literary Text."



Watch video: "Students Cite Evidence from Informational and Literary Text"

THE CENTRALITY OF INFORMATIONAL TEXT

It's evident from the conversation of the tenth-grade students in Julia St. Martin's class that the two kinds of texts they are discussing—literary and informational—have unlocked meaning for each other. The articles have enriched the students' understanding of the themes in the novel, and the novel has helped them understand the articles on a deeper level than they may have without the rich imagery and narration of Bradbury's story.

This Common Core literacy instructional shift requires students to build content knowledge through a balance of rich informational and literary text. Elementary teachers must infuse more informational text into their literacy instruction in order to systematically develop the knowledge base of their students. Secondary English teachers must find ways, as Julia St. Martin did, to integrate informational text with literary text. Secondary content area teachers must explicitly work as literacy teachers, devoting class time for students to engage with rich, informational texts to become better readers. For many teachers, this does not feel like a welcome shift in their instructional practice, and for many it will not be an easy one.

Our goal is to help teachers, especially elementary and English teachers—who may fear the encroachment of informational texts into a curriculum filled with novels, poetry, and plays—see the power of nonfiction to help students explore the issues and themes that emerge from great literature, and also to help secondary content area teachers become effective literacy teachers, strengthening their instruction in their discipline. Building content knowledge is a worthy endeavor—one that makes a big difference in students' trajectory toward college, career, and civic readiness—and all teachers have a role to play.

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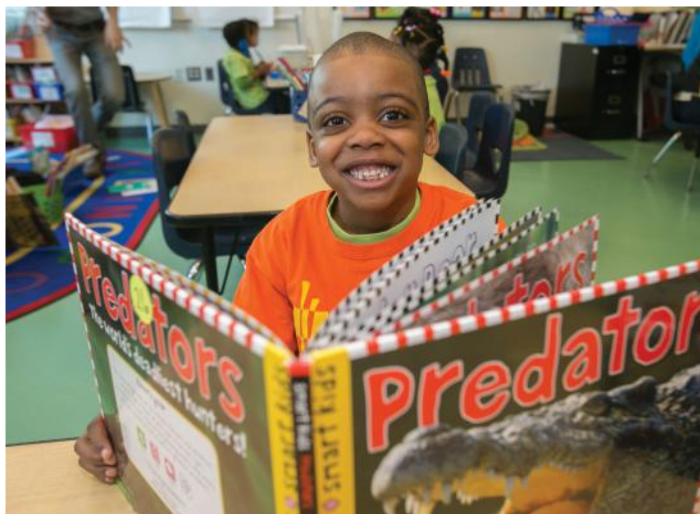
Leveraging This Instructional Shift

In our professional development work with elementary teachers, we find that many worry that the new Common Core literacy standards will cause them to lose the engaging power of literature in their classrooms. They have stacks of books by their favorite authors—picture books for young readers and chapter books for older ones—that they use every year to lead students, individually or collectively, to become eager, strong readers. These same teachers who can list dozens of their favorite fictional authors have few authors of nonfiction whom they would consider their favorites—sometimes none. Many of these teachers feel that the Common Core will mean building a whole new area of expertise and collection of books to teach and they are resistant, feeling that fiction is more engaging for children and adults.

However, informational text is not necessarily less engaging or less interesting to read, either for students or adults. Kindergartners are just as excited to read books about dinosaurs, horses, and trucks as they are to read stories. Adults spend much of their time reading informational text found in print and online—magazines, newspapers, biographies, histories, guidebooks, cookbooks, manuals, and blogs. We don't need to give up the great literature in our classrooms, but we have to also build literacy skills across a range of formats, including informational text, so that students can build their content knowledge and become better readers.

Informational texts have wide appeal for many students.



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When working with middle and high school teachers, we often hear a voice of concern from teachers of math, science, technology, health, arts, and world languages: "What do you mean I'm supposed to be a literacy teacher, too? Isn't that the job of the English teacher? I was hired to teach science (or math, history, etc.), not teach reading. I haven't been trained to teach reading."

This is an understandable and reasonable response. Rather than argue, we start in a different place, with a series of different questions. We ask the science teachers, "How satisfied are you with your students' ability to read scientific texts and write scientifically?" (Almost universally, they are not satisfied—not at all.) "How much of a problem does this create for you in teaching the concepts and skills you wish to teach?" (Almost universally, they consider it a major problem.) "Do you think the English teacher will be teaching your students to read scientific texts and write scientifically?" (Well, of course not.) The problem and need then becomes clearer. "Who on your staff," we ask, "is better equipped to teach your students how to read scientific text than you? Who can help them write scientifically?"

Rather than misuse the expertise of science teachers, this Common Core literacy shift makes good use of it—they can teach students how to make sense of scientific language and the structure of scientific writing (e.g., journal articles, lab reports, data analyses), and they can make their teaching of science more effective and more satisfying. We have found that once science teachers (or teachers of math, history, technology, or the arts) have integrated explicit, discipline-centered literacy instruction into their teaching they discover surprising breakthroughs in their work—students are more clear and confident with concepts, and the work they turn in is significantly improved. And we have found that English teachers such as Julia St. Martin, now more conscientious about pairing informational text with literature, see the power of this shift to prepare their students for the kinds of reading they will do in college, careers, and life.

WHY THIS PRACTICE MATTERS

Creating a new balance of informational and literary texts throughout the K–12 curriculum is important for several reasons. It will meet a broader range of student needs and interests, more accurately reflect the balance of text found after high school, and give students greater capacity to build content knowledge across the curriculum.

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> "I want to LEARN stuff. Learn, learn, learn, learn, LEARN!"
>
> *—Kindergarten student, Downtown Denver Expeditionary School, Denver, Colorado*

Fostering Students' Natural Curiosity and Motivation to Learn about the World

Teachers know that a love of reading seems to make everything about school easier and more enjoyable, and it opens doors that are hard to open otherwise—doors to the imagination and to knowledge about the world. In that spirit, our goal is to provide teachers with more than just guidelines for getting the balance of informational and literary texts right. We also want to provide teachers with tools that can help them ignite their students' natural curiosity about the world so that they see books, articles, recipes, charts, and graphs as a mysterious, interesting, and provocative source of information that they want to read and understand. We want to help teachers celebrate the mystery and excitement of texts of all kinds with their students.

Building Knowledge and Tools for Lifelong Learning

In an information age, students and adults need to be able to read, understand, and think critically about informational texts across a wide range of content areas and forms. Research shows that students hit a barrier in eighth grade and high school if they do not have a solid foundation of the content knowledge and literacy skills they develop from reading informational texts. Currently, elementary and middle school teachers spend 7 to 15 percent of instructional time on informational text (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, appendix A, 2010), yet most of the reading in high school, college, and the workplace is informational. To better prepare students for college and career reading, the Common Core explains that the ratio of informational text to literary text should build to 50:50 by fourth grade and 70:30 by twelfth grade (across all subject areas, not just English).

Connecting Reading with Purpose

Of course, there are many rich purposes to reading literary texts, but infusing the curriculum with more informational texts focuses on "reading to learn" as well as reading across the curriculum. The new balance gives students an invaluable

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tool for independent, scholarly, and practical learning: to be able to seek out and understand informational text on any topic.

Equity and Engagement

Informational text addresses equity issues in two ways: it helps all students to build knowledge about the world, and it engages those individuals and groups who are more literal minded than literary minded. Historically, many students who thrive in school are avid readers, often of fiction. Envision the stereotypical middle school girl with a young adult novel tucked into her bag or a fourth-grade boy hefting the latest volume of a fantasy series. But students are naturally curious, and informational text provides a way to reach more learners and offer reading as a way to learn about the world. Many researchers have found that boys and young men are more motivated and empowered to read when that reading addresses relevant topics or has direct application to their own lives (consider *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys* [2002] by Smith and Wilhelm or *Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males* [2005] by Alfred Tatum). Scholars such as Duke and Bennett-Armistead (2003) emphasize that it is important to expose even our youngest students to nonfiction so they can answer all their big "why?" questions and also become as deeply familiar with nonfiction text structures as they are with the "once upon a time" story structure.

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Chapter 1

Choosing Worthy Texts

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CREATING TEXT-RICH CLASSROOMS

Imagine classrooms brimming with interesting texts—engaging, worthy texts that are challenging enough to cause most students to have to work hard, but not so challenging that they cannot be understood with a teacher's support. These texts are offered to students in a variety of ways. Sometimes the whole class tackles a complex text together, helping each other understand, analyze, and learn from it. Sometimes students choose their own texts for research or pleasure reading. Sometimes the teacher uses a text as a model to show students something that an author has done particularly well.

Creating these kinds of text-rich classrooms, with a balance of informational and literary texts, is a responsibility for all K–12 teachers and administrators who strive to help their students become college- and career-ready readers. In elementary school, the Common Core State Standards recommend that students read half informational text and half literary text. As students progress through secondary school, the recommended balance shifts to 70 percent informational text and 30 percent literary text. But increasing the amount of informational text that students read or adhering to the ratio suggested by the standards is only the first step in ensuring that students become better or more engaged readers who are building their knowledge of the world. On their own, the suggested ratios of informational and literary texts have no bearing on students' ability to think critically or explore issues from multiple perspectives. The selection of worthy texts and the instructional practices that unlock the power of informational and literary texts are far more important and complex issues, and we will explore them in much more depth throughout this book.

Strike the Right Balance

Attending to the amount of informational and literary text that students read on a daily basis will mean different things for teachers at different grade levels. Currently, students in elementary schools tend to be offered literary texts most often, so the work of bringing the ratio into 50:50 balance may feel like a heavy lift for those teachers. The good news, however, is that those elementary teachers have a great deal of control over what they offer their students because they tend to plan for the same group of students all day long (or a good portion of the day).

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The challenge at the secondary level is less about increasing the volume of informational texts that students read—content area teachers, such as biology and history teachers, already engage students with a great deal of informational texts. At the secondary level, the challenge is more about varying the *types* of informational texts students read and, most important teaching them the literacy skills they need to read them well. If students only encounter textbooks, they will never learn to read such things as original research, primary sources, journal articles, field guides, artists' statements, playbills, and government reports—the material that scientists, historians, artists, mathematicians, and other professionals read every day. Common Core success requires that content area teachers work explicitly as literacy teachers as well as teachers of chemistry, economics, music, and history.

What does all this mean for secondary English teachers? They may feel that they're off the hook; after all, can't the English curriculum full of great literature account for the 30 percent of literature students should be reading in the course of a secondary school day? This would be a mistake. Literature can still be the heart of secondary English classes, but English teachers also need to have a greater role in helping students build specific literacy skills with informational text, which will comprise the majority of text they will encounter in college, careers, and life. As the most experienced literacy teachers in the school, English teachers have a key role in supporting readers, especially reluctant readers, to grow confident in a wide range of text styles. Additionally, combining great literature with informational text can help students build context and connections (as the story from Julia St. Martin's classroom illustrates), helping students enjoy and understand literary texts more deeply.

Build Rich Sets of Informational and Literary Texts

The Common Core presents an opportunity to organize texts in a new way, as "sets" organized around a topic or big idea, rather than as stand-alone resources or experiences. At its best, the shift to using more informational text means that informational and literary texts can be grouped and taught together (by one or more teachers) so that students learn to use one text to help them make meaning of others. Engaging students in the study of sets of texts is a strategic move in terms of increasing their reading comprehension. The more a student knows

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about any given topic, the more complex text he or she can read on that particular topic. Each text offers students more background knowledge and vocabulary about whatever is being studied. As students become experts on a topic or a big idea, they are able to access increasingly sophisticated material.

