



Literacy Connects-Table of Contents for

NEPF Instructional Standard 2

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XLIV: Using Multi-genre for Summarizing and Concept Development: Using multiple genres of writing is an effective and fun way to develop and assess understanding, promote concept development, and increase retention of content knowledge and vocabulary. This issue presents cross curricular examples of ways you can motivate students to write and increase their understanding of your content.

XLVI: Understanding Text Complexity within the CCSS: The first in a series on the Common Core State Standards, this issue discusses text complexity within the CCSS. It suggests ways to determine text complexity and provides rubrics to evaluate and scaffold text.

XLVII: Reading with Rigor and Relevance: This issue addresses the disparity between the reading levels of many of our students and the complex texts suggested by the CCSS. By intentionally selecting reading that supports instruction and deliberately layering the types of texts students read, teachers can better support the complexity and range of reading demands of the CCSS.

XLVIII: Close Reading: An Essential Skill for Understanding Complex Text: The third in the CCSS series, this issue suggests an effective strategy to teach students how to grapple with complex text. Close Reading--the careful, sustained interpretation of a brief passage--is a time-tested strategy that provides students of all ages and in all content areas with the tools to successfully navigate complex texts while teaching them how to annotate, question and analyze what they are reading.



Issue II:

CONCEPT BUILDING - Helping students define and expand on one topic

This strategy works well for social studies, math and science selections, in which understanding concepts is crucial to understanding the next topic

Definition or		Evidence or Steps	Review or Examples
Concept	Formula		

Procedure:

1. Explain to students that a concept is an idea or general term. This strategy is useful whenever reading centers on explaining one topic because it requires a definition of the term, and examples or an explanation of the process identified by the term.
2. First have students look for clues to identify the concept by previewing to find words in bold type, in a numbered list, in a box, and in illustrations. Write in Concept box.
3. Define the concept in the Definition or Formula box.
4. Write the evidence or details that explain the concept in the Evidence or Steps box.
5. In the Review or Examples box, summarize the concept or work out problems to demonstrate understanding.

Modeling:

Using the Think-aloud method, model the strategy for the class. Verbalize how you would go about finding the concept, the clues you use (bold type, illustrations, lists...). Show where you would usually find the definition of a concept (after the bold word) and then how you would select the details. Read the chapter aloud with your students, walking them through this process several times. Students can practice this strategy at home and then discuss their charts in small groups before working independently.

The following graphic demonstrates how the Concept Building strategy might work for a math selection on the commutative property of multiplication.

Concept	Definition/formula	Evidence/steps	Examples
Commutative Property of multiplication	The product of 2 or more numbers will always be the same, no matter the order multiplied	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. change the order of numbers you are multiplying. 2. Notice the answer is still the same 	$3 \times 7 = 21;$ $7 \times 3 = 21$



Issue III: Cornell Note-Taking With a Twist

Effective note taking is one of the most important skills that students can develop. The actual recording of the notes, however, is only part of the process; the real value lies in returning to the notes: summarizing, reflecting, reacting, adding, organizing, and using them in some way. This strategy will allow students to organize lecture or reading material and summarize or react to the material while it is still fresh. If this strategy is used during class in a lecture/notes activity, the time you allow the students to summarize and react, can lead to connections and questions during the lecture while the information is still hot.

1. Have students fold their paper lengthwise (1/3 on the left; 2/3 on the right).
2. Have them listen to the lecture or read the text. (1) Use the left column for main ideas, vocabulary, concepts, or questions; (2) Use the right column for details, definitions, descriptors, answers, diagrams, or drawings.
3. Lecture for no more than 10 minutes (or tell them to read up to a logical stopping point) and then give the students 3 minutes to summarize, react, reflect, or question what was said. At this point, students can also orally ask questions to clarify or expand on your lecture.
4. Have students write summaries, reactions, questions, etc. at the bottom of the page or on the adjacent notebook page, depending on the length of lecture notes.
5. Notes can be used for studying or any writing assignment.

Main points, key words, vocabulary words	Details, examples, facts that explain and illustrate, vocabulary definitions, diagrams, graphs, or drawings.
Summarize, question, react, reflect, associate, analyze... OR.... do this on a separate sheet of paper.	



