SCHOLASTIC Instructor

COMMON CORE

COLLECTION

How To CREATE CORE-READY ELA LESSONS

Our teacher-tested ideas will jump-start your literacy lessons and help you meet the new ELA anchor standards. BY KIM GREENE

THE COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS anchor standards are the heart and foundation of the Common Core. "The anchor standards give you goals of what kids should know and be able to do by the time they leave high school," says Brenda Overturf, cochair of the International Reading Association's Common Core State Standards Committee.

These vital literacy skills are boiled down to 34 anchor standards—10 for reading, 10 for writing, six for speaking and listening, and six for language. Corresponding standards are offered at every grade level—making it easy to trace what's expected of students from kindergarten through 12th grade. Think of it this way: In the race to prepare students for college and careers, the grade-level standards are the mile markers and the anchor standards are the finish line.

"It's really important for teachers to know they are part of the entire system," says Overturf, who is coauthor of *The Common Core: Teaching K–5 Students to Meet the Reading Standards*. "They're not just teaching the isolated standards at their grade level."

Although each anchor standard addresses an important skill for students to acquire, Overturf emphasizes that any one standard should not be taught in isolation: "The standards document is really clear that you have to integrate standards … not teach a standard and check it off a list." She believes that the best instructional tasks are developed by using multiple standards across the strands.

Sherida Britt, who serves as project director of ASCD's Tools for Teachers, agrees that integration is key in developing quality instruction. "The standards are presented in an organized way that supports solid lesson planning," she explains. But the focus, she says, should be to reference the standards efficiently and mold them into meaningful, robust lessons.

How do the standards translate into classroom practice? Turn the page for some sample lesson ideas. We've suggested a book to try out with each idea, but the activities are designed to work with any appropriate reading selection.

PHOTO: DOWILUKAS/ISTOCKPHOTO. ILLUSTRATIONS: ISTOCKPHOTO (BUBBLE); SHUTTERSTOCK (BOOK)

CLASSROOM-READY IDEAS

We have chosen to highlight lesson ideas for three key anchor standards. Although each example focuses on a specific standard, each also addresses multiple standards across the ELA strands.

ANCHOR STANDARD R.1 *Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.*

GRADES K–1

TRY THIS

In the primary grades, the Core emphasizes students' ability to ask and answer questions. First-grade teacher Lyssa Sahadevan of East Side Elementary in Marietta, Georgia, first establishes exactly what a question is. (Read a few from the suggested book at left to distinguish questions and answers from lengthy personal anecdotes!) Then her class makes "question bracelets" using pipe cleaners and beads. Students circulate the room to ask questions of their classmates; they receive a bead to add to their bracelets each time they form a question. Students could also make question bracelets when they ask and answer questions about a text.

GRADES 2–3

TRY THIS

Hilary Lewis of College Wood Elementary in Carmel, Indiana, deepens students' understanding of questioning by introducing "thick and thin" questions to her second graders. (Try the Magic Tree House Fact Tracker series for excellent examples of thick questions, which require "big picture" or inferential thinking to answer.) Lewis writes thick question stems, such as *Why did* _____*?*, on slips of paper and attaches them to metal rings for students to reference during reading activities such as book clubs.

GRADES 4–8

TRY THIS

Beginning in fourth grade, students are expected to answer both explicit and implicit questions about texts. These skills can be addressed in Close Reading lessons (see bit.ly/Clos_Read). Though use of the Close Reading approach varies, students typically read a short text multiple times over the course of several class periods. (Scholastic Classroom Magazines feature stories perfect for close reading.) During these readings, which are done both independently and as a class, students ask and answer text-based questions that draw off other standards (e.g., using context clues to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words).

ANCHOR STANDARD R.10 *Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.*

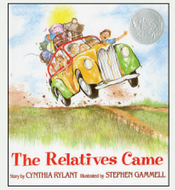
GRADES K–1

There is no expectation for students in kindergarten and first grade to conquer complex texts (and rightfully so). Instead, the focus of standard 10 centers on actively engaging with age-appropriate texts. Consult Common Core's Appendix B for text exemplars that might be used in these activities (*Hi! Fly Guy* by Tedd Arnold made the list). Teachers should use the exemplars as a guideline but feel free to choose the titles they find most appropriate.

TRY THIS

GRADES 2–3

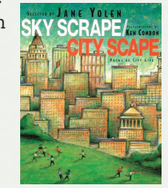
Jennifer Jones, a reading specialist at Lake Myra Elementary in Wendell, North Carolina, recommends using a two-column chart to help students grapple with complex texts. In the left column, students write the words from the text; in the right column, they record their interpretation. Model this strategy while reading aloud a book such as *The Relatives Came* by Cynthia Rylant, then release students to practice the strategy on their own.



TRY THIS

GRADES 4–8

Fourth-grade teacher Meg Anderson from Susie C. Altmayer Elementary in De Pere, Wisconsin, glues the poem "74th Street" by Myra Cohn Livingston (found in the collection below) to chart paper. Students also glue it in their notebooks. They read the poem and make notes. Anderson then has small groups discuss their ideas. As groups share their ideas, Anderson writes them on the chart paper. Students zero in on the poem's meaning and later craft their own poems.

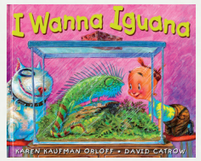


TRY THIS

ANCHOR STANDARD W.1 *Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.*

GRADES K–2

"One thing first graders are not lacking is an opinion," says Sahadevan. She develops the skill of opinion writing through persuasive letters. "It feels so purposeful and audience driven," she says. Students identify one way to improve their school and three reasons to support their opinion. They then draft a letter to the school's principal. To introduce the idea of persuasion, read *I Wanna Iguana* by Karen Kaufman Orloff.



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GRADES 3–8

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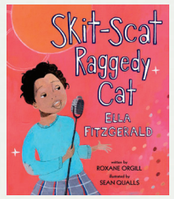


ASCD project director Sherida Britt suggests having students craft an opinion or argument essay about why it's important to play music or sing. They can consult texts about jazz music or famous musicians (see suggestion at right). "Using the close reading model, students pull out information critical to understanding the text," Britt explains. They use the workshop model to revise and edit their essays. The result is "a rich product—opinion pieces that cite evidence from the research gathered." □

PHOTO: DOWILUKAS/ISTOCKPHOTO; ILLUSTRATION: SHUTTERSTOCK

Role Model Math Solutions' Marilyn Burns engages students as they go deep into math concepts.

PHOTO: JIM FRANCO

HOW TO

Do Math Right

Marilyn Burns on embracing the Common Core practice standards to teach math more effectively.

BY ERICH STROM

FOR TOO LONG, math teachers and students have relied heavily on procedure. "Yours is not to question why, just invert and multiply" has been the norm, says Math Solutions' Marilyn Burns. Kids inverted away and got the right answers—whether or not they understood the underlying principles. The Common Core is challenging that approach, and demanding more emphasis on understanding, as embodied in the eight new standards for mathematical practice. These standards apply to all grades, and a quick scan of them—"make sense of problems"; "reason abstractly and quantitatively"; "model with mathematics" (see page 41 for the full list)—indicates why. They are, as a group, the foundational skills for working in any of the domains of mathematics.

