Part III. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Read Complex Texts

Evaluate content in diverse formats and media, Delineate and Evaluate Argument, Analyze two or more Similar Texts, Read Complex Text Proficiently

Integration of knowledge and ideas moves from the close reading of words and text evidence to the level of ideas, a holistic view of text. These Standards are, How do different media compare? Evaluate argument and reasoning. Compare approaches of different texts on the same theme. Standard Ten is read complex texts proficiently.

Common Core Standards value the media in our visually-rich world of film, television, the internet, Smartphone photos. When a news article or sports article has an accompanying photograph, we can use this visual to help us "read" text, to understand the text. Elementary reading programs use visuals with text. Children are taught to read the visual for text context, what the story is about.

When the beloved quarterback is shown in a sports article's photograph slumped on the bench, or on his knees, or our team's receiver is shown crossing the line for a touchdown with rival players falling behind him, the message is clear, heartbreaking defeat or an ecstatic win. The photograph of a sports player stymied by a miss or exulting in a win can be read as text, and help teach how words and pictures convey tone, while engaging the more struggling reader who may find other text irrelevant. The photo is selected to

convey the key message. Helping students see and identify the skill of how words and text convey an image and idea is a step in advancing reading ability.

In a project we can ask students to use video to create a film trailer that presents key scenes and character in a book studied, to match visuals with text, and to have students create the visual, improving text comprehension. Teachers create Powerpoint presentations with graphics for presentation, and share these, knowing visuals enhance learning. Student visual presentations ask them to go more deeply into text.

The Anchor Standards for Integration of Knowledge and Ideas are:

7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

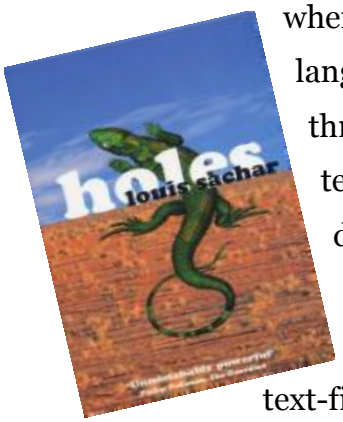
9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

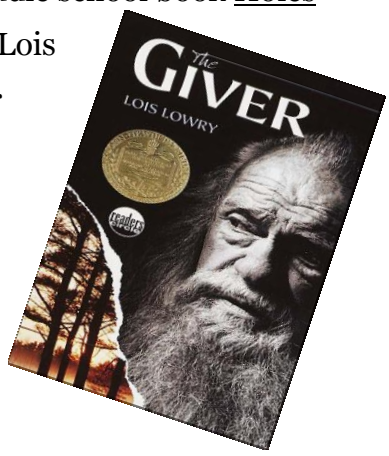
Standard Seven – assess content presented in diverse media and formats -- is often effectively taught in comparing film with text. The visual medium is an access point to print text for many students. Visuals bring text alive. Students often easily develop critical reading of film on their own and with repeated viewings. Reading film is a universal, accessible language, read even by readers who struggle with text. If students are not adept film readers, we teach this. Students learn from insights with visual media skills that they then can bring to text. In a reverse learning activity, because students watch TV and film, the reading strategy of "making a movie in your head" to

comprehend text is a skill to help the reader understand text, another strategy that can be used at any grade level, and with complex text.

When we compare a film and the book with a class this engenders ideas, reinforces close reading of text and of film, requires text evidence to support ideas, and opens up discussion to new ideas from different students. Students who may not become engaged in text discussion can participate in the visual analysis discussion. This brings new thinking to the analysis of each, stimulating closer examination. We go deeper into theme, inference, how purpose shapes point of view, imagery, how pieces of the film or text relate to the whole. character. Film often has subtle clues that can be brought to text meaning making and analysis, reinforcing close reading and inference. Class discussion on this close reading of visual text now includes more struggling readers; peers learn from close readers of film. Often students see with comparison of film with text that the novel is richer, deeper in meaning than that conveyed in film, a teacher's delight that reading excels over film.

Once again Common Core Standards raise the bar in expectations and take us to the next level with Standard Seven, to evaluate content in diverse formats. A teacher loves it when a class decides the film version of a text studied falls short of the rich language and meaning of the novel. At the same time, teachers were thrilled when "Beowulf" became a film, to convey meaning of challenging text, as well as creating an opportunity to compare text and film to develop critical analysis ability. The popular middle school book Holes by Louis Sachar as film, and the film version of Lois Lowry's classic book The Giver set the stage for text-film comparison lively discussion which take students further into the reading and back to the text to evaluate text for meaning.