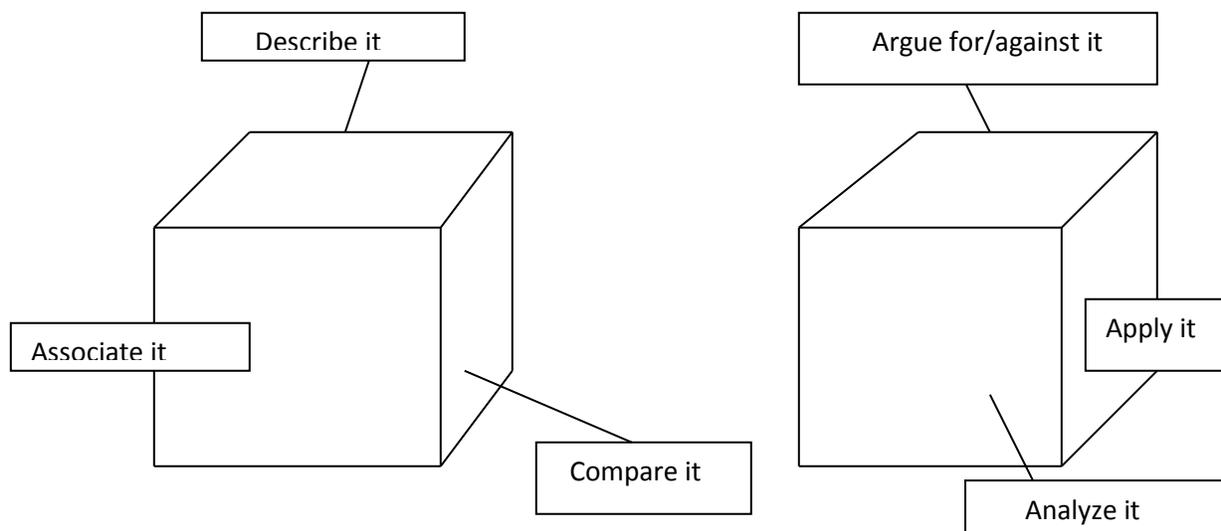
Issue IV: Cubing

Cubing is a great way to explore a topic from various dimensions. The concrete visual of a cube with its six sides serves as a starting point to consider the multiple dimensions of any topic in any content area. Cubing can be used as a preview or background building strategy to engage students before a lesson; it is an excellent way to find out how much students know about a topic before, during, or after teaching a lesson; it also works well when students use Cubing to brainstorm all aspects of a topic before writing or as a concept review. To introduce this strategy, start with a familiar topic and model the process with the whole class. Once the students are comfortable with Cubing, introduce more complex topics and encourage them to use it in small groups or independently.

Cubing involves the following steps:

- Describe it (including its colors, shapes, sizes, textures, if applicable)
- Compare/contrast it (to what is it similar or from what is it different?)
- Associate it (of what does it make you think?)
- Analyze it (how is it made/of what is it composed?)
- Apply it (what can you do with it or what does it do?)
- Argue for or against it (take a stand and list reasons for supporting or not supporting it)

Example: An earth science student used Cubing to explore her knowledge of weathering after reading the chapter on weathering in her textbook. She **described** it as the process that breaks down rocks; she **compared** it to erosion and **associated** it with the Grand Canyon. In the second half of the cube, she **analyzed** weathering by listing the two types (mechanical and chemical) and by naming some causes of each (ice wedging, water, and acids). She **applied** it and **argued** for it by saying that weathering is essential for soil formation, land form development, and the replenishment of soil nutrients.





Issue XIV: Strategies for Reading and Responding to an Article or Editorial

The ability to read, analyze and respond to articles and editorials is essential in both an academic and business setting. This activity encourages students to use the reading and writing process to generate a one-page reaction to an article or editorial that advances a certain point of view.

Read and Pre-write

1. Preview what you plan to read. Note author, author's credentials, title, headings, subheadings, pictures, graphs, italicized words, etc. Read first and last sentence of each paragraph. Read first and last paragraphs.
2. Based on your preview, what do you think this will be about? What do you know about this topic? What don't you know? What is your purpose for reading? Do you need to take notes? Would a graphic organizer be useful?
3. During reading, stop and question. Relate what you are reading to what you already know. Make connections, ask questions, summarize at the end of each paragraph and re-read what you can't explain.
4. Take notes. Divide your paper into two columns. In the left column, write main ideas, key words, and key points from the reading. You will use these notes when writing your summary. In the right column, write your own comments, reflections, reactions, connections, or questions. These will help you write your reaction paragraph.

Summarize (First paragraph)

Start by answering the following questions (Use your notes from the left column):

1. What are you summarizing? (Name the article, journal, date, author, credentials, and topic of discussion; write only one sentence)
2. How does the article begin? (Write only one sentence)
3. What is in the middle? (List each main point in order presented and author's view of each; write no more than three sentences)
4. How does it end? (In one sentence, sum up the author's overall view of the subject)

React/Respond/Comment/Evaluate (Second paragraph)

1. Begin with an overall statement of your opinion of the article. You can agree, disagree or qualify.
2. Using your comments in the right hand column, respond or react to each of the main points made by the author (main points should be in the middle part of your summary).
3. The concluding sentence should be your overall view of the topic.

Revise and Edit

1. Have you included the author's name, name of the article, journal and date?
2. Is the information complete?
3. Have you included only important information and deleted irrelevant or redundant information?
4. Is the information presented in the same order as the original article?
5. Are your opinions clear and well supported?
6. Read aloud. Does it read easily and smoothly?
7. Are there any words you need to change? Delete? Add?
8. Check for spelling, punctuation, and usage.



Issue XIX: Interactive Lectures

Brain research has shown that the working memory (attention span) of preadolescents is approximately 5 – 10 minutes, while adolescents and adults average 10 – 20 minutes (on average, working memory parallels age: 2 years/2 minutes; 12 years/12 minutes; etc.). This means that the average secondary student is unable to focus on information for more than 15 minutes without a change in the way the learner is dealing with the information (*David Sousa, 2001*). Faced with curriculum overload and excessive assessments, teachers often rely on lengthy lectures as their preferred mode of teaching large bodies of information. Although direct instruction is often the most efficient way to impart information, without breaks for students to think, write, discuss, and process what has been taught, it is not the most effective. Following are a few ideas to make lectures more interactive and more brain compatible.

1. **Guided Lecture:** Provide students with a list of objectives for the lecture. Have them put down their pencils and listen carefully to the lecture for 20 minutes. At the end of the 20- minute lecture, give students 5 minutes to write all the information they can recall individually. Next, involve them in small discussion groups (pairs also work well) to reconstruct the lecture using their notes. Help students fill in the missing information as a class.
2. **Responsive Lecture:** Devote one class period a week to answering open-ended, high level, student generated questions on any aspect of your topic or unit of study. All topics have to be presented as questions; students must specify why they think their question submission is important; the class orders the questions in terms of class interest; and, the lecturer answers as many of the questions as time allows.
3. **Pair/Share Lecture:** Deliver a 20- minute lecture and have students take notes. Every 5 to 10 minutes, pause during the lecture, and give students no more than 2 minutes to share their notes with a partner and fill in any missing information.
4. **Think/Write/Discuss Lecture:** Prepare a set of 3 related high-level questions to ask students throughout the lecture.
 - a. Give the first question (a motivational question that helps set the stage) before the lecture and have students write a 2-minute response.
 - b. During the middle of the lecture, pose another question to clarify the information being given. Ask students to write a short response; share some of the questions aloud.
 - c. At the end of the lecture, ask a reflective question that encourages connections and applications.
5. **Feedback Lecture:** Provide students with a reading and outline of the lecture notes in advance. Lecture for 10 minutes, and then divide students into study groups (2 to 4 in a group) for 20 minutes. During this time, students should be discussing a high level question related to the material. Reconvene for another 10-minute lecture and address the study questions in your comments.