Young mathematicians should be calling upon these practice standards to move them forward wherever they are on the path—whether they're adding nine apples to four apples or working with geometry or algebraic equations. As Burns puts it, the practice standards are "the vehicles that permeate every aspect of classroom instruction." They steer teachers away from the trap of drilling kids on procedures and looking for "right answers." Students, says Burns, should be thinking the problem out, reasoning, modeling, talking math with one another.

"Here's the mantra for a lesson: If kids could be successful without having to think or reason, then the lesson is not good enough."

That's not just "doing" the standards; that's doing mathematics.

We talked to Burns about the practice standards, and how they shed light on what an effective math classroom might look like. Turns out, they could allow for a lot more talking (by the kids), listening (by the teacher), and learning (by everyone).

What role do the Common Core standards play in mathematical practice?

The eight practice standards are what we do when we do mathematics, no matter what the math is you're trying to learn.

In the traditional math classroom, as it was when I was a student, the teacher taught something, and you were given the homework. It was all about pencil-and-paper proficiency. They didn't really care if you understood. The engagement wasn't there, whereas in social studies or language arts there was discussion going on.

To me, it's all about thinking, reasoning, making sense, and communicating.

So the standards have the potential to move math instruction in the right direction?

We're being given a shot at doing something that makes sense—getting kids to develop understanding. To quote from the standards themselves: The Common Core recommends "a balanced combination of procedures and understanding." That's really common sense-y. And it cautions: "Students who lack understanding of a topic may rely on procedures too heavily."

I think that the Common Core is a great step forward. Will it be successful? The jury is out. But for me, the standards of mathematical practice are pretty glorious.

How should teachers be thinking about teaching them?

Teachers are nervous: "How do we teach the Common Core practice standards?" Wrong question. We don't teach the practice standards. They are the embodiment of how we do mathematics. You're not supposed to teach them; you use them. Nor are you expected to embed every practice standard in every lesson. Here's the mantra for a lesson: If kids could be successful without having to think or reason, then the lesson is not good enough.

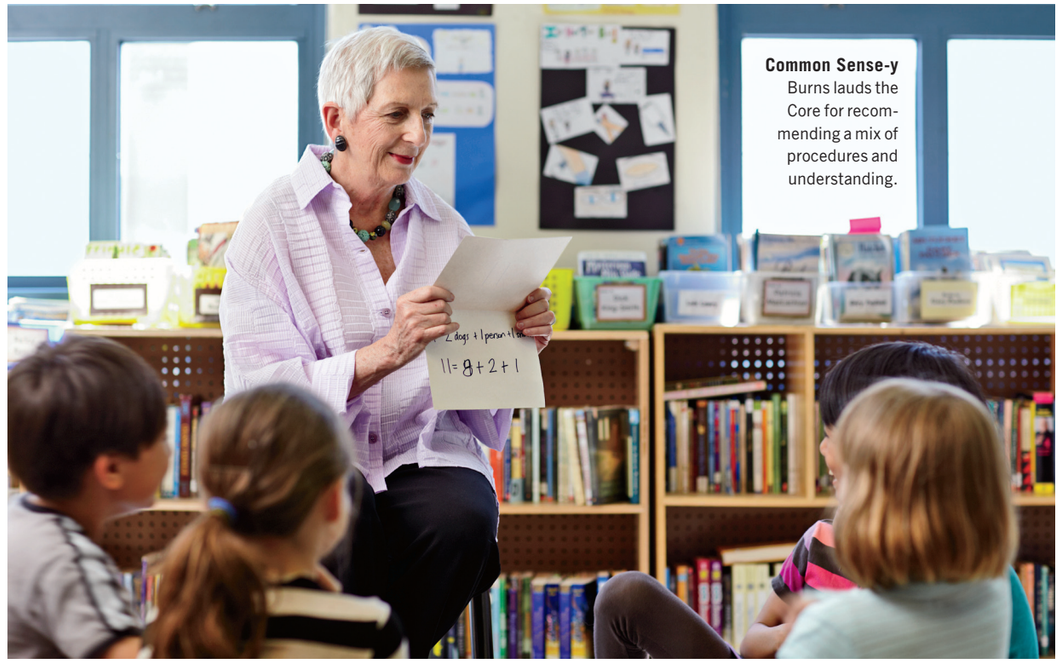
Look at practice standard number 3: "Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others." The implication is, it's not the teacher who is talking and explaining; it's the kids who are talking. That's such a profound shift. If you took just that one, and said the class will be a place where students are constructing viable arguments—explaining their thinking and responding to one another's thinking—then I think we'd be making progress.

What do you think is the biggest challenge teachers face in doing that successfully?

A lot of elementary teachers fear math. You can't teach what you don't understand. The Common Core standards are saying, "You really have to understand this." They make a clear, passionate case for that.

You stress that "doing" math requires communication—talking, listening, discussing—which may not be the math classroom's strong point.

And that's why I'm saying it's not a bad place to start. I was in a class yesterday, modeling for a teacher. I gave a problem that was really too easy for fourth graders. I wrote 99 + 17 = ___ horizontally on the board. I had them figure out the answer, and I had them chat with a neighbor. We said the answer out loud together: "116." Then I said, "We got the answer out of the way. What I'm really interested in is how you got it." The kids had all these ways they thought about it, and my job was to represent their ideas mathematically, connecting their thinking to mathematical representation. I filled the board up with all their work. Then they had to critique the ideas of others and connect it to their thinking. The kids were doing the talking, rather than me doing all the talking. While this wasn't obvious to me when I was a beginning teacher, it seems so obvious now.



Common Sense-y Burns lauds the Core for recommending a mix of procedures and understanding.

PHOTO: JIM FRANCO

THE STANDARDS FOR MATHEMATICAL PRACTICE

1. **Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.**
2. **Reason abstractly and quantitatively.**
3. **Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.**
4. **Model with mathematics.**
5. **Use appropriate tools strategically.**
6. **Attend to precision.**
7. **Look for and make use of structure.**
8. **Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning.**

The practice standards apply to math education at all levels. They are not meant to be taught explicitly, says Marilyn Burns. Rather, they describe "what we do when we do mathematics."

