The Reading Standards

Part I: Key Ideas and Details

The Standards, Close Reading, Text Evidence, How and Why Parts Develop in Text

This chapter looks at the Common Core early learning years Foundational Skills of initial reading development, and specific Reading Anchor Standards of the first Reading Standards cluster of Key Ideas and Details, for basic close reading.

We also discuss here ideas on learning activities to help children understand these Standards, and suggestions for thinking about how to develop these understandings in the classroom.

The big idea of reading is reading for meaning -- to expand one's world, to gain insight

into ideas, people, and values. Such insights and understandings all help us to learn and grow. We learn to love to read, to expand our world, to be transported to another world, time and place. Reading enlarges our understandings, helps us understand others and new ideas, adds to our growth in mind and spirit. Knowledge empowers us, gives us power over our own lives to achieve. Young people especially hunger for this new knowledge and understanding. How text is analyzed for

insights and deeper levels of meaning is the basis of Common Core Reading Standards. Why would we want to limit students by not learning to read at the best level possible?

Primary age children love learning to begin to make sense of text. They exult in reading words that now make sense to them. Young children are beginning to learn to learn. We move them along to the next best step. Some, especially those who have been read to by family members at home, already understand that the page has words; these children can leap ahead in understanding text. Others need to be taught the very basics, such as to hold the book right side up, read left to right. Intermediate elementary children see that a door to understanding the world is opening for them through reading. They move from learning to read to step into the big world of reading to learn, making a huge leap.

Middle school students become intensely engaged when they latch on to books that help them make sense of people, ideas and information. At the intermediate elementary level and middle school and is when we either lose students to reading development or spur them on. Individualized attention to comprehend text is essential for more struggling readers in the early grades.

High school students trying to make sense of their world find reading helps with this understanding they crave. They appreciate insights that will help guide them. High school students seek values; they read to help make sense of people, good and evil, truth, heroism. They seek adventure from a mundane life. Or they have been turned off to reading. Many students are submerged in the cryptic language of texting, Tweeting, Facebook, where reading is simply expedited social exchange. The cyber revolution and multi-

media world threatens to kill reading for students. We have to bring these students back, through hooking them on books.

The Common Core Reading and Writing Standards through learning analysis skills add layers to reading so that students can learn more by learning the levels of understanding of literature with the *how* of reading, and informational text to learn from what is stated, and how statement can project point of view. The Standards help readers see the art and craft of text that add new dimensions. By analyzing the Standards text devices, students learn more, through seeing *how* what is said adds meaning. With Standards reading learning, students become more careful, thoughtful readers and learners. Students learn sharp analysis that carries over into other areas, such as analyzing an argument, assessing sources, gaining self-awareness, understanding and empathy for others, and learning to live life well and with purpose. Critical analysis of reading also carries in to expanding other facets of thinking. Each student must gain this ability to learn deeply from text study. Common Core Standards are a gift because they ask for high level reading ability with all students.

Foundational Reading Skills

Importantly, Common Core Standards set out early reading development key learning in the Foundational Skills area for Kindergarten through fifth grade. These are the traditional basic five areas of Print Concepts, Phonological Awareness, Phonics, De-Coding, Word Recognition and Fluency. Here students learn to break the code of reading. Establishing understanding in these areas is the grounding for reading ability. All students can learn these skills, varying the approach as needed for the child, with such means as explicit instruction, rhyming, "read alouds," letter-sound combination, and the various early reading programs that combine visuals with letters.

Special programs break the skills down more easily, to help special needs children learn to read with "baby steps," repetition and kinesthetic means. If students at upper grade levels don't have these understandings, they must be taught these foundational skills, using the best most age appropriate methods possible – direct instruction, one on one individual tutoring, targeted help at home, the wealth of easy reading age appropriate materials, the many software learning applications, whatever works for the child.

A great unacknowledged success of the federal education accountability Standards and assessment program the *No Child Left Behind* decade of the 1990's is the huge leaps in learning that special needs children have made, due to expectations that all students learn, and sanctions if test results aren't met. This improvement often doesn't show up in the more general test score reports. We must stay with this trend of inclusion that brings so many children along in reading development.

Families that can afford the technology for younger children can develop reading from the many applications such as words and text with graphics. With the right technology children are becoming self-taught readers. Carrying an iPad or Kindle around, young people are reading complete works of authors whom they choose to read. Those eyes on the screen trends we see with children that irk us can help to transform reading ability.

The Reading and Literary Analysis Standards

The Common Core Reading Standards are a annual grade level step by step framework for literacy development. The expected guides begin in the early grades and build from year to year, supporting greater growth each year.