Individual teachers can create rich text sets in their classrooms. In an elementary classroom learning about the American Revolution, for example, students may read from their textbook, along with an informational book called *George vs. George,* and conflicting firsthand reports about the Boston Massacre. Or, a secondary English class may compare accounts of modern-day genocides while reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Pairing texts can also be done *across* classrooms. English teachers, for example, could teach a novel with a character who has a genetic disease while students concurrently study genetics in science. Long-term projects or units are perfect interdisciplinary opportunities for teachers to collaborate and offer students a variety of texts about a specific topic.

> "By asking students to read both informational and literary texts with shared topics and themes, we offer many more opportunities to experience big ideas in profound ways. Informational text suddenly becomes personal in the way that we've always understood literature to be. The elegant interplay—the movement from stories and poems that are personal to information that is convincing—gives students tools for taking a personal stand on challenging, real-world topics."
>
> *—Dolly Higgins, fifth- and sixth-grade teacher, Anser Charter School, Boise, Idaho*

In secondary schools, interdisciplinary collaboration can be logistically challenging for teachers, but it is worth the work. At the Springfield Renaissance School, Julia St. Martin's colleagues, the ninth-grade social studies and English teachers, collaborated on a unit of study from the history curriculum: Africa and British Colonialism. In social studies class students read all informational texts, such as first-person accounts, interviews, expository chapters and articles, maps, time lines, and websites, and in English class students read the memoir *They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky: The True Story of Three Lost Boys from Sudan* by Benson Deng, Alephonsion Deng, and Benjamin Ajak. In both classes students were engaging with coherent texts of various genres, complexities, and text

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structures. Adding the literary lens to the topic helped students better understand the historical happenings. Adding the historical information helped students better understand the memoir (literary nonfiction). The payoff was deeper comprehension and greater engagement.

What follows are two examples of literary texts grouped with informational texts from our Common Core curriculum (www.commoncoresuccess.elschools.org).

Sample Sets of Informational and Literary Texts

Journeys and Survival: Perspectives in Southern Sudan—Seventh Grade

Students explore the experiences of the people of southern Sudan during and after the Second Sudanese Civil War. They read *A Long Walk to Water,* analyzing the points of view of the central characters, Salva and Nya. Students focus on one key theme: how individuals survive in challenging environments. The novel is grouped with complex informational texts on Sudan.

Literary Anchor Text

A Long Walk to Water, Linda Sue Park

Informational Texts

"Loss of Culturally Vital Cattle Leaves Dinka Tribe Adrift in Refugee Camps," Stephen Buckley

Water for South Sudan, www.waterforsouthsudan.org

"Sudanese Tribes Confront Modern War," Karl Vick

"Time Trip" excerpt from "Life and Death in Darfur: Sudan's Refugee Crisis Continues," *Current Events*

Stories of Human Rights—Fifth Grade

What are human rights, and how do real people and fictional characters respond when those rights are challenged? Students develop their ability to read and understand complex text as they explore this question. Students read the introduction and selected articles of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" along with several first-hand accounts of people around the world who face human rights challenges. They use their understanding of human rights as one lens through which they can interpret the character and theme in the novel *Esperanza Rising.*

Literary Anchor Text

Esperanza Rising, Pam Muñoz Ryan

Selected Informational Texts

"Universal Declaration of Human Rights," United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

(*Continued*)

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"Readers on Stage," Aaron Shepard

"From Kosovo to the United States," Isau Ajeti and Blanche Gosselin

"Teaching Nepalis to Read, Plant, and Vote," Lesley Reed

View sixth-graders at P.S. 36 in the Bronx engaged with these texts in the accompanying video, "Engaging Students in Collaborative Academic Discussions."

Watch video: "Engaging Students in Collaborative Academic Discussions"

Strategically Organize Text Sets

There are many ways to organize text sets so that students can draw meaningful connections between literary and informational texts. The following are a few examples, but don't limit your thinking to these ideas only:

- **From mystery to understanding.** Start with a text so dense or obscure that students can barely make sense of it. Let them know that the text is indeed a "mystery" that they will have to solve by reading other texts on the same topic as the mystery text. Intentionally build their background knowledge through a variety of additional texts, returning often to the mystery text to see if they can glean more from it. As students learn from the related texts, they will become able to solve the mystery of the initial text. For example, students might read a brief excerpt from the Mayflower Compact at the beginning of a unit about the Pilgrims and wonder what it's about or what it has to do with. The teacher would record their questions on an anchor chart. Then students would read several other texts about the Pilgrims, learning what was important to them. Finally students would return to the Mayflower Compact to see if they could answer the questions they asked in the beginning of the unit.
- **Sprinkle informational texts with literary texts.** For example, students engaged in the study of adaptions through the lens of frogs that have adapted to their environments around the world could also read a variety of poems and stories about frogs.
- **Toggle between literary and informational texts.** Literary text often builds motivation to learn, and the informational text provides the background

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students are seeking. For example, eighth-graders might read the first couple chapters of *Inside Out & Back Again* by Thanhha Lai, a novel about a family leaving Vietnam following the fall of Saigon. They will read about a young girl, Ha, and her family, and likely come to care for them and wonder about their plight. Students would then take a short break from the novel to learn more about the Vietnam War, building important background for Ha's story. Then they would read more of the novel, then toggle into additional nonfiction, then back to the novel. Julia St. Martin's students toggled back and forth between literary and informational text in the opening vignette.

- **Personal to universal.** Texts grouped this way help students develop interest in a universal concern or topic. Starting with fiction helps students understand how a particular issue affects people (the personal side of an issue) through the characters in the book. This builds their motivation to read informational texts that help them explore the issue more broadly. For example, students might read the novel *Lyddie* by Katherine Paterson as an introduction into the larger issue of working conditions and the Labor Movement. Later they read historical documents and current text related to working conditions worldwide.
- **Universal to the personal.** Conversely, students could begin their journey through a set of texts by starting with a framing document that provides universal concepts or ideas to think about, followed by reading something else that shows how the ideas or concepts affect people. For example, fifth-grade students read a variety of nonfiction related to natural disasters. Then they read the children's book *Eight Days: A Story of Haiti*, by Edwidge Danticat, perhaps paired with the more emotionally mature novel *Dark Water Rising*, by Marian Hale, to understand the impact of natural disasters on people in the western hemisphere. Finally the issue becomes personal when they consider what role America and Americans—perhaps even they themselves—should take when a natural disaster strikes a neighboring country.

WHAT IS TEXT ANYWAY?

The authors of the Common Core wisely wanted to ensure that students are required, daily and deeply, to gather information from written text in order to build their reading skills. Knowing that students may find ways to avoid reading

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if given the opportunity to bypass difficult text with other media, such as video or images, the standards heavily emphasize written text, and often emphasize reading and interpreting multimedia *in relationship to* written text.

In life we gather information from all kinds of sources. Students need to learn to use sharp analytical skills when analyzing a data table, a historical painting, or a fluorite crystal, and we don't want to limit thinking about sets of "texts" to just things that incorporate words on paper. As long as students are compelled to use written text regularly and deeply, we feel it is essential that other sources of information are also viewed as text, and that students learn to decode them and think critically about them as they do with standard written text. The story that follows is a good illustration of the value of a broader view of text.

When Jean Hurst's third-grade classroom at Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York, was closed for renovation and moved into its temporary quarters in a museum, Hurst seized the moment. "We were studying early woodland peoples," she says, "and we went down in the museum displays almost every day. We had access to the displays before the museum opened in the morning and again in the afternoon after all of the school groups had left."

To support her students' writing of a narrative nonfiction piece, Hurst created a series of lessons that involved not only traditional reading and writing but also frequent visits to the museum exhibits depicting scenes of Native American life. The lessons carefully guided her students toward meeting multiple Common Core literacy standards:

> RI.3.2: *Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.*
>
> W.3.3: *Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.*
>
> W.3.5: *With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1–3 up to and including grade 3 here.)*
>
> W.3.10: *Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.*

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SL.3.2: *Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.*

L.3.3a: *Choose words and phrases for effect.*

L.3.5a: *Distinguish the literal and nonliteral meanings of words and phrases in context (e.g., take steps).*

The first several lessons in Hurst's woodland peoples study involved students "reading" the museum exhibits—life-size, realistic scenes depicting Native American life—looking for the main idea and key details in each. When a student suggested that the main idea of one of the exhibits was that the Native Americans were building a longhouse, Hurst asked, "Does the woman grinding corn support that as a main idea?" When the student searched for more supporting details and refined his thinking, he offered that the main idea was that the Native Americans were preparing a meal. Hurst countered, "Is everyone in the scene working with food?" All of the same strategies a teacher might employ to determine main idea and supporting details in a more traditional text were at play here. Students went back to the exhibit to "reread" the scene and find more details. Eventually they arrived at a main idea that was supported by all of the details in the scene: "Everyone in the Native American village had a role in preparing for winter."

For Hurst, a resource such as the museum exhibits is just one more kind of informational text that students can and should learn to read as they build their knowledge of the world. "It's all a form of communication," she says. Eventually the students moved on to reading and studying other kinds of informational text provided by the museum, such as wall displays and signage that surrounded the dioramas. Indeed, it is essential that reading something that is not an actual text (e.g., the museum displays) is complemented by more traditional reading experiences. Back in the classroom, students read additional texts and studied maps and weather data to better understand the scenes depicted in the exhibits. The wide variety of materials appealed to the wide variety of learners in her classroom, and Hurst found that the students were better prepared to tackle the challenging vocabulary they encountered in these texts because of their careful reading of the exhibits. They were also better prepared to write their narrative nonfiction pieces because of the range of texts they read.

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Students must learn to decode and think critically about a wide variety of texts.

Make "Outside the Box" Text Choices

Many teachers have little choice about the texts they teach—the honors biology textbook is the same every year or *Romeo and Juliet* is required reading for all ninth-graders. District staff, literacy coaches, and department heads routinely make these choices for teachers, often simply through the adoption of a particular textbook series. Other teachers may have choices, but they find themselves in a rut, using the same text(s) year after year.

The Common Core will require most teachers to critically examine the texts they teach so that students experience a range of reading experiences more similar to what they will experience in college, careers, and life (e.g., journal articles, current news stories, interviews, legal documents), connect their reading to the world and their own lives, and open their minds to new ways of thinking and new ideas. Just as important as increasing the *amount* of informational text that students read is varying the *kinds* of informational text they read. The most important question a teacher can ask is not, "Am I teaching enough informational text?" Instead, it is, "What informational texts are worth reading?"

Textbooks are not sufficient—they do not address the full range of forms that informational text can take—nor do they fully represent the multiple perspectives that are possible on complex subjects, which can engage students and motivate them to keep reading. The greatest benefit for students—in terms of their

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development as readers, their engagement with and ownership of their learning, and their ability to think critically—will result from teachers approaching text selection with a "beyond-the-textbook" mentality. For example, why not read and discuss news articles representing different perspectives on the Arab Spring—the revolutions taking place in the Middle East—while students are reading textbook descriptions of the American Revolution? (A curricular unit written by Expeditionary Learning, "From Revolution to Democracy: The Complex Fight for Freedom," which introduces students to many themes of the American Revolution with these contemporary examples, can be found at www.achievethecore.org.)