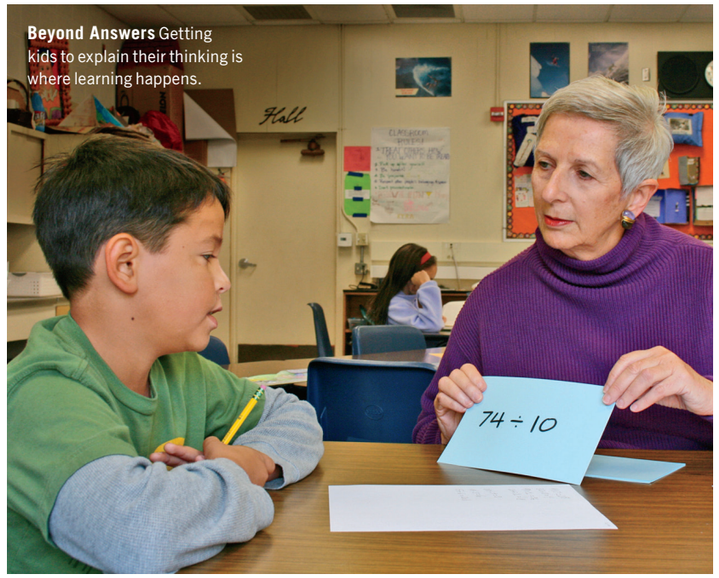
It only takes a simple word problem to engage with them, such as "Molly has 96 pennies and her friend Alice has 39 pennies. How much money do they have altogether?"

Burns says she'll get past the "right answer" stage by having the class say the answer out loud to arrive at the juicy part of having the kids describe for one another the various ways of attacking and breaking down the problem.

One student might have "reached 100" by taking 4 away from 39 and adding it to 96, then adding on the 35 to get 135. Another might have taken 1 away from 96, added it to 39 to get 40, then added 40 to 90, and tacked on the 5. Some students may have done these operations in their heads, others with paper and pencil. Others may have reached the answer using manipulatives to represent the tens and ones. The teacher's job is to fill the board with their work and their thinking, which essentially is a way of "connecting their thinking to mathematical representation," says Burns.

In doing a straightforward problem, and talking out the merits of various approaches, students are making sense of the problem ("it looks like addition…") and reasoning quantitatively. They're using appropriate tools (paper and pencil, manipulatives). They're making use of structures such as place value and the associative property. They're critiquing one another's methods and learning that there are multiple ways to model a problem. Being called upon to explain themselves requires attention to precision. And they will be using "regularity" from their repeated reasoning to develop the very procedures they're calling upon (such as "reaching 100" or "adding the tens, then the ones").

In other words, if kids are doing the work of real math, the practice standards take care of themselves.



Beyond Answers Getting kids to explain their thinking is where learning happens.

"I said, 'We got the answer out of the way. What I'm really interested in is how you got it.'"

And by listening, teachers can gain insight into their students' understanding?

Right. How do you know what kids are thinking unless you're listening to them? The mantra I use is, "As teachers, we ask, we listen, we learn." In my early years of teaching, when I asked a question, I was hoping beyond hope that I'd hear the answer I wanted to hear. And when I heard it, I'd ask the next question. There are so many fallacies there. When I hear the answer I want to hear, I assume that everyone gets it and I can move on. So basically I'm controlling the lesson in a way that reflects not focusing on listening to the students about how they think, not really being interested in what they have to say. That's the shift I want to make in the classroom.

You've also stressed the value of doing the sort of one-on-one formative interviews that are taken for granted in reading instruction.

The world of reading gives teachers tools for having one-on-one conversations with kids. They have DIBELS Fluency and Running Records. They also expect kids to be able to interpret what they've read, to make predictions, to bring understanding to texts. I'm trying to bring those same practices into the math world. It's something that ought to be done. It just seems to me to be common sense.

If you want to find out if kids are reading, you listen to them read. Why in math do we get so excited when they can do the page? I think the practice standards are all about doing the math and not doing the page.

It seems that your new online MRI is designed to be the kind of tool that helps kids "do" the math rather than just complete a worksheet.

I'm trying to make this part of the culture of teaching. What MRI does is ask kids to solve problems mentally (with a few exceptions), hands on the table, no paper and pencil, as a one-on-one formative assessment with the teacher. The questions target pre-sixth-grade Core math standards, so it could be given at the end of fifth grade or used with older kids about whom you have specific concerns. I'm working on developing an MRI for the younger grades, to help teachers at all grade levels gain insight into how their students reason.

Taking away the pencil helps teachers see how kids are really thinking about the numbers?

Yeah. For example, a question we used with fourth graders is 15 x 12. Having them do it in their heads gets at their ability to use the distributive property, breaking a number apart to multiply. If you don't understand that, algebra is going to be very difficult.

The MRI also provides a format for the teacher to quantify each student's numerical reasoning.

It gives you back a report—for each individual kid, and for the entire class. You also can get an item analysis for each question. It's not a score, not a number or a letter; it's information about what your students demonstrate, what they can do, and where the deficiencies are in your classroom. So it's a real tool for making instructional decisions.

And it's making sure the practice standards are being addressed.

Completely. You're giving them a problem. You're asking them to reason quantitatively—that's part of it. You're asking them to do all that stuff. It's all there.

More broadly, it seems like the MRI offers a model for classroom communication.

It provides teachers a way to dialogue with kids. It gives teachers practice listening to understand how kids are reasoning, which isn't always easy. For example, "Molly ran 1.5 miles a day for 20 days. How many miles has she run?" These are problems teachers expect their students to be able to solve correctly. I'm interested in how the kid solves that, and how you hear how the kid solves that. My life has been about improving the quality of teaching, and my hope is that having these conversations with kids will support what teachers do in the classroom. How could you not ask these kinds of questions in the classroom? □

Marilyn Burns is the founder of Math Solutions (mathsolutions.com), which has provided professional development and resources for almost 30 years.

"I think the practice standards are all about doing the math and not doing the page."

MATH REASONING INVENTORY

The free online formative assessment tool, developed by Marilyn Burns and her MRI team, consists of three parts, based on the Common Core math standards through fifth grade: whole numbers, decimals, and fractions. It leads teachers through one-on-one interviews focusing on core reasoning strategies and understandings, and provides individual and class progress reports. There's also a rich array of resources, videos, and practice materials to train teachers to administer the MRI effectively. For more information, visit ***mathreasoninginventory.com.***

PHOTO: SUSAN BARCLAY

COMMON CORE

TEACHING with Complex TEXTS

Six tips to unlocking literacy instruction for your students. BY LAURA ROBB

"WHAT EXACTLY IS TEXT COMPLEXITY?" That's the number-one question teachers ask me during workshops on the Common Core State Standards. Understanding the elements of text complexity can help you select the best instructional materials and guide students to choose readable books. According to the standards document, they are quantitative measures, qualitative measures, and reader and task considerations. Beyond these, I'd like to share my six keys to unlocking complex texts for your students.

Quantitative Measures

This refers to text characteristics best analyzed by computer, such as sentence length and word frequency. The Common Core uses Lexile measures to set grade-level targets for students. Keep in mind that Lexile measures refer to the readability of a text—not a grade level. That's why it's crucial to keep our focus on students and choose texts based on their strengths and needs. A seventh-grade English language learner might be able to comprehend texts at a third-grade Lexile, while an advanced reader in that same class can comprehend texts Lexiled for 10th grade.