Visit the RPDP website (www.rpd.net) for a complete selection of *Literacy Connects*.



Issue XXV: Marking Text - A reading comprehension strategy

Reading comprehension is a complex interactive process. Good readers use their experiences and knowledge about the world, their understanding of vocabulary and language structure, and appropriate reading strategies to create meaning. Helping struggling readers understand this complexity is problematic because the interaction between text and reader is not visible. *Marking Text*, a during-reading strategy, promotes the development of active reading skills by requiring students to record their thoughts, connections, and wonderings while reading. "Marking text helps readers pay attention and remember what they read (*I Read It But I Don't Get It*, Tovani, 2000)."

1. Introduce codes that elicit an internal dialogue between the text and the students. As students read, they mark the code next to the passage and write down their connections, questions, or predictions. Following are a few examples of comprehension codes:
 - BK—this code indicates a connection between the text and the student's life. A typical BK code might be followed by a written response that begins, "This reminds me of..."
 - !—this code denotes an "ah-ha" moment a student has while reading the text. A typical "!" code might be followed by a written response that begins, "Wow..." or "I never realized that..."
 - ?—this code indicates a question the student has while reading the text. A typical "?" code might be followed by a written response that begins, "I wonder..."
 - P—this is a prediction code used to make a prediction about what a student thinks might happen next. A typical "P" code might be followed by a written response that begins, "I predict that..."
2. As with any new strategy, *Marking Text* should first be modeled whole class using *The Think Aloud* (See Literacy Connects #1 for *The Think Aloud*). Using a short piece of text that the whole class can see, thoroughly discuss the code you have chosen and your thinking while reading. Write the code next to the paragraph or line that you are discussing; end by writing a brief summary of your thoughts.
3. Give students a short, accessible piece to mark on their own. If the text is too hard, students will have difficulty using the strategy. It is important that students not only mark the code as they read, but also document their thinking, so they can discuss their thoughts once they've finished. Be careful not to assign too many codes at once. Begin with one; once students are comfortable using the first code, add the second and so on.

If you are unable to mark in your books, sticky notes work well; they can be removed from the text and are small enough for jotting down a few ideas for each code. Another way to write on text is to cover a page with a clear overhead transparency and use overhead markers to code thinking. You might also consider photocopying a text for students to code.

Marking Text will help create independent readers who are responsible for and aware of their own reading comprehension.

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Issue XXVIII - Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum

Thomas Jefferson once wrote, "A democracy cannot survive unthinking citizens." This basic premise has served as the cornerstone for public education. Yet, are we doing enough to insure that our young citizens are thinking critically about our subject areas, their lives and community, and the world at large? In order to think critically, students must be able to analyze and evaluate information. These skills do not come naturally; they must be taught. Research indicates that developing proficiency in thinking skills is a cumulative, developmental process that must start in the early years and continue through college. Additionally, critical thinking is not limited to certain subject areas but must be taught across the curriculum. There are numerous strategies for raising the level of questioning in the classroom, but the easiest way is to create purposeful questions that seek to engage thinking rather than repeat knowledge. Following is a list of question starters that may increase the level of thinking in almost any context:

1. Hypothetical thinking

- What if this had happened?
- What if this were not true?
- What if this had not occurred?
- What if I could do something I can not do?

2. Reversal: to think backwards from results to causes

- What caused this?
- How does this change if I go backward?
- What if I turn this upside down or sideways?
- What if ____ had happened first?

3. Application of different symbol systems and modality

- Can I make this into a word problem?
- Can I make this into a number problem?
- Can I draw a picture of this?
- Can I represent this in musical terms?
- Can I act it out?
- Can I make a dance to represent this?

4. Analogy

- How is this like ____?

5. Analysis of point of view

- What else could account for this?
- Who would benefit if I thought this?
- What view of the world does the author assume the reader holds? How do we know?
- How many other ways could someone look at this?
- What would ____ say about this?
- Where is the author unclear? Why is this unclear?
- What perspective is missing? Why?
- What does the author want us to believe? Why?
- How does the text depict age, gender, and or cultural relationships?



Issue XXX - Building Classroom Community

Educators have always understood the importance of building and nurturing positive relationships with and among students. Recent brain research has shown that emotions are the single most important consideration in learning. Emotions determine whether or not we pay attention or make personal connections, while positive emotions increase our motivation to learn. Our most powerful memories are emotional. In fact, feeling stressed or threatened alters the body's chemistry which can impair the ability to learn and cause health problems. Emotions are so powerful that the brain can not differentiate between emotional and physical danger. With this in mind, it is essential that educators take time at the beginning of the school year to establish a safe environment where students are part of a positive learning community. Subsequent *Literacy Connects* will focus on ways to build community in your classroom, starting with the following "Getting to Know You" activities:

Spotlighting: Ask students to make a list of as many things about themselves as there are students in the room. They should write things that not many of their friends know but that they would be willing to share. Examples are "I raise hamsters; I have been to Russia twice; I eat pizza for breakfast; I love cream cheese and jelly sandwiches." Then allow students to move around the room and talk to one another. They should trade one fact with each student and write the student's first name beside the fact. Then let students take turns sitting in a chair at the front of the room, being "spotlighted," while everyone goes around and calls out the things they have learned about that student.