The word *text* generally refers to books; however, there are a wide variety of informational text types (see table 1.1), from brochures and manuals to textbooks,

Table 1.1 Kinds of Informational Text

Expository	Argumentative	Instructional	Narrative
Textbooks (science)	Opinion and editorial pieces	Training manuals	(Auto)biographies
Textbooks (humanities)	Speeches	Contracts	Histories
Reports	Advertisements	User guides and manuals	Correspondence
Tourism guides	Political propaganda	Legal documents	Curriculum vitae
Product specifications	Journal articles	Recipes	Memoirs
Product and service descriptions	Government documents	Product and service descriptions	News articles
Magazine articles	Legal documents		Essays
Company profiles	Tourism guides		Interviews
Legal documents	Correspondence		Agendas
Agendas	Essays		
Correspondence	Reviews		
Essays	Memoirs		
Interviews			
Government documents			
News articles			

Source: New York State Education Department (nd).

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recipes, and autobiographies. Teachers should make every effort to teach students to read primary source documents (e.g., interview transcripts, scientific research, political propaganda), because these forms of texts invite probing discussions and can generate great inquiry questions. (For more on a special protocol for the close reading of primary source documents first read chapter 7 and then see appendix E).Teachers should look for accuracy of the content, expertise of the author(s), usefulness of the text's features, and appropriateness of the text for their grade level. If the text is a challenging one for students, it is an opportunity to help build their skills in tackling complex texts (see chapters 6 and 7 for more on complex texts).

In addition, teachers must analyze the texts they are offering students for the opportunities they provide to engage students in close reading and critical thinking. For example, what follows are two sample informational text excerpts about life in colonial America. Figure 1.1 is the "Probate Inventory of John Allen (1659–1704)," a primary source document from the probate records of Hampshire County, Massachusetts. John Allen was a farmer in colonial Deerfield.

John Allen's probate record is a list of every possession he owned at the time of his death in 1704, along with the assessed value of each item (in the currency of the time—pounds, shillings, and pence). In three pages, it gives a stark, concrete picture of the Spartan life of a colonial farmer through his meager possessions (e.g., one horse, one glass bottle, four "baggs," two guns). It raises all kinds of questions. How much was a pig worth compared to a shirt, a frying pan, or a bushel of malt? For that matter, what is a bushel of malt and what was it used for? How did the currency of that time work? Why is the spelling of common words so strange? What was life like when you owned almost nothing? Was John Allen considered poor? The opportunities for discussion, research, and projects are plentiful and the opportunities to build literacy skills and historical understanding are rich. This and many other probate records can be found on the Historic Deerfield website at www.historic-deerfield.org.

The second excerpt—figure 1.2—comes from a website for kids (www.socialstudiesforkids.com) and is written much like a textbook in terms of content, syntax, and complexity.

"Food in the 13 American Colonies" certainly provides students with a great deal of information about food in colonial times; however, it won't necessarily invite the rich questions and tasks that John Allen's probate inventory does—it

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Figure 1.1 Probate Inventory of John Allen (1659–1704)

INVENTORY OF JOHN ALLEN (1659-1704)
Hampshire Probate Records, Volume III, p. 132
An Inventory of John Allen's Estate Taken June the 5. 1704

	L	Sh	d
To money in Mr. Porter Hands	3	9	3
Cloathes of his own Wareing	1	5	
Beds and Bedding	2	10	
1 horse	2		
1 Heifer	1		
1 Heifer	1		
1 Steer Calfe		17	
1 Heifer	1	15	
1 Steer	2	10	
1 Cow	2	15	
1 Cow	2	1.7	
8 Sheep	2	8	
5 Swine	2	15	
2 Gtms	1	8	
To Halfe a Barrel of Pork	1	15	
To I Hundred &37 pound of Beefe	1	2	10
To 16 Bushels of Indian Corn	1	1	4
To 8 Bushels of Rye		16	
To 10 Bushels of Malt	1		
To 1 Sive		1	6
To 1 wheel		3	
To 1 Pail and Tubb		1	8

(John Allen contir

To Part ofa Cart a
To 1 pr of Plow Ir
To WoodenWale
To 1Iron Pott
To Iron Pon5/
To 1 Iron Kettle
To 1 Pewter Platte
To 2 Pewter Perri
To 1 frying Pan
To 1 Smoothing I
To 2 cans and 3 D
To 2 Old Axes an
To Part of al-lawh
To Books
To 1 Glass Bottle
To Horse Tackling
To I Uning Wheel
To 4 four baggs
To linne Yarn
To 1 Sieth and Ta
To 1 fork and Hoe
To Iyd and Halfe

To a Plow Chain and Clevy	6	6
To1 bed Cord	1	

(John Allen

To 12 poun
To 1 Cart C
The Lands r
What to Val
Capt. Jonath

INENTORY
Hampshire
John Allen's

To money i
To Cloaths
Beds and Be
1 horse
1 Heifer
1 Heifer
1 Steer Calf
1 Heifer
1 Steer
1 Cow
1 Cow
8 Sheep
5 Swine

2 Guns	1	8
To Halfe a Barrel of Pork	1	15

Source: Historic Deerfield website (nd). (www.historic-deerfield.org/discover-deerfield/museums/memorial-libraries/probate-records-wills-and-related-documents).

leaves little to the imagination. The probate inventory of John Allen, however, demands higher-order thinking in order to understand it—students must make inferences, learn new vocabulary, and apply their minds to piecing together the puzzle of what they think life was like before the American Revolution. It puts readers in the compelling role of thinking like a historian, trying to make sense

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Figure 1.2 Food in the 13 American Colonies

The American colonists got their food from several places. The modern supermarket that we know today, where you can get all kinds of food, was not an option back then.

People who lived on the Atlantic coast often caught fish and whales. They sold fish and whale blubber at fish markets, which were usually down by the docks.

Farmers who grew wheat, barley, corn, tobacco, or rice hauled their crops to a town market, where the crops were sold to people in that town or to traders who would ship the goods to other colonies. (These traders would send the goods by boat, on rivers, or along the ocean coast, or on wagons.)

A great many American colonists also took care of their own food needs. It was not uncommon for a farm family to have crops growing near the ocean while chickens, pigs, and cows were grazing nearby and for that same family to fish for clams and other fish down at the Oceanside. This way, the family wouldn't have to buy food from anyone else. They might have apple trees and rows of corn and wheat. They might turn that corn into cornbread or cornmeal mush. They might turn that wheat into flour themselves and use it to bake bread. They might also hunt wild animals, like deer, rabbits, and turkeys.

The farms of the 13 Colonies took up a much larger amount of the total land available than do farms today. Still, farming is very much a way of life for many people today, just as it was for the American colonists.

Source: Social Studies for Kids (2013). (www.socialstudiesforkids.com).

of mysterious, confusing, and sometimes surprising content. Students can actually discover things in this document—things their teacher may not have noticed. There is value to each kind of text, depending on the purpose of the lesson—many teachers find that combining these two very different kinds of texts is highly engaging and effective for students.

Seek Out Great Informational Texts

A lot goes into finding great texts, and we will explore some of the criteria for making these decisions in the pages that follow. But beyond knowing what you're looking for in texts, how do you know where to find them? Choosing worthy informational texts for students to read requires considerable teacher research. Some teachers consider themselves "text geeks" and relish the quest. Others find it daunting. Regardless, seeking out strong informational texts is

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crucial. The list of resources in appendix A at the end of this book serves as a useful starting point, especially for the shorter informational texts that complement longer anchor texts (e.g., the articles about urban literacy rates that Julia St. Martin's students read). Most of the resources in this table come from the following types of organizations (their websites are often a good place to start your search):

- Museums
- Government organizations
- Nonprofit academic, arts, or professional organizations

Photographs and art also serve as powerful texts to engage students and help build their background knowledge about a topic, particularly English language learners. Appendix B at the end of this book provides a list of websites with powerful collections of photographs and images.

No list can or should be comprehensive. What follows are some recommendations and cautions:

- Seek out librarians as key allies. Librarians often have access to specific databases and websites that others do not, and librarians can also coach you on search strategies that you then can apply independently when future text needs arise. Tap the resources of your school, district, public, academic, or state libraries.
- Be wary of open web searches (i.e., "googling it"). Material that can come up as highly ranked in an unrestricted web search may initially look credible. Yet these resources often lack authority and may violate the copyright of the original source.
- Join e-mail lists or networks of teachers who teach the same content or grade level to learn what they've found and to share your treasures. Just

"Draw on your prior knowledge and connections—either another course, colleagues who are scientists, or librarians—they may know of good texts. Or conduct a theme-based search on Amazon. This can be time-consuming, but it can also be fun. If you search multiple topics, you'll feel confident that you haven't missed a great book."

—Rhonda Berkhower, Conservatory Lab Charter School, Boston, Massachusetts

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as you would ask friends, "Read any good books lately?" begin to ask colleagues, "Used any great texts with students lately? Where did you find them?"

- Be savvy regarding copyright laws. In most cases, materials available to an individual teacher or school librarian on the sites in appendixes A and B can be used in the classroom under what is called "fair use." But if your school, district, or state plans to copy and distribute a text broadly, additional rules often apply. The American Library Association is a good source for resources on copyright and fair use.

In the case study that follows we see one teacher's journey to find the right texts for her fourth-grader's exploration of westward expansion.

Case Study

On a Journey to Find the Right Texts

As a fourth- and fifth-grade teacher at Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning in Denver, Colorado, Ali Morgan planned and taught a historical case study of westward expansion. The guiding questions and big ideas students explored were, Was the journey a success? Whose land is this? and Was the story of westward expansion a story of progress?

For Morgan, an early step in the planning was selecting an anchor text—a text the entire class would read together and which would provide a backbone for the case study. "I look for an anchor text that is 'layered' so that it can be used for multiple entry points and lessons," says Morgan. In this case, she looked for a text that would engage her readers, build their understanding of the content, and serve as a model for what writing would have looked like and sounded like during that time period so that they would be better prepared to do their own writing. Morgan chose a historical fiction book that was written in the style of a journal, *The Journal of Augustus Pelletier: The Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804* by Kathryn Lasky. The novel about the Lewis and Clark expedition gave students an accurate time line of events, included a who's who of real players, and provided a good sense of what everyday life was like using descriptive imagery.

Morgan also had to consider what other texts would complement and supplement this anchor text. Students would read one or two journal entries from the anchor text followed by reading an informational text that would provide more detail about a particular event or person referenced in the anchor text. Students would read initially for the gist

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and then reread, annotating or coding the text as they read. As a group they would record important information about the purpose of the text on a class anchor chart. The readability and imagery of the anchor text helped students access and make connections to the informational texts and gave them a reference point when the reading was more challenging.

Because each text had different features, Morgan embedded skill-building mini-lessons when necessary to help students become stronger, more independent readers. They might read the same informational text two or three times, each time reading for new kinds of information or employing different text-coding strategies. Morgan values having students go back to the same text multiple times, digging deeper each time: "I want the students to understand that this is what real researchers, scholars, and historians do," she says.

"I realized when we were doing our historical case study on westward expansion," reflects Morgan, "that I needed to put as much time and effort into finding good texts at all levels as I did on planning the literacy and content lessons." Morgan found texts for the case study in the school and public libraries and worked hard to vary the selection to build student engagement—maps, time lines, and graphs provided a different way for students to access and analyze information. The varied texts also gave students more entry points as writers. They could write in the journal entry style of the anchor text or in the style of other informational texts, such as newspaper articles or historical documents. "When you get good informational texts, they really help expand students' thinking. I read all the books I gather and, after a while, you can really see the difference in quality. You begin to know what makes a good choice."