Qualitative Measures

These examine a book's content and concepts: knowledge demands (prior knowledge), levels of meaning, text structure, language conventionality, and clarity. This area is the heart and soul of text complexity. Fifth graders can read *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, but should they? This novel deals with euthanasia and sexual feelings, concepts that make the book's text complexity more appropriate to students who are in middle school. So as we rush students toward texts of increasing complexity, we must continue to ask, "Is this book's content right for this child?"

Reader and Task Considerations

This area looks at students' motivation, knowledge, and experience, allowing you to choose texts at their level, even if they don't correspond to CCSS targets. In other words, you won't have to give students instructional texts they can't read. It also allows you to live with the fact that these developing readers need more than one year to meet the goal of reading complex grade-level texts. Remember, your ultimate goal is to accelerate student achievement, which you can only do by meeting students where they are and steadily moving them forward.

You're now ready for the big six! Use these tips to help students unlock meaning in complex texts.

1 Use an Anchor Text to Model Comprehension Skills and Strategies

An anchor text can be a picture book, part of a novel, biography, or informational text, or a short story, myth, or article that relates to the unit's genre and theme. The rule of thumb is to keep it short. With this versatile teaching tool, you can make visible how you analyze texts or organize thinking into a journal entry. And because the texts are short and the lessons brief, it's easy to review an anchor text lesson while conferring with a student or a small group.

2 Improve Students' First Readings: Set Purposes and Read for the Gist

Setting purposes for reading helps guide students' search for important details, themes, and inferences. To set purposes, you can ask students to turn the title into a query: Why is this called _____? Or students can use a unit theme, such as stereotyping, to pose a question: What does this book have to do with stereotyping? Then students read for the gist to discover a few core ideas.

3 Unconfuse Students: Teach Them to Reread and Close Read

All students, from beginning to advanced, can experience confusion when reading an unfamiliar word or a complicated passage. I recommend slowing down and rereading to unlock meaning from a challenging passage or find context clues to figure out the meaning of a tough word. If rereading doesn't work, invite students to close read and think aloud word by word, phrase by phrase, making connections among ideas, until they comprehend.

4 Spotlight Text Evidence!

Challenge students with high-level, text-specific questions and ask partners or small groups to skim texts for evidence and then discuss. Also teach students that a high-level question has more than one answer. Students can craft their own discussion questions using words such as *how, why, evaluate, compare and contrast, explain*. No matter who composes the questions, the CCSS stress that students use text details and/or inferences to support responses.

5 Amplify Writing: Improve Comprehension and Text Analysis

The Common Core recommends that students write about reading because writing can improve comprehension, recall, and analytical thinking. To build thinking and writing fluency, I recommend that students write daily brief, spontaneous responses to teacher read-alouds and their instructional reading. Equally important is for students to summarize fiction and nonfiction, explain specific ideas, and develop claims that they argue for, using evidence from one or more texts.

6 Get Going With Robust Independent Reading

Independent reading invites students to choose materials that they can read with 98 to 100 percent accuracy. Students who read 40 to 60 books a year build stamina and can practice what they're learning during instructional reading. When students read, read, read, they enlarge vocabulary, background knowledge, and fluency. We can strengthen independent reading by steering students to more complex texts and move the needle on reading achievement forward.

Knowing students' interests and reading level can support decisions about ramping up independent reading and accelerate achievement. Let me explain. An eighth grader, reading two years below grade level, asks to be in the group reading L. M. Elliott's *Under a War-Torn Sky*. He explains that he knows "tons" about World War II and "really, really" wants to read the book. During our negotiations, I point out that he might have to reread parts to comprehend. At our end-of-book conference he says: "I reread some parts three times. It was worth it 'cause I love the book." □

MORE TO THINK ABOUT

You can improve students' reading skill with challenging instructional texts because you are there to scaffold. Understanding the relationship between text complexity and students' interests and motivation lets you encourage students to read more challenging texts independently. Now you're ready to integrate the "big six" into your instructional plans so that you can point students on a steady course to reading grade-level complex texts.

Author and literacy coach Laura Robb has taught in grades 4–8 for more than 40 years. Her newest book is Unlocking Complex Texts: A Systematic Framework for Building Adolescents' Comprehension. She co-consulted on Scholastic's XBooks, a nonfiction middle school curriculum.

TRASH YOUR FICTION

(And Other Myths About the Common Core)

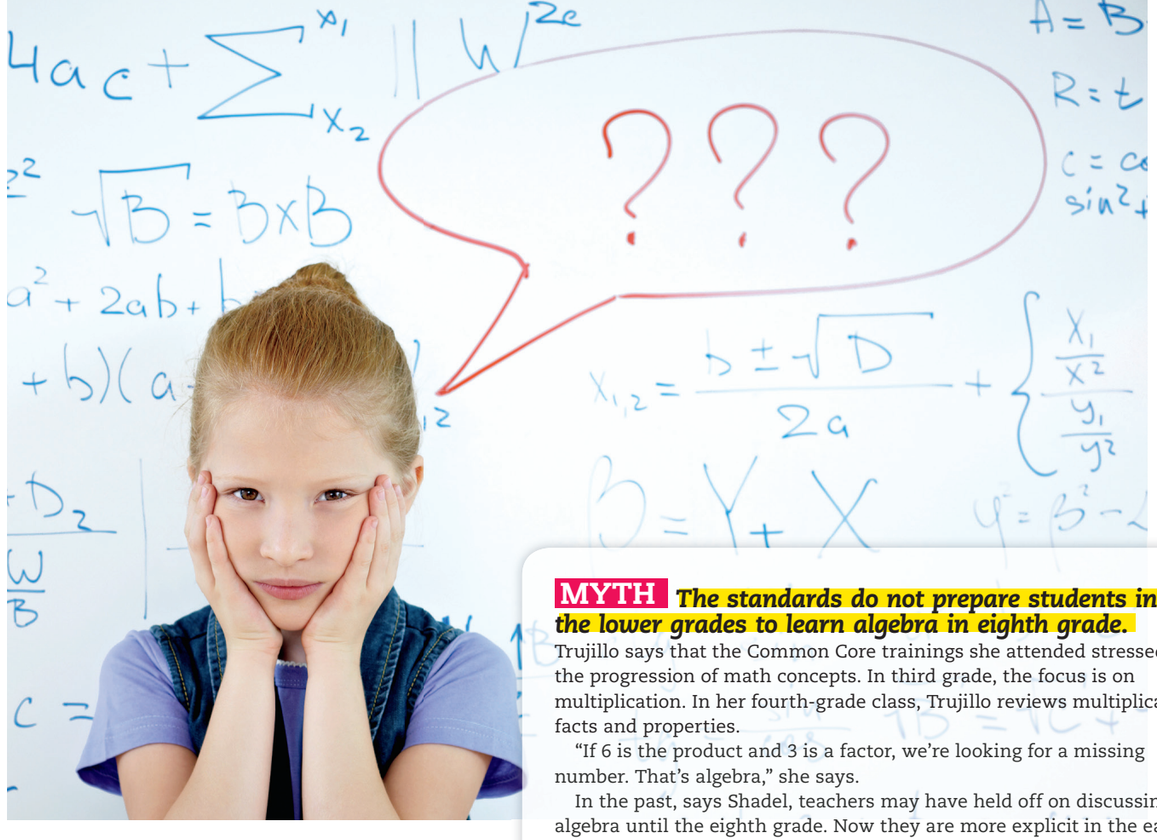
We cut through the rumors to give you the real scoop on the Core. BY KATE RIX