Name Game: Starting with the student nearest you, ask, "What is your name?" Repeat the student's first name. Then go to the next student and ask, "What is your name?" Repeat that student's first name and ask him/her, "What is his/her name?" while you gesture to the first student. Then go to the third student and continue around the room. The last student will have to name all the students in the room. After the last student has named all students, you should name them all again. Then tell all students to get up and sit somewhere else. Then ask, "Who can name everybody now?" Then you do it too.

Alliteration Name Game: A variation of the Name Game can be played by adding alliteration and a ball. Have everyone stand up. Say your name using alliteration. For example, "I am Lucky Lasley" then throw the ball to a student who says his/her name using alliteration and then repeats yours. For example, "I am Reggie Robert and this is Lucky Lasley" and then throws the ball to another student. Once the student has introduced him/herself, he/she can sit down. The last student to introduce himself must repeat all the names.

Two Truths and a Lie: Ask students to make a list of 2 things that are true about themselves and one thing that is a lie. The students introduce themselves and read their three facts. The rest of the group tries to determine which fact is a lie. You should start by introducing yourself and your two truths and one lie.

Snowball Fight: Have each student in your class write 3 interesting things about themselves on a piece of paper, wad up their paper and throw it across the room (the snowball fight part). Each student picks up a paper ball and finds the person who wrote it. The students interview each other based on the details written on the paper. They then introduce each other to the class. If time is an issue, you can have the students write only one detail about themselves.



Issue XXXI - Building Classroom Community, Part II

Our brain is strongly influenced by four enemies of learning: Threat, excessive stress, anxiety and induced learner helplessness. Each of these menaces causes the brain to shut down to minimal performance; at minimal performance, students use less of their brains to learn and revert to reactive behaviors. Threats also reduce higher-order thinking skills, creativity, and memory. Nearly anything can induce learner helplessness, from forgetting a textbook, lacking the resources to complete an assignment, to not understanding classroom procedures. Building community in the classroom is the first and most important step to alleviating learner helplessness and unnecessary stress (see *Literacy Connects Issue XXX* for more on building community).

- **Classroom Norms:** Allowing students to participate in setting class norms will build community and promote student buy-in. Even if you provide the norms, decide on a maximum of five and discuss each with your classes explaining why these behaviors are essential for learning. Wording is important: These should be statements of desired behaviors as opposed to a list of what not to do. Once you have established your classroom norms, have students choose the one norm with which they struggle the most. Have them write a short reflection explaining why they struggle with this particular directive and specific ways they can work on changing the undesired behavior. Post norms where they are fully visible to everyone.
- **Don't confuse class norms with classroom procedures.** Classroom procedures are routines that facilitate movement and student needs. Turning in and passing back papers, beginning and ending the period, transitioning from large group to small groups, getting out and putting away books and supplies, and greeting new students are just a few examples of activities that happen everyday in a classroom. Teach these procedures as you would skills, refining and adding new ones as the need arises.
- **Establish a climate where learners feel comfortable making mistakes—we learn best from our mistakes!** Discuss errors as a natural part of the learning process and have students identify, correct and explain their mistakes. Don't be afraid to point out your own mistakes and what you have learned from them.
- **Provide plenty of wait time after asking questions, so students don't feel pressured to have an immediate answer.** Research has revealed that teacher wait-time rarely lasts more than 1.5 seconds in a typical classroom. Increasing this to 3 – 5 seconds has been proven to have a positive impact on student learning, motivation and attitude.
- **Get to know your students:**
 - Learn student names as soon as possible. In a recent survey, students revealed the learning of names as the most important factor for creating a positive learning environment.
 - Interest surveys: Survey students to find out their likes and dislikes, their interests, hobbies, etc. Use this information to help connect and motivate.
 - Multiple Intelligence/Modality Surveys: Have students identify and reflect on their dominant learning modality. Discuss behaviors and learning strengths and weaknesses in terms of modality rather than individual student deficiencies.



Issue XXXII - Critical Stance Across the Curriculum

When readers demonstrate a critical stance, they must be able to stand apart from the text, see it objectively, and evaluate it. These skills can be developed across the curriculum using student text books, trade books, newspaper and journal articles, short stories, novels, and even picture books. Teaching students to critically examine print will develop the high level, critical thinking skills they need to succeed both inside and outside of the classroom. (*See Literacy Connects XXVIII for more on teaching critical thinking*)

Following are the skills needed to critically evaluate text, as well as example questions teachers can ask to help their students demonstrate a Critical Stance across the curriculum and across the grade levels:

Making Predictions:

- What will happen next?
- What is the author implying?
- Does the author offer hints of things to come?
- What conclusions can you draw?
- Can you predict the outcome if....?

Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion:

- What is fact in the text? How can you tell?
- Does the author make statements without supporting them?
- Does the author base any part of the argument on feelings rather than fact? How can you tell?
- Does the author generalize rather than support with specific details?

Using Relevant Information when Responding:

- Support your answer with facts from the text.
- List the reasons for your answer.
- How do you know?
- Cite examples to support your answer.

Synthesizing and Extending Information:

- How would you improve ...?
- Propose an alternative to
- What changes would you make to solve...?

Awareness of Values, Customs and Beliefs Represented:

- Who is the speaker?
- What does he/she believe?
- What is most important to the author/speaker?
- How does the author describe women/children/minorities?
- What groups are not represented in this writing?

Analyzing the Author's Craft:

- What literacy devices does the author use (metaphors, similes, irony, personification...)?
- What is the author's purpose (to entertain, inform, persuade...)?
- For what audience is this piece intended? How do you know?
- Analyze the sentences in this piece (long, short, formal, informal...).
- In what format (essay, letter, editorial...) is this written? Why?
- Classify the words the author uses (long, difficult, short, easy, common, specific to a region or profession...).



