Preface

WELCOME TO THE AGE OF THE COMMON CORE! Thank you for joining us in our quest to teach students to meet the Common Core English Language Arts (ELA) Standards.

This volume, Inside the Common Core Classroom: Practical ELA Strategies for Grades 6–8, is part of Pearson’s College and Career Readiness Series. The books in this series have been written for in-service teachers to support their implementation of the Common Core State Standards for English language arts in K–12 classrooms. The four volumes in the series address the standards in grades K–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12, respectively.

The purpose of the series is to help teachers create connections between the Common Core and their school curriculums. Each book provides in-depth information about the standards at a particular grade-level band and offers examples of a variety of teaching ideas to support students’ meeting the expectations of the ELA Standards.

About This Book

This book is structured to provide essential information about the Common Core, insights into the Standards, practical classroom strategies, and vignettes from inside Common Core classrooms. An interdisciplinary unit completes the work.

The book begins with an overview authored by series editor, Donna Ogle. Donna discusses the origin of the Common Core initiative and chronicles its development and implementation.

Chapter 1 narrows its focus to the English Language Arts Standards, grades 6–8, including the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards and the Common Core State Standards. Also discussed are the language of the Common Core, formative and summative assessment, and what is and what is not included in the Common Core Standards.

Chapter 2 looks at how the Common Core relates to reading comprehension, what is known about reading comprehension, and which strategy applications can be used to effectively teach it. A variety of teaching ideas in subsequent chapters also support students’ reading comprehension.

Chapter 3 explores the CCSS and vocabulary. Details from the standards, current knowledge about teaching vocabulary, and practical teaching ideas are all included.

Chapter 4 addresses text complexity and features the Common Core Model.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to the Common Core Speaking and Listening Standards. In this chapter, multiple ways to integrate speaking and listening in teaching and learning are explored and projects, such as Press Conference and Debate, are delineated.

The focus of Chapter 6 is writing. The Writing Standards and practical teaching ideas are integrated.
Chapter 7 examines how the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) relate to school curriculums. Emphasis is placed on integrating the CCSS, rather than using them to replace existing curriculums.

The book concludes with an appendix, featuring an Interdisciplinary Unit on Climate Change that focuses on the Common Core and the Next Generation Science Standards (2013). English, science, social studies, and the arts are the integrated disciplines. The Common Core State Standards are embedded in the unit, which includes discipline-specific teaching suggestions, sample lesson plans, completed strategies, an assessment and evaluation plan, a culminating activity, and a rich collection of resources.

Teaching and learning in the age of the Common Core is a challenge for all engaged. It is both hopeful and rewarding to note that we are all working together to ensure that our students are college and career ready.

**Acknowledgments**

As always, there are many people to thank for making this book possible. I express appreciation to all who contributed to the manuscript's development as well as all who enhanced the quality of my life during the research and writing process. I thank them for their insight, their understanding, and their support.

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The Common Core English Language Arts Standards for Grades 6–8

As educators, many of us have experienced opportunities to integrate new standards into our teaching. In fact, most of us have probably had more than one experience of this type. We seem to have this experience every time new state standards are developed, but this time, the context is different. This time, we are busy integrating and implementing the Common Core State Standards, a set of expectations shared by most states and many U.S. territories.
As we begin working with this set of Standards, we need to understand both the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Anchor Standards and the Common Core State Standards. We need to know how the Standards function and are interrelated as we align our teaching to the Common Core. We also need to know that the standards are built on an integrated model of literacy.

The goal in this chapter is to delineate the Common Core State Standards for grades 6–8. We begin by exploring the English Language Arts Standards, including the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards and the Common Core State Standards. Next, we discuss the language of the Common Core and the need to teach it to students. Then, we examine both formative and summative assessment and their integration in Common Core classrooms. Finally, we consider what is and what is not included in the Common Core State Standards.

**The English Language Arts (ELA) Standards**

The connections between the Common Core State Standards and ELA for grades 6–8 come from two documents: *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language* (NGA & CCSSO, 2010c) and the *Common Core State Standards: English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* (NGA & CCSSO, 2010d). There are College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards and Common Core State Standards for reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. There are ten College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading, ten for Writing, six for Speaking and Listening, and six for Language. The Common Core State Standards are built upon the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards.

In addition, three appendixes have been developed to complement the standards and provide resources we can use as we seek to understand and implement them. Appendix A provides research that supports key elements of the standards and a glossary of terms (NGA & CCSSO, 2010e). Appendix B comprises text exemplars and sample student tasks (NGA & CCSSO, 2010f), and Appendix C provides samples of student writing (NGA & CCSSO, 2010g).

In designing the Common Core State Standards, the developers focused on key considerations. The most prominent include the following:

- a focus on results, rather than means
- an integrated model of literacy
- the integration of research and media skills
- shared responsibility for students’ literacy development among teachers in all areas
The College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards

The College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards anchor the document and define general, cross-disciplinary literacy expectations that must be met for students to be prepared to enter college and workforce training programs ready to succeed (NGA & CCSSO, 2010d, p. 4). College- and career-ready students are described as having these qualities:

- Demonstrating independence as learners
- Building strong content knowledge
- Responding to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline
- Comprehending as well as critiquing
- Valuing evidence
- Using technology and digital media strategically and capably
- Understanding other perspectives and cultures (NGA & CCSSO, 2010d, p. 7)

Key features of the CCR Standards include:

1. reading, with emphases on text complexity and the growth of comprehension
2. writing, with emphases on text types, responding to reading, and research
3. speaking and listening, with emphases on flexible communication and collaboration
4. language, with emphases on conventions, effective use, and vocabulary (NGA & CCSSO, 2010d, p. 8)

The College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading in grades 6–8 are organized into four clusters:

1. Key Ideas and Details
2. Craft and Structure
3. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
4. Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity (NGA & CCSSO, 2010d, p. 35)

The Anchor Standards address a variety of topics. For example, standards in the cluster Key Ideas and Details address close reading, themes and summarizing, and analyzing how individuals and ideas interact throughout a text. The Craft and Structure standards address word choice, text structure, and point of view. Standards in the cluster Integration of Knowledge and Ideas focus on content in diverse forms and media, reasoning and argument, and comparing and contrasting two texts. The final cluster, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity, addresses a single topic: comprehension of complex text.
TABLE 1.1  College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conventions of Standard English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge of Language</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Vocabulary Acquisition and Use</th>
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<tr>
<td>4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The CCR Anchor Standards provide a foundation for the CCSS across grades K–12. In the English Language Arts, these standards address reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. In this book, the Anchor Standards for grades 6–8 are discussed in these chapters: reading (2 and 4), writing (6), speaking and listening (5), and language (3). The College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language are featured in Table 1.1.

The Common Core State Standards

According to the developers of the Common Core, the Standards have these key qualities:

1. Are aligned with college and work expectations;
2. Are clear, understandable, and consistent;
3. Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;
4. Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards;
5. Are informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and
6. Are evidence-based. (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010c)

The Common Core State Standards delineate what students should know and be able to do by the end of specific grade levels. The Standards define the skills and knowledge required of all students.

**Standard Strands**
The Common Core State Standards are divided into four strands: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language. Within each area, the standards are organized according to the clusters established in the Career Readiness Anchor Standards. Some grade-level standards are similar across text types and disciplines, but others are quite different. Table 1.2 presents four variations of Reading Standard 6 for grade 8.