PHOTO: ADAM CHINITZ

YOU'VE PROBABLY HEARD RUMORS—and lots of them—about the Common Core State Standards. Maybe these myths were whispered to you in the teachers' room over lunch or were the subject of a heated debate at a faculty meeting: *Don't even think about teaching pre-reading strategies ever again! Throw out your fiction books because your students will read only informational text from now until June! Be prepared for every last one of your students to fail the new assessments!*

Many of these myths have taken hold because of ambiguities and a lack of communication surrounding the standards. Where there's room for interpretation, there can also be confusion. As well as misconceptions.

Instructor has recruited a crew of myth-busting Common Core experts to separate myth from fact. With their assistance, we'll help you sort it all out.



MYTH ***The focus on informational texts means the standards do not emphasize fiction.***

There's no doubt that the standards have given informational text its heyday. But that doesn't mean that fiction is no longer important.

Susan Pimentel, a lead writer of Common Core's English Language Arts standards, says this myth is based on a misreading of Common Core's introduction, which suggests students' reading diets should mimic the texts found on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. For instance, fourth graders should read an even balance of 50 percent literary and 50 percent informational texts across an entire school day—not specifically within an ELA class.

Christina Trujillo is a fourth-grade teacher at Tiefort View Intermediate School in Fort Irwin, California. "The majority of books in our curriculum are fiction," she says. But her students prefer nonfiction, which she assigns in short passages of informational text. In doing so, she strikes a balance between the two text types.

MYTH ***The standards prohibit teachers from doing pre-reading activities with students.***

The hubbub about pre-reading came as a result of a document for publishers and curriculum developers who are crafting Core-aligned resources. The guidelines say that the instructional focus should remain on the text—rather than on providing students with too much information before reading, or "giving away" the story.

But remember that the Core is a set of standards, not a curriculum. While it does delineate what students should be able to do, it does not prescribe how teachers should teach.

"There are no standards that dictate whether or how teachers should use pre-reading strategies," says Pimentel. "Instead, the standards focus on students reading, carefully and deeply, appropriately complex texts."

MYTH ***Students are required to read complex texts that are not developmentally appropriate, including the exemplars in Appendix B.***

Students are expected to read texts that fall into their grade band's complexity level. By some accounts, these texts are more challenging than what students are accustomed to reading.

That being said, students are by no means required to conquer a complex text every time they read. (Imagine how frustrating that would be for any reader!) Instead, students should read texts of varying complexity levels in different instructional settings.

Trujillo introduces her students to complex texts using read-alouds. "With good literature, we can talk about figurative language and cause-and-effect," she says. "I'm amazed at how much my students can grasp."

As for specific texts, Pimentel says states that adopted the Common Core did not adopt Appendix B, a list of suggested stories, poetry, and more. Local teachers and administrators will continue to guide the selection of texts.

MYTH ***Key math concepts are missing or are required in the wrong grade, resulting in "fuzzy" math standards that emphasize problem solving more than accuracy.***

When each state operated under its own standards, different topics were covered in different grades. Depending upon the state in which you teach, switching to Common Core may mean shifting some concepts up or down a grade level.

During trainings, math specialists like Steven Shadel, who works in Community Unit School District 300 outside of Chicago, aim to show that concepts progress logically from one grade to the next. He creates visuals to make the sequencing more tangible.

"Without doing that, that's where the 'fuzziness' can come from, when teachers don't see the big picture and the progression," Shadel says.

As for overemphasizing problem solving, second-grade teacher Toni Chastain believes that California's previous state standards didn't stress it enough. She learned about seven different math strategies during a Common Core training and brought them back to her students at Lewis Elementary in Fort Irwin. "There were different ways to solve the problem, all good but different," she says.

Sure enough, when Chastain put a problem on the board and said simply, "Let's think about this," her students didn't know what to do at first. She got a lot of blank faces. One student eventually asked, "Aren't you going to tell us what to do?"

The class decided to tackle the problem by drawing pictures. "That was great, and eventually it will be second nature for them to say, 'Let me stop and think,'" Chastain says. "This is a shift for them as well as for teachers."

PHOTO: MEDIAPHOTOS/E+/GETTY IMAGES

MYTH ***The standards do not prepare students in the lower grades to learn algebra in eighth grade.***

Trujillo says that the Common Core trainings she attended stressed the progression of math concepts. In third grade, the focus is on multiplication. In her fourth-grade class, Trujillo reviews multiplication facts and properties.

"If 6 is the product and 3 is a factor, we're looking for a missing number. That's algebra," she says.

In the past, says Shadel, teachers may have held off on discussing algebra until the eighth grade. Now they are more explicit in the earlier grades. Sixth-grade teachers are tying their teaching of proportions and ratios directly to algebra so that by eighth grade the concepts aren't new to students.

"These are concepts that naturally show the way to algebra," Shadel says. The new standards, he adds, allow students time to master each early step so they are ready for the next grade, including Algebra I as early as eighth grade.

MYTH ***New Common Core assessments are designed for students to fail.***

The new tests will be more challenging than current state tests and will likely lead to sharp drops in scores, at least initially. During a recent faculty meeting, second-grade teacher Chastain and her colleagues took a sample third-grade ELA assessment developed by Smarter Balanced. "It was difficult. I'm not going to lie," says Chastain. "Students are going to have to think in a different way."

Introducing a new test often leads to a drop in scores. "That won't mean our students are suddenly doing worse, just that we have a more honest assessment of how we're doing than we were getting from previous state tests," says Jason Zimba, a lead author of the Common Core math standards.

But this is a major concern for Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers. Earlier this year, Weingarten called for states to hold off on high-stakes Common Core tests for at least a year, until teachers have had adequate time to prepare. "There are places across America that haven't come up with curricular tracks that align to the new standards," Weingarten says. Teachers need time and support to learn how to teach to the standards, she adds.

"We're not ready for prime time," Weingarten argues. "It would be such a big deal if Arne Duncan or Bill Gates said, 'These are important new standards. Let's take a step back and put this into practice.'" □

CORE CURRICULA

EXEMPLAR K–12 LESSONS

Share My Lesson, the American Federation of Teachers' website, offers news, curricula, and lesson plans in both math and ELA.

FREE TEACHER-DEVELOPED LESSONS

Achieve the Core is a bank of almost 300 free teacher-developed lesson plans for grades 3–10 that are aligned with the Common Core.