Issue XXXVII: NCTE National Day on Writing - Celebrating Who We Are!

When writing is celebrated and shared with others, it becomes a powerful and authentic way to create community in your classroom. *The National Council of Teachers of English* (NCTE) has established October 20, 2009, as the **National Day on Writing**. To celebrate the importance of this event and to showcase writing from across this nation, NCTE has created an online *National Gallery of Writing*. On October 20th, the Gallery will open its virtual doors and share all submissions. Writers in Las Vegas can participate in this event by submitting their writing to our own Las Vegas Gallery—“*What Happens in Vegas*.” You can access our online LV Gallery by going to <http://galleryofwriting.org>; there you can browse the National Gallery using the keyword “Vegas.” Although all types of writing are welcome on *The Gallery of Writing*, following is a writing activity that invites students to share their families, homes, and neighborhoods with each other and with the rest of the nation.

Where I’m From: Inviting Students’ Lives into the Classroom
(adapted from Reading, Writing, and Rising Up by Linda Christensen)

1. Have students read “Where I’m From” by George Ella Lyon (***a copy of the poem and student samples are posted in the “Additional Resources” file of your Literacy Connects Interact Icon and on RPDP.net, ELA, Literacy Connects Resources.***)
2. Discuss the poem, asking students to notice the details the poet uses to bring alive her home, family and memories. For additional support, students can read the student samples and discuss what the details say about each writer.
3. Ask students to create lists that match the ones from the poems they read:
 - a. Items found around their home: bobby pins or stacks of newspapers, grandma’s teeth, discount coupons
 - b. Items found in their yard: broken rakes, dog bones, hoses coiled like green snakes
 - c. Items found in their neighborhood: the corner grocery, old cars, parks, an old plum tree
 - d. Names of friends and family: especially ones that link them to their past
 - e. Sayings they grew up with: “If I told you once...”
 - f. Names of foods and dishes that recall family gatherings or favorite family recipes
 - g. Names of places, streets, animals, favorite songs, stories, anything specific that says something about who they are
4. Ask students to share their lists with their classmates and encourage them to make their piece “sound like home” using the language they hear at home. When students use vague nouns like “shoes” or “books,” ask them to be more specific, “worn, pink satin ballet slippers” or “a tattered copy of *Cat in the Hat*.”
5. Once students have their lists of specific words, phrases, and names, ask them to write a poem. Encourage them to find a link or phrase like “I am from” to weave the poem together, and to end with a line or two that ties their present to their past. Use the Lyon poem and student samples as examples/models.
6. Before having students type and submit their poems to the writing gallery, encourage them to work in response groups to share, revise and edit their work.

Extension: Once the poems are completed, have students share aloud a single “golden line” from their piece. Using each of these favorite “one-liners,” create a class poem that celebrates the diversity of our community, as well as the commonalities that unite us all.



Issue XLI: Motivating Students

Whether you are a teacher, a coach or an administrator, you are first and foremost a manager. One of a manager's top priorities is motivating workers, in our case, students. Motivated students are more likely to do quality work, learn eagerly and behave responsibly. There are two approaches to motivation: one appeals to external motivation (extrinsic) and relies heavily on incentives, rewards and/or punishment; the other appeals to internal motivation (intrinsic) and originates from the needs and desires from within each of us. External motivation is most prevalent in schools. We often try to "make" students perform by assigning grades, calling home, or threatening consequences. In his book *Punished by Rewards*, Alfie Kohn (1993) examines the research on external incentives and concludes that the "do this and you'll get that" approach to motivation is, in the long run, ineffective. Citing hundreds of studies, Kohn discusses the reasons that incentives do not work. Through his research, he found that "rewards change the way people feel about what they do" (p. 68). He explains that when a student hears "If you do this, then you'll get that," the message to the learner is, "There must be something wrong with this if you have to give me that to get me to do it." Therefore, what we are doing when we offer a reward for doing class work or behaving appropriately is actually "killing off the interest in the very thing we are bribing them to do" (p.72). Educational brain research guru, Eric Jensen, takes this a step farther: "...the use of rewards actually damages intrinsic motivation" (*Teaching with the brain in mind*, 1998, p. 67).

In *The Quality School: Managing Students without Coercion*, William Glasser proposes a psychological model that explains human behavior. His research has powerful implications for the classroom. Glasser asserts that all behavior is purposeful and is driven by five basic needs: to survive, to love and belong, to gain power, to be free, and to have fun.

- **Survival:** The physiological need to survive is a fundamental to all humanity. Survival includes the obvious needs for food, shelter, physical comfort and safety. Certainly, teachers can insure that all students feel safe in their classrooms, but sadly, the other needs are beyond our control.
- **Love and Belonging:** Humans are social creatures. We live in family units, work on teams, form social and civic organizations, attend social gatherings, and engage in hundreds of other behaviors that help us connect to others. This is as important in today's classrooms as it was thousands of years ago when humans depended on social structures for survival. Building a strong community of learners and creating opportunities for collaboration through effective, flexible grouping are two ways to satisfy this need. See *Literacy Connects* 30, 31 and 36 for community building activities and *Literacy Connects* 39 for ideas on creating and using collaborative learning groups.
- **Power:** The need for power is more than just the drive to dominate. Power is gained through competence, achievement and mastery. Our genetic instruction is to achieve, to master new skills, and to be recognized for our accomplishments.
- **Freedom:** As humans, we are motivated to be free, to choose. Effective teachers help students follow the drive to be free in ways that are respectful to others. Students who perceive themselves as having no choices will behave in ways they think will get them the freedom they believe they need. This often results in disruptive behaviors.
- **Fun:** Glasser relates fun to learning: "Fun is the genetic reward for learning. We are descended from those who learned more or better than others. The learning gave our people a survival advantage, and the need for fun became built into our genes" (1998, p.41).