**Reading**  The Common Core State Standards for Reading are divided into two substrands—Literature and Informational Text—but both sets of standards are based on the same four clusters that appear in the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards: (1) Key Ideas and Details, (2) Craft and Structure, (3) Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, and (4) Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity.

The Common Core State Reading Standards for Literature address what students need to know and be able to do when reading a narrative, or story-based, text. Topics addressed within these standards across grades 6–8 are diverse. For example, Standard 1 is text based and focuses on citing evidence from text, explicit content of text, and text-based inferences.

**TABLE 1.2 • Variations of Reading Standard 6 for Grade 8**

- **Reading Literature (Grade 8):** Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.
- **Reading Informational Text (Grade 8):** Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.
- **Literacy in History/Social Studies (Grades 6–8):** Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).
- **Literacy in Science and Technical Subjects (Grades 6–8):** Analyze the author’s purpose in providing an explanation, describing a procedure, or discussing an experiment in a text.
The primary topic of Standard 2 is determining the central idea and theme of a text. The remaining standards delineate additional text-based topics, including story elements, use of words and phrases, text structures, point of view, and text complexity. (For an overview of the content of the Common Core State Standards for Reading—Literature, structured by cluster, see Chapter 2, Table 2.2.)

The Common Core State Reading Standards for Informational Text focus on what students need to know and be able to do when reading informational or factual text. For example, in the cluster Key Ideas and Details, the focus is on topics such as citing textual evidence and determining central ideas. In the cluster Craft and Structure, word choice, structure, and point of view are among the emphases. The standards in the Integration of Knowledge and Ideas cluster focus on topics such as making arguments and specific claims and analyzing works on the same topic written by different authors. In the cluster Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity, the sole standard addresses comprehending texts at the high end of the grades 6–8 complexity band. (For an overview of the content of the Common Core State Standards for Reading—Informational Text, structured by cluster, see Chapter 2, Table 2.3.)

**Writing**  The Common Core State Standards for Writing address what is required when creating specific types of text, as well as aspects of writing that are more general in nature. The clusters within this section of the Standards are (1) Text Types and Purposes, (2) Production and Distribution of Writing, (3) Research to Build and Present Knowledge, and (4) Range of Writing. In the first cluster, the three standards address three types of writing: argumentative, informational/explanatory, and narrative. In the remaining clusters, the standards address coherent writing, steps in a writing process, using technology, conducting research, and writing routinely over time. (For a more detailed view of the Writing Standards for grades 6–8, see Chapter 6.)

**Speaking and Listening**  The Common Core State Standards for Speaking and Listening are organized into two clusters and emphasize a range of oral communication and interpersonal skills. The standards in the cluster Comprehension and Collaboration address collaborative discussions, information presented in diverse media and formats, and evaluating arguments. The standards in the second cluster, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, focus on making oral presentations, integrating multimedia, and adapting speech to context and task.

**Language**  The Common Core State Language Standards are divided into three clusters: (1) Conventions of Standard English, (2) Knowledge of Language, and (3) Vocabulary Acquisition and Use. The first cluster includes topics such as conventional grammar and usage and conventional capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. The only standard in the second cluster, Knowledge of Language, focuses on language use in context. Among
the emphases in the third cluster, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use, are strategies for determining word meanings, understanding of figurative language, and building academic vocabulary.

**Understanding the Standards**

To integrate the Common Core State Standards into our teaching, we must understand them. This involves reading and rereading the standards, as we “backward map” from the Anchor Standards to the strands and the grade-level standards. Of course, our efforts cannot end there!

Next, we need to read the Standards both vertically and horizontally within each strand. Reading vertically will help us to understand the breadth and depth of what our students need to know and be able to do at the end of the grade level we teach. For example, if we teach grade 8 and wanted to gain a general understanding of the Common Core State Standards for our students, we should read the grade 8 Standards vertically. Reading horizontally will help us to understand what our students need to know and be able to do before they arrive in the grade level we teach and what they need to know the following year. For example, if we are eighth-grade teachers, we should read Standards 1 through 10 horizontally from kindergarten to grade 8 to develop an understanding of what students should already know and be able to do.

A prime example of the benefit of reading horizontally can be found in the first Reading standard for Literature, in which students in grades K–3 are expected to “ask and answer questions.” In the same Standard for grades 6–8, expectations focus on citing evidence from text and making inferences. The writers of the Standards have assumed that students in grades 4–8 know how to ask and answer questions, but that very well may not be the case, particularly when it comes to generating questions involving higher levels of thinking. Reading the Standards horizontally illuminates such assumptions and reminds us that there may be topics not included in our students’ grade-level standards that we still need to teach.

Table 1.3 features the Common Core State Language Standards for grades 6–8. In reading this section, eighth-grade teachers can see which Standards are required for eighth grade (reading vertically) and which Standards their students should have met in the previous two years (reading horizontally).

It is important to note that when discussing or using the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for planning, we can identify them by strand, CCR status, and number. For example, the label *R.CCR.6* stands for Reading, College and Career Readiness, Standard 6. Similarly, individual grade-specific standards can be identified by strand, grade, and number (or number and letter, where applicable). For example, *RI.4.3* stands for Reading, Informational Text, grade 4, Standard 3 and *W.5.1a* stands for Writing, grade 5, Standard 1a (NGA & CCSSO, 2010c, p. 8).
### TABLE 1.3 • Common Core State Standards for Language: Grades 6–8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 6 students:</th>
<th>Grade 7 students:</th>
<th>Grade 8 students:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventions of Standard English</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conventions of Standard English</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conventions of Standard English</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.</td>
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<td>1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>a. Ensure that pronouns are in the proper case (subjective, objective, possessive).</td>
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<td>a. Ensure that pronouns are in the proper case (subjective, objective, possessive).</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Use intensive pronouns (e.g., <strong>myself, ourselves</strong>).</td>
<td>b. Use intensive pronouns (e.g., <strong>myself, ourselves</strong>).</td>
<td>b. Use intensive pronouns (e.g., <strong>myself, ourselves</strong>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in pronoun number and person.*</td>
<td>c. Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in pronoun number and person.*</td>
<td>c. Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in pronoun number and person.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Recognize and correct vague pronouns (i.e., ones with unclear or ambiguous antecedents).*</td>
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<td>d. Recognize and correct vague pronouns (i.e., ones with unclear or ambiguous antecedents).*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Recognize variations from standard English in their own and others’ writing and speaking, and identify and use strategies to improve expression in conventional language.*</td>
<td>e. Recognize variations from standard English in their own and others’ writing and speaking, and identify and use strategies to improve expression in conventional language.*</td>
<td>e. Recognize variations from standard English in their own and others’ writing and speaking, and identify and use strategies to improve expression in conventional language.*</td>
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### TABLE 1.3 (continued)

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<tr>
<th>Grade 6 students:</th>
<th>Grade 7 students:</th>
<th>Grade 8 students:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</td>
<td>2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</td>
<td>2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Use punctuation (commas, parentheses, dashes) to set off nonrestrictive/parenthetical elements.*</td>
<td>a. Use punctuation (commas, parentheses, dashes) to set off nonrestrictive/parenthetical elements.*</td>
<td>a. Use punctuation (comma, ellipsis, dash) to indicate a pause or break.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Spell correctly.</td>
<td>b. Spell correctly.</td>
<td>b. Use an ellipsis to indicate an omission.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Knowledge of Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.</th>
<th>3. Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.</th>
<th>3. Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Vary sentence patterns for meaning, reader/ listener interest, and style.*</td>
<td>a. Choose language that expresses ideas precisely and concisely, recognizing and eliminating wordiness and redundancy.*</td>
<td>a. Use verbs in the active and passive voice and in the conditional and subjunctive mood to achieve particular effects (e.g., emphasizing the actor or the action; expressing uncertainty or describing a state contrary to fact).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Maintain consistency in style and tone.*</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

*Beginning in grade 3, skills and understandings that are particularly likely to require continued attention in higher grades as they are applied to increasingly sophisticated writing and speaking are marked with an asterisk (*).*
TABLE 1.3 • (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 6 students:</th>
<th>Grade 7 students:</th>
<th>Grade 8 students:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary Acquisition and Use</td>
<td>Vocabulary Acquisition and Use</td>
<td>Vocabulary Acquisition and Use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 6 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.
   a. Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word’s position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
   b. Use common, grade-appropriate Greek or Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word (e.g., *audience*, *auditory*, *audible*).
   c. Consult reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning or its part of speech.
   d. Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).