Texts used in the westward expansion case study:

The Journal of Augustus Pelletier, Kathryn Lasky

This Vast Land: A Young Man's Journal of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Stephen E. Ambrose

Lewis and Clark on the Trail of Discovery, Rod Gragg

York's Adventures with Lewis and Clark: The African American's Part in the Great Expedition, Rhoda Blumberg

Buffalo Dance: The Journey of York, Frank X. Walker

Lewis and Clark for Kids: Their Journey of Discovery with 21 Activities for Kids, Janis Herbert

Lewis and Clark journal excerpts

Library of Congress website (www.loc.gov), Jefferson page

www.pbs.org/lewisandclark

www.smithsonianmagazine.com

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FINDING TEXTS THAT MEET THE STANDARDS

Creating great sets of texts is an ongoing process that often starts—as it did for Ali Morgan in the preceding case study—with a single excellent text, the central or anchor text of a unit. This may be a text that's been traditionally taught or used at a grade level or a new favorite. Turning that stand-alone text into a set first requires a close look at the grade-level Common Core standards, the topic or theme the text represents, and the quality of the text.

Studying the standards enables teachers to be clear on what, precisely, a student should be able to do or how a student should think about a text or set of texts together. Not every text offers the opportunity to teach every standard. For example, if a standard indicates that students need to be able to compare and contrast the perspectives of multiple characters or narrators, that means they have to work with text that incorporates multiple perspectives. If the text at hand doesn't do that, additional texts could be brought into the set that do.

In addition, teachers need to think about what they want students to learn or discover from the text at hand. What is the reason for reading the text at all? Should students understand that every person has basic human rights that should be protected? If so, build a text set that enables students to see how human rights are protected and also what happens when they are violated. Should students understand that cracking the genetic code has led to myriad advances in health care? If so, texts should help them understand how the code was cracked, as well as the resulting advancements.

Finally, teachers need to consider the quality of each text. It needs to offer students the opportunity to learn new vocabulary and to consider increasingly sophisticated ways of writing. If the text is literature, it should be critically acclaimed literature that holds up as a model of excellent writing. If it's informational text, it should do its job well—explaining new ideas fully or arguing craftily.

The anchor text is the centerpiece of students' reading: the key or central text that all students will have and read in order to build content knowledge and literacy skills. In the universe of all the rich resources students will read in a given unit, the anchor text is like the sun: all the other articles, poems, maps, charts, and other forms of text circle around this one text. Thus, choosing an anchor text is a high-stakes decision. Sometimes a district or school literacy coach will make this

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decision. Other times it will be teaching teams or even individual teachers. In any case, gathering many possible texts, then critiquing each against multiple criteria is a good place to start.

> "When choosing a text I search for a relationship among the topic (or the big idea framing our learning), the target (or standard we are targeting), the task (or specific assessment we are using to achieve our target), and finally a compelling and complex text in order to create a transformative learning experience for students."
>
> *—Joseph Longbottom, K–5 media specialist, Delaware Ridge Elementary School, Kansas City, Kansas*

Analyze Anchor Texts

What follows is a list of criteria against which teachers can analyze anchor texts, along with examples from our Common Core curriculum. Keep in mind: no text is perfect. No single text can do everything we need text to do for students: the following criteria should be considered as a system. Yet similar to any major decision—choosing a house, a car, a career—choosing the text that will anchor student learning is one of those times when it is worth "going slow to go fast." As you and your team plan, ask this question: "What are all the things we need this text to do for us?" Keep iterating until you've landed on a text that is worth your time to analyze and plan from, and worth your students' time, effort, and intellect to understand and appreciate. In the snapshot that follows the criteria list, a curriculum designer reflects on this important choice.

Content: Is the text aligned to grade-level content standards? To what extent will this text help students learn something important and enduring about the big ideas of an academic discipline? How can the text help to build students' knowledge about the world? If a literary text, what topics can it still teach students about? To what extent does this text provide sufficient information, so students can successfully respond to an evidence-based writing task?

Example (grade 8): *Inside Out & Back Again* by Thanhha Lai (a fictional account of a Vietnamese girl whose family flees during the Vietnam war) offers an opportunity to teach about the universal refugee experience, aligned with social studies themes such as the role of social, political, and cultural interactions in the development of identity.

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Interest: Is the text compelling for students? Will students love digging into this text? Why? Is the text developmentally appropriate—will it sing to students of this age and background? Is it high interest in terms of content or format? Is it particularly beautifully written or illustrated?

Example (grade 5): *The Most Beautiful Roof in the World* by Kathryn Lasky (about rain forest researcher Meg Lowman) has rich scientific information about biodiversity and the rainforest, and includes gorgeous photographs of her in the canopy and stories about her son's adventures in the rainforest that will hook kids.

Complexity: Is the text appropriate in terms of qualitative and quantitative measures of complexity? What makes this text challenging? Based on qualitative measures, in what ways will the concepts, structure, language, and so on give students something worth grappling with? Based on quantitative measures, is this text sufficiently demanding in terms of syntax and academic vocabulary? Does this text provide sufficient complexity to ensure that students have to work hard and get to build their literacy muscles as they work through this text? In this unit, how will this text be paired with texts of greater or lesser complexity? (For more on choosing texts at the right level of complexity see chapter 6.)

Example (grade 5): *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan has a Lexile text measure of just 750, somewhat low for fifth grade. Yet it provides quite a challenge for fifth-graders based on qualitative measures—the concepts (identity formation of the main character and human rights violations experienced by migrant farm workers in the 1930s) as well as the metaphorical language and symbolism.

Reading standards: Does the text offer opportunities to teach the grade-level Common Core literacy standards? What opportunities does this text afford you to teach specific Common Core standards at a specific grade level of rigor? If the reading standard requires students to infer, is the text sufficiently rich to require such inferring or are the ideas all right there? If the reading standard requires students to interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively, does the text include the types of diagrams and charts that would make this work possible? Usually, a complex text will provide

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opportunities to address all the reading standards. But some texts may provide a particularly elegant fit for addressing a given standard at a given grade level.

Example (grade 7): *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park (fiction set during the Second Sudanese Civil War) traces the perspectives of Salva (from the Dinka tribe) and Nya (from the Nuer tribe). Though the language is simple for seventh-graders, the concepts related to tribal conflict, personal identity, and loss are intense. This novel affords a perfect opportunity to address RL.7.6: *Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text,* because each chapter opens with a section told from Nya's perspective and then provides a longer section told from Salva's perspective. And by pairing this novel with articles about the Second Sudanese Civil War and websites with information about the "lost boys" of Sudan, this historical fiction also provides an opportunity to address RL.7.9: *Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history.*

Writing standards: Can this text serve as a mentor text and model of author's craft? To what extent is this text a strong model of written arguments, informative writing, or narrative writing? Can this text—or sections of this text—serve not only as a context for students to build knowledge but also as an example of author's craft that students can emulate in their own writing?

Example (grade 8): *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* by Laura Hillenbrand is literary nonfiction. Through this text, students learn about Japanese-American relations in WWII. But they also see a master storyteller at work. Consider this review from the book's endorsements: "The author's skills are as polished as ever, and like its predecessor [*Seabiscuit*] this book has an impossible-to-put-down quality that one commonly associates with good thrillers" (Roland Green, *Booklist*). Students are sucked in as readers and inspired as writers. Hillenbrand's work serves as a mentor text when students craft their own narratives in order to meet W.8.3: *Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events . . . use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.*

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Snapshot: Aligning Texts to the Standards

Sharon Newman, an Expeditionary Learning staff member who worked on our Common Core curriculum design team, reflects on her struggle to find a text that would cover content and address grade-level Common Core State Standards. "When writing curriculum, you are trying to not only address content but also the Common Core State Standards," Newman says. "When working on a third-grade curriculum module, 'Gathering Evidence and Speaking to Others: The Role of Freshwater around the World,' we needed to teach the standard RI.3.8: *Describe the logical connection between particular sentences and paragraphs in a text (e.g., comparison, cause/effect, first/second/third in a sequence).*"

"We selected inspiring complex texts—one about a nine-year-old boy who had built a well to provide clean water to a village in Africa (Ryan Hreljac, *The Boy Who Built a Well)*; another about the efforts of citizens in Australia to conserve water (Ann Weil, *Dry Days in Australia*); and a third about an inspiring American who started a foundation to keep our rivers clean (Jill Esbaum, *Tackling the Trash*). When we reviewed the texts, we felt good about their potential to meet the standards. They were rich with sequence and cause and effect and included some comparisons. But when we dug in deeply to the standard and became more familiar with it, we realized that although these 'logical connections' were present, they didn't always exist between sentences and paragraphs. At times there were connections, but the structure of these texts did not support students in learning about the logical connections. As our uncertainty grew, we checked released test items aligned to the standard. This was a huge help! It made us realize that the texts we selected were not going to provide rich and appropriate opportunities for mastery of the standard.

"With this in mind, we went back and did a deep analysis of texts about rivers and the water cycle that we had planned to use in the previous unit, including our anchor text, *One Well: The Story of Water on Earth* by Rochelle Strauss. Through these texts, we were able to more tightly meet the intent of the standard—noting comparisons between groundwater and surface water in different paragraphs, sequence as an author follows a river from its headwaters to the sea, and cause and effect within the water cycle.

"The trick is finding the sweet spot. Where in the text does it reach the standard? Some of the Common Core standards are very detailed in what students are asked to do. Texts are layered and don't necessarily fit standards exactly. As a teacher you have to analyze the heck out of it, look closely at the assessment and what it's asking kids to do, and then make sure that your instruction draws them to that standard."

Newman offers these tips for teachers selecting texts aligned to Common Core State Standards:

- Know with clarity what standards you are trying to address—make sure you really understand what is expected of students.
- Gather lots of texts. Pull everything you can on the topic. Work with librarians (our local library will pull dozens of books on a topic), so you have a range of different texts to consider. Anchor texts are one way to teach the standards, but you need others as well. Some anchor texts can be taught over and over and some can't.

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- As you review texts that are the right level of complexity, try them out—design note-catchers to help students track and organize their notes, preplan text-dependent questions. Do this with a series of texts to ensure that they will give students ample opportunity to meet standards.

A VOLUME OF READING

In the Common Core era, students are challenged to read complex texts to build content knowledge, literacy skills, and academic vocabulary. Working with complex text is slow, careful work, and it's important, but it's not the only thing students need in their reading diet.

In order to grow as readers, students also need a volume of reading. They need a lot of text and a variety of text, including text beyond the texts central to a unit and in addition to texts they read in school. A rich reading diet helps students build important world knowledge, acquire additional academic vocabulary, gain fluency, and master increasingly challenging syntax, all of which are critical for reading comprehension.

Our approach to a volume of reading is influenced by the following:

- The Common Core vision of what it means to be college and career ready as readers
- The research base on reading instruction
- Recognition that reading is a skill that demands ongoing practice to develop proficiency

Unfortunately, many students in the early years struggle to decode text or fail to discover books on topics they are interested in. Just as children on a meager, monotonous, or strictly junk food diet fail to thrive physically, they often lose their enthusiasm for reading and fail to thrive academically. This in turn can lead to decreased motivation to read for learning or pleasure and ultimately results in a lost opportunity to become proficient readers.

To get enough reading practice students need to read for a variety of purposes and encounter all types of text. Although reading development does not occur in a linear fashion, and students' reading proficiency occurs at different rates (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State

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Independent reading time helps students maintain a healthy reading diet.

School Officers, 2010), children who become strong readers often begin by reading the backs of cereal boxes, the road signs outside the bus window, labels on the grocery shelves, or magazines in the doctors' office. In school, teachers can provide a balanced diet of reading even with a single topic of study by adding biographies about chemists to reading in the chemistry textbook, a newspaper article about a local election to the civics reader, even cartoons or jokes added to morning meeting. Independent reading, encouraged by a varied, deep, and accessible classroom library, is another opportunity to develop students' reading muscles.