Katherine Scheidler, September, 2014

Common Core Reading Standards break reading instruction and literacy development into four main areas.

1. **Key Ideas and Details** Section One focuses on close text reading, inference, theme, and stages of text.

2. **Craft and Structure** Section Two is more overall view of craft on how a text is shaped for author's purpose with word choice, how text pieces fit together, and how author's purpose shapes style and content.

3. **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas** Section Three is a more holistic view to compares texts or text and visuals for different style, delineate and evaluate text argument, and compare texts for knowledge or to compare approaches.

4. **Read Complex Text Proficiently** Standard Ten promotes moving to higher level, more complex reading, independently, and reading with understanding. Complex text includes more challenging vocabulary, complex sentences, subtle and complex ideas, and complexity in plot, character, and themes.

Mentor Texts

An effective way to teach these ten Reading Standards is by finding good grade level Mentor Texts that illustrate well the particular Standard.

This Mentor Text can then always be referred back to in order to remind students of the skill. Learning "central idea" at the early grades can be a fable that has a lesson, the main point of the brief story. A short poem with a light, happy tone can be used as a Mentor Text for how word choice affects tone. A sad, gloomy tone in a poem or short story, such as Poe's classic horror pieces, can illustrate tone. Shakespeare can be used at

upper grade levels for use of context clues to determine word meaning, as can any challenging text.

In this chapter, we take each Reading Anchor Standard of Key Ideas and Details and Craft and Structure one by one. Mentor Texts are referenced here to illustrate use of this learning strategy.

I. Key Ideas and Details

The section of Key Ideas and Details stress close reading of text, explicitly stated information, and basing comprehension, inference and main ideas on specific text evidence. We must closely read the words on the page.

The first three Key Ideas and Details Anchor Standards are:

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.

2. Determine **central ideas** or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the **key supporting details** and ideas.

3. Analyze how and **why individuals, events, ideas develop and interact** over the course of a text.

Close text reading for stated information

Reading Standard One requires that students read for explicit stated information and inference. We must pay attention to particular words or risk losing meaning. When we skim text we may miss key words. Explicit close reading of words is termed "right there" learning, a term to use in instruction. Literacy specialist Lucy Calkins refers to this close reading stated information as staying "within the four corners of the page" (Calkins, et.al., 2012 Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Learning, Heinemann Press).

Close text reading versus comparing experience

Common Core focus is rightfully on what the text states. This is different from the reading strategies of instructional practice, in which students are asked to compare their own experience with that in the text, moving away from close text words for broad comparison.

Students often learn to read by such valuable reading strategies as comparing plot or character with their own experiences or people whom they know. This is a helpful means of learning to read, by drawing on our own experience to understand text, seeing how text connects with our one's life. If there's puppy in the story a teacher may ask if any children in the class have a puppy. This is an intentional question to connect the child's experience with text. But we must then return to the text for what is stated. Comparing text with one's own experience enhances understanding, develops reading comprehension, and can help us through life's trials. But citing text evidence is a necessary skill for close text reading to able to advance our learning from what the text states. One approach doesn't refute the other. Standards learning simply ensures that reading the words on the page are taught. This is why close reading of informational text is important learning, to help with future learning through reading.

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We can easily integrate this Standard One into teaching by always directing students at every grade level back to the text with their ideas: Where does it say this? How do you know that? What's the evidence in the poem, story, article, novel?

Inference is taught by asking children, What are the word clues that help you believe something is probably true? Based on these points, what can we infer about this character? What words on the page tell us that that idea is *not* what is implied by the text? We can integrate looking at stated information and inference into all discussion of text.

We use the "teachable moment" when a student skips key words for misinterpretation, bringing him or her back to the text. At the early grade levels we can use "read alouds" to learn the reading skills of stated information and inference. At the upper grade levels students must continue to practice this skill to become adept at close reading and appropriate inference, pointing to the words that precisely convey meaning.

Standard Two is reading for central ideas or theme, which children are taught in early years with fables and brief narratives read aloud to them. This begins as, What is the lesson we learn from this story?