RESOURCES AND LESSONS

Clark County, Oregon, created **Wiki Teacher** with thousands of teacher-developed resources, including lesson plans and videos. Users create a free account to access the materials.

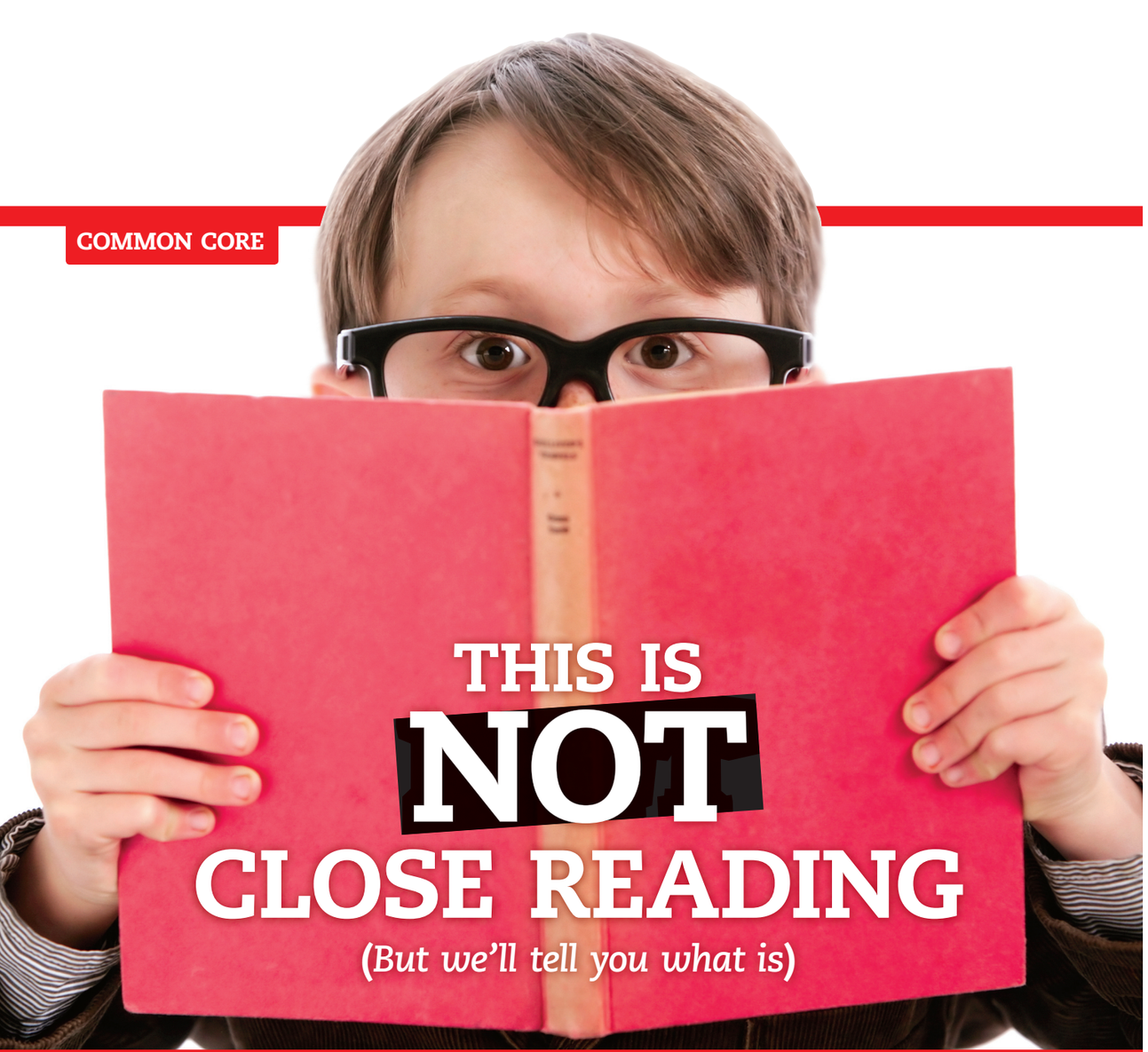
VIDEO LESSONS

LearnZillion offers video lessons and other resources for teachers implementing CCSS. Teachers can create a free account to enter the site.

COMMON CORE CATALOG

OpenEd launched a large collection of Core-aligned videos and games. Search by grade, topic, or standard for resources that fit your needs.

COMMON CORE



It's a natural fit for the Common Core, and easy to implement in your classroom.

BY TIMOTHY SHANAHAN

SKINNY JEANS...chunky watches...celebrity chefs.... There are few things hotter right now than close reading.

Ever since the Common Core State Standards burst onto the scene, close reading has been a matter of great curiosity. And no wonder! It's different from other reading approaches that schools have promoted in the past, so classroom routines meant to mint in-depth readers are pretty different, too.

So what exactly is close reading? How is it different from other reading instruction? And, most important, how can you make close readers out of your students? Let's take a close look.

PHOTO: BRADLEYM/ISTOCKPHOTO

Text Detectives

The first time I heard of close reading, I imagined sitting scrunched up with one of my daughters while I read her a good book. But reading closely isn't about building affection among readers. It is about getting readers to focus intently on the text—giving it a thorough examination to gather as much meaning as possible.

Close reading expects readers to focus on the information that a text provides, without relying on a lot of information or support. This is different from other kinds of reading lessons you teach, in which you may start out by introducing teacher-set purposes, discussions of students' life experiences, picture walks, and so on.

Close reading discourages such front-loading. The goal of close reading instruction is to foster independent readers who are able to plumb the depths of a text by considering only the text itself.

Redefining Good Readers

We all know that it's not enough to just understand what a text says. Close readers not only grasp an author's message, but they also take a look under the hood, so to speak. They try to recognize the author's tone or perspective, the implications of the author's word choices, and why a text is structured or organized as it is. Additionally, readers should go beyond a text, evaluating its quality or value, comparing it with other texts, or determining its implications. It's a lot to ask of students, but with appropriate scaffolding and support, they can do it.

Anyone with doubts about how close reading ties into the Common Core standards should take a look at the organization of the reading standards: Standards 1, 2, and 3 emphasize identifying a text's key ideas or details (what the text says); standards 4, 5, and 6 focus on craft and structure (how the text works); and standards 7, 8, and 9 highlight the "integration of knowledge and meaning" (how the text measures up and compares to other texts). Close reading is unique because it has those three interpretive goals.

In the past, we may have thought students were good readers if they could tell that Goldilocks shouldn't have been in the bears' house or if they could predict what Baby Bear would find in his bed. In close reading, that's not enough. Close readers would wonder why the author had Goldilocks try out Papa Bear's, Mama Bear's, and Baby Bear's belongings in each episode, or why she is so hard on Baby Bear's stuff. (Goldilocks seems to want to grow up, but trying out grown-up stuff isn't getting her there, which raises questions about what it takes to be grown up.) Great stories, and other quality texts, are coherent: How an author presents the text reinforces and extends the message itself. Good readers can make sense of this coherence and what it contributes to the meaning.