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### TABLE 1.3  *(continued)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 6 students:</th>
<th>Grade 7 students:</th>
<th>Grade 8 students:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</td>
<td>5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</td>
<td>5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., personification) in context.</td>
<td>a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., literary, biblical, and mythological allusions) in context.</td>
<td>a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., verbal irony, puns) in context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Use the relationship between particular words (e.g., cause/effect, part/whole, item/category) to better understand each of the words.</td>
<td>b. Use the relationship between particular words (e.g., synonym/antonym, analogy) to better understand each of the words.</td>
<td>b. Use the relationship between particular words to better understand each of the words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Distinguish among the connotations (associations) of words with similar denotations (definitions) (e.g., stingy, scrimping, economical, unwasteful, thrifty).</td>
<td>c. Distinguish among the connotations (associations) of words with similar denotations (definitions) (e.g., refined, respectful, polite, diplomatic, condescending).</td>
<td>c. Distinguish among the connotations (associations) of words with similar denotations (definitions) (e.g., bullheaded, willful, firm, persistent, resolute).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.</td>
<td>6. Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.</td>
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*(continued)*
The Language of the Standards

A number of terms appear frequently in both the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards and the Common Core State Standards. Typically, they are verbs used to describe student expectations. Among the verbs employed are determine, analyze, compare and contrast, cite, trace, delineate, and evaluate.

From a teaching standpoint, we need to ensure that students understand these terms so they can fully understand the expectations of the Standards. For example, the word analyze is used quite frequently. In the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards, students are expected to analyze how and why people and ideas develop and interact, how texts are structured, and how two or more texts address similar themes or topics. In the Common Core State Standards for Reading Literature, students’ ability to analyze is the expectation of Standards 3, 5, and 6, and for Reading Informational Text, it is the ability to analyze Standards 3, 5, and 9.

Most definitions of analyze focus on examining the structure of information in detail, particularly for the purpose of explanation. Analyzing requires responding in a way that demonstrates an ability to see patterns and to classify information into groups or parts. As teachers, we may also be familiar with the term analyze as a level in Bloom’s taxonomy, in which it is defined as taking something learned apart to think about the parts and how they fit together (Bloom, 2013). For example, when analyzing informational text, our students must be able to use several skills—principal among them are the abilities to generate and respond to questions and to use text structures. Both of these skills contribute to readers’ comprehension. We need to teach our students these skills as we prepare them to engage in analysis (McLaughlin & Fisher, 2012/2013).

Asking and answering questions and understanding text structures are Common Core expectations in the lower grades but not in grades 6–8. Because all students need to have these valuable skills, we need teach our students how to use them—to think actively about what they are learning. This is the foundation of analysis, a level of thinking in which all students in grades 6–8 need to successfully engage.

Assessment in the Common Core Classroom

Classroom assessment is typically formative or summative in nature. Formative assessment is used every day; summative assessment is used periodically.

Formative assessment captures students’ performance as they engage in the process of learning. This type of assessment affords insights into students’ understandings at any point in the learning experience. Formative assessment does not involve quizzes and tests. Rather, it reflects constructivist theory and is viewed not as an add-on but as a natural component of teaching and learning.

Both students and teachers take active roles in formative assessment, which is typically informal in nature and can be used in a variety of instructional settings. This
What is and is not included in the CCSS

includes scaffolded learning experiences, in which students are provided with varying degrees of teacher support. In this context, assessment captures students’ emerging abilities and provides insights that may not be gleaned from independent settings (Minick, 1987). Examples of formative assessments include strategy applications such as Bookmark Technique (McLaughlin, 2010), the Concept of Definition Map (Schwartz & Raphael, 1986), and KWL (Ogle, 1986). Observations, discussion, and informal writing are among the numerous other possibilities.

Formative assessment presents a natural, viable, and continuous means for teachers to learn about what students know and can do. It is a natural component of everyday teaching and provides insightful information about students and the learning process. Formative assessment is distinctive because it documents the responsiveness of the learner not only during initial teaching, but also during subsequent instruction that has been designed in response to the learner’s needs. Formative assessment can easily be incorporated in grade 6–8 Common Core classrooms.

In 2013, the International Reading Association published a Position Statement on Formative Assessment (IRA, 2013). In this statement, formative assessment is defined as “a purposeful process that provides teachers and students with descriptive feedback concerning students’ literacy” (p. 1). The full text of the position statement provides general information about formative assessment and makes recommendations for policy and practice. As stated in this document, “The International Reading Association believes that using formative assessment in accordance with the appropriate principles, practices, and recommendations will contribute considerably to student literacy achievement and personal growth” (p. 3).

In classrooms, summative assessment is typically used at the ends of units or embedded in long-term projects. Summative assessment typically involves the use of rubrics. State assessments, school district assessments, end-of-unit assessments, and, indeed, the Common Core-commissioned assessments are other examples of summative assessments.

What Is and Is Not Included in the CCSS

THE AUTHORS OF THE COMMON CORE STATE THAT “the Standards should be recognized for what they are not as well as what they are” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010d, p. 6). In this section, we briefly review what is addressed in the Common Core, and what is missing in relation to literacy.

To begin, both our teaching and the Standards are based on integrated language arts models. The following parallels can be drawn:

- **Reading comprehension:** Although the Common Core State Standards do not address reading comprehension strategies in any significant way, they do address aspects of comprehension, including making inferences, understanding text structures, and developing vocabulary.
Chapter 1 / The Common Core English Language Arts Standards for Grades 6–8

- **Vocabulary:** Vocabulary is addressed in the Common Core State Standards across multiple strands, including Language, Reading, and Writing.

- **Writing:** The Writing Standards address this specific language art in depth, covering a variety of types of writing and integrating the use of technology.

- **Discussion:** Discussion skills are addressed in the Speaking and Listening standards, which comprise an entire strand of the Common Core State Standards.

Although the Common Core State Standards focus on what students are expected to know and be able to do, “they do not describe all that can or should be taught” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010d, p. 6). The authors of the Standards make this point in the introduction to the document. They further note that although the Standards delineate expectations for students, they leave a great deal of decision making to the discretion of teachers and curriculum developers. Essentially, the Common Core Initiative has provided the Standards, but the teaching has been left in the hands of the educators. For example, as stated in the Common Core State Standards document:

> The Standards do not mandate such things as a particular writing process or the full range of metacognitive strategies that students may need to monitor and direct their thinking and learning. Teachers are thus free to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the Standards. (NGA & CCSSO, 2010d, p. 4)

In addition, the Common Core State Standards do not include advanced work for students who meet the Standards before completing high school, nor do they delineate the methods or materials needed to support students who are significantly above or below grade-level expectations. “No set of grade-specific standards can fully reflect the great variety in abilities, needs, learning rates, and achievement levels of students in any given classroom” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010d, p. 6).