Build in Plenty of Time to Read for Research

The authors of the Common Core state that "to be ready for college, workforce training, and life in a technological society, students need the ability to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas, to conduct original research in order to answer questions or solve problems, and to analyze and create a high volume and extensive range of print and nonprint texts in media forms old and new" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 4). When students

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are engaged in "research reading," they typically are reading many texts about the same or related subjects. For example, to design working wind turbines and write proposals about renewable energy, eighth-graders at King Middle School in Portland, Maine, conducted research of articles on the Internet, but they also read public documents from Maine's Land Use Regulatory Committee and gathered information from science videos. In Ali Morgan's classroom, which we visited previously in this chapter, chalk rails, milk crates, and wheeled library carts were full of books about westward expansion. Students were saturated with opportunities to build their knowledge about this topic. Grappling with a variety of text types and sources pushes students to expand their vocabularies and repertoire of text structures, as well as their understanding of a topic. Short research projects, rather than one monumental research project each year, offer multiple opportunities for reading variety and are more likely to appeal to diverse learners. Library media specialists play a critical role in helping students to complete assigned research projects and independent research related to students' personal interests.

Build in Plenty of Time to Read for Pleasure

The Common Core has brought into focus the cognitive benefits of reading: vocabulary building and comprehension of complex texts. It is important for us to keep in mind, however, that even if students can read, it does not mean they will choose to do so.

Reading for pleasure complements reading complex text that is required reading (and a few students do choose to read complex text for pleasure). Reading for pleasure is key for building lifelong readers and enables developing readers to make choices about their own reading likes and dislikes as they construct their own reading identities. As every book club member can attest, conversations about books and authors and ideas found in print stir the pot of what we know about the world, what we believe, and what we can imagine. Teachers, media specialists, and even reading volunteers who encourage students to choose their own books for independent reading and talk to students informally and formally about their choice reading invite children to uncover new knowledge and connect with each other and their world.

Teachers often are concerned about holding students accountable for independent reading. There are endless ways to track independent reading requirements,

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but the most successful ways place the responsibility on the student. Launching independent reading routines that include checking out books, goal setting, reading journals or letters, silent time and talk time, and protocols for exchanging books creates a culture of reading in the classroom that builds students' reading stamina and engagement. You can find sample independent reading plans at www.commoncoresuccess.elschools.org.

Clearly it will take time, effort, and intention to transform the process of choosing worthwhile texts from simply using what's left over in the bookroom or what was listed on last year's lesson plan into a process that is collaborative, purposeful, and designed to grow lifelong readers. Why bother? Perhaps returning to the opening vignette for part 1 provides the answer. Julia St. Martin had her students grapple with the question "why read?" by engaging with strategically paired literary and informational texts. In so doing, she gave them a glimpse of the answer.

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Chapter 2

Bringing Text to Life

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REASONS TO READ

Choosing the right texts for students to read in service of building their knowledge of the world is key to this Common Core instructional shift. Equally important are a high-quality curriculum that motivates them to read and instructional strategies that make good use of the text. In this chapter we will explore structures and strategies that will help teachers breathe interest, mystery, and curiosity into texts in any content area.

Building a compelling purpose for reading can change student dispositions toward engaging in the work from passive compliance (or resistance) to positive motivation. Often a local topic with a final product that provides a service to the community—an authentic audience—is highly motivating and challenges students to do their best work. For example, fifth- and sixth-grade students at Explore Elementary School in Thornton, Colorado, conducted a case study on Colorado's mountain pine beetle in order to better understand how global climate change is affecting Colorado's forests. In addition to conducting their own fieldwork, they also studied original scientific research papers, topographical maps, and other informational texts about the pine beetle to prepare for writing a field guide to the Colorado forest that was sold in local businesses.

It's not always feasible to use authentic projects and real-world work to create motivation to read. Motivation can also be built simply by catalyzing intellectual interest by exposing students to compelling questions and interestingly different perspectives on a topic. For example, eleventh-grade students at Tapestry Charter School in Buffalo, New York, kicked off a unit on social justice issues in America's foundational documents with a case study of Hurricane Katrina. They began by viewing Spike Lee's award winning documentary, *When the Levees Broke,* a probing examination of the US government's role and response to the Hurricane Katrina disaster. The film helped to open a discourse about how race and class determines the American experience. Students explored the cultural heritage of New Orleans and the complicating factors that led to its demise when Katrina hit. They studied the government's role in the Hurricane Katrina disaster, and its aftermath, and used this as a starting point for a deep look at the concept of federalism in US history. The case study was also a starting point for a focus on Jim Crow laws and their influence on race and class relations as they developed during reconstruction. The topic of the case study was not only profoundly appealing to high school students but also provided opportunities for reading a wide variety of

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texts, including primary source documents such as *The Federalist Papers* and Jim Crow laws.

Strategies to hook students into compelling content vary. Before exploring strategies that require more extensive planning, here we highlight several that are relatively easy for teachers to plan and implement. Not only are these strategies great hooks for content but also many of them support reading fluency and develop students' skills citing evidence, instructional shifts we will explore more deeply in parts 2 and 3:

- Readers' theater presentations—students prepare a dramatic production by reading and staging selected quotes from one or more texts
- Formal or informal debates in or beyond the classroom (see chapter 3 for more on debates)
- Socratic seminars—student-led discussions that are text and evidence based and that address important questions (Julia St. Martin's fishbowl protocol at the opening of part 1 is an example of a type of Socratic seminar)
- Poetry slams, reading slams, and choral readings based on texts
- Sets of texts with a range of perspectives on an issue, including some that are oppositional, so that students are challenged to consider different viewpoints in discussion and writing
- Sets of texts centered on issues of justice and fairness (e.g., legal justice, environmental ethics, social and emotional dilemmas, historical injustices)—students have strong feelings about what is fair and right and are often motivated to read texts about such issues
- Opportunities for students to teach a text to their peers—their own classmates, other classes, or community members (note that this strategy requires helping students learn how to be effective teachers—they must have clear goals, plan active and engaging lessons, and plan how they will assess the impact of the lesson)

Teach Content through Case Studies

Case studies animate the major concepts of a discipline or broad topic through concrete—often local, but not always—studies of subtopics within the discipline.

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The case study, which is typically two to six weeks in duration, enables students to focus their research and gain expertise on a topic before they generalize their learning to broader concepts and content. As part of a US history study of the civil rights movement, for example, students may research, interview, and write about a local civil rights hero. A local connection like this requires that students do a different kind of research, more like real scientists or historians, and this inevitably leads them to read a wider variety of informational texts, particularly primary sources. Local connections are wonderfully compelling for students, but they aren't necessary for successful case studies (e.g., students in Buffalo exploring social justice by studying the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina).

Case studies often involve an authentic audience of community members who students will share their work with or to whom they will make a presentation. As mentioned previously, an authentic audience beyond the school is not always possible. However, providing students with an opportunity to present their work to their peers, either within the classroom or within the school, is a good starting point. Alternatively, as in the described example of the mountain pine beetle case study, sometimes an authentic audience can be the future reader of a field guide or pamphlet and doesn't necessarily need to be a highly coordinated and logistically complicated event.

What Is an Authentic Audience and Why Does It Matter?

In Expeditionary Learning schools, an **authentic audience** is the group of community members for whom students produce work (e.g., interpretive signs in a local nature preserve) or prepare presentations (e.g., policy briefs). It is an audience beyond the classroom teacher that motivates students to care about the purpose and quality of their work. Knowing that an authentic audience cares about the quality of their work helps students persevere through challenging reading, writing, and thinking.

In addition to motivating students with compelling content, case studies often offer opportunities for service learning that are meaningful to students and the community. Ninth-graders at the Springfield Renaissance School in Springfield, Massachusetts, for example, conducted a feasibility study for creating a public beach at a local pond, which involved water testing and usability testing of the grounds. The class produced a report for the city that helped Springfield move

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Having an audience for their work connects students deeply to their reading, writing, and knowledge building.

forward with its plans for a public beach. Students started by reading the Environmental Protection Agency's Water Quality Standards, taking them one at a time, ensuring that they understood what the implications of the standards were for their local pond. They also read examples of other water-quality reports and population-density and commerce-density maps in preparation for writing their own professional-quality report.

Because of the opportunities they provide for students to connect deeply to their content, whether it's because of a local community connection, a connection to a personally significant social justice issue, or even a connection to a classroom pet, case studies can motivate students to persevere with challenging texts and to seek out the

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resources they need to do high-quality work. Not only are case studies a great vehicle for exposing students to a wide variety of informational texts but also they enable students to read and research for a purpose, much more similar to what they may do in college and in many professions. Oftentimes a case study will involve fieldwork and consultations with local experts—these experiences reinforce what students have previously read or discussed and help the concepts become more real.

Introduce New Topics with the Building Background Knowledge (BBK) Workshop

The Building Background Knowledge (BBK) workshop is a protocol that generates enthusiasm for learning new content and motivates students to persevere through challenging work. The BBK immerses students in a new content topic. It is a short (two to three class periods) hook into a longer unit of study. The BBK builds curiosity and mystery as teachers guide students through a series of texts and other media, helping them to generate questions and promoting a spirit of inquiry about a new content area. The BBK provides a rich opportunity for students to have a range of reading experiences—complex texts, provocative texts that represent multiple perspectives, informational texts, and literary texts such as poetry and short stories—and is a strong vehicle for building literacy skills and content knowledge.

The BBK encompasses a series of steps that provide just enough provocative information to inspire students to want more. Students record what they know or think they know as well as their questions at each step in the process. As additional pieces of information are provided, some of the questions get answered and new questions are formulated. It is important to stress that the questions are answered not by the teacher but by individuals and small groups carefully reading and interpreting text.

At the end of the BBK, students have some basic knowledge about the topic, have gotten some clarity about things they thought they knew, but about which they may have had incorrect or incomplete information, and have generated questions they are eager to answer. The types of questions range from simply factual to more complex—questions that scholars in the field still grapple with—that require further digging and reading. Students are now well positioned to approach their long-term study with excitement and engagement.

BBKs are powerful for students, but they can also be quite time intensive for teachers to prepare. Doing one or two steps of a BBK may be more feasible to plan and teach than the entire protocol. A shortened protocol can still be valuable for students.

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Overview of Steps in the BBK

The "mystery piece." The mystery piece captures students' interest in the topic they are about to begin studying. It piques their curiosity. Sometimes the mystery piece is an image, chart, graph, or poem that students must try to make sense of. It may be realia from a historical time period, such as the probate inventory of John Allen in chapter 1 (figure 1.1). It may even be an expert visitor who comes to the classroom or fieldwork at a museum or local site that is important to the upcoming content. Teachers may also put together a gallery walk of several mystery pieces, during which students explore images, charts, graphs, or short written pieces hanging around the room. Figure 2.1 is a complicated chart of energy data that makes for a provocative mystery piece.

During this stage of a BBK, students still don't know what they are going to study. The mystery piece is designed to give them a clue, but to not give too much away, so that they are eager for more information. Teachers may give students questions to consider as they explore the piece, perhaps using a protocol such as think-pair-share, which gives students an opportunity to think independently before talking to a peer and making meaning collaboratively. Depending on students' familiarity with the medium of the mystery piece, they may need a skill-building mini-lesson (e.g., how to read a photo, how to interpret scatterplots). (See "Five Key Questions for Deconstructing Media.") At the conclusion of this stage, and following whole-class discussion, the topic of study is revealed and learning targets are introduced.

Five Key Questions for Deconstructing Media

- Who created this message?
- What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
- How might different people understand this message differently?
- What values, lifestyles, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
- Why is this message being sent?

