We are passionate book lovers. You know those little kids who read all night under the covers with a flashlight? That was us. Maybe it was you. You know those kids who reluctantly closed a freely chosen book they were reading when the teacher announced, “Time for reading groups.” That was us. Maybe it was you, too. Books have brought us much pleasure in our lives. We are educators who possess a combined 100+ years of teaching experience during which we communicated our passion for children’s literature. We continue to find joy in the literature written for children that has long crowded our home and office bookshelves. We have shared laughter, shed some tears, acquired knowledge, and lingered over the language of these books. This text is our way of giving back, helping teachers bring the pleasures of sharing memorable, high-quality books to the students in their lives.

With the mandates of No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, the 21st Century Skills Framework, and now the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), we hear teachers worrying that they can no longer spend time with literature and foster the varied responses that students make as they read real books that are engaging and challenging. “My school says I have to prepare students for the state test,” “I have to use programmed materials which have short reading passages because that’s efficient and that’s what students will encounter on the test,” or “I have all these standards to teach.” We understand these concerns. We also passionately believe that teachers can meet the mandates of testing and standards by sharing engaging, challenging books of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry with their students. In fact, we contend that those students will not only master the skills mandated by standards but also surpass these expectations if given the opportunity to respond thoughtfully to books of substance.

When we agreed to do this book, we were a bit skeptical of the CCSS. Could young children really do literary analysis, finding evidence to support their answers, we wondered? Could students in grades K–8 engage in rich discussions about a character’s point of view, make in-depth comparisons across multiple texts from various genres, or engage in other kinds of complex literary analysis? What about our diverse students and those whose first language is not English? We’ve found that the CCSS are not perfect. They do not address the needs of diverse students. They do not explicitly provide for students who may be struggling with reading and may need some accommodations to be successful. Most important, they focus almost entirely on analysis and acquiring information and ignore the elements of passion and delight in reading that we see as critical to creating lifelong readers.

What the CCSS do provide is a blueprint for helping students read closely and learn what distinguishes a book as high literary quality. They emphasize the importance of fiction, nonfiction (informational text), and poetic texts—something we have not seen in many prior standards. They ensure that we are purposeful in our teaching—that we carefully show students what makes a poem so delightful to the ear or a nonfiction book a compelling read. They remind us of the necessity for integrating all the language arts. They also challenge us to make sure that every child learns to read competitently. We have added the elements that we believe are missing from the CCSS: how to engage our culturally diverse students, how to support students who are English language learners, and how to develop interest and excitement in reading.
In *Teaching Children’s Literature in an Era of Standards*, you will find the tools to instill a lasting love for literature while also building reading and critical thinking skills, thus meeting the mandates of standards. Although we emphasize the CCSS, we also have integrated references to the 21st Century Skills Framework, as they are an important and interrelated set of skills. This text is designed to help you understand how students respond to books, build your knowledge of quality children’s literature, and develop teaching strategies that support authentic interactions with books. Thus, it is appropriate for both undergraduate and graduate courses in children’s literature and reading or children’s literature and language arts.

**Mentor Texts**

We have organized a significant number of examples around several mentor texts. In general, mentor texts are books that have particular qualities or features that teachers can draw on for class discussions and activities. Rich classroom conversations evolve when students read or listen to the same book. The mentor texts we have selected will help make the examples and lesson plans in this book more meaningful and memorable. The selected mentor texts are the following:

- *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio: a contemporary book of realistic fiction that we believe will be a classic of the future.
- *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle: one of the best-known picture books that is also complex enough to generate in-depth discussions about the integration of text and illustration in picture books.
- *Smithsonian: Bug Hunter* by David Burnie: a nonfiction book that offers fascinating information about a variety of insects and includes related activities.

**A Content Walk Through This Text**

*Teaching Children’s Literature in an Era of Standards* is organized in two sections. Part I emphasizes foundational concepts. Part II features seven chapters devoted to each of the major forms and genres of children’s literature. Instructional methods are woven into each chapter. We strongly believe that the books children have enjoyed for decades should not be lost to future generations. These books have lasted because children have seen something memorable in them and have passed their passion for these books to friends, siblings, and their own children. Thus, form and genre chapters feature examples of both older titles and those published more recently that we believe will resonate with children in the years to come. We have endeavored to mention only the best. More titles could not be included due to limited space in the book, but we hope you will continue to discover quality books on your own. This book is organized as follows:

**Part I: Foundations**

**Chapter 1:** discusses the foundational and philosophical aspects of teaching in classrooms where literature plays a prominent role. We take the perspective that what teachers believe about learners, books, and school will affect how they choose to teach literacy. We also provide an overview of the CCSS and 21st Century literacy skills.

**Chapter 2:** addresses the concepts of response to literature. We build a framework for how the factors of reader, text, and context interact to drive one’s engagement with books. We also discuss theories of literary response, focusing specifically on Rosenblatt’s Transactional Response Theory and how the mandates of the CCSS do and do not mesh with
this theory. General strategies teachers use to encourage authentic interactions with books are described.

Chapter 3: describes the teaching strategies educators can use to involve children in meaningful reading experiences and how literature can be shared in various ways across the curriculum.

Part II: The Forms and Genres of Children’s Literature

Chapters 4 to 10: present detailed information on each of the major forms and genres in children’s literature, including picture books, poetry, traditional literature, fantasy/science fiction, historical fiction, contemporary realistic fiction, and nonfiction, including biography.

Each chapter features sections on defining the form or genre, how it is significant in children’s lives, evaluation and selection criteria, discussion of memorable books, and connections to the CCSS. We also discuss how the books in that form or genre can support the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners. A controversial issue invites readers to consider the pros and cons of a related important debate topic. We conclude each chapter with an extensive list of notable and representative titles.

We suggest that teacher candidates carefully read Chapters 1 to 3 in their entirety. We also recommend carefully reading the introductory and concluding sections of Chapters 4 to 10. Skimming the sections of these chapters in which specific books are discussed “Categorizing Books Within the Form or Genre” provides an overview of the genre and book suggestions. We hope this provides a strong foundation but also leaves time to read the wonderful books we recommend. We also anticipate that these sections will serve as references when teacher candidates need to find books for their future students who will have wide interests and tastes in what they want to read.

Important Features of This Text

- For the sake of efficiency, we have used abbreviations when we reference standards. A key to these abbreviations and acronyms is provided in Chapter 1.
- In most instances, books within lists are designated as follows: P (primary grades, K–3); I (intermediate grades, 4–6), and M (middle grades, 6–8). Books suitable for preschoolers are marked with an asterisk (*). If these designations do not appear, the list is suitable for one grade level (as noted at the beginning of the list).
- The hash mark (#) designates titles that feature culturally diverse characters, settings, plots, or information. Exceptions are noted.
- We have designated activity/CCSS connections that work particularly well with a specific genre. However, many of the activities can be used with books from multiple genres; thus, we encourage you to adapt activities across genres.

Integration of Technology

Computer technology offers additional tools for research, reading assistance, and media for student response to literature. Throughout the text, we have integrated three types of “Tech Clicks”: Information Technology within the context of 21st Century literacy skills, ideas for student responses to books, and a sampling of important Web sites. Due to the likelihood that URLs have changed, we provide the sponsoring organization or the title of the site rather than long and awkward addresses.
As you embark on the journey to use technology in the most meaningful ways to support good literature and mastery of standards, a helpful strategy is to discard the notion that the teacher must know everything. Consider the “voice and choice” of your students when it comes to response to books and, at the same time, be mindful of your purposes and goals.

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Part I
Foundations

*Picture-Books in Winter*

Summer fading, winter comes—
Frosty mornings, tingling thumbs,
Window robins, winter rooks,
And the picture story-books.

Water now is turned to stone
Nurse and I can walk upon;
Still we find the flowing brooks
In the picture story-books.

All the pretty things put by,
Wait upon the children’s eye,
Sheep and shepherds, trees and crooks,
In the picture story-books.

We may see how all things are
Seas and cities, near and far,
And the flying fairies’ looks,
In the picture story-books.

How am I to sing your praise,
Happy chimney-corner days,
Sitting safe in nursery nooks,
Reading picture story-books?

—From *A Child’s Garden of Verses*,
Robert Louis Stevenson, 1905 Scribner’s.
Knowing Children’s Literature and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

To provide foundational context for children’s literature, we address the following questions in this chapter:

- What is children’s literature?
- Why use literature with children?
- What are the forms and genres of children’s literature?
- What are the basic criteria for evaluating children’s literature?
- What principles guide teachers as they create and implement a literature program?
- How do we integrate our beliefs, standards, and exemplary literature to meaningfully and authentically connect children and books?

The most important thing you learn at school is how to read. It’s important because we live in a literate society and in our society it’s as important to be able to read as it is to be able to walk and talk—if you can’t do these things, your ability to participate in society is restricted. But literature is bounding along ahead like the white rabbit, and before you know where you are, it’s over the hills and far away. Because children’s literature knows perfectly well that literacy is only a beginning, not an end. It’s the starting point, not the goal. (Parkinson, 2011, p. 52)
Siobhán Parkinson, Ireland’s first laureate for children’s literature, understands the desire to pass along culture to the next generation. Yet in the excerpt on the previous page, she also conveys the exuberant experiences that books can afford readers. She describes the boundless opportunities of literature to construct personal meaning and to show the commonalities of being human. Siobhán points out that “literacy is only a beginning,” implying that standards provide educators with starting points, but standards are not the goals, nor do they proscribe a methodology.