Although the Common Core State Standards do not address the types of support needed by English learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, the authors of the Standards state that both groups of students should have a high-quality education. In a document entitled *Application of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Learners* (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a), the creators of the Standards note that for English learners to meet the Common Core State Standards, they need access to the following:

- Teachers and personnel at the school and district levels who are well prepared and qualified to support ELLs while taking advantage of the many strengths and skills they bring to the classroom;

- Literacy-rich school environments where students are immersed in a variety of language experiences;
● Instruction that develops foundational skills in English and enables ELLs to participate fully in grade-level coursework;

● Coursework that prepares ELLs for postsecondary education or the workplace, yet is made comprehensible for students learning content in a second language (through specific pedagogical techniques and additional resources);

● Opportunities for classroom discourse and interaction that are well-designed to enable ELLs to develop communicative strengths in language arts;

● Ongoing assessment and feedback to guide learning; and

● Speakers of English who know the language well enough to provide ELLs with models and support. (pp. 1–2)

In another Common Core State Standards document, *Application to Students with Disabilities* (NGA & CCSSO, 2010b), the creators of the Standards note that students with disabilities “must be challenged to excel within the general curriculum and prepared for success in their post-school lives, including college and/or careers” (n.p.). The creators further recommend that three types of supports and services be provided for students with disabilities:

1. instructional supports for learning that are based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

2. instructional accommodations that allow suitable changes in materials or procedures but not in the standards

3. assistive technology devices and services that ensure students have access to the general curriculum and to the Common Core State Standards (n.p.)

It is important to remember that the Common Core State Standards are different from other standards with which we have previously taught. These distinctions occur on multiple levels. For example, adoption of the Common Core State Standards marks the first time that so many states and territories are supporting the same standards. In the past, not only did each state or territory have its own standards, but each entity also frequently wrote its own standards. The CCSS have been written by diverse panels of educators.

Other differences are evident in how the authors of the Common Core State Standards have treated particular topics. For example, Pearson and Hiebert (2012) have noted four areas in which the treatment by CCSS writers is either new or unique compared to the treatments by most previous standards documents of states or national organizations: (1) close/critical reading, (2) connections across language arts and between language arts and disciplines, (3) integration of research and media, and (4) text complexity. All four of these topics are prevalent in the grade 6–8 ELA Standards.
REFERENCES
When we think about what our students need to know to be successful in meeting the Common Core Reading Standards (CCSS), we need to understand what the Standards entail. In addition, we need to know what the teaching of reading requires. The reality is that not everything students need to know about reading is included in the CCSS. As noted in Chapter 1, the writers of the CCSS created the Standards, but they left the teaching in our hands.

The purpose of this chapter is to situate the Common Core State Standards within the research, theory, and practice involved in the teaching of reading. To that end, we examine not only the CCSS Reading standards but also what students need to know and be able to do in reading to meet the Standards successfully.

This chapter is divided into four sections. First, we delineate what the Common Core has to say about reading, emphasizing specific connections such as narrative and informational
text structures. Next, we examine what we know about reading, placing special emphasis on reading comprehension. Then we explore examples of CCSS-based rich instructional tasks, including classroom examples of teaching ideas that support reading, as it is addressed in the Common Core State Standards. Finally, we consider *Inside the Common Core Classroom*, a vignette of one classroom teacher’s choices when teaching to the Common Core.

**The Common Core Reading Standards**

THE COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS (CCR) Anchor Standards are the broad statements that serve as the foundation of the CCSS for grades 6–12. There are 10 CCR College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading ranging in topic from reading closely to analyzing text structures to reading complex text. The complete list of Anchor Standards for Reading is presented in Table 2.1.

**TABLE 2.1  ● College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Ideas and Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Craft and Structure</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please see “Research to Build Knowledge” in Writing and “Comprehension and Collaboration” in Speaking and Listening for additional standards relevant to gathering, assigning, and applying information from print and digital sources.
The Common Core State Standards for Reading are divided into two substrands: Literature and Informational Text (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). Some concepts are addressed in both areas, but others are unique to one or the other. For example, the concept point of view is an emphasis in both the Literature Standards and the Informational Text Standards. Conversely, the concept multimedia is barely mentioned in the Literature standards in the cluster Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, but it is prevalent in the same cluster of the Informational Text Standards. The CCSS Reading standards for Literature (Standards 1–10) are provided in Table 2.2, and the CCSS Reading standards for Informational Text (Standards 1–10) are provided in Table 2.3. Both tables feature the standards for grades 6–8.

**TABLE 2.2 • Common Core State Standards for Reading Literature, Grades 6–8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 6 Students:</th>
<th>Grade 7 Students:</th>
<th>Grade 8 Students:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Ideas and Details</strong></td>
<td><strong>Key Ideas and Details</strong></td>
<td><strong>Key Ideas and Details</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</td>
<td>1. Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</td>
<td>1. Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.</td>
<td>2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.</td>
<td>2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Describe how a particular story’s or drama’s plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.</td>
<td>3. Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).</td>
<td>3. Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Craft and Structure</strong></td>
<td><strong>Craft and Structure</strong></td>
<td><strong>Craft and Structure</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.</td>
<td>4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.</td>
<td>4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
## TABLE 2.2  ●  (continued)

**Craft and Structure (continued)**

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.</td>
<td>5. Analyze how a drama’s or poem’s form or structure (e.g., soliloquy, sonnet) contributes to its meaning.</td>
<td>5. Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.</td>
<td>6. Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.</td>
<td>6. Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## TABLE 2.3  ●  Common Core State Standards for Reading Informational Text, Grades 6–12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 6 Students:</th>
<th>Grade 7 Students:</th>
<th>Grade 8 Students:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Ideas and Details</strong></td>
<td><strong>Key Ideas and Details</strong></td>
<td><strong>Key Ideas and Details</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</td>
<td>1. Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</td>
<td>1. Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.</td>
<td>2. Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.</td>
<td>2. Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).</td>
<td>3. Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events).</td>
<td>3. Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(continued)*
TABLE 2.3  ● (continued)

Craft and Structure

4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.

4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

5. Analyze how a particular sentence, paragraph, chapter, or section fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the ideas.

5. Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.

5. Analyze in detail the structure of a specific paragraph in a text, including the role of particular sentences in developing and refining a key concept.

6. Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

6. Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others.

6. Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.

7. Compare and contrast a text to an audio, video, or multimedia version of the text, analyzing each medium’s portrayal of the subject (e.g., how the delivery of a speech affects the impact of the words).

7. Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.

8. Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

8. Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.

8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

(continued)
The Reading standards address a variety of aspects of reading, but as noted in the introduction to the CCSS, they do not address methods of teaching reading (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). For example, Standard 10 in both the CCSS Reading Standards for Literature and for Informational Text states the expectation that students will read complex text, but how to teach students to comprehend complex text is left in teachers’ hands. (For more detailed information about text complexity, see Chapter 4.)