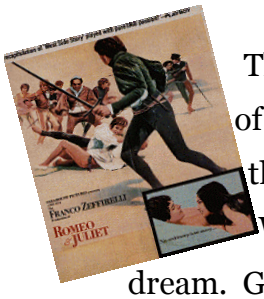
A caution here is that Common Core Standard Two refers to central ideas or themes, plural. This underscores the process area of reading skills. Reading in the sense of reading analysis is a process we undertake. Fiction can be read in varied ways for central idea or a theme, as when a student sees a major theme the teacher missed. A poem, film, short story, or novel may be read for a different theme with different readers. When substantiated by text, there can be more than one central idea. The e e cummings poem "In Just-Spring" has a "goat-footed balloon man." This character is with equal validity read as either Pan, the god of the woodlands, a joyful god of nature, or as a dark figure who

leads children astray. As long as the reader can justify by text a certain central idea, the theme derived is valid. Close text reading makes the difference. A test question that tests this skill asks students the central idea of text and then to give evidence to support this interpretation. Practice of this skill of identifying central idea is an essential basic reading skill, easily taught first with more simple reading, then moving to more complex reading. Student practice to discover central idea develops this ability. As with all reading development, we may first teach how theme is derived, then move students to doing this on their own, in gradual release of responsibility from dependence on the teacher to independent work with such reading analysis, on one's own.

We can keep our minds open to a student's reading the central idea as different from what other students or the teacher believes. This is an opportunity to justify one's view with text evidence. It's a delight when a student brings a new reading to text, supported by evidence. Teaching sparks learning when we use, "Is this supported by the text?" as a way to teach close reading. Bringing the class along to engage in discussion of whether one idea is or is not supported by the text teaches close reading skills and appropriate interpretation. When students can do this on their own in small groups they gain ownership of the skill. This analysis of central idea through close reading is the life of ideas that bring excitement to the classroom, to learning, and to love of learning.

Examples of common reading of central ideas in more complex text at the higher level grades are when students trace a consistent theme such as "courage" in To Kill a Mockingbird, and the theme of racism, or "other-ism." "We can't understand another until we walk around in his shoes," Atticus tells his daughter Scout, underscoring a central theme of this classic text.

Personal associations with minor points are not forbidden. These bits add to our ideas on life. But always a central idea must be substantiated by text evidence.



Themes of love, passion, impulsive behavior, and the destructive forces of conflict and emotion rage in Romeo and Juliet. Young readers enjoy the lively party scenes with extravagant wealth in The Great Gatsby. We also see a floral theme that enhances a central idea of fragility of a dream. Gatsby's dream of acquiring wealth to attract Daisy is a fragile one, Fitzgerald conveys. We also see the dark side of money and greed as a theme in The Great Gatsby, with the green light at the far end of the dock, and the "carelessness" of the wealthy in the car accident. Money and its superficial satisfaction is a central theme also. "I'm bored," states Jordon, summing up the ennui of the wealthy. Three people die at the end. The brief party scenes are light and filled with gaiety. But Fitzgerald's observation on wealth is largely dark. Unwrapping a central theme expands understandings of life and reading ability.

Tracing and Identifying a Theme Versus Teacher Taught "The Main Idea"

Reading for a central idea is traditional in reading instruction; it's not new. The difference is that Common Core Standards recognize that there is not necessarily only one central, or single main idea especially in fiction. A reader may see a different idea, reading from a different angle. Test questions on this Standard test close reading for central idea, to assess this learning. Therefore, teachers must frequently ask students to cite text evidence, make logical inferences of clues that leave the reader to believe something is probably true. We trace central idea from text at each grade level. Deeper, closer reading in more complex text can reveal multiple central ideas.

Students enjoy debate of central idea and validating one's idea with close text reading. This propels word study, text scrutiny, ideas and justifying one's ideas based on the text. Further, as a Standard this aims to ensure that all students learn to discern a central idea, not only those who can already do this. Struggling students can engage in this pursuit of determining a central idea when text is close to their reading level. Ideas are not beyond struggling readers. When we open our classrooms to democratic expression

of ideas, the classroom becomes a stimulating, thoughtful environment, unique to our special profession.

Name the Skill, for Understanding and Retention

Another useful implied skill new in teaching the Common Core Standards is that in the same way we teach figurative language such as "metaphor" and "simile," we need to pin terms on reading skills. When we name the reading skill we're using, students understand the skill. With repetition, students recall the skill, to heighten students' understanding that these are reading skills that can be applied to understanding reading in any text.

Often we do the analysis with students, and hope that students are learning analysis from the discussion. When we teach for inference we assume that students will understand that we're teaching for inference. But we must state and re-state the term; better yet, ask the student to name the reading skill. Then the student can recognize the skill with recalling the term. "That's a simile" type of literary device identification becomes learning the term in the same way when we name "inference," identifying and naming the "right there" word," terming a text "theme" or "central idea." At the upper grade levels, we hope students will indirectly understand the analysis skills we discuss. But we must be explicit with more challenging Common Core Standards, and for all students. When we state the skill we're using, such as "inference," this firms up the skill for students. We must pin down the skill so students recognize that it's important, and can continue to carry it into their reading.