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Standard Eight is "Delineate and evaluate argument including validity of reasoning and sufficiency of evidence." Evaluating argument is an essential skill to create critical thinking. Students must see that they can learn information, insights and ideas from reading, but also develop judgment on text. The author presents a viewpoint. Reading fine text in school assists in building a sense of effective and well reasoned argument, whether fiction or non-fiction, providing a basis on which to judge other text. The classic works of Ayn Rand present a case for individualism; her arguments are hotly debated.

A key learning area with the Common Core Standards is that of understanding that any text presents a case for a point. All text is written by a person who has a point of view on the topic. This is a 21st century skill because of the proliferation of text via the internet. With Common Core, students learn that not all readings on the internet are factual. Readers must take the stance of not accepting all text as truth. We must assess the argument and its claims, and critically analyze for valid reasoning, and relevant and sufficient evidence to find the argument valid. The sophisticated reader knowledgeable in a field looks at the author and says, "This is his viewpoint," considering the source, assessing the argument, reading carefully to judge. We keep in mind Standard One, close attention to the words on the page to see well what the author states, and don't leap to conclusions. Inference must be based on text.

As an example of assessing argument, with the debate on global warming and climate change, the writer may state that because we've had a cold winter in our area, we can't be having global warming. The counter argument is that by collecting large amounts of data over extended time scientists see through data a trend toward global warming. Denial of humans contributing to global warming is also dismissed. Scientists, with research data, prove otherwise. Unbiased, data-based, factually reported non-fiction informational text is to be valued, when it reports thoroughly researched findings.

Critical analysis of text with this Standard of evaluating argument helps a student distinguish polemic. Students learn to value carefully reasoned argument with strong, valid evidence to support a case. Reading local newspapers' "Letters to the Editor" is a nice place to begin to understand this concept of evaluating argument and evidence. Complex editorials by economists and scholars challenge more advanced readers.

Standard Nine on analyzing how texts address similar themes brings us from discussion of two texts, to *how* texts present differently. The common comparison of texts moves to the higher analytic level of how comparison of text is conveyed with different text.

An example of text comparison could be comparing a news article on bullying with Arthur Miller's complex play The Crucible in which townspeople are accused of witchcraft, or Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lottery," in which the town has a tradition of selecting a person to be stoned to death, a mindless brutal act based only on tradition. Which text is richer? Which text is more powerful a statement? Which is more convincing? Why and how? Which is more accessible to a reader? Are the rumors that some in the town are witches similar to rumors people spread about others today that can be considered bullying? If so, why and how? If not, why not?

Here we also have an opportunity also to integrate information text. Miller wrote in the 1950's at the time of "McCarthyism," when Senator Joseph McCarthy was on a "witch hunt" during the Cold War to accuse and force informants to uncover citizens who were members of the Communist Party, or socialist leaning. McCarthy accused many of being associated with communism, with many brought to public hearings and charged as Communists or asked to report on those who may be associated with communism, and therefore considered dangerous to our country. Many writers and film makers were "black-listed," no longer employed. Close analysis of this period in history with the play "The Crucible" and the short story "The Lottery" create close reading, lively discussion and require close text reading, a wonderful opportunity to compare fiction with real life events in informational text.

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This type of discussion and comparison of texts brings heightened engagement in a class. Students can have differing insights and thoughts. Their observations can be made and validated. Students want to learn truth. They want to know what is right and what is wrong, in ideas and in actions. Our students are seeking how to live their lives, what kind of person another is, and what kind of person one wants to be. When we strike a chord of excitement on an idea that engages our students, this is one of those opportunities that remind us of why we became teachers. We can thank the Common Core Standards for guiding us to use bigger idea-driven content in our teaching. The electricity in the classroom intensifies when we touch on an idea in which our students are invested. The more timely the issue, the more heated the debate, which can then lead to fine writing to argue one's case. Open, broad discussion of text must always lead back to, "Where does the text state that?"

This is an additional Standard added by Massachusetts:

MA.8.A. Locate and analyze examples of similes and metaphors in stories, poems, folktales, and plays, and explain how these literary devices enrich the text.