**What We Know about Teaching Reading**

As literacy educators, our common goal is to teach students to become active, strategic readers who can successfully comprehend text. Of course, to teach students to be successful readers, we need to know what comprehension is, as well as it how it works and how we can help our students understand what they read. Teaching students how to comprehend is particularly critical for teachers of students in grades 4–12. As noted in *Reading Next*, a report on literacy among middle school and high school students:

Approximately eight million young people between fourth and twelfth grade struggle to read at grade level. Some 70 percent of older readers require some form of remediation. Very few of these older struggling readers need help to read the words on a page; their most common problem is that they are not able to comprehend what they read. (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 3)
There are ten essential principles that underpin effectively teaching students how to comprehend text:

1. beginning with a social constructivist view of reading;
2. understanding students’ roles in the reading process;
3. being an influential teacher;
4. motivating and engaging students;
5. teaching reading comprehension strategies;
6. using differentiated instruction;
7. providing various types and levels of text;
8. encouraging students to use multiple forms of representing thinking;
9. teaching in meaningful contexts;
10. teaching students to comprehend at deeper levels. (McLaughlin, 2012, pp. 432–438)

Details of these principles follow later in this chapter. Next, we examine the research base for reading comprehension and make connections from theory to practice.

The Nature of Reading Comprehension

Today, reading researchers suggest that reading comprehension is a multifaceted process. Factors such as constructivist beliefs, influential teachers, active readers, type and nature of text, and type of instruction play important roles in the construction of meaning. This approach is markedly different from that of the 1970s, when Dolores Durkin (1978/1979) reported that little if any comprehension instruction occurred in classrooms.

In current thinking, reading comprehension is a social constructivist process that results in the personal construction of meaning. Prior knowledge is a significant factor in this process. The more prior knowledge a reader has about a given topic, the greater the possibility the reader will be able to comprehend text related to that topic. Essentially, meaning is constructed when readers make connections between what they know (prior knowledge) and what they are reading (the text).

In reading comprehension, constructivism is reflected in schema-based learning development, which suggests that learning takes place when new information is integrated with what is already known. The more prior knowledge and experience readers have with a particular topic, the easier they can make connections between what they are learning and what they know (Anderson, 2004; Anderson & Pearson, 1984). The social constructivist nature of comprehension suggests that readers refine their understanding by negotiating meaning with others. This typically occurs through discussion. Engaging students in discussion promotes active engagement in constructing meaning from a text (McKeown, Beck, & Blake, 2009). The social nature of constructing meaning also reflects Lev Vygotsky’s (1978) principle of social mediation.
The Roles of Teachers and Students

Both students and teachers need to take active roles in reading. The research refers to such students as “good readers” and such educators as “influential teachers.”

Much of what we know about comprehension is based on studies of good readers. These students actively participate in reading. They have clear goals and constantly monitor the relation between the goals they have set and the text they are reading (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Pressley, 2000). These readers use a repertoire of comprehension strategies to facilitate the construction of meaning. Researchers believe that using such strategies helps students become metacognitive readers, who can think about and monitor their own thinking while reading (Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Roehler & Duffy, 1984). Good readers read both narrative and informational texts and know how to figure out unfamiliar words. They use their knowledge of text structure to process text efficiently and strategically (Goldman & Rakestraw, 2000). These readers also generate questions spontaneously at different points for a variety of reasons. They are problem solvers who have the ability to discover new information on their own.

Good readers read widely, monitor their understanding, and negotiate meaning. They know when they are constructing meaning and when they are not. When comprehension breaks down due to lack of background information, difficulty of words, or unfamiliar text structure, good readers know and use a variety of “fix-up” strategies, such as rereading, changing the pace of reading, using context clues, and cross-checking cueing systems. These readers are able to select the appropriate strategies and to focus consistently on making sense of text.

Influential teachers are highly valued participants in the reading process. They know the importance of every student being able to comprehend text successfully. In fact, the International Reading Association (2000) reports that it is the teacher’s knowledge that makes a difference in student achievement. The teacher’s role in the reading process is to create experiences and environments that introduce, nurture, or extend students’ abilities to engage with text. Doing this requires that teachers use explicit instruction, which includes modeling, scaffolding, facilitating, and participating (Au & Raphael, 1998).

Both reading researchers and professional organizations have delineated the characteristics of influential reading teachers (IRA, 2000; Ruddell, 1995, 2004):

Influential reading teachers:

- Believe that all students can learn.
- Differentiate instruction and recognize that providing motivation and offering multiple kinds of text are essential elements of teaching and learning.
- Understand that reading is a social constructivist process that functions best in authentic situations.
- Teach in print-rich, concept-rich environments.
● Have in-depth knowledge of various aspects of literacy, including both reading and writing.

● Provide myriad opportunities for students to read, write, and discuss.

● Teach for a variety of purposes, using diverse methods, materials, and grouping patterns to focus on individual students’ needs, interests, and learning styles.

● Understand the skills and strategies that good readers use and can teach students how to use them.

● Continually monitor students’ learning and adjust teaching as needed to ensure that all learners are successful (McLaughlin, 2012).

**Emphases of Effective Teachers of Reading**

Duke and Pearson (2002) describe reading comprehension as “a consuming, continuous, and complex activity, but one that, for good readers, is both satisfying and productive” (p. 206). Effective teachers also view comprehension as a complex process. To ensure their instruction is effective, they integrate such components as motivation and engagement, comprehension strategies, differentiated instruction, a range of texts at a diversity of levels, multiple representations of thinking, formative and summative assessment, meaningful contexts, and comprehending at deeper levels.

**Motivation and Engagement** Motivation and engagement are key factors in comprehension. Gambrell (2011a) suggests that students who are highly motivated to read will choose to read and continue to read over time. Gambrell (1996) also suggests that “classroom cultures that foster reading motivation are characterized by a teacher who is a reading model, a book-rich classroom environment, opportunities for choice, familiarity with books, and literacy-related incentives that reflect the value of reading” (p. 20). Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, and Mazzoni (1996) note that highly motivated readers read for a wide variety of reasons, including curiosity, involvement, social interchange, and emotional satisfaction.

The *engagement perspective* on reading integrates cognitive, motivational, and social aspects of reading (Baker, Afflerbach, & Reinking, 1996; Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999). Engaged learners achieve because they want to understand, have intrinsic motivations for interacting with text, use cognitive skills to understand, and share their knowledge by talking with teachers and peers (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997). Engaged readers read widely for enjoyment and have positive attitudes about reading.

Engaged readers transact with print and construct understanding based on connections between prior knowledge and new information. As described by Baker and Wigfield (1999), “Engaged readers are motivated to read for different purposes, utilize knowledge gained from previous experience to generate new understandings, and participate in
meaningful social interactions around reading” (p. 453). Guthrie and Humenick (2004) suggest that having goals for reading, interest in the topic, and choices about what to read and how to respond to reading all contribute to readers’ motivation and engagement.

Gambrell (2011b) has created the “Seven Rules of Engagement” for students. According to these “rules,” students are more motivated to read under the following conditions:

1. The reading tasks and activities are relevant to their lives.
2. They have access to a wide range of reading materials.
3. They have ample opportunities to engage in sustained reading.
4. They have opportunities to make choices about what they read and how they engage in and complete literacy tasks.
5. They have opportunities to socially interact with others about the text they are reading.
6. They have opportunities to be successful with challenging texts.
7. Classroom incentives reflect the value and importance of reading. (pp. 173–176)

**Comprehension Strategies** Pearson (2001b) has identified the three most important things we have learned about comprehension in the past 30 years:

1. Students benefit from learning and using comprehension strategies and routines.
2. Students need to have opportunities to read, write, and talk.
3. Having background knowledge supports comprehension by providing a starting point: where readers are and what they know.

Other researchers have confirmed that using a repertoire of reading comprehension strategies enhances readers’ reasoning (Duke, Pressley, & Hilden, 2004; Paris & Paris, 2007; Pressley, 2006).