Similarly, Robert Louis Stevenson’s poem paints with words the emotional enticement of stories, the pull of stepping outside one’s everyday life, and the pleasure of learning new things—all feeding the mind and soul. Teachers who know and treasure books will lead their students on wonderful reading adventures, such as traveling to “seas and cities, near and far” or following a white rabbit. Teachers who know quality literature will bring books and children together. This is especially critical in a time when schools must focus on outcome-based learning. Teaching Children’s Literature in an Era of Standards will help you integrate quality literature with the expectation that your students will meet critical standards.

What Is Children’s Literature?

What is children’s literature? The obvious answer, books written for children, is too simplistic. A working definition is more nuanced, and, oddly enough, children’s literature professionals disagree on the details. This section examines the characteristics of children’s literature.

What Is Included in Children’s Literature

We use the term children’s literature to encompass the realm of books written for children or read by children, regardless of format: print, audio, or digital. Children’s literature can include nonfiction, poetry, magazines, traditional literature, fiction, and picture books. For the purposes of this book, we emphasize literature that is appropriate for children kindergarten through middle school and also suggest books appropriate for preschoolers.

Some experts recognize the literacy value of children’s magazines and e-zines, such as Cobblestone, Cricket, or Ranger Rick (Johnson, 2010; Strickland & Morrow, 1991), as well as acknowledging that many students prefer this format. A 2005 survey of more than 8,200 students found that more than 75% indicated that magazines were on their list of favorite reading materials (Davila & Patrick, 2010, p. 202).

Some professionals eliminate nonfiction, even when written for children. Nancy Anderson (2009) offers her opinion that nonfiction books usually function as a quick reference and were not designed to be read from cover to cover. We politely disagree; in Chapter 10, we provide a strong rationale for viewing nonfiction as literature. Another contended category includes books designed for sampling rather than reading cover to cover, such as joke books or poetry anthologies. We include them as children’s literature.

Note that many children’s literature professionals view the term kiddie lit as denigrating to this vital, complex, and rewarding area of study. Children’s literature has been discussed in deeply scholarly ways, dissected with passionate precision, and minutely examined under the lens of cultural studies (McGillis, 2011). Thus it should be referred to in a scholarly fashion.
Some professors (Atkinson, Matusevich, & Huber, 2009) use the term *trade books* synonymously with children’s literature, referring to the types of books found in quality bookstores. In contrast, textbooks, workbooks, and related skill-based resources are considered curriculum materials rather than literature.

By high school, students typically read more advanced books that bridge the divide between adolescence and adulthood. Literature that targets a maturity level between childhood and adulthood is called young adult literature. However, vocabulary and sentence complexity are not the only measures that separate books for children and adolescents. Plato used simple words in *The Cave*, but these metaphysical reflections are not for children.

A healthy discussion flourishes regarding whether books originally written for adults and now read by middle-level students, such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain), *The Yearling* (Rawlings), or *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien), should be categorized children’s literature (Trites, 2007). We also consider a title as children’s literature if it is intended for children but boasts a wide adult readership, such as Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series.

When classrooms are rich with quality literature they engage and captivate students.

The Role of Literature in the Lives of Children

Teachers in preschool through grade 8 can prepare a foundation for powerful reading and writing experiences by sharing a variety of children’s literature with their students. Quality literature is well written and memorable, with varied writing styles, engaging plots, richly developed characters, beautiful poetic language, and accurate and intriguing information.

Teachers need to make many decisions about teaching reading and writing no matter what grade they teach. Sometimes a school or district requires specific materials, such as basal readers or workbooks, but that should not preclude sharing real books with students. Children long remember books their teacher shared aloud. Access to quality literature for independent reading is not a luxury, but a necessity for reading growth. Be committed to your own literary growth and development; know your students and know books. Wise choices and thoughtful planning and sharing of books are all essential factors in fostering positive attitudes and growth in reading and writing regardless of age or grade level. Whereas reading was once taught as a separate subject in many classrooms, the Common Core State Standards emphasize reading and writing as essential to learning in all disciplines. Researchers continue to examine the best way to motivate students to read, as shown in Figure 1.1.

These are important points to keep in mind: organizing learning around children’s literature is an excellent way to accomplish this goal (Galda & Beach, 2004; Wooten & Cullinan, 2009). We should build on what we know about developing positive attitudes toward reading and counteract or avoid the elements that build poor ones. You will create an environment for rich learning and lasting engagement with literature by knowing your students, by reflecting on
your beliefs, and by modeling a love of literature. By becoming familiar with classroom practices that engage readers and writers, you will help to build on their natural curiosity to develop content-area knowledge, reading and writing skills, and a love of books while still addressing standards.

The Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 7) lists the following strategies that improve students’ reading skills by incorporating literature in the curriculum. Through exposure to literature, students will be better able to do the following:

- Demonstrate self-directed and independent reading and build an awareness that reading can be personally useful, satisfying, and powerful
- Build foundational knowledge in a wide range of subjects
- Communicate with attention to various audiences
- Understand and question reading matter

**FIGURE 1.1 What We Know About Nurturing Positive and Enduring Attitudes Toward Reading**

- Students read more, with better understanding, if books are plentiful and easily accessible (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004). Because at-risk students are less apt to read during vacations and have less access to books, additional support needs to be provided (Allington et al., 2010).
- Students enjoy reading more when instruction includes literature as opposed to solely using workbooks or other decontextualized materials (Goodman, 2005; Reis et al., 2007). This is also true for struggling readers (Thames et al., 2008).
- Students are motivated to read when they have choice in their reading (Allington et al., 2010; Guthrie & Humenick, 2004; Reis et al., 2007).
- Students who are read to by teachers develop positive attitudes toward reading (Bruckerhoff, 1977).
- Students are motivated when they are able to discuss books with peers (Allington, 2002; Guthrie & Humenick, 2004; Nystrand, 2006).
- Students improve in reading attitudes when they have opportunities to teach and to help younger students, such as in cross-aged tutoring (Leland & Fitzpatrick, 1994; Slavin, Lake, Cheung, & Davis, 2009). On the other hand, research on computerized assessments such as *Accelerated Reader* show mixed results (Smith & Westberg, 2011; What Works Clearinghouse, 2010).
- As students become teenagers, their interest in reading tends to decline (Tunnell, Calder, & Phaup, 1991). Middle school teachers have the weighty responsibility of trying to prevent this.
- Poor reading attitudes are likely when reading instruction is limited to prescribed texts and does not include engaging literature (Allington, 2010; Garan & DeVoogd, 2008; Sweet, Guthrie, & Ng, 1998).
- When students are grouped for reading by ability, lower-ability groups rarely score high on reading attitude surveys, and it is often difficult to motivate them (Schooley, 1994).
Recognize and attribute evidence and its source
Use appropriate digital technology mindfully
Appreciate and seek to understand multiple cultural perspectives

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) provide a framework for the literacy skills that lie at the heart of all subjects. Children’s literature is the core component in leading children to a lifelong enjoyment and appreciation of reading, and Teaching Children’s Literature in an Era of Standards presents a fusion of these two essential concepts. We believe that teaching with literature will enhance children’s reading across topics in social studies and science as well as other subject areas. Thus, creating a standards-based, literature-rich classroom has the potential to increase reading development and promote positive feelings toward books and lifelong reading.

While it is conceivable that almost any text could work with the Common Core Standards, Roger Sutton (2013), editor in chief of The Horn Book Magazine, cautions that “the hard part comes in the classroom, where teachers have the task of putting these Standards, at once weirdly specific and uselessly generalized, into effective practice. . . . Librarians, support those books and your teachers by bringing them together. Parents and kids, keep reading” (para. 5).

Our goal is to help you build a solid foundational knowledge of children’s literature, the key concepts regarding book response, and ways to thoughtfully design literacy learning incorporating the Common Core State Standards and other standards mandated by governing bodies. Our job as teachers of reading has two parts: to teach students to read. But the second, teaching students to want to read, is equally important. Mark Twain is blunt: “The man who does not read good books is no better than the man who can’t.”

Organizing Children’s Literature

Children’s literature is primarily organized as genres. The term genre refers to distinct categories based on defining characteristics, for example the distinguishing attributes that separate fantasy literature from historical fiction or contemporary realistic fiction. We use the term form for two other categories—picture books and poetry. These forms are used across genres, such as a historical novel written in verse or a contemporary realistic picture book.

This section provides a brief introduction of the key concepts about form and genre. We also address series books and blended genres—titles that do not neatly fit into one category. Specific form and genre chapters outline the important role literature plays in students’ lives and provide greater definitional details and appropriate ways to integrate technology. These chapters discuss how to choose high-quality titles and make teaching connections, including the integration of technology. Each form and genre chapter suggests ways that literature meets the needs of diverse students and the mandates of the Common Core State Standards can support instructional decisions and increase the scope and depth of student learning.