Though figurative language is stated in Craft and Structure Standard Four, literary devices are also emphasized here. Teaching similes and metaphors, even if it's with the mnemonic device of "simile," with the first letter "s" is comparison with like or "as," ending in "s," is traditional for English language arts teachers.

A star is "like a diamond in the sky," in "Twinkle,Twinkle Little Star." Similes abound in Shakespeare's Sonnet 130, in which "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun; Coral is far more red than her lips' red: . . .If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head . . ." Students can be asked to create similes and metaphors on their own in a topic. The inventiveness here, as with all Standards, tumble out of a teacher's mind, and two-fold

when brainstorming with a colleague to on learning activities. First providing appropriate Mentor Text example of similes, then having students find or create them own, together in a group, always helps students internalize the learning.

The teacher can distribute varied poems to students to look for simile or metaphor, or locate from their own reading or from music. A team of students can research examples of similes and metaphors and create a powerpoint presentation that explains how the literary device adds meaning. Students can add graphics to illustrate the precise connection. Examples of students creating form poems that chose pictures to illustrate a metaphor are below. The teacher follows where students take them on this venture, and continue with reinforcing the learning as the devices arise in text and with student writing. The aim is to see how these devices add depth to reading, underscoring ideas.

How these devices enrich text is the key understanding.

Katherine Scheidler, October, 2014

Standard 10: Read Complex Text Proficiently

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Complex text is text that has higher level vocabulary, bigger less simple words, more complex sentences and book structure, and complex ideas, relative to the grade level.

Common Core Reading Standard Ten expects that students will be moved along to read increasingly more complex text, not languishing with text that is too challenging so that the student isn't learning to read, and not hindering stronger reader development with too easy text. The key is close assessment of a student's reading ability and carefully moving students to more complex text relative to the student.

Our elementary grades have moved from the set achievement level groups of "Bluebirds" and "Robins" of earlier years to individualize reading and use more flexible grouping for reading learning. In the early grades, teachers use "leveled texts," assessing students' reading ability and learning level for the best next step, so that there's wider range of reading development in a class that is flexible for students to move to a higher level of text. Higher achieving readers are provided more challenging text, struggling readers are provided simpler text, with careful teacher comprehension assessment, and more reading instruction support. The goal is to help each student grow in learning to read.

In the early grades these varied books are termed at the child's "instructional level," which means it's a stretch for the child and the teacher supports the reading, or termed a "just right" book, which a child can read on one's own, thereby developing fluency and comprehension, with the reading level at the "independent" level.

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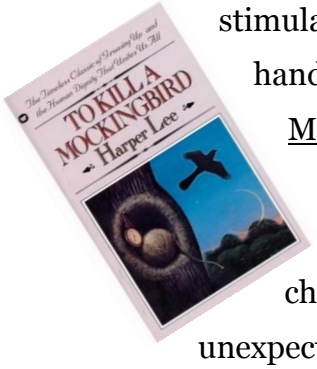
However, another factor in reading is student interest. If a child enjoys animals, he or she can read on one's own more complex text on the topic. If a student has an affinity with science, reading a physics text is relatively easy for that student than it is for a student who finds science more challenging. We encourage children to read widely in an area of interest, to further develop comprehension, fluency and vocabulary.

A teacher is successful when engaging students in more culturally varied literature, to bring students to the understandings not close to them. This is the power and great value – and the challenge -- of literature, to develop empathy and understand other cultures.

The emphasis on women and multi-cultural writers today counteracts emphasis – or totality – of the earlier "dead white male" writers. While "boy books" engage a male reader, when we broaden the range of gender and culture in text we find ways to elicit understanding and empathy in our particular students in order to avoid having them feel the text is remote from their own lives. My African-American students intensely sympathized with the persecution of Hester Prynne in The Scarlet Letter, while the weak males in the classic novel hid. This student outrage spurred the difficult reading, stimulated dynamic discussion, and powered strong writing. On the other hand, one African-American student told me he really liked To Kill a Mockingbird. Thrilled, I asked him why. He told me it was because the big words in the book helped his rapping. It wasn't the theme of freeing a black man that caught him. He loved the rich, more challenging vocabulary of the book. As teachers we keep open to unexpected learning opportunities, expected the unexpected.