Close Reading in Action

Since close reading requires that students analyze the texts more thoroughly, a "one and done" reading is not enough. Students will need to read and reread the texts. Because there are three reading goals, plan to visit the text three separate times.

The first reading will focus on what the text says, the second reading will emphasize how the text works, and the third will engage students in evaluating the text, comparing it with other texts, or thinking about its implications in their lives.

In many ways, each of these reads will look like the reading lessons you're already accustomed to teaching. You would assign portions of the text to read and follow up with a series of questions aimed at getting students to think about those portions of the text. (For examples of the kinds of questions, see sidebar.) Or students might read the entire story or article first to make sense of what it says, and then, after a retelling, you could have them reread particular parts of the text relevant to the goals of the second and third reads.

CLOSE READING QUESTIONS

First Reading

Determine what the text says

- What is the text about?
- What is the theme of the story?
- What was _____ (character) like, and what did he/she do in the story?

Second Reading

Figure out how the text works

- What does _____ (a word from the text) mean in this context?
- Who is telling this part of the story?
- What is the author's purpose for this section?

Third Reading

Analyze and compare the text

- What information do these illustrations add to the text? Or, how does this picture differ from what the author wrote?
- Compare _____ (an aspect of the text, such as character or main idea) with the same aspect in another text by the same author. (Readers can also examine texts on the same topic or from the same genre.)
- What reasons does the author give to support _____ (one of the ideas)?

Ready, Set, Read!

You're ready to take your first journey through close reading. How do you set your students up for success? First, don't keep it a secret that they're going to read the text multiple times. We wouldn't want them to think that we are going back because they missed something or did something wrong. Tell them about the kinds of things that they are trying to figure out by rereading. For example, you might say, "Good readers often read and reread a text, which is what we'll do with this story. After we read it a first time, we'll talk about what happened and who did what. After that, we'll go back and reread some parts of the story to figure out how the text works and what choices the author made."

It may also help to pre-teach difficult vocabulary words. Some teachers have expressed concern that they are no longer permitted to provide such assistance, but that is not the case. This kind of preparation is still useful and appropriate.

You'll also want to briefly introduce the story. There is no need for an extensive overview. Sufficient introductions for a first reading would include: "We are going to read a story. We'll read it to find out what the main character, Goldilocks, does and what happens to her."

The questions that you'll ask during each reading are extremely important because they should encourage a deep consideration of the text. These questions should also be "text dependent." This means that students shouldn't be able to answer them correctly if they haven't read the text. Asking students, "How did Baby Bear feel about what Goldilocks did?" or "Why were the Bears upset?" are appropriate, but "Is it okay for children to go into someone else's house?" would not be. That doesn't limit you to low-level questions about what is stated explicitly in a text (for instance, "What was the little girl's name?"). You can still require students to infer and interpret, but those interpretations should depend upon the ideas in the text. If the questions are truly text dependent, then students' responses can easily be explained or supported with "evidence" drawn from the text.

Do's and Don'ts

The Common Core envisions the transformation of all students into thoughtful readers. To make this vision a reality, you'll need a variety of lessons aimed at creating close readers. Lessons can be delivered to whole classes of children, to small groups, and even one-on-one. Large group lessons are useful for exposing all students to particular ideas, while smaller groupings encourage greater participation and allow for more observation.

Of course, not every text deserves a close read. Sometimes it's okay to be interested only in the story—considerations of craft and structure and deeper implications are beside the point. And classroom reads don't always have to emphasize close reading; the key is to incorporate close reading into your instruction, not use it exclusively. No one knows how many teacher-led close reads would be a good idea, but don't overdo it; one or two close reads every couple of weeks (some taking place over multiple days) seems like the right dosage.

I predict close reading will still be in fashion when skinny jeans are long gone. And that is as it should be, given its emphasis on making children more thoughtful, independent readers. □

READING ABOUT CLOSE READING

Notice & Note
by Kylene Beers and Robert E. Probst. $27.31.
Featuring six complete lessons, this book also covers everything you need to know about text complexity, rigor, and text-dependent questions.

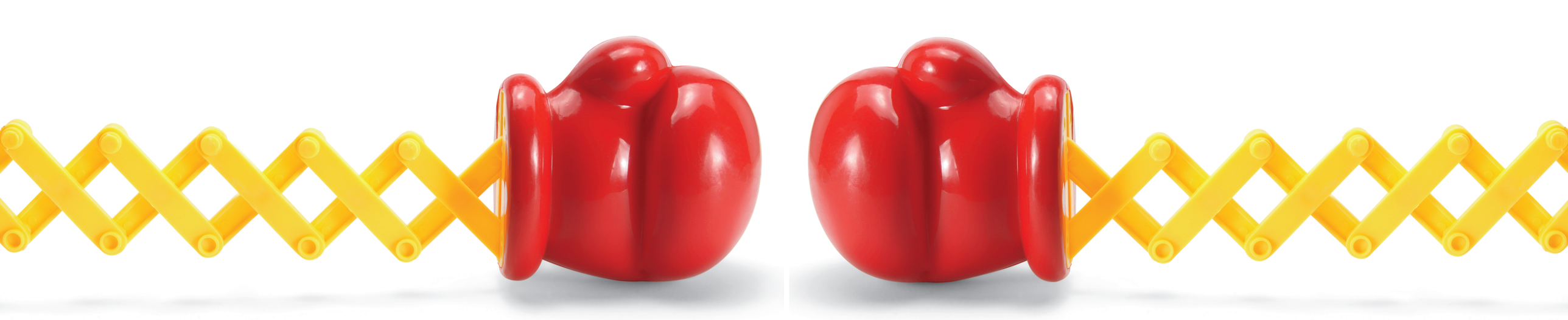
Falling in Love With Close Reading
by Christopher Lehman and Kate Roberts. $22.50.
Is it possible to fall in love with close reading? Lehman and Roberts make a compelling case. Chapters include those dedicated to word choice, structure, point of view, and more.

Teaching Students to Read Like Detectives
by Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Diane Lapp. $24.95.
Not sure how close reading works across genres? This resource focuses on ways to approach narrative, argumentative, expository, and new-media texts.

Close Reading of Informational Texts
by Sunday Cummins. $26.
Dedicated entirely to informational texts, this book addresses key skills, including previewing, understanding features, and self-monitoring.

TIMOTHY SHANAHAN

Shanahan is a distinguished professor emeritus at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He was director of reading for the Chicago Public Schools. He is also a past president of the International Reading Association and a former first-grade teacher.



COMMON CORE ROUND ONE

Champion teachers weigh in on what they've learned from implementation of the standards.

BY JENNIFER L. W. FINK

IT'S BEEN A TUMULTUOUS YEAR FOR THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS. They suffered a one-two punch when several states dropped out of the Core-aligned assessments and then Indiana repealed the standards altogether. (Other states, including Oklahoma, may follow suit.) On a national level, politicians have fought about whether the standards are a federal infringement of local control. The National Education Association also took a jab at them by demanding a "course correction." Closer to home, parents have held protests in front of schools and state capitals.