Forms

Picture Books. The picture book is considered a form used in all literary genres—for example, poetry, folklore, historical fiction, and nonfiction. A picture book is usually a combination of text and illustration, although some have few or no words. Many picture books specifically
target a young audience, but others can be appreciated at any age level. Chapter 4 focuses on the art and writing of picture books, including a discussion of graphic “novels,” manga, and anime comics. (Chapter books are referenced throughout but are not examined as a discrete form.) We also discuss the future of picture books and whether animated digital books are likely to take their place.

Poetry. Poetry is also considered a form rather than a genre. Poets love musical language and create patterns with words that please the ear. Words can be arranged playfully with romping rhythms or spun into elegant beauty with verbal images. Chapter 5 describes various poetic elements and forms of poetry. In addition, we explore the controversial issue of asking students to dissect and analyze poems based on critics’ opinions.

Genres

Fiction. The genre of fiction encompasses narratives or stories drawn from an author’s imagination. Fiction does not make a story “fake” or “untrue.” Author Madeleine L’Engle calls fiction “a vehicle for truth,” explaining that “truth and story are what connect human beings to each other” (quoted in Schmidt, 1991, p. 11). The three fictional genres—fantasy and science fiction, contemporary realistic fiction, and historical fiction—each have a dedicated chapter.

Traditional Literature. Traditional literature encompasses works that have been handed down orally for generations and therefore have no identifiable author. Some stories preserve the history and mores of a culture; others were intended purely as entertainment. In Chapter 6, readers will learn to distinguish various categories in this genre, such as fables, legends, folktales, and tall tales. We also examine the concern that mainstream authors have misappropriated the stories of other cultures.

Fantasy and Science Fiction. Fantasy fiction contains elements that are not considered possible in our world. These include such disparate components as ghosts, talking animals, magic lamps, or transformations. In science fiction, the main elements are based on reasonable but extrapolated scientific theory. Someone might travel forward or backward in time, live on another planet, or encounter unknown but realistic oceanic creatures. Good science fiction also explores ethical or societal aspects of the future. Chapter 7 delves into various subcategories of fantasy and science fiction, such as alternative worlds and heroic fantasy. We also explore the controversial aspects of this genre as it continues to be one of the most censored types of children’s literature.

Historical Fiction. Stories set in the past with believable and realistic elements are called historical fiction. Although main characters are generally fictionalized, the setting is identifiable as a specific time period. Minor characters may be historical figures. In Chapter 8, we classify the genre by time period and explain how significant themes appear regardless of era or geographic location. In addition, we investigate the controversial question of exposing children to all aspects and perspectives of our turbulent history.

Contemporary Realistic Fiction. Contemporary realistic fiction is the term used for stories about people and animals that could realistically occur. Readers often find personal value as they vicariously come to know fictional characters facing realistic issues and challenges. In contemporary realistic stories, animals can be the main character but cannot talk or think as humans do. In Chapter 9, we discuss the many categories of contemporary realistic fiction, such as stories about school life, peer relationships, family life, mysteries, humor, and adventure.
We examine this genre through the lens of critical literacy, focusing on the reader’s potential response to stories that reflect social and cultural issues.

**Nonfiction and Biography.** Nonfiction is “the literature of fact.” It is the only literary genre that is named for what it is not (“not fiction”) instead of what it is. An important criterion for nonfiction is that content must be factual and accurate (Kristo & Bamford, 2004). Biography is a subtype of nonfiction, documenting a person’s lifetime or focusing on a specific time period. Biographies are often popular with intermediate and middle school students who are searching for their own identity and speculating about what their future may hold. Chapter 10 describes many types of nonfiction and biography. We explore how to use blended genres, specifically literature that blurs the line between fiction and nonfiction.

**Series Books**

College students inevitably list series books among their childhood favorites. When children read a book they like, they commonly beg for “another one just like it!” Child readers, like adult readers, become enamored of an author’s style; they may become “friends” with characters, or they enjoy learning about a specific historical era. It is natural to want more of these pleasurable experiences, and series books can provide that anticipated pleasure. Some series are written by multiple people who use either a pseudonym or the original author’s name, such as *The Baby-Sitters Club*; the original author was Ann Martin.

Many books become popular because friends recommend them, often from series such as *Clifford the Big Red Dog, Magic School Bus, Percy Jackson and the Olympians, The Princess Diaries, The Baby-Sitters Club, Time Warp Trio, Captain Underpants,* or *Goosebumps Gold.* When reading series books with their friends, children experience the positive aspects of being part of a group (Greenlee, Monson, & Taylor, 1996). Another reason that series are popular is the ease of selecting the next book to read (Greenlee et al., 1996).

Series books are usually formulaic, with little change in characterization or plot structure. R. L. Stine, creator of the *Goosebumps* series, acknowledges this: “Nobody learns and nobody grows. Mostly, they’re just running” (quoted in Greenlee et al., 1996, p. 217). A number of years ago, we noticed a boy who was a voracious *Hardy Boys* reader. When he brought the latest one back to the library, he glumly announced that he didn’t want to read any more. After a dramatic pause, he complained that he knew exactly what was going to happen and it wasn’t exciting anymore! The series had honed his powers of prediction, but he wanted something more challenging.

Ellen Singleton (2006) notes that in a field where most early series books for girls perpetuated the cultural message of restricted physical activities for young women, *The Girls of Central High* was a clear exception. This series promoted sports and other rigorous recreational activities, and Singleton attributes the series with influencing interschool sports for girls.

Not all series are constructed using formulaic plots, and these may fall between cookie-cutter pop fiction and acclaimed award winners. Such books might be called workhorses because they “collectively help move youngsters from word callers to lifetime readers” (Carter, 2010, p. 53). One such example is the *Alice* series (Naylor), which follows the chronological order of a young heroine’s typical traumas and delights of growing up.

**Tech Click**

Loyal readers of Phyllis Reynolds Naylor’s *Alice* series freely write on her blog how much they cried when they finished the latest book and knew there were no others to anticipate. Reciprocally, Phyllis acknowledges that her blog helps her learn as
much from her fans as they do from her. For instance, her readers taught her delicious
details about Spirit Week, Prank Day, and pep rallies (Scales, 2011). Author Rick
Riordan’s blog shows the “human” behind the popular writer by including pictures
of his pets as well as recommending books and posting covers of new books in his
Heroes of Olympus series.

Series books are frequently criticized as “pernicious,” “mind weakening,” and “addictive.”
Interestingly, the features that are typically criticized by adults (plot predictability and one-
dimensional characters) are exactly what young readers like about them. The use of familiar
characters, stable settings, and predictable plots allows readers to build substantial background
knowledge, which, in turn, aids comprehension (Brooks, Waterman, & Allington, 2003).

Series books should not be automatically dismissed as being without literary merit. Arter
and Nilsen (2009) suggest vocabulary activities to use with the word-rich Lemony Snicket series.
Alcatraz Smedry is the fictive author of a recent fantasy series by Brandon Sanderson (Alcatraz
Versus the Evil Librarians and Alcatraz Versus the Shattered Lens). Michele Castleman (2011) draws
interesting connections between the humorous “autobiographical” series and how it makes theo-
ries about implied readers and implied authors accessible for middle school students. In addition,
she found that her in-depth study of this series enabled her to better reflect on her own teaching.

Series books are often the first chapter books for young readers. They minimize the chal-
lenge of reading longer books due to consistent characters and predictable plots. They provide
a scaffold until readers are ready to make the leap to longer texts. Developing readers need many
opportunities for “high-success” reading to become independent, active, and fluent readers
(Brooks et al., 2003).

Children who read voraciously by choice and for pleasure are more likely to succeed at school
than those who dislike reading (for a seminal work, see Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; on
intrinsic motivation, see Garan & DeVoogd, 2008). If series provide that practice, they serve a use-
ful purpose. For these reasons, we believe that series should be included in classroom collections
and that children should be allowed to read them, particularly during independent reading time.

Blended Genres

Some recent book titles do not fit neatly into the discrete categories we have described, such as
nonfiction or contemporary realistic fiction. The definition of verse novel is “necessarily elastic,
since as a genre it is still evolving. There is the vexed question of distinguishing between a novel
told in verse and a series of poems linked in a narrative sequence” (Alexander, 2005, p. 270). For
example, teachers might ponder whether to place Hesse’s Out of the Dust (a verse novel set in
Depression-era Oklahoma) in the poetry basket or with historical fiction, or should Koertge’s
Shakespeare Bats Cleanup (a baseball story for middle school readers told in free verse) mingle
with sports or poetry? Combining the rich language of poetry with the characteristics of quality
verse novels makes this subgenre appealing in an audio book format.

Novels such as the puzzling When You Reach Me by Rebecca Stead or mystical Maniac Magee
by Jerry Spinelli skilfully blend elements of fantasy and realism, causing the reader to ponder
what is real. Miranda, the main character in When You Reach Me, tries to make sense out of the
mysterious notes she receives and a street person who fascinates her. The title of each section of the
book demonstrates her need to organize: “Things You Keep in a Box,” “Things That Go Missing,”
and “Things That Turn Upside Down.” Spinelli begins Maniac Magee with the conventions and
cadence normally found in folktales. The main character, whose real name is Jeffery, takes on the
hues of a larger-than-life tall-tale hero as he battles homelessness, community unrest, and racism.
A story may unfold in a traditional narrative style but interweave several story lines and hyperlink to alternative versions of the same or related stories in verse (Ward & Day, 2010, p. 63). Combining multiple writing styles, various formats, and differing voices is not surprising in our era of techno-music, “photoshopping,” remixing sound tracks, and mash-ups (Knobel & Lankshear, 2008). This blurring of boundaries is also called blending genres and may produce a hybrid work such as Black and White (Macaulay).