The terms used to identify comprehension strategies vary, to some degree, by researcher and publication, but an example of a typical set of strategies are those taught in the Guided Comprehension approach. **Guided Comprehension** provides a context in which students learn and employ comprehension strategies in a variety of settings using multiple levels and types of text (McLaughlin & Allen, 2009). The strategies taught in Guided Comprehension include the following:

- **Previewing:** Activating prior knowledge, making predictions, and setting purposes
- **Self-questioning:** Generating questions to guide reading
- **Making connections:** Relating reading to oneself, the text, and others
- **Visualizing:** Creating mental pictures of the text while reading
- **Knowing how words work:** Understanding words through strategic vocabulary development, including use of the graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic cueing systems to figure out unknown words
What We Know about Teaching Reading

- **Monitoring**: Asking “Does this make sense?” while reading and adapting strategic processes as needed based on the response
- **Summarizing**: Synthesizing the important ideas of a text
- **Evaluating**: Making judgments about the content of the text and the author’s craft in writing it

Research supports the idea that the explicit instruction of comprehension strategies increases students’ comprehension (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Research further suggests that reading comprehension strategy instruction should begin in the primary grades (Hilden & Pressley, 2002; McLaughlin, 2003).

Explicit instruction involves directly teaching students comprehension strategies, often through a multistep process that promotes scaffolding. When we scaffold instruction, we gradually release responsibility to the students. When we use explicit instruction, we introduce the text and encourage students to activate their prior knowledge, make connections, and set purposes for reading.

McLaughlin and Allen (2009) recommend a framework for explicit strategy instruction that involves five steps: (1) explain, (2) demonstrate, (3) guide, (4) practice, and (5) reflect. For example, when teaching students to summarize, we may begin by explaining and demonstrating summarizing. In the explanation step, we define and discuss the strategies and an example application. In this case, a Sketch-and-Label Retelling could be the strategy application. In the demonstration step, we might use a think-aloud (Davey, 1983) to share our own thought processes while we model the strategy. At this point, we would provide full support to students. In the third step, we may guide students as they summarize in small groups or with partners. In this stage, we offer support as needed. Next, we encourage students to practice summarizing independently. At this point, we provide little or no support. Finally, we encourage students to reflect on what they have learned and how to use the strategy when reading other texts.

As we move from full support to providing support as needed to providing little or no support, students take on more and more responsibility. As Pearson and Hoffman (2011) note:

> Teachers who teach reading in this way are using what we have come to call the *gradual release of responsibility* (from teacher to student) for helping readers become independent and self-sufficient readers—readers who know when and whether they have understood a text, and, if they haven’t, what to do to fix things. (pp. 32–33)

During explicit instruction, the teacher purposefully interacts with students and takes an active role in their acquisition of strategies by explaining, demonstrating, and guiding (Dahl & Farnan, 1998; McLaughlin, 2010a, 2010b; Roehler & Duffy, 1984). Providing explicit instruction in comprehension strategies affords the teacher opportunities to observe students in various stages of learning. As they observe students gaining competence in using
strategies, the teacher gradually releases responsibility for learning to the students, who apply the strategies independently in their everyday reading after having practiced them in a variety of settings. Observing students’ strategy use provides further insights into students’ progress, interests, and abilities, which can often be used to differentiate additional instruction.

**Differentiated Instruction** Duke and Pearson’s (2002) work reminds us that learners need different kinds and amounts of reading comprehension. As teachers, we understand this. We know that we have students of differing capabilities in our classes, and we strive to help them comprehend to the best of their abilities. When we differentiate instruction, we accommodate the diversity of students’ needs (Gibson & Hasbrouck, 2008; Tyner & Green, 2009).

To develop a learning environment that promotes differentiated instruction, Gibson and Hasbrouck (2008) suggest that we do the following:

- Adopt a collaborative approach to teaching and learning.
- Provide explicit instruction in both whole-class and small-group settings.
- Establish and follow routines and procedures.
- Scaffold students’ learning.
- Increase students’ engagement in learning.
- Teach students both how to learn and what to learn.
- Change how teaching occurs.

We can differentiate key instructional elements to support students as they gain competence and confidence in learning. These include (1) the *content*, or the information being taught; (2) the *process*, or the way the information is taught; and (3) the *product*, or how students demonstrate their learning (Tomlinson, 1999).

When we differentiate instruction, we create multiple pathways to learning. Doing this supports our goal of helping students to perform to their maximum potentials.

**Variety of Texts at a Diversity of Levels** Students benefit from engaging daily with multiple types and levels of text. Experience in reading texts from multiple genres provides students with knowledge of various text structures and improves their text-driven processing (Goldman & Rakestraw, 2000). Transacting with a wide variety of genres—including biography, historical fiction, legends, poetry, articles, and brochures—enhances students’ motivation and increases their comprehension (Gambrell, 2001). When a leveled text is being used, teachers scaffold learning experiences and students receive varying levels of support, depending on the purpose and instructional setting.

We provide independent-level or easy texts when students are working on their own in literacy centers or routines. Students can read texts at this level with no teacher support. We use instructional-level or “just right” texts when students are engaged in guided reading.
Students can read texts at this level with some assistance from the teacher. We do not encourage students to read frustration-level texts, but we can share these more challenging texts in several ways, including teacher read-alouds, cross-age experiences, small-group close reading, and as books on CD.

It is important to note that student interest plays a role in text selection. To determine individual interests, invite students to complete interest inventories, literacy histories, or interviews. Use the information gleaned from these activities to inform your selections when choosing new books for your classroom library and to make recommendations to the school or community librarian, as well as to parents.

**Multiple Representations of Thinking**  
We often ask our students to provide oral or written responses to the texts they read, because those typically are the most frequently used response modes. Although oral and written responses are fine, we also need to offer students alternative modes of response, including sketching, dramatizing, singing, and designing projects.

Because we do not all learn in the same way, the same instructional environment, methods, and resources are effective for some learners and ineffective for others (Burke & Dunn, 2003). Offering students opportunities to express their thoughts through multiple modes of representation allows them to choose their strength modalities when expressing their ideas. Offering multiple modes of response is motivational for all students, but it is particularly beneficial for struggling readers.

**Meaningful Contexts**  
Duke (2001) has delineated an expanded understanding of context for present-day learners. Specifically, she suggests that context should be viewed as curriculum, activity, classroom environment, teachers and teaching, text, and society. One of the most interesting aspects of this expanded notion of context is the number of influences that impact student learning. As Cambourne (2002) reminds us, “What is learned cannot be separated from the context in which it is learned” (p. 26).

Lipson and Wixson (2009) describe the instructional context as including settings, practices, and resources. *Instructional settings* include teacher beliefs and a literate environment, as well as classroom interaction, organization, and grouping. Instructional goals, methods, activities, and assessment practices are all *instructional practices*. Commercial programs, trade materials, and technology are viewed as *instructional resources*.

More specific literacy-based descriptions of context have been offered by Gambrell (1996), Hiebert (1994), and Pearson (2001a). They suggest that the classroom context is characterized by multiple factors, including the classroom organization and authentic opportunities to read, write, and discuss. Other contextual components include instruction in skills and strategies, integration of concept-driven vocabulary, use of multiple genres, and knowledge of various text structures.
Comprehending at Deeper Levels  Current thinking about reading suggests that we should also teach our students to comprehend at deeper levels—levels that require readers to understand beyond the information on the printed page or screen—and to critically analyze the author’s message (Luke & Freebody, 1999; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004, 2011). In critical literacy, an approach that promotes deeper comprehension, readers move beyond passively accepting the message of a text to question, examine, or dispute the power relationship that exists between the readers and the author. These readers ponder what the author wants them to believe, act on what they believe, and promote fairness between people. Critical literacy focuses on the problem and its complexity. It addresses issues of power and promotes reflection, action, and transformation (Freire, 1970).