When e.e. cummings uses the words "mud-luscious" and "puddle-wonderful" in his poem "In Just-spring," the inference is a joyous view of wet muddy spring-time. This poem is an excellent example of how words create tone. The tone here is upbeat, happy. The author's point of view is a child's view of spring-time. We must use the terms "tone" and "point of view" to nail down the skill. These are the terms tested for the skills, and

the terms one must know for literary analysis. Standards and tests promote good learning, reading and reading analysis.

In past years, and often today, we analyze and discuss text in class. Mostly higher achieving students really understood the concept; they intuitively learned it. When we name the skill or understanding, more students grasp this as a reading analysis skill. Students learn how to analyze text through the discussion. But naming the reading skill helps more struggling children understand the skill. This explicit instruction when tied to the open discussions of examining and exploring and debating text ignites the brain. We can feel this energy in the classroom, breathing life into teaching and learning. Deeper reading feeds insight.

Struggling readers can engage in this discussion, bringing them into the world of ideas that they may have been shut out of prior to Common Core Standards expectations. In turn, this discussion of ideas enhances reading ability because the reader is asked to go back to text to find the text evidence to justify ideas. By bringing the level of idea development and text evidence to all readers, more struggling students can be included in the stimulating discussions once reserved formerly only for the "better" students.

Analyze How and Why the Characters, Events and Ideas Develop

Standard Three asks students to look at how and why events develop text.

The classic poem "Casey at the Bat" illustrates the movement of despair at the baseball game in the town of "Mudville." Then unexpectedly Casey comes to bat. Hopes rise. Casey deftly controls the crowd. We see a slight arrogance in his stance. He swings the bat. Then, "There is no joy in Mudville. Mighty Casey has struck out." Perhaps a comment on pinning our hopes on heroes who are all too human. Or a statement on hubris.

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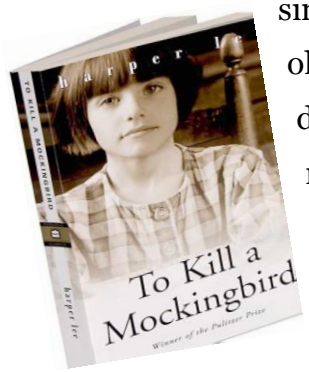
Another example of analysis of how and why characters, events and ideas develop is in a single chapter of the classic To Kill a Mockingbird. "Atticus was old," the brief chapter begins, with the novel told from Atticus' daughter Scout's point of view. In this chapter a rabid dog is moving through the small town. The town people are fearful, locking their doors. The child Scout then learns something startlingly new about her father. Atticus brings out a rifle, throws his glasses to the ground, takes aim and fells the dog in one shot. The children are astonished. Scout and her brother Jem had never seen nor imagined their gentle, scholarly father shoot anything before. The text then unfolds to show that Atticus was "old," but wise and skillful when necessary. And courageous. This sets the scene for the later trial in the book, when Atticus shows courage on a larger scale showing clearly why an accused black man couldn't have been guilty of the rape with which he's charged.



This one event, a stage in event and idea development of Atticus suddenly shooting the dangerous dog, makes a deliberate point that leads us to see that Atticus is brave in facing danger. Atticus is more capable than his children had imagined. This event prepares us to understand that the final trial scene is consistent with what we know of Atticus in this one chapter. The reader now is prepared for the central idea that evolves. Noting how one event underscores and adds to meaning sharpens reading and insight.

Teachers teach this understanding of how smaller pieces of text relate to the whole, especially with more complex text. This helps students see a piece as a whole and how the parts contribute to and enhance the whole. The difference, again, is that at the high school level, this analysis is done without naming the skill. Referencing Standard Three helps all students grasp this concept of the art of text. We can also teach this with "read-alouds" beginning in kindergarten with simpler text. The psychologist Piaget noted that any concept can be taught at any grade level. Common Core Standards ask us to find ways to do this.

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"Reading" Film as a Bridge to Text Analysis

In addition, Common Core Standards encourage us to use the visual medium of film to learn reading analysis skills. "Reading" film – which students are adept with and enjoy -- easily carries into reading text. Students who may have trouble with text reading and analysis can be first asked to learn terms with film, the visuals they can "read" well. Then we help students transfer this to text. Word choice, visual clues for inference, and movement of character, events and ideas are discussed in relation to film, then applied to text.