But when your students enter your classroom, you put politics aside. You close the door and teach. That's where the work that matters happens—with you and your students and a new set of standards they're expected to master.

With at least a year of Core experience under their belts, we spoke with educators about what they have learned from teaching the standards. These Core champions spoke candidly with us about what's working, what isn't, and what advice they can offer to fellow educators.

COMMON CORE TAKES TIME.

Sarah Vallejos, a third- and fourth-grade teacher at Horizon Community Learning Center in Phoenix, says that patience is key. "Implementing these rigorous new standards and teaching our students a new way to think is not going to happen in just one year," she explains.

While the number of concepts you're expected to teach with the Core decreases, you'll have to dig deeper into each one. Rethink your schedule to allow time to explore the necessary skills. Nicole Wade, a third-grade teacher at Chevy Chase Elementary School in Maryland, adjusted her schedule to teach science and social studies on alternating days, which allows her students more uninterrupted time to focus on any given subject.

COLLABORATION HELPS. A LOT.

The five teachers on Wade's third-grade team used a "divide and conquer" approach to the Core. "We decided to specialize, with each of us working on something we're good at," Wade says. "We then brought our ideas to the team the week before we were due to teach that lesson."

Teachers at other schools have found success in communicating their progress across grade levels. "That collaboration is key because it helps us see not just what's going on at our grade level but what's going on with the whole curriculum. It helps us see the path that's been laid out," says Vallejos.

PHOTO: SUNSTOCK/THINKSTOCK

BE PREPARED TO FILL IN GAPS.

With the exception of the very youngest, most of today's students have not grown up with the Core, which can present a challenge for both teachers and students. Vallejos has noticed this in math. "One of the biggest challenges we faced is that we have students in third grade who have never had experience with bar models. They've never seen a number bond. Yet the curriculum we're given assumes our students have seen those things," she says.

Other teachers are adjusting the curriculum to allow students time at the beginning of the school year to transition to the more rigorous standards.

"Our third-grade students weren't ready for the writing expectations, so we created beginning-of-the-year mini-units to give kids more time to develop and understand their writing," says Nicole Zuerblis, a reading specialist at Paul W. Kutz Elementary School in Doylestown, Pennsylvania.

CHANGE YOUR APPROACH FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS.

Brenda Mendoza, a second-grade bilingual ELL teacher at Greenman Elementary School in Aurora, Illinois, has found that the Core presents hurdles for her students. "It's been difficult to integrate Common Core standards while also abiding by the standards for English language learners," she says.

Previously, Mendoza had taught most of her literacy lessons in Spanish. But when her teaching team looked at the Common Core standards, they decided that the amount of English they were using in the classroom wasn't enough. As a result, they created a biliterate English block, focusing on academic language. "Students' understanding of the vocabulary and terminology needs to be solid in English if they're going to be successful meeting the Common Core standards," Mendoza says.

She has noticed that students are making strides—to the point where they can be assessed in English, something that didn't happen in the past. "They're not yet at the same reading and comprehension level as their peers," she says. "But if they have that academic vocabulary, it's going to be easier for them to take the new assessments."

SCAFFOLD FOR SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS.

The level of rigor demanded by the standards has been especially difficult for special education students. "I have children in my room who have learning disabilities and cannot answer a Depth of Knowledge Level 1 question, which is basic recall skills, let alone a Level 3 or 4 question, which calls for more strategic thinking and reasoning," says Lucy R., a second-grade teacher in New York City. (She prefers not to use her last name.) Her class consists roughly of 60 percent general education students and 40 percent special education students. Despite her special needs students' struggles, administrators have told Lucy that she needs to ask more complex questions in her lessons. When

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- Achieve the Core offers self-paced PD modules, which contain presentations, videos, and hands-on assignments. ***bit.ly/pdmodules***
- Teaching Channel is loaded with videos of Common Core lessons, from close reading to linear functions. ***teachingchannel.org***
- Edcamp offers in-person "unconferences" across the U.S. Session topics aren't predetermined because participants drive the PD, but there are bound to be discussions about Common Core. ***edcamp.org***

she asks for strategies to help students answer even the most basic questions, she has been met with suggestions like "Let them have struggle time."

"Struggle time" has been frustrating, and not too useful, says Lucy. Instead, she has found some success with scaffolding and differentiating tasks. "My scaffolding techniques range from small-group instruction to repeat mini-lessons to giving my kids checklists and written reminders of strategies being taught," she says. "There isn't a one-size-fits-all, a scaffold that is sure to work. Some work with some kids, and others don't."

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED.

Despite the challenges that face certain students, some teachers told us they have been pleasantly surprised to find that many of their students are Common Core heavyweights. For instance, Vallejos recalls a math problem that asked her third-grade students how much juice is in a cup if Johnny pours half of his 280-milliliter cup into it.

"They hadn't done fractions yet. They didn't know how to divide 28 by two, much less 280 by two," Vallejos says. Still, she encouraged her students to discuss the math problem in small groups, emphasizing that she wasn't as interested in the right answer as the steps the students would take to solve the problem.

Nine of the 12 small groups solved it correctly.

"I was floored," Vallejos says. "My adult mind didn't expect them to be able to do it because it automatically set up a long division problem. But because they'd been taught analytical skills, they were able to break the problem apart, to really think about it, and they weren't afraid to give it a shot."

LEAVE ROOM FOR CREATIVITY.

"When I first saw Common Core, I was afraid I wasn't going to be able to do all the fun things I like to do with my class," says Wade, the third-grade Maryland teacher.

She has since learned that the Core lends itself to cross-curricular creativity. She created a unit about Africa in which her students researched information and composed a newsletter about the continent. The third graders then applied their research-based knowledge of Africa's animals and habitats to solve Core-aligned math problems. "Students needed to find the perimeter of a fenced-in area," explains Wade. "But first, they had to figure out how large that area would have to be to be comfortable for a given animal. They had to do research to learn about the animals, and they had to use the area and perimeter skills they learned in math."

LOOP IN PARENTS.

"What's surprised me most is the Common Core divide," says Suzy Brooks, a third-grade teacher at Mullen-Hall School in Falmouth, Massachusetts. "I want parents to be informed, but all of that can be unraveled when they see one picture on Facebook that shows a ridiculous math problem and they think that's what we're teaching their kids."

To combat misinformation—and to make it easier for parents to help kids with their homework—schools nationwide are reaching out to parents. Brooks's school hosts "parent universities" for caregivers to attend and learn about Common Core lessons and work. Other schools are creating videos and uploading them online to demonstrate the skills and strategies that students learn in class.

"A lot of parents don't understand why students can't just get the answer and have that be good enough," says Megan Mathers, a fifth-grade teacher at Chevy Chase Elementary. "We need to help them understand it's not so much about the product as it's about the process." □