Source: Center for Media Literacy, Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York (nd).

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Figure 2.1 A Provocative Mystery Piece

Table 7.2a Electricity Net Generation: Total (All Sectors)

(Sum of Tables 7.2b and 7.2c; Million Kilowatthours)

	Fossil Fuels						Renewable Energy						
								Biomass					
	Coal[a]	Petroleum[b]	Natural Gas[c]	Other Gases[d]	Nuclear Electric Power	Hydroelectric Pumped Storage[e]	Conventional Hydroelectric Power[f]	Wood[g]	Waste[h]	Geothermal	Solar/PV[i]	Wind	Total[j]
1973 Total	847,651	314,343	340,858	NA	83,479	(f)	275,431	130	198	1,966	NA	NA	1,864,057
1975 Total	852,786	289,095	299,778	NA	172,505	(f)	303,153	18	174	3,246	NA	NA	1,920,755
1980 Total	1,161,562	245,994	346,240	NA	251,116	(f)	279,182	275	158	5,073	NA	NA	2,289,600
1985 Total	1,402,128	100,202	291,946	NA	383,691	(f)	284,311	743	640	9,325	11	6	2,473,002
1990 Total[k]	1,594,011	126,460	372,765	10,383	576,862	-3,508	292,866	32,522	13,260	15,434	367	2,789	3,037,827
1995 Total	1,709,426	74,554	496,058	13,870	673,402	-2,725	310,833	36,521	20,405	13,378	497	3,164	3,353,487
1996 Total	1,795,196	81,411	455,056	14,356	674,729	-3,088	347,162	36,800	20,911	14,329	521	3,234	3,444,188
1997 Total	1,845,016	92,555	479,399	13,351	628,644	-4,040	356,453	36,948	21,709	14,726	511	3,288	3,492,172
1998 Total	1,873,516	128,800	531,257	13,492	673,702	-4,467	323,336	36,338	22,448	14,774	502	3,026	3,620,295
1999 Total	1,881,087	118,061	556,396	14,126	728,254	-6,097	319,536	37,041	22,572	14,827	495	4,488	3,694,810
2000 Total	1,966,265	111,221	601,038	13,955	753,893	-5,539	275,573	37,595	23,131	14,093	493	5,593	3,802,105
2001 Total	1,903,956	124,880	639,129	9,039	768,826	-8,823	216,961	35,200	14,548	13,741	543	6,737	3,736,644
2002 Total	1,933,130	94,567	691,006	11,463	780,064	-8,743	264,329	38,665	15,044	14,491	555	10,354	3,858,452
2003 Total	1,973,737	119,406	649,908	15,600	763,733	-8,535	275,806	37,529	15,812	14,424	534	11,187	3,883,185
2004 Total	1,978,301	121,145	710,100	15,252	788,528	-8,488	268,417	38,117	15,421	14,811	575	14,144	3,970,555
2005 Total	2,012,873	122,225	760,960	13,464	781,986	-6,558	270,321	38,856	15,420	14,692	550	17,811	4,055,423
2006 Total	1,990,511	64,166	816,441	14,177	787,219	-6,558	289,246	38,762	16,099	14,568	508	26,589	4,064,702
2007 Total	2,016,456	65,739	896,590	13,453	806,425	-6,896	247,510	39,014	16,525	14,637	612	34,450	4,156,745
2008 Total	1,985,801	46,243	882,981	11,707	806,208	-6,288	254,831	37,300	17,734	14,840	864	55,363	4,119,388
2009 January	171,925	6,104	66,390	807	74,102	-501	23,490	3,030	1,462	1,289	7	5,951	354,993
February	140,916	3,318	62,139	784	64,227	-413	17,812	2,823	1,357	1,168	30	5,852	300,887
March	135,530	3,349	68,203	834	67,241	-315	21,827	2,919	1,553	1,300	78	7,099	310,603
April	125,935	2,807	61,159	758	59,408	-272	25,770	2,664	1,542	1,222	99	7,458	289,537
May	131,673	3,209	68,146	773	65,395	-349	29,560	2,735	1,522	1,235	110	6,262	311,306
June	148,087	3,243	84,205	876	69,735	-226	29,233	2,997	1,558	1,209	103	5,599	347,658
July	158,234	3,358	101,894	966	72,949	-491	23,385	3,227	1,628	1,255	121	4,955	372,542
August	163,260	3,642	109,240	1,012	72,245	-613	19,580	3,355	1,604	1,251	116	5,464	381,221
September	137,145	2,853	92,127	1,022	65,752	-348	17,359	3,061	1,501	1,217	95	4,651	327,401
October	139,956	2,560	72,603	960	58,021	-385	19,691	3,032	1,533	1,221	68	6,814	307,040
November	136,810	2,072	63,285	910	59,069	-330	21,008	3,049	1,572	1,273	40	6,875	296,635
December	166,434	2,422	71,590	930	70,710	-383	24,730	3,158	1,608	1,368	21	6,906	350,507
Total	1,755,904	38,937	920,979	10,632	798,855	-4,627	273,445	36,050	18,443	15,009	891	73,886	3,950,331
2010 January	173,505	4,301	73,558	909	72,569	-537	22,156	3,248	1,482	1,373	10	6,965	360,401
February	153,073	2,313	65,345	829	65,245	-96	20,513	2,958	1,315	1,217	34	5,494	319,004
March	144,703	2,436	62,548	997	64,635	-49	20,626	3,170	1,557	1,332	81	8,683	311,601
April	127,164	2,246	64,240	947	57,611	-303	18,630	2,998	1,596	1,262	124	9,838	287,279
May	143,686	2,991	73,427	992	66,658	-197	24,920	3,010	1,562	1,334	175	8,681	328,208
June	165,918	4,026	92,398	939	68,301	-227	29,489	3,198	1,577	1,294	196	7,992	376,100
July	179,933	4,454	114,883	950	71,913	-466	24,136	3,419	1,610	1,304	182	6,631	409,972
August	178,101	3,553	121,127	1,041	71,574	-533	19,748	3,403	1,606	1,319	173	6,613	408,761
September	148,667	2,817	92,503	973	69,371	-349	16,915	3,173	1,527	1,263	146	7,080	345,064
October	132,955	2,207	76,631	782	62,751	-374	17,382	2,954	1,518	1,224	75	7,963	307,054
November	135,496	2,050	68,332	897	62,655	-429	19,425	3,124	1,588	1,333	67	9,875	305,340
December	167,548	3,532	76,822	938	73,683	-530	23,111	3,319	1,619	1,412	38	8,833	361,244
Total	1,850,750	36,925	981,815	11,193	806,968	-4,091	257,052	37,975	18,557	15,666	1,299	94,647	4,120,028
2011 January	171,246	3,288	74,070	923	72,743	-426	25,746	3,167	1,432	1,435	43	8,888	363,378
February	138,590	2,201	65,375	795	64,789	-247	24,346	2,699	1,325	1,289	102	10,315	312,334
March	134,715	2,437	65,679	958	65,662	-350	31,385	2,878	1,568	1,425	110	10,452	317,835
3-Month Total	444,550	7,926	205,124	2,676	203,193	-1,023	81,476	8,744	4,325	4,150	255	29,654	993,546
2010 3-Month Total	471,281	9,050	201,451	2,735	202,449	-682	63,295	9,376	4,353	3,922	125	21,141	991,006
2009 3-Month Total	448,371	12,771	196,732	2,425	205,570	-1,230	63,130	8,772	4,373	3,757	116	18,902	966,483

[a] Anthracite, bituminous coal, subbituminous coal, lignite, waste coal, and coal synfuel.
[b] Distillate fuel oil, residual fuel oil, petroleum coke, jet fuel, kerosene, other petroleum, and waste oil.
[c] Natural gas, plus a small amount of supplemental gaseous fuels.
[d] Blast furnace gas, propane gas, and other manufactured and waste gases derived from fossil fuels.
[e] Pumped storage facility production minus energy used for pumping.
[f] Through 1989, hydroelectric pumped storage is included in "Conventional Hydroelectric Power."
[g] Wood and wood-derived fuels.
[h] Municipal solid waste from biogenic sources, landfill gas, sludge waste, agricultural byproducts, and other biomass. Through 2000, also includes non-renewable waste (municipal solid waste from non-biogenic sources, and tire-derived fuels).
[i] Solar thermal and photovoltaic (PV) energy.
[j] Includes batteries, chemicals, hydrogen, pitch, purchased steam, sulfur, miscellaneous technologies, and, beginning in 2001, non-renewable waste (municipal solid waste from non-biogenic sources, and tire-derived fuels).
[k] Through 1988, all data except hydroelectric are for electric utilities only; hydroelectric data through 1988 include industrial plants as well as electric utilities. Beginning in 1989, data are for electric utilities, independent power producers, commercial plants, and industrial plants.

NA=Not available.

Notes: • Totals may not equal sum of components due to independent rounding. • Geographic coverage is the 50 States and the District of Columbia.

Web Page: See http://www.eia.gov/totalenergy/data/monthly/#electricity for all available data beginning in 1973.

Sources: See sources for Tables 7.2b and 7.2c.

Source: US Energy Information Administration (2014).

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Activating schema. During this stage of the BBK, the teacher conducts informal assessments to determine what students already know about the topic. Students may write in a journal or on a note-catcher about what they know about the topic. Primary students may draw pictures to represent what they know. As students think, write, and share about things they already know, they build connections to the topic they are going to study, which builds their confidence to begin learning new things.

Reading a common text. Students read a foundational text that anchors the learning in common content and vocabulary. This is an opportunity for teachers to select a complex text that not only builds content knowledge but also builds literacy skills. Teachers should move slowly with the common text, perhaps coming back to it over multiple days, and should provide students with note-catchers and other tools to help them read closely. Discussion protocols will help students make meaning as they work through the text. During this stage, and those that follow, students inevitably will generate many questions, which teachers should record.

Expert and jigsaw groups. In order to further build on what students have learned about their new area of study, teachers select a set of reading materials to expand students' knowledge to be used as "expert texts." In expert groups, all students will read the same expert text. They will gain expertise on that topic so that they can join a "jigsaw" group—a group made up of one student from each expert group—and speak knowledgeably about their topic. Students in jigsaw groups can answer questions that cut across the various topics and consider issues from multiple perspectives.

When students read in expert groups the text has a different kind of power. Because each student in an expert group will need to share his or her knowledge with the jigsaw group, every student will feel accountable to understand and communicate the content and ideas. No one in the jigsaw group will have read that particular document except for that student, and the group will depend on him or her to give them information they will need for their work.

In terms of helping students develop content knowledge *and* making sure all students are building their literacy skills, teachers must be mindful of two key

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Expert and jigsaw groups support students to build group understanding based on individual reading.

factors when using expert and jigsaw groups: text selection and level of teacher support. When choosing texts for expert groups, be sure weaker readers have texts that they can access (however, this does not mean students should be grouped homogenously). Struggling readers need a chance to build their content knowledge *from the text itself* (as opposed to just from listening to stronger readers explain what is in the expert texts): building their reading muscle is how they will become better readers. Also, expert groups may need considerable teacher support. Teachers can circulate to different groups to read the text aloud before students dig in, define key vocabulary that may not be easily determined from context, or ask text-dependent questions. Gone are the days of just giving groups folders with texts and leaving them totally on their own to decipher them.

Watch jigsaws in action in the accompanying short video, "Strategy: Jigsaw" from the Brennan Rogers School in New Haven, Connecticut, and in the longer video, "Engaging Students in Collaborative Academic Discussions," from P.S. 36 in Bronx, New York, previously referenced in chapter 1.