My Dominican students were bored with the lengthy and at times just too philosophic The Autobiography of Malcolm X, which had worked well with other classes. I dropped the lengthy text and turned to Julia Alvarez's How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accent, a middle class woman's experience. Even my tuned-out baseball player student read this

book intently, and with analysis, connecting with the book. He had immediately read the back cover and said, "She's from the Dominican Republic!" I hadn't even been sure he could read. We had lively discussions, excellent student writing.

We can't always predict student reaction to readings. But we can capitalize on what does strike them. We have to be ready. We have to know the field and the Standards well enough that we can be flexible. We're teaching our students reading Standards. When a book that worked well with one class fails with another, we switch to a concept or text better suited. When the opportunity arises to spark interest in a more complex text, we take advantage.

In a strategy to engage readers, we can have role-play characters, which forces students back to the text. Having students role play a scene, or work in small groups to extend a character into another situation and present to the class, have students write a letter as if one were one character to another character in text to get inside the character, having students argue from an otherwise remote character's point of view, are all examples of ways to engage students with text that is otherwise irrelevant to one's own life and world. In one class I had a panel of students at a table at the front of the classroom each playing the role of one of the characters in the novel, and the rest of the class interrogated the characters. With one especially theatrical student enacting an interesting character from the text, this activity was a huge success. We plan, but can never predict how well an activity will work, excited when it does, moving to Plan B when it doesn't. This is the drama of school.

In determining complex text, while middle school students may be able to read the simple words and sentences of John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men and The Pearl, high school teachers retain these, due to the relative complexity of ideas and symbolism. Vocabulary, sentences and ideas of To Kill A Mockingbird constitute relatively complex text, but the engaging story and characters, and a striking story make it easier reading, hence eighth grade teachers long to teach this wonderful novel, and ninth grade teachers

also treasure this text. One of my ninth grade African-American students loved reading the lengthy, complex but romantic Gone with the Wind, even with its offensive view of slavery; she read Wuthering Heights for summer reading and arrived in September to state that the passionate, angry Heathcliff was just like her father. My heart stopped, thinking of her home life. She connected with the dense, otherwise inaccessible text.

When we can develop reading ability with complex text that's of personal interest to a student, we then move to other complex text. Students needn't be leveled, doomed with simpler reading that doesn't help them grow in conquering more complex text.

Free reading is invaluable to reading development. Students will read an entire author's work if they love the author – Avi, Dr. Seuss, Chris Van Allsburg, J.K.Rowling's Harry Potter books, David Macaulay, Judy Blume, Gary Paulsen, Robert Heinlein's great science fiction. The subject may be compelling for others, such as the vampire books, the mystery or romance genre, or fantasy reading, with its rich challenging vocabulary and complex sentences and imaginative ideas. Such reading on the child's own time dramatically develops fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. We must encourage such independent reading as much as possible, and as meshes with interest. Avid readers become strong readers.

Instituting, maintaining, and updating summer reading for pleasure and to continue to read to develop a life-long habit of reading is the mark of a good school. When we can effectively engage children in reading in the summer, through carefully selected high interest, engaging text, we can help to instill this love of reading. Providing the option of complex text supports reading growth. Choice always makes a difference. Personal interest overcomes complexity.

Reading Standard Ten is the highest goal to which we aspire.

Katherine Scheidler, October, 2014

Having students write extended metaphor poems helps them internalize the device.

Connecting Words and Images -- Metaphor

"School Circus"

Obedient to their trainers,

Nose to tail, the elephants

Plod around the ring.

An audience of children

Watch to see them lumber up.

The announcer calls each name.

The children shout, break free,

Rush to their yellowed sides.

Twice a day they do their act.

The familiar image of school busses lined up is viewed by a fourth grade student as a happy, lively, repeated "act," with the connotation of "circus" adding to the bus circle.

Katherine Scheidler, October, 2014

"The Rhino"

The rhino grunts down Johnson Road

Pausing, pushing, roaring, shoving.

Its head is down; its pointed horn

Aimed at the ground.

It charges onward through the storm.

Look at the track it made in the snow.

Reference:

Common Core Standards: figurative language, connect graphics to text, publish

Created by grade 4 students

From posted DESE Common Core unit: "Using Words and Images to Interpret and Create Metaphor"
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, October 2012

Katherine Scheidler, October, 2014