Blended books work well when implementing the CCSS because of the complexity of the texts and discernment required from readers. “The Reading standards place equal emphasis on the sophistication of what students read and the skill with which they read” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 8). Students’ skills grow when making connections between ideas, genres, textual evidence, prior reading, and life’s experiences.

Criteria for Choosing High-Quality Children’s Literature

The Common Core State Standards recommend that teachers help children respond deeply and thoughtfully to the literature they read, hear, or otherwise experience. Investigating literary elements is a primary way to implement these standards. This section describes the literary elements of fiction as useful tools in discussing the genres of fantasy, science fiction, contemporary realistic fiction, and historical fiction. We explore one historical fiction title in depth to illustrate what might typically be discussed regarding a fictional work. We examine the unique qualities for picture books, poetry, and nonfiction in their respective chapters.

Book selection guidelines conclude this section.

A Close Look at Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred Taylor

The winner of the 1977 Newbery Award was Mildred Taylor’s gripping tale of one year in the life of an African American family in Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry. Facing the crushing poverty of the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Logans strive to keep their land. In a time and place of vicious racism, they retain their dignity while finding ways to confront social inequities. The reader experiences events mostly through the eyes of 9-year-old Cassie Logan.

As the novel begins, Cassie is angered at being purposefully splashed by a school bus carrying white children. She sides with her fastidious younger brother as he expresses resentment at the “gift” of dilapidated textbooks no longer “good enough” for white students. But, she also exudes a naïveté nurtured by her close and loving family. All readers alike will feel her stunned reaction, not only when a shopkeeper keeps them waiting to attend to white customers but also, more deeply, when Cassie realizes that some African Americans consciously perpetuate racial inequities. There are currents of tension between the African Americans who see and accept their position and those, like the Logans, who see and refuse to accept. As Cassie’s awareness of racial injustice grows, we also see Cassie and her family take risks to stand against these atrocities.

Even as Mrs. Logan desires to shield her own children from life’s cruelties, every action of the parents strives to lift the children above their oppressive history, to demonstrate that land stewardship is a route to freedom, and that there are no shortcuts to an ethical life. For example, Mrs. Logan insists that they go with her to visit a friend who has been horrifically burned by the Wallaces. She knows that the valuable lesson about why they are boycotting the Wallace
store will not be forgotten. But a boycott is just the beginning, and both mother and father Logan show by example that they have “agency”—power to act positively to address racial and social issues (McDowell, 2002). There are numerous times in which the two older children, Stacey and Cassie, take matters into their own hands, knowing that they are courting trouble but believing in their hearts that they are doing the right thing as shown by their parents’ examples. This is explicitly seen as Uncle Hammer chides Stacey for giving away his warm new coat at the same time he drives home the consequences of Stacey’s action and the misguided thinking that drove him to lose the coat.

In a powerful example of “showing,” not “telling,” Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry takes us on a journey to another time and place to experience the gut-wrenching terror of “night riders” and outrage when an innocent man is profoundly burned. In the harrowing final scene, the life of a neighboring boy is apparently and inevitably in danger. Yet the Logans’ courage and self-respect, amidst a conflagration of evil, terror, and flames, encourages readers to reflect on love, compassion, and principled stands. The title comes from the defiant song that opens chapter 11, a refusal to be beaten down by those who oppress.

What Are the Elements of Fiction?

Understanding core concepts such as characterization, plot, theme, setting, style, point of view, and illustration can enhance students’ appreciation of fiction. Although each element is defined individually in this section, skilled authors weave them into a cohesive whole. A light touch is needed when sharing this information, as too much analysis leads to disengagement. As we discuss each element, we use examples from Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry to illustrate the application to an actual book.

Characterization. Good fiction writers create credible, realistic characters. As we become immersed into the lives of fictional characters, they help us understand plots and themes more deeply. Younger children can be guided into deeper understandings of character, such as a first-grade teacher who uses props, a map, and drama to help her students understand the ethical dilemma faced by the main character in Winthrop’s The Castle in the Attic (Roser, Martinez, Fuhrken, & McDonnold, 2007).

The protagonist is the main character, and the problems or situations facing this person drive the plot. For example, in Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry the reader watches Cassie’s innocence sweep away and her sense of outrage grow. Cassie’s actions are clearly the focus, but nearly every main character also faces a private struggle. Cassie’s mother clashes with the school board, her father strives to find sufficient money to keep their land, and her brother faces confrontations with a bully. (Similarly, we share the agonies of the little mouse with the big ears in Kate DiCamillo’s The Tale of Despereaux as he strives to be brave and loyal).

An antagonist appears in many stories as a foil for the protagonist. Sometimes, this character attempts to thwart the goals of the protagonist or is on the opposing side of a controversy. An antagonist might have another point of view or may provoke a dilemma through which we come to understand the main character. For example, in The Lord of the Rings, (Tolkien) Gollum is alternatively portrayed as an obsessed, wicked creature and a creature to be pitied.

Cassie and her family face a number of antagonists: the Wallaces, who own the sole local store and viciously discriminate against African Americans. Poor whites who attempt to steal their land and the racist school board that fires Mrs. Logan are among the tribulations faced by
the Logans. T.J., a contemporary of the children, serves a complex function. At his core, he is lonely but attempts “friendship” with Cassie’s brother Stacey in a misguided way. By subterfuge, T.J. wrangles Stacey’s new coat; he implicates Stacey in a cheating scheme and endangers all of their lives. Readers can see right through him even when Stacey does not. But as poorly as T.J. acts, he does not deserve a near lynching, and the Logan family risks everything to save his life.

Another author writing about the Great Depression who is also an expert in characterization is Christopher Paul Curtis. He uses all these techniques to breathe life into his main character in *Bud, Not Buddy*. Because the story is written in the first person, readers come to know Bud’s thoughts and feelings intimately: his longing for a father and a permanent home. Readers understand why he travels on foot from Detroit to Flint, Michigan, and why he is cautious around unfamiliar people. They also know him through the eyes of the “Dusky Devastators of the Depression,” members of a jazz band who alternately tease and comfort him as he searches for his identity.

Writers sometimes develop characters in subsequent books, exemplified by J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter*. As the story opens, Harry is presented as an intelligent but frightened 11-year-old boy, ignorant of his heritage and oblivious to his powers. Readers of the many volumes watch as he becomes more courageous and able to face the numerous challenges he faces. Authors must maintain internal consistency of a story or a series; they do so by ensuring that everything characters say or do fits with prior thoughts and actions. As Mildred Taylor does so well, the characters’ behavior should also be consistent with their ages and the cultural context of the story.

Children develop an understanding of characterization as they mature (Roser et al., 2007). Younger readers focus on actions or external qualities, such as appearance. Older readers are more attuned to the inner qualities, such as feelings, motives, and relationships. Readers can empathize with Bud’s desire for family and a permanent home in *Bud, Not Buddy* (Curtis). In quality fiction, main characters are highly developed. Through the course of the story, readers come to know their gifts as well as their flaws and struggles. This is true even if the protagonist is a stuffed toy, such as Winnie-the-Pooh (Milne), or an animal, as in *Babe the Gallant Pig* (King-Smith).

**Plot.** The plan of action, the manner in which events unfold, and the resolution of the central conflict are all aspects of plot. Plots in children’s books tend to be linear, with an identifiable beginning, middle, and end. Younger children often have trouble following flashbacks, multiple interwoven plotlines, or other complex plot structures. Often, the story focuses on one main struggle or pivotal event. This is true even for the nearly wordless plot in the 2012 Caldecott winner *A Ball for Daisy* (Raschka), which shows what happens to a puppy’s new toy.

A well-constructed plot develops logically, even if the events are presented in a flashback or flash-forward. The story usually features a conflict in which the main characters struggle with a problem or overcome an obstacle. Children’s literature typically features four main types of conflict: (a) person against person, (b) person against society, (c) person against nature, and (d) person against self (Lukens, Smith, & Coffel, 2012).

Some stories focus on one conflict, whereas others have evolving layers of conflict. In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* several plotlines are interwoven. The reader wants to know whether Jeremy, a neighboring white boy, will succeed with his overtures of friendship; whether T.J. will ever understand loyalty; and how the Logans will survive when their mother is unfairly fired. However, these are minor threads in the larger fabric of 1930s racism, where property rights and life itself appear to have little value.

Good plots are not predictable. Rather, authors strive to make their plots believable yet fresh and original. In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* readers have multiple opportunities to make predictions. Will the Logan children’s plan for revenge on the bus that purposefully splashed them be successful? Can the family resist sustained efforts to steal their land? The plot reveals answers to some questions. However, deeper, more systemic problems have no easy answers and are left percolating in the reader’s mind.
In another example, in *Crispin: The Cross of Lead*, author Avi crafts an intriguing mystery set in medieval times. Crispin must fend for himself after his mother dies. To complicate matters, he is falsely accused of murder and must flee for his life. His many adventures keep readers intrigued. As one child described the most enjoyable part about Crispin’s adventures she explained that nothing was predictable and she was always surprised. Children are drawn to books that feature action scenes with minimal dialogue or description. They raptly turn pages to conclude cliffhangers or experience the breathtaking action that characterize plots such as Avi’s *Beyond the Western Sea*, an exciting story of three children emigrating from Ireland.