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Watch video: "Strategy: Jigsaw"

Revisiting the original hook or mystery. This final stage of the BBK is a chance for students to reflect on their new knowledge and understandings. Students think about what they knew before the BBK, what they know now, and what they still have questions about. This is an important time for teachers to hold students accountable for returning to their texts to cite specific evidence for their assertions.

TEXT AS TEACHER: USING TEXT TO TEACH CONTENT AND LITERACY IN YOUR DISCIPLINE

Content area teachers, such as earth science, economics, and history teachers, are accustomed to delivering important disciplinary content through informational texts. Rather than guiding students to and through a text, however, most often reading is assigned for homework. After reading the assignment, students are often asked to answer a set of questions about the reading, and, generally, the reading and questions are reviewed or turned in during the next class. But what happens if students don't understand the reading? What if they've learned to bluff their way through the content by skimming for factual answers instead of reading?

Additionally, most secondary content teachers, whether in science, social studies, math, technology, or the arts, are frustrated by their students' efforts to read and write effectively in their discipline. Teachers are discouraged when their students avoid required reading assigned as homework or do the reading but struggle to understand it. The written work that students turn in often demonstrates conceptual gaps or poor understanding of how to write as a scientist, historian, or mathematician. Nevertheless, most secondary teachers do not carve out time to explicitly teach and support literacy in their discipline during class. In order to teach students the skills they need to read informational texts—including very challenging texts—and meet Common Core standards, we need to change this paradigm.

Content area teachers must also become literacy teachers within their discipline. The Common Core literacy standards are not just for English language arts teachers. A set of Common Core Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and

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Technical Subjects standards provide guidance for the literacy skills content area teachers must teach. This should not be viewed as an add-on or something that will take time away from teaching the important content of the course. On the contrary, texts can and should be used as a vehicle for helping students understand the concepts and content of the discipline. In the following case study, we take a deep look at an eighth-grade earth science module that uses text as the backbone of every lesson.

Case Study

Text as Teacher in the "Water Is Life" Module

> We keep an eye out for wonders, my daughter and I, every morning as we walk down our farm lane to meet the school bus. And wherever we find them, they reflect the magic of water: a spider web drooping with dew like a rhinestone necklace. A rain-colored heron rising from the creek bank. One astonishing morning, we had a visitation of frogs. Dozens of them hurtled up from the grass ahead of our feet, launching themselves, white-bellied, in bouncing arcs, as if we'd been caught in a downpour of amphibians. It seemed to mark the dawning of some new aqueous age. . . .

So begins Barbara Kingsolver's luscious *National Geographic Magazine* essay "Water Is Life" (2010). This essay frames Expeditionary Learning's eight-week middle school earth science module, in which students wrestle with these guiding questions:

- How can the properties and movement of water (around the earth) help us explain the phrase "water is life"?
- How can we use the water cycle to understand the phrase "water is life"?
- How and why can water-quality issues in one watershed affect the quality of water in other watersheds?
- How do our increased understanding of the hydrosphere, watersheds, and human uses of water affect our fresh water resources?

In the module, "Water Is Life: The Earth's Hydrosphere and Its Impact on Living Systems," which can be found at www.achievethecore.org, students closely read Barbara Kingsolver's "Water Is Life" essay; use the US Environmental Protection Agency MyWATERS Mapper to explore the specific rivers and streams and watershed boundaries for the major US watersheds; study the USGS National Water Information System to examine surface water flow, underground water levels, and water-quality parameters for students' local watershed (no matter what region of the country they are in); and write an informative essay to explain the need to protect "the water commons." Through a series of twenty carefully designed

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lessons—concept-rich and literacy intensive—students work with a wide variety of texts as they build a deep conceptual understanding of the importance of water in sustaining life on earth or what life might be like if this pattern were disrupted. Simultaneously, they build their ability to read and write like scientists—meeting or exceeding the demands of the Common Core literacy standards for science and technical subjects.

Contrast this to how students in many middle schools typically learn about the importance of water: their learning may involve reading a section from a textbook, conducting basic experiments, listening to lectures, reading a current events article about a recent flood or drought, and studying the diagram with arrows that represent water flowing from mountaintops through rivers and streams into the ocean and then back up into the clouds. In this approach, most of students' learning takes place through "teacher talk," not through text that is varied, compelling, and authentic.

To grasp the artistry of choosing, sequencing, and using texts to promote deeper learning through the Common Core, let's peek into this module's first unit, in which students learn about the hydrologic cycle. Jennifer Seydel, the science educator who designed this module, made a bold choice to place Kingsolver's literary nonfiction as the unit's centerpiece.

The article is challenging—nuanced, dense with scientific and academic vocabulary, flooded with figurative language, and assuming quite a bit of background knowledge and conceptual understanding of complex systems. Seydel says that when she first read it, she thought, "This is too complex! I don't think this is a match for a lot of readers in urban middle schools." Yet marrying her science expertise with her understanding of the rigors of the Common Core, she spent a significant amount of time unpacking the text. "Using the red flags that were triggered when I first read the article, I did an analysis: I listed all the vocabulary I thought students wouldn't understand, the metaphors, the concepts. What I found were all the concepts essential to a unit on climate change and water sheds such as the parts of the hydrologic cycle, desertification, and the relationship among the hydrosphere, biosphere, and lithosphere, which are part of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) for earth systems science." She goes on: "With this deep understanding of the text, I decided that if we unpacked the text and the concepts embedded in the text as we were reading, the article could serve as the framework, or backbone, for the unit." (To see how Seydel analyzed this text and then crafted text-dependent questions throughout the unit for students, see the module's appendix at www.achievethecore.org.)

After this analysis, Seydel returned to the standards: "I had to go back and study the NGSS and the Common Core standards using the concepts and skills that students would need to understand the article so that I could determine what reading skills I was supporting and what content standards I would use to identify other support materials, labs, and lessons. Because I had clarified the content standards and analyzed the article, it was very easy to determine the sequence of literacy and science literacy lessons that were needed. The structure of the article and the arguments of the author helped to determine lessons and the content standards that would be assessed through this unit of study."

Seydel's lesson sequence asks students to read and reread the Kingsolver article in small chunks, spiraling across lessons, focusing on key scientific concepts and vocabulary.

(*Continued*)

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Their work with the article is extended and enhanced by a wide variety of images, videos, maps, diagrams, and conceptual models—the type of authentic scientific texts students must be able to comprehend and analyze if they are truly to be college and career ready.

Seydel describes this process and having students "dive deep" and then "back out" of complex text. For example, she says, "In one place in the article Kingsolver references trying to dig a well in Peru. The whole concept of desertification and the misuse of water resources is embedded in the images Kingsolver creates: 'a dozen hopeful men in stained straw hats stood back to let me inspect their work, which so far had yielded only a mountain of exhumed sand, dry as dust.' As a science educator, I knew students needed to understand the concept of desertification. So I pulled out of the article and did a whole sequence on desertification. I created a gallery of photos to hook the students' interest in what happens to the land and people when there is no water. Then I built some activities using the vocabulary in the article to help students understand the dynamics of the misuse of water resources in an arid climate. I pulled in maps from the BBC News that would help students see how water availability changes as temperatures, population, and industrialization increase, and pulled in some lessons from the desertification curriculum from the United Nations to help build background knowledge and understanding. Once we had established an understanding of desertification, we reread that section of the article using text-dependent questions [see the following]. Then I knew students would grasp not only Kingsolver's language but also the key concepts, and would be ready to move on to read the next section."

Text-Dependent Questions, "Water Is Life"

1. In paragraphs 6, 7, and 8, Kingsolver describes one example of people living in the Piura Desert in order to show what it is like to live in an area of extreme drought. Underline in the text examples of the challenges they face.
2. Explain what Kingsolver means when she writes, "I climbed . . . ?" Why do you think Kingsolver had tears in her eyes? What experiences has she shared in earlier parts of the text that might make her feel sad for the people living in the desert?
3. Kingsolver came to the desert to learn about "an innovative reforestation project." What was the purpose of the project? Why do you think reforestation in a desert is innovative?

Choosing worthy text is critical. Using it wisely is even more challenging, yet potentially inspiring as well. As Seydel states, "Because of who we are as scientists, because we have an affinity to understand how the world works, we need to help our students and our colleagues understand that much of what is written—and much of what is assumed about the world—is grounded in science. So selecting texts that are supposed to be accessible to the general population and unpacking those texts to help them see where the really rich science is, is as much of an adventure as doing a lab." Table 2.1 details the standards and sequence of lessons in the first unit of the "Water Is Life" module. Lesson four of this sequence is explored in depth in chapter 7.

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Table 2.1 "Water Is Life"—Unit 1 Lesson Sequence

Understanding the Hydrologic Cycle These early lessons build a compelling case for considering fresh water as a fundamental ingredient for life on earth while building students' academic and content-specific vocabulary. Students read closely paragraphs 1 through 3 of the text, "Water Is Life." Students develop clear routines using four different vocabulary strategies during the close-reading process, respond to text-dependent questions, and use the Interactive Word Wall to develop their first conceptual model of the hydrologic cycle.		
Topic	**Text**	**Sample CCSS for Science and Technical Subjects**
Lesson 1: Introducing the Big Idea "Water Is Life"	**Excerpt:** "Water Is Life" three sentences **Image** of the earth **Interactive Word Wall:** hydrologic cycle, hydrosphere **Video:** "Earth's Water Cycle" (NASA) **Literary nonfiction:** "Water Is Life" paragraphs 1–3	RST.6–8.1: *Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of science and technical texts.*
Lesson 2: The Water Cycle	**Literary nonfiction:** "Water Is Life" paragraphs 4–5 **Video:** "Earth's Water Cycle" (NASA)	RST.6–8.7: *Integrate quantitative or technical information expressed in words in a text with a version of that information expressed visually (e.g., in a flowchart, diagram, model, graph, or table).*
The Relationship among the Hydrosphere, Atmosphere, Lithosphere and the Biosphere Students build their conceptual understanding of how and why the movement of water on earth determines whether living organisms can survive. They use the Kingsolver article (paragraphs 6–9) as the main text but will also use maps and other resources to explore why Kingsolver has used desertification as her example of the importance of water in this section of the article. By examining the process of desertification, students will learn how the hydrosphere (water on, over, and under the surface), the atmosphere (layer of gases surrounding the earth), and the lithosphere (the land) influence the biosphere (where life can survive).		
Topic	Text	Sample CCSS for Science and Technical Subjects
Lesson 3: Distribution of Fresh Water Resources	**Literary nonfiction:** "Water Is Life" paragraphs 6–9 **Map** or globe **Interactive Word Wall:** atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere, biosphere **Diagrams:** The Earth as a System: Earth's Spheres (Gallaudet) **Maps:** The Key Effects of Climate Change (BBC)	RST.6–8.4: *Determine the meaning of symbols, key terms, and other domain-specific words and phrases as they are used in a specific scientific or technical context relevant to grades 6–8 texts and topics.*

(*Continued*)