Issue XLIV: Using Multi-genre for Summarizing and Concept Development

Using multiple genres of writing is an effective and fun way to develop and assess understanding, promote concept development, and increase retention of content knowledge and vocabulary. Following are cross-curricular examples of ways you can motivate students to write and increase their understanding of your content.

Biopoems

Students can read biographies of famous people from any content area and write e-mails, letters, journals, or stories from the perspective of the character portrayed in the book. They can also write movie reviews, plays, or re-write a scene changing the time and location. Another option is to have students write biographies of inanimate objects or concepts (rocks, planets, organs, numbers, geometric figures, mathematical functions...). This activity can be easily adapted to almost anything.

- Line 1. First name (I am...)
- Line 2. Four traits that describe that character (object, concept) (I am
- Line 3. Relative of (I am related to...)
- Line 4. Lover of (3 things or people) (I love...)
- Line 5. Who feels (3 items) (I feel...)
- Line 6. Who needs (3 things)
- Line 7. Who fears (3 things)
- Line 8. Who gives (3 things)
- Line 9. Who would like to see (3 items)
- Line 10. Resident of (I reside in...)
- Line 11. Last name

Riddles for Content Review and Vocabulary

Writing often takes a backseat to “learning the content.” Even though the act of writing helps students to learn, they are often required to spend their time on worksheets that require a minimum of writing and reading. This activity can be used in any class for a variety of reasons: as a unit, concept, or semester review, to check for understanding, or for a change of pace.

Procedures:

1. After studying a unit, students pick a concept, term, or idea and write a riddle describing their concept. Each line contains a new and more descriptive clue; they start with broad clues moving to more specific clues.
2. Riddles are exchanged with partners and solved, or students can take turns reading them to the entire class, allowing the class to solve the riddle.

Extensions:

1. Riddles can be compiled into a book as review of the unit or as an introduction to the unit for the following year.
2. Riddles can be used to review for a test or quiz.

Student examples follow:



Math

I am a polygon found in the pattern blocks;
I am a quadrilateral;
Two of my sides are parallel;
Two of my sides are congruent;
My base angles have the same measure;
I am a truncated triangle;
What am I?
(An isosceles trapezoid)

Science/Math/Social Studies

I was born in England in 1642;
I loved to experiment and invent;
Calculus is the subject for which I'm famous;
I studied the movement of the earth and moon;
I determined that gravity is the force that exists
between all bodies and the universe.
Who am I?
(Sir Isaac Newton)

Life Science

I am in the animal kingdom;
I am in the vertebrata phylum;
I am usually green, but can be olive or black;
I breathe with lungs;
I eat frogs, toads and insects;
I lay eggs, sometimes as many as 80.
King snakes and black snakes eat me;
I am helpful to man because I eat gophers and young squirrels
What am I?
(A garter snake)

Research Recipes

Recipe poems are another fun way to share knowledge. Have students gather 10 specific facts about a subject or concept. Then list recipe language on the board: mash, beat, whip, fold, stir, bake, scant teaspoon, heaping table spoon, etc. Show students sample of recipes, so they understand the format, and have them summarize their understanding using a recipe poem. (This activity has been adapted from Reviser's Toolbox by Barry Lane)

Examples:

Constitution Stew

- 1 teaspoon First Amendment
- 27 cups of amendments
- Sliced hatred for King George
- 1 cup of Preamble
- 13-15 oz. of African American Rights
- 16 cups voters' rights
- Cook President for 4 years then remove
- Strain out obsolete amendments
- Mince and throw away leftover racism
- Boil on high for 3 years
- Preserve in freezer for hundreds of years.
-- Matt Lehet, 7th grade



Recipe for Coastal Rain Forest

Ingredients:

- A constant shower of rain water
- 2000 decaying logs
- 100 cups of hemlock seeds
- 120 cups of spruce seeds
- 220 cups of fir seeds
- A healthy dose of fecundity
- Moss (to taste)

Instructions: This recipe works best if made in northwestern North America. Some have found success making similar dishes in Chile, New Zealand and the Black Sea. Place logs on the ground (preferably above the watershed line and the high tide mark) and let them rot sufficiently. Scatter in hemlock, spruce, and fir seeds among the naturally occurring fecundity. Let steam for a number of years, at least a dozen. Naturally occurring organic material from leaf litter, foliate, and animal left-overs is to be expected. Once the trees seem well-established, sprinkle the whole dish with moss for desired color. Sheila S., 6th grade

Top Ten Lists

Comedian David Letterman has perfected the top ten list as a humorous genre of writing. Students can use this form to show what they know about a topic in any content area. For example, *“Top Ten Reasons Why You Wouldn’t Want to be a Christian in Roman Times”* for social studies; *“Top Ten Reasons I’d Rather Be a One-Celled Organism”* for science; or *“Top Ten Reasons Macbeth is a Tragic Hero”* for English. These are funnier if they are stated indirectly. For example, let’s say my poem is *“Top Ten Reasons I don’t Want to Be a Cat.”* One reason could be my friend is a dog, but that’s not as funny as writing, *“My best friend’s name in Fido.”* Be a little indirect and the audience will find the humor. Also move from 10 – 1, stacking your better reasons near the end. Try mixing some straight facts with you funny ones. (This activity has been adapted from The Reviser’s Toolbox by Barry Lane)

Example:

Top Ten Reasons Why Columbus Discovered America

- 10 He needed a job
- 9 He was looking for the edge of the world
- 8 He was looking to make some money
- 7 He tried to discover Portugal but someone beat him to it
- 6 He knew the state capital of Ohio would someday need a name
- 5 He didn’t. His boats did but they were lost
- 4 Queen Isabella had a thing for explorers
- 3 He was sick of Spain and the lack of opportunities
- 2 He wanted to find a shortcut to the West Indies
- 1 He needed some gold to fill a tooth



Issue XLVI: Understanding Text Complexity within the CCSS

With the adoption of the new Common Core State Standards, teachers are being asked to critically evaluate the level of texts their students are reading. "One of the key requirements of the CCSS for Reading is that all students must be able to comprehend texts of steadily increasing complexity as they progress through school." The goal is to graduate students who can "read and comprehend independently and proficiently the complex texts found in college and careers" (CCSS, [Appendix A](#), page 2).