**Theme.** Theme refers to the dominant idea of a story; an insight about life or society. One way to think about “theme” is by relating it to music. When we watch a movie with theme music, such as *The Lord of the Rings* or *Titanic*, the increasingly familiar melody surfaces time and again as the movie progresses. Themes in literature work the same way as these connecting musical threads: characters and their actions form patterns that resurface as the plot progresses.

Themes in books for young children are frequently based on common childhood experiences. For example, the theme of *Frog and Toad Are Friends* (Lobel) is the importance of friendship. *Me . . . Jane* (McDonnell) shines with the themes of following your dreams and being a steward of nature. In contrast, themes in books for older readers often focus on the journey to adulthood and the consequences of one’s choices (Norton & Norton, 2010). Along with the powerful themes of racism injustice and striving for an honorable life, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* offers additional complexities. The Logan family exhibits agency: the self-perception that one has power over how one lives regardless of social context. Cassie’s little brother gets into trouble when he pastes over the offensive list of textbook borrowers that shows that only white children used the books. Not only does Mrs. Logan refuse to punish the children, but, at the same time, she acknowledges inequities and the existence of evil.

Many well-written books feature themes that function on multiple layers. Gary Paulsen’s *Hatchet* conveys a theme of person versus the environment as Brian struggles to survive in the wilderness. However, his experiences transformed him from an inexperienced boy to one who is independent and responsible. Because the struggle for basic survival has forever changed Brian, *Hatchet* is also a coming-of-age story.

Sometimes, themes are directly stated, but in some books, readers must think critically to discern deeper meaning. Writers must be careful that a theme does not override the story, making the message too didactic or preachy. Jack Gantos, in *Dead End in Norvelt*, conveys complex and challenging themes with just the right amount of dark humor and comic relief. The 12-year-old protagonist must wend his way between his quarreling parents (coming of age) and coming to grips with the history and future of his town (reflections on utopian ideals). Jack struggles to solve the mystery of the growing number of deaths as he records the history of the town through assisting an elderly neighbor type the obituaries she composes.

Figure 1.2 lists some common themes found in children’s literature, matched with recommended titles.

**Setting.** Setting includes both where and when a story takes place. It can be a real place within a real time period, an invented place in real time, or an invented place in manipulated time. Setting is an important element in fiction; Mildred Taylor’s setting of the Deep South of the 1930s in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* with its stifling poverty and overt racism, remains vivid in readers’ minds decades later. She does not baldly state that her story takes place during the Depression; she shows us Mrs. Logan placing cardboard inside her shoes because the soles are worn through. Readers observe the Logans mixing cornbread, forced to use less flour and less baking powder than required.

Similarly, Lois Lowry, in *The Giver*, introduces a utopian setting, but the reader gradually understands that a seemingly perfect world is severely restricted by authoritarian rules. The
## Figure 1.2 Common Themes in Children's Fiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sample Books Featuring the Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflict: person vs. environment (physical and cultural)</td>
<td>Hiaasen, Carl. <em>Hoot</em>. (M)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Law, Ingrid. <em>Savvy</em>. (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lowry, Lois. <em>The Giver</em>. (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taylor, Mildred. <em>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</em>. (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict: person vs. self</td>
<td>Brooks, Bruce. <em>What Hearts</em>. (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gantos, Jack. <em>Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key</em>. (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Le Guin, Ursula. <em>Wizard of Earthsea</em>. (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Littman, Sarah Darer. <em>Confessions of a Closet Catholic</em>. (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spinelli, Jerry. <em>Maniac Magee</em>. (I, M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coming of age: self-acceptance, morality, ability to face problems and responsibilities; awareness of one's destiny</td>
<td>Babbitt, Natalie. <em>Tuck Everlasting</em>. (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barron, T. A. <em>The Lost Years of Merlin</em>. (M)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Curtis, Christopher Paul. <em>Elijah of Buxton</em>. (M)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Erdrich, Louise. <em>The Birchbark House</em>. (M)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Holt, Kimberly Willis. <em>When Zachary Beaver Came to Town</em>. (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pullman, Philip. <em>The Golden Compass</em>. (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sachar, Louis. <em>Holes</em>. (M)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voigt, Cynthia. <em>Dicey's Song</em>. (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search for freedom</td>
<td>Choi, Sook Nyul. <em>The Year of Impossible Goodbyes</em>. (M)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ellis, Deborah. <em>Parvana's Journey</em>. (M)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ho, Mingtong. <em>The Clay Marble</em>. (M)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Holm, Anne. <em>North to Freedom</em>. (M)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mikaelson, Ben. <em>Red Midnight</em>. (M)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paterson, Katherine. <em>Jip: His Story</em>. (M)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Temple, Frances. <em>Tonight, by Sea</em>. (M)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loyalty and honor</td>
<td>Collier, James, and Collier, Christopher. <em>My Brother Sam Is Dead</em>. (M)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lowry, Lois. <em>Number the Stars</em>. (M)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philbrick, Rodman. <em>Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg</em>. (M)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taylor, Mildred. <em>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</em>. (M)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White, E. B. <em>Charlotte's Web</em>. (I, M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict: good vs. evil</td>
<td>Cooper, Susan. <em>The Dark Is Rising</em>. (M)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>L’Engle, Madeleine. <em>A Wrinkle in Time</em>. (M)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lewis, C. S. <em>The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe</em>. (I, M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rowling, J. K. <em>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone</em>. (I, M)</td>
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</table>
### Theme Sample Books Featuring the Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sample Books Featuring the Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Personal and social responsibility               | Haddix, Margaret Peterson. *Among the Hidden*. (M)  
|                                                 | Naidoo, Beverly. *The Other Side of Truth*. (M)    |
|                                                 | Park, Linda Sue. *A Single Shard*. (M)            |
|                                                 | Paterson, Katherine. *The Great Gilly Hopkins*. (M) |
|                                                 | Paterson, Katherine. *Lyddie*. (M)                |
| Getting along with others:                       | Creech, Sharon. *Walk Two Moons*. (M)             |
| friendship, family conflicts;                     | Estes, Eleanor. *The Hundred Dresses*. (I)        |
| accepting differences                             | Holt, Kimberly Willis. *My Louisiana Sky*. (M)    |
|                                                 | Johnson, Angela. *Toning the Sweep*. (M)          |
|                                                 | Lord, Cynthia. *Rules*. (I, M)                    |
|                                                 | Polacio, R. J. *Wonder*. (M)                      |
|                                                 | Woodson, Jacqueline. *Feathers*. (I, M)           |
| Quests and adventures                             | Alexander, Lloyd. *The Black Cauldron*. (M)       |
|                                                 | Barron, T. A. *Merlin Effect*. (M)                |
|                                                 | Dahl, Roald. *James and the Giant Peach*. (I)      |
|                                                 | Farmer, Nancy. *A Sea of Trolls*. (M)             |
|                                                 | McKinley, Robin. *The Blue Sword*. (M)            |
|                                                 | Paterson, Katherine. *Park’s Quest*. (M)          |

Main character, Jonas, ran away because he felt trapped by the unfeeling, suffocating dystopia. Because setting and plot often support each other, understanding time and place in a story contributes to an appreciation of the events.

Authors create a vivid, believable setting in several ways. All elements of the setting need to be consistent, something that is particularly important in historical fiction. To help us walk in the shoes of the Meeker family in *My Brother Sam Is Dead* (Collier and Collier) during the Revolutionary War, the family must be described as wearing clothes, eating foods, and living in dwellings consistent with that period. It is also true in an invented world, such as Narnia in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Lewis) or Hogwarts in the *Harry Potter* series. If the Gryffindor Tower requires a password for entry, a password must be given every time a character enters the tower.

Picture book illustrations can also enhance readers’ or listeners’ comprehension of setting. For example, in Lita Judge’s *One Thousand Tracings: Healing the Wounds of World War II*, paintings convey an emotional sense of the time period. However, it is the collages of black-and-white photographs, foot tracings, and snippets of letters and postcards that vividly portray the life after the war.

Describing the setting is an art in fiction writing: too much description becomes tedious and leaves nothing to the reader’s imagination. But too little description may fail to engage the reader. Readers need enough to help them connect with the story, then they can use their imaginations to fill in the rest.
Style. Quality books need more than characters, plot, theme, and setting; they need good language to knit these elements together. This is the function of style. Authors use language to compose a story using their own distinct voice.

Style is comprised of the writer’s creative use of vocabulary, sentence structures, and literary devices that convey a unique voice. Style is not a mechanical skill that follows a prescribed blueprint. Rather, the style must fit the plot, characters, and cultural milieu. Most important, the style must make the story come alive. Just as composers blend tone and rhythm to create a symphony, authors imaginatively fuse elements of language into a compelling voice for their story. Style—the rhythm of the sentences, the vivid descriptions, and the fresh imagery—is what subtly affects a reader’s response. Even the youngest children can appreciate finely crafted language that resonates in the ear and mind.