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Table 2.1 *(Continued)*

<table>
<tr><td>Lesson 4: The Impact of Water Scarcity on Living Systems</td><td>Photos and texts related to desertification: definition, causes of desertification, water and desertification, environmental consequences of desertification, consequences of desertification on humans
Literary nonfiction: “Water Is Life” paragraphs 6–9</td><td>RST.6–8.9: Compare and contrast the information gained from experiments, simulations, video, or multimedia sources with that gained from reading a text on the same topic.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Using Models to Understand This Watery Planet
In lessons 5 and 6, students continue their close reading of Barbara Kingsolver’s “Water Is Life,” focusing on how access to fresh water is the determining factor in planetary and human health. Students will apply reading and vocabulary strategies developed in lessons 1 to 4 to their analysis of computer-based and conceptual models of the hydrosphere. As they compare what they learn from computer and conceptual models to the evidence that Kingsolver used in her article, they will begin to discuss the qualities of conceptual models and the text that supports them.</td></tr>
<tr><th>Topic</th><th>Text</th><th>Sample CCSS for Science and Technical Subjects</th></tr>
<tr><td>Lesson 5: How Scientists Use Models to Make Sense of the World</td><td>Image: Blue marble images and animation files (NASA)
Literary nonfiction: “Water Is Life” paragraphs 10–11
Outline for models: Aristotle through Kepler
Video model: (NASA)
Website: Tropical Rainfall Measuring Mission (NASA)</td><td>RST.6–8.5: Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to an understanding of the topic.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Lesson 6: Using Models to Make Sense of the Hydrosphere</td><td>Conceptual models of water cycle (USGS, Center for Atmospheric Research, Encyclopedia Britannica, US Environmental Protection Agency, BBC Education Scotland)
Literary nonfiction: “Water Is Life” paragraph 11</td><td>RST.6–8.7: Integrate quantitative or technical information expressed in words in a text with a version of that information expressed visually (e.g., in a flowchart, diagram, model, graph, or table).</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Creating Models to Explain the Limits of Fresh Water Resources in the Hydrosphere
In lessons 7 and 8, students complete their close reading of Barbara Kingsolver’s article “Water Is Life” and complete the summative assessment for this unit, the creation of a conceptual model of the hydrosphere with an explanatory paragraph using scientific and technical vocabulary to describe their model.</td></tr>
<tr><th>Topic</th><th>Text</th><th>Sample CCSS for Science and Technical Subjects</th></tr>
<tr><td>Lesson 7: The Water Commons</td><td>Video: “Why Care about Water” (National Geographic)
Literary nonfiction: “Water Is Life” paragraphs 12–14</td><td>RST.6–8.6: Analyze the author’s purpose in providing an explanation, describing a procedure, or discussing an experiment in a text.</td></tr>
</table>

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Topic	Text	Sample CCSS for Science and Technical Subjects
Lesson 8: Synthesis, Conceptual Model, and Assessment	**Conceptual model with explanation:** human impacts on the water cycle **Conceptual models** of water cycle	RST.6–8.5: *Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to an understanding of the topic.*

Teachers like Seydel devote hours to planning. The Common Core instructional shifts challenge us to reallocate those precious planning hours. Of course we will always need to think about the *how* of teaching and learning: the instructional moves and activities to engage students. But the Common Core instructional shifts elevate our need to think even more carefully about the *what* of teaching and learning: the actual texts we will put in front of students. As the examples in this chapter illustrate, it is no simple matter to address content standards and literacy skills through a complex text or set of texts, but it is rich and rewarding. Giving students ownership of a challenging, purposeful process through strategies such as case studies and the BBK workshop *and* giving them access to compelling, quality texts in every content area will provide a terrific boost to their readiness for higher-level work and learning.

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Part **one**

Conclusion

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CRITICAL MOVES FOR MAKING THIS SHIFT

For some teachers and schools, implementing this Common Core instructional shift—building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction—will not represent a big change in their lessons and curriculum. For others, the change will be significant. It is important for all teachers and school leaders, no matter their level of comfort with this shift, to keep the outcomes for students in mind. All of this hard work is done in service of students being ready for college, careers, and civic life. Part 1 conclusion table 1 highlights the who, the what, and most important, the why of unlocking the power of informational and literary texts.

Part 1 Conclusion Table 1 The Who, What, and Why of Unlocking the Power of Informational and Literary Text

What Do Teachers Do?	What Do Students Do?	What's the Result?
Ensure that elementary students experience a 50:50 split of informational to literary texts. As students get older, the amount of informational texts should increase so that by the time they are in eleventh or twelfth grade, they experience a 70:30 ratio.	Read and discuss a greater volume of informational text.	By the time they leave high school, students are prepared for the kind of reading they will do in college and careers.
Pair literature and informational texts so that students can explore the themes and characters in literature and understand disciplinary content on a deeper level.	Read informational and literary texts in conjunction with one another and use them as references for discussion and debate.	Students learn to appreciate the ways in which literary and informational texts unlock meaning for each other.
Choose a wide variety of texts that help students explore multiple perspectives and promote inquiry.	Learn the skills needed and different approaches for reading a variety of types of text.	Students see the value of learning about the world from a variety of perspectives and types of text.
Promote a volume of reading, and set up structures for independent reading.	Read widely for pleasure and satisfaction.	Students develop an innate desire to read; their curiosity and inquiry guide them to learn about the world.

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Part 1 Conclusion Table 1 (*Continued*)

What Do Teachers Do?	What Do Students Do?	What's the Result?
Teach strategies that help students access and make meaning of grade-level texts and meet specific Common Core State Standards.	Go back to the text multiple times to learn new content and skills. Make use of tools such as graphic organizers and anchor charts to keep track of information in the text.	Students are able to apply a variety of reading strategies to all kinds of text and become more independent and proficient readers.
Design lessons and curriculum that give students a compelling reason to read. Promote a need-to-know culture of reading in the classroom.	Use text as a resource for answering important inquiry questions and provide evidence to support their thinking.	Students see texts of all kinds as valuable sources of information and find greater joy in reading because reading has greater purpose.
Slow down lessons in the content-area disciplines and use texts as a way to teach the content. Help students read texts during class time.	Read and reread text for information during class time.	Students who may be lacking strong reading skills have the opportunity to read with teacher support and gain reading confidence. They learn to use text as a resource.

COMMON CHALLENGES

Settling for Anchor Texts That Are Not Worthy

Choose texts worth reading. Make sure that the key texts you choose contribute strategically to students' knowledge about the content and are also engaging and rich, with compelling concepts and significant academic vocabulary. Anchor texts should be at the right complexity level for students. It is okay to let a really great text (especially one that has nice overlaps with other great texts) guide decisions about lesson planning and curriculum design. In some cases it is better to retrofit the curriculum around a great text than to ask students to read mediocre texts to fit an existing curriculum or lesson plan.

Limiting Reading *Only* to "Worthy" Texts

Go deep *and* wide. There is no reason students cannot read a volume of texts focusing on a topic as well as carefully reading one or more well-selected anchor texts a number of times to peel back the layers of meaning. In fact, this is precisely what *has* to happen. As much as possible, students need a consistent volume of reading connected to what

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they are studying. In fact, reading across texts within a topic produces as much as four times more vocabulary growth as jumping from topic to topic or reading fiction alone (Adams, 2010). Thus when students are engaged in a unit on rain forests or the gold rush, a number of texts at different levels related to the topic need to be available. It is not always realistic that *all* of these texts will be powerful and intriguing.

Focusing Too Much on One Type of Text

Keep your balance. It is important that students experience a balance of informational and literary texts throughout the school day. Equally important is the variety of the informational texts themselves. Teachers must guard against an overreliance on or superficial reading of textbooks. There is such a rich range of informational texts widely available—on every subject imaginable—that teachers should take the time to search out the texts that will ignite curiosity, spark questions, and help students build their literacy skills. Librarians can be great partners in this work. Combining these worthy informational texts with literature can further enhance students' understanding of the content. Attending to text type balance can be especially challenging at the secondary level. To the extent possible, content area teachers and language arts teachers should communicate about the reading their shared students experience over the course of their day. School leaders and instructional guides can help facilitate communication structures that keep everyone informed.

Asking Students to Read Challenging Texts without Building Their Skills to Do So

Prepare and support students. Reading skills and confidence are key to students' ability to learn about the world. We certainly don't want to build mystery and excitement about a topic and then deflate students' confidence by providing them with inaccessible reading materials. We also don't want to underestimate what we can expect from students. Using the augmented workshop model (Workshop 2.0) described in chapter 7 will support students to access academic content and build literacy skills.

Overscaffolding Students' Experience with Text

Build independence. One of the primary goals of the Common Core literacy standards is to help students read independently and proficiently. Well-chosen texts give teachers the opportunity to help students read closely, building their literacy skills and academic content knowledge. Too much scaffolding can protect students from reading and making meaning on their own. (For more on this topic, see part 3.)

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Too Much Telling

Encourage a culture of evidence. Teachers should help students find answers to their questions in texts and should preplan their own questions so that students learn to search for and cite evidence from text. Deeper learning comes from great questions, not great answers. Position the text as the expert and trust that students will make meaning from it if given enough time and the opportunity to reread, perhaps multiple times.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Successful implementation of the Common Core instructional shifts will take time and will proceed in phases. Teachers may at times experience frustration with the challenges of learning new strategies for choosing strong texts, pairing literary and informational texts, and helping students become strong readers of informational text. Over time, teachers and students alike will see the rewards for their hard work.

Beginning

This early phase of implementation will be marked by teachers test-driving some of the practices that can be easily integrated into their existing curriculum. Students will experience more integration of informational texts into their lessons. Some uneven implementation from classroom to classroom is to be expected.

Indicators

- Teachers begin to make text choices that go beyond or complement the textbook. They may choose primary source documents, charts, journal articles, and other varied informational texts to pique students' curiosity and deepen their understanding of a topic.
- Teachers examine the texts used in their curriculum and search for pairings of informational and literary texts that will deepen students' understanding of literature and disciplinary content.
- As they explore both kinds of texts in tandem, students begin to appreciate the power of informational text to unlock meaning in literature and vice versa.

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Intermediate

The intermediate phase of implementation is marked by a more systematic approach to embedding this instructional shift across the curriculum and the school. Students will build their literacy skills and content knowledge as informational text becomes a more regular part of the classroom routine.

Indicators

- Teachers reconsider the tried-and-true texts in their curriculum and search for more complex texts that are rich enough to address the standards.
- Teachers closely read and analyze the grade-specific literacy standards. They identify key words in the grade-specific standards that give clarity about the extent and nature of understandings we want students to have when interacting with rich complex text (e.g., understanding how R.1 "citing evidence" is more challenging at the eighth-grade level than at the seventh-grade level).
- During class, students build their literacy skills and content knowledge. Teachers support students with mini-lessons on close-reading strategies as necessary (e.g., text coding).
- School leaders support staff members with professional development that improves their classroom practice and provides consistency for students throughout the school.
- A deeper understanding of the literacy skills required in the Common Core Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects standards encourages secondary content areas to take more responsibility for teaching literacy skills.
- Students are motivated to read by seeing the purpose for their reading within a compelling curriculum.
- Students experience a volume of reading connected to what they are studying.

Advanced

In the advanced phase, schools have a well-articulated plan to ensure a rich brew of informational and literary texts throughout the school. Teachers are adept at building students' literacy skills, and students become proficient and independent readers who can mine text to build their content knowledge.

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Indicators

- Text becomes like a second teacher in the classroom and students learn to use it as a resource for information and evidence to support their claims.
- Teachers are adept at finding texts that cover the desired content, are well-written and worth reading, and address Common Core literacy standards. Though not every text can be all things, teachers learn to discern the good from the bad and to augment as necessary to meet their needs.
- Teachers plan with the dual goals of building content knowledge and literacy skills, and they know when and how to foreground one or the other.
- Working backward from the skills students must learn to meet each Common Core literacy standard, teachers plan lessons and develop graphic organizers, anchor charts, and other tools that will support all students to meet those standards.
- Schoolwide content and curriculum maps provide rich opportunities for teachers to collaborate on text choices in their classrooms and help school leaders ensure that students experience the right ratio of informational and literary texts on their path to college and beyond.

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