Reading from a critical perspective involves thinking beyond the text to understand such issues as why the author wrote about a particular topic, why he or she wrote from a particular perspective, and why certain ideas about the topic were included and others were not. Becoming critically literate means that readers do not passively accept information imparted by others but rather question the source of the ideas, examine who is represented and who is marginalized, and then take action.

Reading from this perspective requires having both the ability and the deliberate inclination to think critically about to analyze and evaluate the power relationship that exists between the reader and the author. Those who read from a critical stance know that though the author has the power to create and present the message, the reader has the power and the right to be a text critic: to read, question, and analyze the author’s message. Understanding this power relationship is the essence of critical literacy.

The teacher plays a multifaceted role in initiating and developing critical literacy. It begins with personal understanding and use of critical literacy, and it extends to teaching students about critical literacy. This involves modeling reading from a critical stance in everyday teaching and learning experiences, and providing students with access to a variety of texts that represent critical literacy. When examining the teacher’s role, it is important to note that we cannot just “become critical.” Developing critical literacy is a process that involves learning, understanding, and changing over time. This includes developing theoretical, research, and pedagogical repertoires; changing with time and circumstance; engaging in self-criticism and self-analysis; and remaining open to possibilities (Comber, 2001).

Once the teacher has become critically aware, teaching students to read from a critical stance should be a natural process. First, as with any other act of reading, the teacher should ensure that students have the background knowledge necessary to comprehend text from a critical stance. The teacher might then choose to scaffold learning by using a five-step instructional framework, as noted earlier: explain, demonstrate, guide, practice, and reflect (McLaughlin & Allen, 2009). Gradually releasing responsibility to the students provides the time and opportunity for them to become comfortable with reading from a
critical stance. To begin, the teacher explains what it means to be critically aware and then demonstrate this awareness by using a read-aloud and a think-aloud. During this process, the teacher provides a critical perspective that questions and challenges the text, asking questions such as the following:

- Whose viewpoint is expressed?
- Whose voices are missing, silenced, or discounted?
- What action might you take based on what you have learned?

After the teacher explains and demonstrates, students work in pairs or small groups and offer responses to the questions. The teacher continues to guide their reading as they practice reading from a critical stance. As a final step, the teacher and students reflect on what they know about being critically aware and how it help them to understand the text at deeper levels. This often leads to discussions of how they can apply what they have learned to reading other texts.

Students who engage in critical literacy become open-minded, active, strategic readers who are capable of comprehending text at deeper levels. They understand that the information presented in texts—including not only books but also magazines, newspapers, song lyrics, and websites—has been written from a particular perspective for a particular purpose. They know that meaning is “grounded in the social, political, cultural, and historic contexts of the reading event” (Serafini, 2003, n.p.). The goal is for readers to become text critics in everyday life—to naturally comprehend information sources from a critical stance. As David Pearson (2001a) suggests, comprehension is not enough. It must have a critical edge.

Creating Rich Instructional Tasks

THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS ARE BASED ON an integrated model of language arts. So, it is logical that CCSS-based reading lessons for grades 6–8 should be designed as rich instructional tasks that address multiple standards. For example, a life science lesson might integrate the CCSS identified in Table 2.4. A wide range of reading comprehension strategies can be included in such rich instructional tasks. The following sections describe specific strategies and provide examples of their use in the classroom.

Bookmark Technique    Monitoring is a reading comprehension strategy students use to ensure they are making sense while reading text. Bookmark Technique (McLaughlin & Allen, 2009) is a strategy application in which students monitor their understanding and evaluate specific aspects of text. Typically employed during and after reading informational text, this strategy application provides support to guide students’ thinking as they are reading.
In Bookmark Technique, students create four bookmarks:

- On Bookmark 1, students record what they found most interesting about the text.
- On Bookmark 2, the students choose a vocabulary word that they think everyone in the class needs to discuss.
- On Bookmark 3, the students record an illustration, chart, map, or graph that helped them to understand what they read.
- On Bookmark 4, the students note something in the text that they found confusing.

Students also record the page and paragraph where the information appears on each Bookmark. As an alternative mode of response, students can also sketch their responses on their bookmarks. Figure 2.1 shows four bookmarks completed in response to reading about a topic in American history.

When students complete their bookmarks, they all have four pieces of information to share in whole-class or small-group discussion, which contributes to the social construction of meaning. The completed Bookmarks also provide evidence that students have read the text. Students are motivated by the opportunities that Bookmark Technique offers to express their individual thoughts and make personal choices about the text they are reading.

**Lyric Summary**  Summarizing is a vital reading comprehension strategy. The Lyric Summary is a strategy application that provides students with the opportunity to create
### FIGURE 2.1  Example of the Bookmark Technique Using a Text in American History

**Text:** *American History of Our Nation: Beginnings through 1877* (Davidson, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bookmark 1</th>
<th>Bookmark 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bookmark 1</strong>&lt;br&gt;The most interesting part was . . .&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<em>I think that when George Washington took office as the first President of the United States and set up the three departments of the executive branch: Treasury, State, and War is the most interesting part, because that action became the foundation of our government.</em>&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;Page 283&lt;br&gt;Paragraph 3</td>
<td><strong>Bookmark 2</strong>&lt;br&gt;A vocabulary word I think the whole class needs to discuss is . . .&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<em>I think the class should discuss invested. I know that it means to buy something and hope that it will increase in value. People invested in government bonds and hoped that their value would grow.</em>&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;Page 284&lt;br&gt;Paragraph 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bookmark 3</th>
<th>Bookmark 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bookmark 3</strong>&lt;br&gt;The illustration, chart, map, or graph that helped me understand what I was reading was . . .&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<em>I think the chart that showed me the amount of money it cost to run the government, the amount of money that the United States owed, and the income that the United States received helped me to understand that the United States needed more income to pay back its debt.</em>&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;Page 284&lt;br&gt;Paragraph 4</td>
<td><strong>Bookmark 4</strong>&lt;br&gt;Something that confused me was . . .&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<em>It confused me when the book stated that people had sold their bonds for less than they had originally paid, because the book stated that the government promised to pay back all of the money for the bonds with interest.</em>&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;Page 284&lt;br&gt;Paragraph 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 2: Reading Comprehension

**FIGURE 2.2** Lyric Summary about Bacteria

**Text:** *Biology* (Miller & Levine, 2008)

**Song:** “The Facts of Life,” by Alan Thicke, Gloria Loring, and Al Burton; sung by Gloria Loring (available online at http://classic-tv.com)

You can have bacteria, it's not all bad,
There are two types and there you have
microscopic life, microscopic life.
Prokaryotes the smallest form is now
divided in two groups, let's shout
microscopic life, microscopic life.
When eubacteria is the largest, it seems
and achaebacteria is chemically different it's foreseen
that suddenly we’re finding out
bacteria's vital to maintain the world, world.
Producers of energy, that's right
decomposers, nitrogen fixers, and human uses for life
Learning about microscopic life
Learning about microscopic life.

an objective summary (McLaughlin & Allen, 2009). In this strategy application, students gather in small groups after learning about a particular topic. To begin, students work in small groups and brainstorm individual lists of information about the topic. Next, they choose a song—a melody that everyone in the group knows. Then, they use their brainstormed lists to write new lyrics for the song.