Some fiction writers use a fluid, poetic style in which the language is rhythmical and, at times, alliterative, as seen in Sarah, Plain and Tall by Patricia MacLachlan. The flowing descriptions can be contrasted by the short and choppy style of Gary Paulsen’s Hatchet. Other writers use dialogue as an element of their style. Authors find it a useful technique because it can advance the plot and demonstrate characters’ thoughts and feelings in a more immediate way than straight exposition. Jack Gantos skillfully uses internal monologue in Dead End In Norvelt to lead readers to make inferences about the characters and events. In an early scene the narrator is invited into an elderly woman’s house while she is treating her arthritic fingers with hot wax. Jack wonders, “if she was melting herself down. Mom had always said she was worth her weight in gold” (p. 23). The reader doesn’t need to be told explicitly that Jack is an intelligent young boy possessing an overactive imagination.

Some students may have difficulty reading “eye dialect,” the phonetic writing of nonstandard English that Taylor uses so effectively, and they may need additional support. There is some controversy about the use of dialect, and this may cause young readers to draw inappropriate conclusions about the characters, such as a lack of intelligence or education (Carr, 1978). Being aware of this potential pitfall will aid teachers in countering unintentional negative impressions and turning it to their advantage. The Common Core State Standards suggest that upper-level elementary students should be able to compare and contrast varieties of English, including dialects.

Fiction writers often use figurative language to develop style in their work. Skilled authors invent fresh comparisons that make their work distinctive while still fully developing setting, plot, and characters. When Mildred Taylor describes what Cassie saw after the fire she describes dawn poetically as peeping. Engaging use of dialogue, descriptive vocabulary, and varied sentence structure are all factors in creating an author’s style.

Point of View. The perspective from which a story is told is called point of view. First-person narrative (using “I” or “we,”) is also a popular point of view in children’s fiction, as shown by Cassie’s position as the narrator in Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry. When Mildred Taylor wants the reader to know about events that Cassie did not witness, such as the time when a wheel came off Mr. Logan’s wagon, she adroitly has Cassie grill her brother for information. Some writers extend the first-person point of view by shifting perspective from one character to another to create revolving perspectives. Paul Fleischman uses this technique in Bull Run, a Civil War novel showing 16 perspectives, including those of soldiers, observers, men, and women (some southern, some northern). In Maggie’s Door (Giff), two characters, one female and one male, recount their experiences traveling from Ireland to America to escape the Irish potato famine.

The omniscient, all-knowing storyteller’s voice is often used in fiction. When the author employs this voice, the thoughts and feelings of multiple characters can be revealed. Both The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (Lewis) and Charlotte’s Web (White) are told from this perspective. A limited third-person point of view focuses on the perspective of one character; the story is still told in the third person, but the reader knows the story only through the filter of one perspective as seen in Bridge to Terabithia (Paterson).
### Figure 1.3 Guidelines for Choosing Literature: Evaluating Fiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characterization</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Are the characters true to life? Do they seem plausible? Are their actions consistent with their age and cultural background?</td>
<td>● Is the theme developmentally appropriate and of interest to the book’s intended audience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Are the main characters multidimensional? Do they have both strengths and weaknesses?</td>
<td>● Does the theme emerge naturally from story events, or does it override the story?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Do the characters grow and change? Are the reasons for their actions clear?</td>
<td>● Has the author talked down to children or become too didactic in conveying the theme?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Is the theme relevant for today’s children?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Will the theme help readers grow and change?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot</td>
<td>Style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Does the book tell a good story?</td>
<td>● Is the style appropriate for the book’s intended audience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Is the story line developmentally appropriate for the intended audience? (Are the events understandable and interesting to the children who will read it?)</td>
<td>● Is this author’s use of literary devices, such as figurative language, fresh yet understandable to the book’s intended audience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Is the plot original yet believable?</td>
<td>● Is the dialogue suited to the characters? Do they sound like real people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Does the story unfold logically?</td>
<td>Setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Does the climax seem possible?</td>
<td>● Does the author make the setting seem real?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Are controversial issues presented openly and honestly?</td>
<td>● Is the setting appropriate for the story?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Authors determine which point of view to use based on theme, plot structure, and the manner in which characters are revealed. These decisions, in turn, influence readers’ response to the story. When we evaluate fiction, we need to determine who is telling the story and whether the viewpoint is effective.

**Illustration.** The artwork in children’s literature can add significantly to the quality of a book. A picture book is a format using illustrations to tell the story. In novels for older students, cover images may be the only visual. In transitional chapter books, there may be pictures that replicate the text. The impact and evaluation of illustrations are discussed in Chapter 4. Figure 1.3 synthesizes these guidelines to assist educators in selecting quality books.
Awards for Children’s Literature

A spectrum of awards spotlights high-quality children’s titles. Some awards cut across genres, such as the prestigious Newbery Medal, whereas others focus on literature reflecting diversity (e.g., the Coretta Scott King Award); a specific genre, such as nonfiction (the Orbis Pictus Award); or fantasy (the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award). Awards and Notable Book Lists are excellent resources to locate high-quality books. However, even when adult critics proclaim the “best and brightest,” it is still important for teachers to evaluate a book in light of their own students and curriculum.

Children’s Choice Awards may be useful selection tools. Most states sponsor contests in which children vote for their favorites from preselected lists; these awards typically highlight popular titles that adults may have dismissed (Bang-Jensen, 2010).

The names of form and genre awards with examples in each category are listed at the end of the book; full lists for each award can be found at the sponsor’s Web site. Literature reflecting diversity is embedded throughout this book, and awards for multicultural books are described in the appropriate genre chapter.

Guiding Principles for Creating and Implementing a Literature Program

Teachers’ actions, from lesson planning to minute-to-minute classroom management, are guided by foundational beliefs. This section describes five important principles that support decisions for creating and implementing the use of literature in a standards-based curriculum (see Figure 1.4). In each instance, we have stated the principle from both the child’s and the teacher’s perspective.

Principle 1

• Students need to know the best literature from all genres.
• Teachers need to know how to evaluate and select the highest-quality literature that also appeals to children.

Not all children’s books exhibit the same level of quality. Our role and responsibility is to lead students to the best; they will find the popular books themselves. Lesser-quality choices may help students develop a continuing interest in reading, but teachers who know literature and their students can recommend titles so that personal interests are broadened and the ability to respond thoughtfully to books is extended. Fostering the ability to help students make good book choices is an important goal of this book.

Principle 2

• All students need to see their own lives reflected in the literature they encounter.
• Teachers should know literature that is culturally authentic, reflects the lives of their children, and leads readers to be more culturally responsive to others.

Novelist Christopher Paul Curtis admits he was not an avid reader as a child, in part due to the dearth of titles populated by African American boys (Curtis, 2008). The absence of characters with whom he could identify inspired him to write the books he wished he had as a child.
## FIGURE 1.4 Principles of Teaching Children’s Literature in an Era of Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Students Need To:</th>
<th>Teachers Need To:</th>
<th>Teaching Children’s Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>. . . know the best literature from all genres.</td>
<td>. . . know how to evaluate and select the highest-quality literature.</td>
<td>Introduced in Chapter 1, all genre chapters, and throughout the book. See “Awards for Excellence in Children’s Literature” at the end of the book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>. . . see their lives reflected in the literature they encounter.</td>
<td>. . . know literature that is culturally authentic, reflects the lives of their children, and leads readers to be more culturally responsive to others.</td>
<td>Introduced in Chapter 1 and interspersed throughout the book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>. . . respond to literature in ways that celebrate their diverse interests, learning styles, languages, cultural backgrounds, and developmental levels.</td>
<td>. . . know multiple ways to respond to books that support children’s diverse interests, learning styles, languages, cultural backgrounds, developmental levels, and cultural awareness.</td>
<td>Introduced in Chapter 2 and throughout the book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>. . . be in classrooms where literature is valued and celebrated.</td>
<td>. . . know how to create standards-based literature classrooms.</td>
<td>Introduced in Chapter 3 and throughout the book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>. . . use technology meaningfully and efficiently to select books, access information about books and authors, and extend their appreciation of literature.</td>
<td>. . . know how to use technology effectively to support children’s interactions with literature.</td>
<td>21st-century skills introduced in Chapter 1 and throughout the book.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This means that teachers must be diligent about ensuring their classrooms and school libraries include titles that reflect the diversity of their students. Share books with children that portray a range of cultures that not only mirror students’ experiences but also expand and enrich their lives beyond their immediate community. All readers can benefit from literature reflecting diversity in text and illustrations regardless of their home culture.

We feel strongly about integrating diverse literature in all chapters and not isolating them into a separate chapter. Therefore, you will discover ways to select and use high-quality titles that reflect diversity throughout this book.

### Principle 3

- Students need to respond to literature in ways that celebrate their varied interests, learning styles, languages, cultural backgrounds, and developmental levels.
Guiding Principles for Creating and Implementing a Literature Program

- Teachers need to know multiple ways to respond to books that support children’s varied interests, learning styles, languages, cultural backgrounds, developmental levels, and cultural awareness.

As adults, we are often eager to share an exciting book that we just read. Interacting with and responding to literature is at the heart of literary experiences. When readers have meaningful and sustained engagement with literature, they are likely to become lifelong readers. Response is personal, but it is also cultural, experiential, and emotional. Learning about reader response and ways to support response in the classroom is the topic of Chapter 2.