Research has shown that despite growing reading demands in college and career, K-12 text complexity has decreased over the last 50 years, particularly in the case of informational text. In response to this trend, the CCSS has increased the complexity requirements (see chart below for CCCSS Lexile levels).

Text Complexity Grade Bands	Old Lexile Ranges	Lexile Ranges Aligned to CCCSS
Grades 2-3	450-725	450-790
Grades 4-5	645-845	770-980
Grades 6-8	860-1010	955-1155
Grades 9-10	960-1115	1080-1305
Grades 11-12	1070-1220	1215-1355

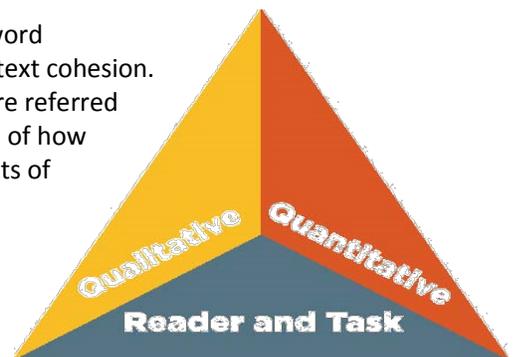
Educators have two ways to insure that their students are reading texts at the appropriate levels: (1) They can choose a grade appropriate excerpt from the CCSS [Appendix B: Text Exemplars](#), which provides grade level appropriate examples of literary and informational text and sample performance tasks related to Core Standards, or (2) they can choose their own texts and determine the complexity themselves. With this in mind, the CCSS offer a three-part model to help practitioners evaluate the level of complexity of any text, literary or informational.

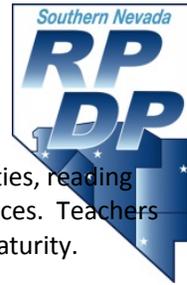
1. **Quantitative measures** refers to text readability and includes word length, frequency and difficulty; sentence and text length; and text cohesion. These features are best measured by computer software and are referred to as Lexile scores. (Go to [Lexile.com](#) for a detailed description of how to use Lexile and for Lexile measures and grade level equivalents of numerous books.)

2. **Qualitative measures** refers to levels of meaning, structure, language conventionality and clarity, and knowledge demands. Qualitative measures are best determined by the teacher based on considerations such as whether the purpose or theme of the text is explicit or implied; whether the text is organized using an easy to follow structure or one that is more subtle and complex; whether the language used is literal and conversational or ambiguous and unfamiliar; and whether the subject matter requires specialized content knowledge.

(Go to [Literacy Connects Resources](#) for rubrics to measure informational and literary text).

3. **Reader and Task considerations:** This refers to the background knowledge, motivation and interests of the reader, and the complexity generated by assigned tasks. Reader and Task considerations can only be determined by the teacher based on his/her knowledge of the individual





student. Teachers need to evaluate student readiness based on their cognitive abilities, reading skills, motivation and engagement with the topic, and prior knowledge and experiences. Teachers should also consider the appropriateness of the content matter based on student maturity.

This model to determine text complexity provides teachers with the tools to choose grade appropriate reading for their students based on more than a readability formula. Take for example, To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee. When evaluated quantitatively, this high school novel falls in the 4-5 grade band (770-980 Lexile Range); however, when the other two measures are added to the formula, the novel moves to its appropriate level at the 9-10 grade band. This is based on the complexity of ideas presented in the novel, including multiple levels of meaning, a complex narrative structure that includes flashback and inferred meaning, and mature content. Teachers also need to take into account students' understanding of the social and historical events of the time in which To Kill a Mockingbird is set.

Understanding text complexity as required by the CCSS is not difficult. Lexile scores are easy to find online, and using the rubrics and the check-list of questions posted at RPDP.net, Qualitative and Reader and Task Consideration can be accurately measured, as well. The biggest challenge we face is how to prepare our below grade level readers to understand text so far above their reading levels. One way to address this deficit is to design instruction that supports the development of academic language and the background knowledge essential for reading (numbers 2 and 3 of the CCSS complexity model). Before introducing students to the target text, explicitly teach the vocabulary necessary to comprehend the concepts presented. In addition to crucial language areas, text comprehension is also based on world knowledge and student ability to access and relate appropriate background knowledge to the topic. To address this, teachers need to explicitly scaffold instruction in ways that develop students' schema, thus laying the foundation for successful critical literacy experiences.

Using tiered text is one way teachers can scaffold reading for students. Educators can select an easy-to-read text aligned with students' entry-level background and academic knowledge. As their knowledge and language base expands, students are able to read, discuss, and write about more difficult texts on the same topic. Built on the Gradual Release of Responsibility model, which involves explicit teacher modeling, guided instruction, and independent practice—tiered texts scaffold student understanding and provide background knowledge and the multiple exposures to academic vocabulary required for comprehension. The first text the teacher selects should be short, introduce students to key concepts, and be written at a level that matches students' entry level abilities. The second text selected should be longer and more challenging. It should reinforce the information and language of the first selection and transition students to the target text. Once students have developed background knowledge and the vocabulary necessary for comprehension, they will be better prepared to tackle the complex language and ideas represented in the grade-level text.