Of course, the only way to share Lyric Summaries is to sing them, so each group does exactly that. Figure 2.2 shows a Lyric Summary that students created about the topic *bacteria*.

**Venn Diagram** The Venn Diagram is a graphic organizer that illustrates the similarities and differences of two topics. The similarities are written in the overlapping part of the circles (comparison), and the differences are recorded in the outer portions of each circle (contrast). Figure 2.3 shows a Venn diagram about the topic *rocks*.
The Venn Diagram can also be used as the basis of an oral or written summary. This graphic organizer is also an appropriate representation of the comparison/contrast informational text structure, knowledge of which is an expectation of the Common Core.

To create rich instructional tasks in literature, we might integrate the Common Core State Standards identified in Table 2.5. During a lesson based on these standards, we could invite students to do the following:

- Quote from the text to support analysis of what the text says explicitly.
- Analyze how the setting (including the place and time) shapes the characters.
- Write a sequel or “next episode” for the story that includes descriptive details.
- Use the writing process when creating the sequel or “next episode.”
- Engage in different types of collaborative discussions throughout the lesson. Share a sequel or “next episode” in a PowerPoint slide show that integrates multiple media that relate to and support the writing.
- Determine or clarify selected vocabulary featured in the original story.

**Making Connections** Making Connections is a reading comprehension strategy that students use to activate background knowledge and link it to the information they are reading. Sketching Connections (McLaughlin & Allen, 2009) is a strategy application that can be used as an alternative mode of representing ideas found in a text. Figure 2.4 features

![Figure 2.3: Venn Diagram about Rocks](image-url)

**TABLE 2.5**  Examples of Integrating the Common Core State Standards for Grades 6–8 in a Rich Instructional Task in Literature

- **Reading Literature Standard 1**: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- **Reading Literature Standard 3**: Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact.
- **Writing Standard 3**: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events, using effective techniques, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
- **Writing Standard 5**: Develop and strengthen writing by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.
- **Speaking and Listening Standard 1**: Engage in a variety of collaborative discussions.
- **Speaking and Listening Standard 5**: Include multiple types of media and visual displays in presentations.
- **Language Standard 4**: Determine or clarify the meanings of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases.

**FIGURE 2.4**  Sketching Connections in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

I drew a picture of a tree after reading Chapter 9, because to me it represents how trees can be very different and grow beautifully next to each other like people do. Cassie’s father also explains to her that every tree/person deserves to grow and live and should never give up because of its size/differences. The tree also represents roots and how important it was for Cassie’s family to own their own land.
In the Common Core Classroom

Sean is a sixth-grade, middle school science teacher who has worked extensively with colleagues to implement the Common Core. As he began to include the CCSS in his planning, he realized that this was the first time his students would be expected to meet the Common Core. Given this, Sean was particularly careful to read the Standards horizontally. He wanted to ensure that his students could meet all of the expectations of the CCSS for sixth-grade students, including those designed for grades K–5.

When designing the rich instructional task that included the following lesson and related class project, Sean integrated Common Core State Reading Standard 1 for both Literature and Informational Text for grades K–3, which addresses asking and answering questions about a text. He also integrated the following CCSS for grade 6 in the lesson and project:

- Reading Informational Text: Standards 1, 4 (lesson and project)
- Writing: Standards 2a–f, 4, 5, 6 (lesson: Standard 4; project: all Standards)
- Speaking and Listening: Standards 1a–d, 5 (lesson and project: Standard 1; project: Standard 5)
- Language: Standards 1, 3, 4, 6 (lesson and project)

As Sean and his colleagues worked together to learn about the Common Core State Standards, they read the standards vertically to understand the expectations for students at their grade level and horizontally to understand what the standards assumed their students would know. The teachers became concerned that their students were not adept at generating and responding to questions at multiple levels. After engaging in an in-depth discussion with his students, Sean realized that although they knew how to ask and answer questions at the literal level, they did not know how to employ that skill using higher levels of thinking. (Asking and answering questions is the focus of Reading Standard 1 for grades K–3, although applying multiple levels of thinking is not mentioned.)

Sean began by discussing questioning with his students. It was early in the school year, but the students would soon be engaging in research projects in science. Each student would choose a female scientist, research her contributions to the field, and report these findings in a PowerPoint slide show or other medium of his or her choosing. Sean decided to situate his teaching of questioning within the research project.

To engage students and help them to activate their background knowledge, Sean asked them to work with partners to brainstorm questions they could use to guide their research. Students readily shared their ideas. Questions included when the scientist was born, when she died, and what scientific contribution she was known for. Sean knew immediately that he needed to teach his students how to generate and respond to
questions using multiple levels of thinking. He used this information to create a series of lessons to teach his students about generating and responding to questions at multiple levels. He framed his teaching using the five-step model for explicit strategy instruction (McLaughlin & Allen, 2009).

Providing explicit instruction, Sean taught his students how to create questions at the convergent level. He used his students’ literal-level questions to launch asking question at the next level. He explained convergent questions as those that begin with why and how. He also noted that questions at this level can be used to compare and contrast information.

Next, Sean demonstrated by using Albert Einstein’s biography, appropriate signal words, and a think-aloud (Davey, 1983) to model how to create convergent levels questions. (One useful online source of biographies is the website Biography.com [www.biography.com].) Here are some examples of convergent questions that Sean generated:

- Why was Albert Einstein considered a school dropout?
- How did this affect his enrolling at his next school?

After discussing these questions with his students, Sean guided them to work with partners to create two convergent questions about another section of the Einstein text, offering support as needed. He encouraged students to use the signal words to begin their questions. After the students had generated their own questions, they shared what they had created. Here are several of the students’ questions:

- Why did Einstein begin thinking about relativity?
- Why was 1905 called Einstein’s “miracle year?”
- How was Einstein successful in becoming respected in the academic world?

Sean noted, “It was as if light bulbs were turning on all over the room! The students clearly understood how to structure the questions.” Next, Sean shared an additional section of the text and encouraged students to practice by creating convergent-level questions on their own.

Sean followed up by teaching his students about Thick and Thin Questions (Lewin, 1998). Thin questions would, as always, be literal-level, memory questions. At this point in students’ learning, the thick questions would be limited to convergent-level questions. Sean provided an electronic biography for students’ use in this part of the lesson. When students felt comfortable generating and responding to convergent questions, Sean moved on to teaching about divergent and evaluative questions. Students wrote several of these types of questions, including the following:

- Divergent level: Imagine that Einstein did not make the scientific discoveries for which he is known. How would our world be different?
Evaluative level: Einstein said: “The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don’t do anything about it.” Do you agree or disagree? Justify your position.

The class also discussed chronology as a text structure (Reading Informational Text Standard 5 for grades 4–5) to assist students with their research projects. Sean recognized that grade 5 is the last grade for which the CCSS include text structures. “So, technically,” he stated, “knowing text structures is not a grade 6–8 skill, but in real life, students in grades 6–12 do need to know and be able to use text structures. This is an example of a gap in the Standards.”

As Sean taught the levels of questioning and chronology as a text structure, it became clear that he should discuss these topics each year before the start of students’ science research projects. That way, he would be able to assess what his students already know about these topics and then decide whether he needed to teach them.

Comprehending text is an essential skill for students in grades 6–8. The authors of the CCSS note that the teaching of reading comprehension is not included in the Standards but rather is left in teachers’ hands. We need to embrace this responsibility to ensure that our students are college and career ready.

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chapter 2 / Reading Comprehension


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**LITERATURE AND INFORMATIONAL TEXTS CITED**