**Principle 4**

- Students need to be in classrooms where literature is valued and celebrated.
- Teachers need to know how to create literature-rich classrooms while still addressing the Common Core State Standards.

How do you know you are in a classroom in which literature is valued? You see books readily available to students: on the classroom bookshelves, on windowsills, in baskets and bins, displayed on racks and tables, on student desks, and in the teacher’s work area. Additional evidence around the room shows that books play a vital role. Projects, posters, and other kinds of book responses, as well as sign-out sheets and charts of book recommendations, are all evidence that books are part of everyday living. Throughout *Teaching with Children’s Literature*, suggestions are offered about creating a literature-based, standards-based classroom.

**Principle 5**

- Students need to use technology meaningfully and efficiently to select books, access information about books and authors, become critical consumers of information, and extend their response and appreciation of literature.
- Teachers need to know how to use technology effectively to support children’s interactions and learning with literature.

Many students today are “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001). They have not known a world without cell phones, customized music play lists, mobile computing, and the Internet. Technology evolves, so students need meaningful ways to interact with technology that enhance literacy and learning. When teachers integrate multiple technologies into teaching and learning, students will be better prepared to be lifelong readers and critical consumers of information regardless of format. Twenty-first-century skills are referenced throughout.

**Reconciling Our Principles with the Requirements to Meet Standards**

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARD FEATURE #1**

**Determine Central Ideas or Themes of a Text (CCSS.RL.2)**

Expectations for each skill build on one another with increasingly complex understandings by grade level. For example, it is clear how understanding progresses year by year in the Career and College Readiness Anchor Standard’s (CCRA in CCSS) Reading Standard for Literature: Key Ideas and Details:

- **RL.K.2.** With prompting and support, identify the main topic and retell key details of a text.
- **RL.1.2.** Identify the main topic and retell key details of a text.
RL.2.2. Identify the main topic of a multiparagraph text as well as the focus of specific paragraphs within the text.

RL.3.2. Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

RL.4.2. Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.

RL.5.2. Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects on a topic; summarize the text.

RL.6.2. 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.

RL.7.2. 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.

RL.8.2. 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.

*Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* provides a useful example of how to determine themes and central ideas. This novel presses the reader to empathetically experience racism and, subsequently, to understand the risks of confronting that racism (Brooks & Hampton, 2005). Even with unfriendly visitors, Mrs. Logan teaches her seventh-grade class the bitter history of slavery. She demonstrates that facts alone are not sufficient; teachers must make important lessons of history real. Mildred Taylor’s description of her own father’s storytelling is echoed in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*—essential history comes not so much from textbooks but rather through oral traditions. Mrs. Logan continues her history lesson of the classroom by demonstrating that stories are not enough; action is needed.

By comparing and contrasting *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* (Curtis), teachers could guide students in a discussion of the authors’ intended and unintended impact on the readers (Barker, 2010).

Another important feature of the Common Core State Standards is that English language arts skills are considered critical in all content-area and technical subjects as teachers bring their discipline-specific skills to assist students in meeting the standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language.

*What* is taught should be viewed separately from *how* it is taught. Educators have the freedom to select the instructional strategies based on their own preferences and their students’ learning needs. In other words, implementing a standards-based classroom does not necessitate constraining educators’ wisdom, decision making, or creativity (Long, 2011).

The Common Core document explicitly states that the standards are a shared responsibility; they are goals, not the methodology for attaining them (Wilhelm, 2012). In this book, we outline instructional strategies using literature that are authentic and appropriate while fulfilling the requirement to cover content outlined in the standards. For example, using quality books when addressing the “Reading Standard for Literature: Key Ideas and Details” listed above will be much more engaging and effective than using dry, watered-down texts.
We believe that the progression of learning never stops—for students or for teachers. Teaching is a complex process, and teaching children is not easier because they are younger. Newly adopted standards, curricular choices, pedagogy, assessment, paperwork requirements, and many other expectations vie for time and attention. In addition, researchers continue to pose relevant and intriguing questions; their published findings present new opportunities or challenges for all educational levels.

Because of the weighty responsibility for children’s intellectual, social, and emotional growth, teachers must pursue lifelong learning. All educators should keep intellectually active by being readers themselves—studying professional journals and books, keeping current with children’s literature, attending conferences or workshops, joining professional book clubs, subscribing to literacy blogs or listservs, and taking graduate courses. Most schools encourage this growth by committing time and money for professional development. Be prepared to be an active participant by suggesting school or districtwide children’s literature topics and fostering collegial discussions (Sailors, 2009, p. 647). Becoming adept with the tools of today’s youth, especially those that are technology related, assist educators with motivational and constructivist tools. The Common Core State Standards articulate the expectation that all teachers in all disciplines should focus on reading skills and not be distracted by being too preoccupied with “covering the content.”

Not everyone views the Common Core in a positive light. “To think that every student in this country should be made to learn the same things is illogical on its face—it lacks face validity” (Tienken, 2011, p. 60). Eccles and Roeser’s (2011) review of current research on adolescents’ engagement notes that curriculum is only part of the picture; careful material selection and appropriate and scaffolded learning activities that demonstrate multiple perspectives are much more significant motivators (p. 226).

Other critics worry that the standards were crafted too quickly, that teachers are not involved adequately (Strauss, 2013), that current state standards are superior (Stotsky & Wurman, 2010), or that there is a dearth of attention given reader response (Wilson & Newkirk, 2011). Susi Long (2011) speculates that common standards will lead to inappropriate comparisons, eventually resulting in teachers being compensated on the basis of test scores or other “inappropriate assessment practices” (p. vii).

### 21st-Century Skills

Twenty-first-century students need a deeper understanding of the core concepts in the disciplines than they receive now. In addition, students need to be able to design, evaluate, and manage their own work. Students need to be able to frame, investigate, and solve problems using a wide range of information resources and digital tools.

(Linda Darling-Hammond, quoted in Brown, 2011, para. 6)

The abstract concepts of 21st-century skills expand the content knowledge of the Common Core State Standards into a broad range of literacies, specifically information literacy, critical thinking, communication, and problem solving. These skills move a student from knowing facts into the realm of **doing** and **applying**. This emphasis is not new; it is rooted in Socratic discourse, John Dewey’s educational theories, and Bloom’s taxonomy, among others, but they are newly emphasized.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2013) constructed a unified framework to help reconceptualize public education by joining core knowledge, new-century themes, media literacy, life and career skills, and support systems. Critics of this vision claim that focusing on the process of learning may detract from foundational disciplinary content. Traditional practices
of requiring simplistic book reports imprison students as passive learners, whereas acquiring 21st-century skills requires that students develop the ability to question, locate, analyze, synthesize, and create.

On this point, Linda Darling-Hammond (in Brown, 2011) stresses that forcing the debate into either/or terms distracts from the much-needed balance between content and process. She assigns a major portion of the negative international image of the United States to widely swinging pendulums of conflicting mandates. To Darling-Hammond, a partial solution lies in providing teachers with the adequate professional development time to align standards, instruction, and assessment. This book strives to meet this need.

Tech Click

The Partnership for 21st-Century Skills Framework has captured the interrelatedness of core subjects, professional development, media, curriculum, standards, and other essential educational components, a perfect lens for the Common Core State Standards. Common Sense Media is an excellent resource to bookmark. This rich and easy-to-access Web presence contains an array of movie and Web reviews as well as Graphite, a free service that “rates for learning potential” apps, games, and Web sites in the core subjects as well as arts and hobbies. Common Sense Media is also well known for its cyberbullying and digital citizenship materials.
Integrating Our Principles, Standards, and Exemplary Literature to Meaningfully and Authentically Connect Children and Books

Throughout this book, we address issues related to the teaching of children’s literature. In addition, each genre and format chapter contains teaching ideas for populations not specifically addressed in the Common Core State Standards. The teaching and response ideas demonstrate how to bring all children and books together while still meeting the mandates of the standards. The following sections provide a brief overview of these students.

Supporting Culturally Diverse Students with Children’s Literature

Using quality literature provides an engaging and appropriate instructional strategy that is useful for scaffolding (supporting) the learning of all students. However, teachers should be mindful of how and when to bring “culture” forward in classroom conversations.

Cultural authenticity is sometimes debated when considering literacy that reflects diversity. Mildred Taylor is an author of color writing a historical novel about the Logans, several generations of a free African American family that still carries the fresh memories of slavery. While using this book as part of a standards-based unit, care must be taken that the identity of the author be considered and that students of color not be used as “objects of a lesson on racism for white students” (Ricker-Wilson, 1998, p. 70).

Tech Click

All educators working with diverse students should visit the website of Reading Is Fundamental, the largest nonprofit children’s literacy organization in the U.S. For resources, including RIF’s activity sheets based on award-winning multicultural books for children, visit www.RIF.org. RIF’s mission: RIF is dedicated to motivating young children to read by working with children, their parents, and community members to make reading a fun and beneficial part of everyday life.