The common reference of the film "Titanic" is a good example of how with Standard Three readers can trace the scenes and see how and why scenes are used to convey an idea. The beginning scene of the protagonist (Leo DiCaprio) winning a ticket on the *Titanic* from gambling contrasts with the wealth of the upper class patrons, including the lovely Kate Winslet, to establish class differences, a central theme of the film. This initial gambling scene of the film presents an idea that develops a main idea.

We bring literary analysis understandings to all students through the more accessible medium of film. Then we help readers transfer this visual ability to reading text; we also can reference a film scene, and use the film as a Mentor Text for reading study. Many teachers find that the visuals of the Zefferelli production of "Romeo and Juliet" clarify Shakespeare's archaic language. Comparing the film "Titanic" and the text of "Romeo and Juliet" is also following Standards guides of comparing texts. Separated by class or family feud, two young people find each other, unexpected tragedy ensues. We study what are the similarities, what are the differences? We ask students to point to the text that supports this.

Background information

Background information contributes heavily to reading development. Younger children are often interested in animals will devour with high-level comprehension with informational text on animals. One child may avidly read a biography of a person beyond expected reading ability when the subject is the child's hero. Books that make a cultural connection that are challenging reading can be comprehended by students who identify with the text. One of my Latino students reading Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Chronicle of a Death Foretold remarked delightedly, "This is so Hispanic." He had context for the reading.

When background on a topic is lacking, we must provide background information to establish context for reading. We can't always assume that students have the background information to comprehend text. A recent state test began with a lengthy reading passage on surfing, foreign to urban, low income, and immigrant students, a good test of reading remote text, but not necessarily a valid test of reading comprehension.

Informational Text

The Common Core emphasis on non-fiction is intended to ensure that students will be able to read for information to continue their learning. Novels are a joy to read, develop reading ability, and add meaning and ideas to our lives and enlarge our understanding of the world, but we must also prepare students to read for information. Many of these Common Core English Language Arts Standards – close text reading, inference, central idea, stages of text -- can be applied to content area informational text.

Also, by researching non-fiction background information, students can better understand fiction. Teachers can supply background information for students to read. The "jig-saw" strategy has small groups read varied pieces of background information, and present this to the class, often via PowerPoint. The next level would be for small groups to research background on their own and present information to the class.

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Any time we can have students do the work, not only is teacher burden lifted, but students learn more and better, well worth the time spent.

Much of the Common Core Reading and Writing Standards are familiar to us as teachers. Adopting these Standards for all our students is the challenge. As the Standards become adopted by all teachers, we have a framework to build on each year, and Standard become easier for each teacher to teach, counteracting the curriculum anarchy of the past. This graduated learning will also help narrow the achievement gap. The grade level expected mastery outcomes are all based on the Anchor Standards.

Teachers can independently determine how they teach these skills and understandings, though the more commonality, the better.

When teachers get together to discuss readings and how they teach Standards, we can find commonality of content and approaches for more common learning. This ensures that students will be learning the same things. Sharing ideas sparks new ideas.

When I mentioned to one sixth grade English teacher that she could probably tell which of the three elementary schools her students came from, she responded, "I can tell what teacher they had." This teacher saw vast differences in learning with her students. Bringing commonality to teaching practice works best for students. Standards grade level guides help immensely with this common grade level learning.

Our job is to serve our students. We have to be flexible and adaptable. We're teaching the students who are in front of us, not an ideal that may not exist. Those "Golden Years" of the good old days when teaching was easier, weren't so really golden. We left too many students behind. We teach who we have.

We're used to using inventiveness, differentiating, personalizing learning, providing more time on learning, because that's what teaching is about. We're stressing, and not limited to, teaching the Standards. The result will be stronger readers and writers.

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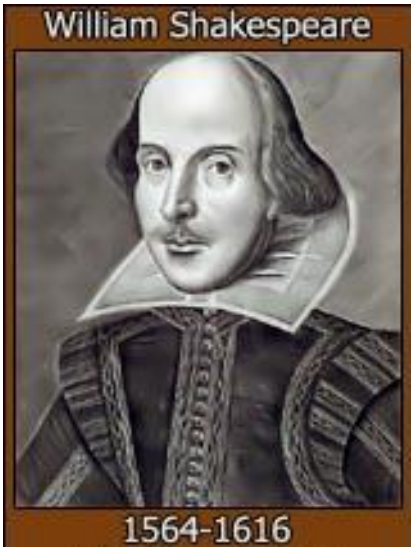
And as we all adjust to the Common Core Standards, using test score data as information on successes and needs, teaching the skills and understandings of literacy can become an easier and more rewarding adventure.



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