Balancing the rigor of text complexity as proposed by the CCSS with current student reading levels may seem daunting; however, through explicit instruction in vocabulary and by building background knowledge through the use of tiered texts, teachers can differentiate learning and keep students engaged while moving towards more complex reading.



Issue XLVII - Reading with Rigor and Relevance

The Common Core State Standards define the literate student as one who “actively seeks the wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and informational texts that builds knowledge, enlarges experience, and broadens worldview” (CCSS, page 3). Students who meet these standards are able to critically cull through large amounts of information, digital and print, and understand how their lives are impacted. The Standards also ask students to stop seeing texts as isolated pieces of work and to compare them to other texts. To address these requirements, teachers need to focus on how to design lessons that include a variety of texts, fiction and non-fiction, organized in authentic and meaningful ways. It is important for teachers to consider how and why a text is selected and to organize reading in a way that ideas connect and build on each other, all the while scaffolding reading instruction to support comprehension of increasingly more complex text.

In Supporting Students in a Time of Core Standards, Sarah Brown Wessling addresses this challenge by suggesting that teachers think of texts as falling into three categories (see chart below). **Context Texts** support reading instruction by generating prior knowledge while connecting to student interests, motivations, and questions. These entry-level texts provide the scaffolding essential for student understanding of the Target Text. **Target Texts** should meet grade-level complexity measures and are generally the traditional novels or plays read whole class. Often students struggle with the reading and knowledge demands of Target Texts, so they need support and guidance to be successful. By carefully choosing Context Texts that build essential background knowledge, introduce target vocabulary, and provide practice with text structure, teachers can prepare students for these more complex pieces. **Texture Texts** provide perspective and deeper meaning of the topic/theme of the unit. They may be read before, during or after reading the Target Text and can be used to contradict, support or highlight an aspect of the topic being studied. Texture Texts are often brief and can be at any reading level.

Context Texts	Target Texts	Texture Texts
<i>These accessible texts create a reservoir of prior knowledge that gives context to the complexity of further reading. These texts should be at the student’s reading level.</i>	<i>These more complex texts are often the traditional whole-class text. They are aligned with the appropriate grade-level complexity suggested by CCSS.</i>	<i>These texts are shorter than the Target Text; they can be used to compare/contrast or juxtapose the Target Text</i>
Art Film excerpts Informative pieces News/magazine articles Picture books Blog/podcast Radio shows Short stories Poetry Drama Graphic novel Brief fiction/nonfiction	Book-length fiction Book-length nonfiction Stories Drama Poem or series of poems Film	Art Film excerpts Informative pieces News/magazine articles Picture books Blog/podcast Radio shows Short stories Poetry Drama Graphic novel Brief fiction/nonfiction

By intentionally selecting reading that supports instruction and deliberately layering the types of texts students read, teachers can better support the complexity and range of reading demands of the CCSS.



Issue XLVIII: Close Reading: An Essential Skill for Understanding Complex Text

With the emphasis of the Common Core State Standards on increasing text complexity, teaching students to dig deeply into grade-level texts has become more important than ever. Close Reading--the careful, sustained interpretation of a brief passage--is a time-tested strategy that provides students of all ages and in all content areas with the tools to successfully navigate complex texts while teaching them how to annotate, question and analyze what they are reading. Close Reading places emphasis on the particular over the general, as it guides readers to pay close attention to individual words, syntax, and the order in which sentences and ideas unfold. Close Reading is the precursor to writing that involves an analysis of any text. Although specifics for Close Reading may vary depending on the type of text being read, the purpose of the reading, and the reading levels of the participants, following is a general description of how to conduct a Close Reading with students:

1. Choose a short piece of text at or above your students' reading levels. This can be an excerpt from a longer piece, a poem, a scene from a play, etc. The point is that the text chosen must be short, so students can complete all the steps involved without losing interest.
2. Students read the text a minimum of three times focusing on different aspects of the text with each read. Generally students move from comprehending the text, to noticing details, to developing broader generalizations and making assertions, and finally to finding evidence in the text to support their assertions.
3. During the **first read**, model the reading process. Preview the passage and make predictions. Read aloud while students annotate. Active reading strategies such as marking on text, asking and answering questions, paraphrasing, visualizing, and connecting should be emphasized during this stage. The purpose of this step is for students to comprehend the text (*See Literacy Connects I, XXIII, XXV and XXVII for reading comprehension and think-aloud strategies*).
4. The **second read** can be done individually, in pairs or small groups. During this read, students look for meaning beyond the obvious. It is helpful to pose a series of guided questions. These questions will vary depending on the text, the purpose of the reading and the reading level of your students; however, in general, students should pay attention to such features as language, both literal and figurative; the purpose; speaker, point of view and author; audience; how the text is organized; the sound and rhythm of words (alliteration, assonance, rhyme, etc); syntax; tone and attitude; theme(s); and the validity of arguments presented. Other, more critical questions, such as gender bias and representation of ethnicity, culture and historical context may also be examined (*See Literacy Connects XXVIII and XXXII for more on asking critical questions*). For struggling readers it may be best to group your questions from the second read into two parts and have them answer the harder questions during a third read.
5. During the **final read**, students look for the evidence to support what they identified during the second read. It is helpful to create a note-taking template where students can make a claim about any aspect of the text (rhetorical devices, themes, arguments, etc.), write the quote or paraphrase from the passage that supports their assertion, and then write a few sentences explaining WHY the quote they chose supports their assertion (commentary). Using this format is especially helpful for students when they start writing their analysis of the text.