Supporting English Language Learners with Children’s Literature

In today’s classrooms, students not only come from diverse ethnic, racial, and national backgrounds but also arrive speaking multiple languages, often just beginning to speak English. “Nationally, 19 percent of children of immigrants age 5 to 17 were limited English proficient (LEP) in 2006” (Fortuny, Capps, Simms, & Chaudry, 2009, p. 7). Consequently, they need targeted support to build English reading and writing skills.

Much has been learned about the acquisition of languages, and the principles that apply to good language and literacy learning in one language apply to language and literacy learning in second, third, and fourth languages as well (Gersten & Geva, 2003). If you have not had the advantage of specialized training in teaching English language learners (ELLs), applying the theory and experience you have had with native-born English-speaking students will help you
Chapter 1 

Knowing Children's Literature and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

negotiate challenges with ELLs. Ask yourself the same types of questions you would pose for good reading and language arts teaching (Cox & Boyd-Batstone, 2009):

- How do I make language learning realistic, authentic, and relevant to learners?
- How do I provide meaningful and realistic practice required for any developing skill?
- How do I find texts that are developmentally appropriate but also meaningful and culturally relevant?
- How do I integrate reading, writing, listening, and speaking in all areas of my school curriculum?
- How can new technologies help me achieve these aims in engaging ways?

Today’s technology can be particularly helpful in supporting ELL students as they learn to speak, read, and write English. Many digital texts allow the student to click a word or phrase to hear its pronunciation or definition. Digital texts can hyperlink abstract concepts to background information. A curious ELL student reading an electronic text about an unfamiliar holiday, such as the Fourth of July, might wish to click links to understand fireworks or parades.

Naturally, teachers need to evaluate all resources before using them with students to verify that instructional purposes are met. For example, popular e-readers or online apps offer various modes of interaction; usually, the story can be heard read aloud in a page-by-page, linear format. In other modes, the child has full control over interactive components, both textual (e.g., definitional) and within the illustrations (a click makes the flower buds bloom). Grimshaw, Dungworth, McKnight, and Morris (2007) note that all digital books are not equivalent; educators should differentiate between types to determine their educational benefits.

We believe that this emphasis on critical issues will enhance the potential to transform conversations around books to life-changing ones.

Supporting All Students with Technology

Digital devices and online resources can play an important role in literature investigations. When educators understand the power of leveraging technology-mediated environments to enhance knowledge about books and authors, tech-adept students tend to become more motivated, such as melding technology and popular culture as a vehicle for responding to literature (Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, & Goldstone, 2006) ranging from digital storytelling (Czarnecki, 2009) to writing their own fan fiction (Black, 2009). If technology provides an inviting stepping-stone, we should use it to build students’ understanding of literature.

In subsequent chapters, you will discover ideas about using technology in support of literacy and a lifelong appreciation of literature. For example, students could hold virtual book discussions with peers in a different town, state, or even country via e-mail or blogs. They can create podcasts based on books they have “published” in the classroom. Reluctant readers might be motivated by reading a book using an electronic device or listening to a digital story recorded by volunteers. Some groups experience another “world” using virtual experiences based on books appropriate for their age level. Technology can also be a powerful tool for ELLs. Students could also set computer preferences to read aloud Web sites or books as text files.

Some adults feel that today’s students have nothing to learn about digital technology, yet the opposite is true. Students in prekindergarten through grade 8 may be voracious tech users, but they still require guidance to learn cognitive strategies for deep research, constructive analysis, and communication and collaborative skills (Carr, 2010).
These new literacies illustrate *intertextuality*, drawing "attention to how learners integrate across texts. Students must contend with both on and offline texts, classmates’ postings, and e-mail correspondence. In addition, new technologies allow for inclusion of complex nonverbal arrays within learning environments" (Van Meter & Firetto, 2008, pp. 1090–1091). The new literacies are exciting for most students and can greatly enhance their understanding of literature.

We have established that students need a wide variety of books that are interesting and challenging to them so that they maintain their interest in reading. When funds are scarce, we have several suggestions for bringing more high-quality books into your room. First, visit your local school and public libraries. In addition to maintaining extensive collections, libraries often provide additional services for teachers: longer borrowing periods, additional support in book selection, and a higher number of titles borrowed. Second, with many commercial book clubs, teachers receive bonus points based on the number of books students buy, points that can be used for additional books. Third, grants from a local business or foundation may be available. Even small grants of a few hundred dollars can go a long way when purchasing paperbacks or secondhand books from online booksellers. Check with your local bookstore, as it may offer educational discounts. Some schools maintain a wish list of books that teachers would like so that during book fairs or other events, parents and community members can consult this list and may purchase books for the school as gifts. Other districts sponsor programs for parents to purchase classroom or library books in honor of a child’s birthday or in memory of a relative.

Controversial Issue: Movies, Commercialization, and Children’s Literature

Movie mogul Walt Disney did much in the 1930s to market—with strict copyright protection—-toys, dolls, games, and even toothbrushes based on his studio’s version of fairy tales and classic books. "Increasingly, children’s consumer culture was part of a separate fantasy world, which children and the merchandisers alone understood and which was designed to stimulate un-ending desire for more goods—even as it provided children with a measure of autonomy" (Consumer Culture, 2008).

The blatant invasion of mass culture into classrooms includes sticker collections, product-oriented “books,” or texts based on blockbuster movies (Star Wars), candy (Hershey’s Kiss math series), or expensive dolls (American Girl). This growing encroachment works in reverse as well; book publishers reach out to toy companies in order to expand their product lines. A quick Web search reveals proliferating stuffed animals and other toys based on book characters: Harry Potter (Rowling), Frederick (Lionni), Lily (Henkes), Arthur (Brown), Clifford, The Big Red Dog (Bridwell), Paddington (Bond), and Curious George (Rey). Daniel Hade (2001) views such merchandizing as a way for the shrinking number of publishers to sell “meaning”: “The brand doesn’t represent the product, the product represents the brand. Thus, a book becomes one more kind of product that carries the brand’s meanings” (p. 162).

The lure of corporate sponsorship may be a special enticement for authors of series books. The Baby-Sitters Club characters and plots are featured in a mystery board game, learning adventures, dolls, and collectible card sets. Commercialization of children’s books is not just an American phenomenon; Moomins, characters in the charming series by Tove Jansson, have sparked museums, theme parks, and merchandizing specifically in Finland and Japan (Classroom Bookshelf, 2010).
As a related issue, some authors consider portraying a hero or heroine as using a specific brand name or a product line. Teachers can encourage reader discussions regarding the value added by fleshing out characters’ personalities or the detracting with commercialization. Motoko Rich (2008) elaborates by comparing how the authors of two preteen books handle the dilemma.

Renowned author-illustrator Uri Shulevitz (2004) notes that an increasing number of books are marketed solely on the author’s prior fame and not based on intrinsic worthiness (*Budgie the Little Helicopter* by the Duchess of York, Katie Couric’s promotional poetry, or Madonna’s preachy *Lotas de Casha*). Often, such books emanate not from an author’s compelling desire to craft a fine story but rather as a source of income. Phrases such as ‘‘books as merchandise,’ ‘blockbusters,’ and ‘products’ resound throughout the country. Children’s books are joining mass culture” (Shulevitz, 2004, p. 24). “In our highly commercialized culture, children reading becomes one more instance of children consuming” (Hade, 2001, p. 164).

Remembering that our job is to lead students to quality literature, we may find that reluctant readers will enjoy and appreciate books after they have seen the movie (*Harry Potter*). We are not advocating that a movie adaptation can replace reading literature, but movies do have the potential to stimulate students to read the book. Discussions about similarities and differences can make the reading experience richer. On the other hand, a critical adult eye may disparage “books” whose sole purpose is to promote purchases. For the same reason that we see a place for popular series in children’s reading lives, we view books with movie ties as having value when students choose them.

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**Summary**

- **What is children’s literature?** Children’s literature encompasses the world of books and includes materials written by skilled authors who generally specialize in the art of writing for children and by illustrators who add special perspectives. These include formats such as picture books, poetry, and e-books and all genres, such as traditional literature and nonfiction.

- **Why use literature with children?** Literature is vital to children’s lives as they are entertained and educated. Stories shared with the family, in school settings, or at the library, form an important foundation for literacy and lifelong learning. Using high-quality literature fits well with the Common Core State Standards.

- **How is children’s literature organized?** Teachers need to gain an understanding and appreciation for the various genres (traditional literature, fantasy and science fiction, contemporary realistic fiction, historical fiction, and nonfiction) and various formats (picture books and poetry). Appropriate examples of each are provided.

- **What are the basic criteria for evaluating children’s literature?** We outline guidelines for evaluating fiction based on characterization, plot, setting, theme, style, and point of view.

- **What beliefs and principles guide teachers as they create and implement a standards-based literature program?** Children should have access to quality books: literature that is personally meaningful and fits their developmental level. They should be able to find people like themselves in illustrations and stories. Professional development is a key element in synthesizing multiple requirements and expanding the realm of books. Technology is part of everyday life, and in teaching and learning about literature, online and other technological resources play an ever-increasing role.
All educators can assist children in thinking critically about what they read and take appropriate action based on their conclusions. Educators need to understand the values of the community in which they work and be prepared to support democracy and critical thinking.

Questions/Activities to Invite Thinking, Writing, and Conversation About the Chapter

1. Think about your childhood experiences with children's literature. Write a “Reading Autobiography” that describes your feelings about books in school or on your own. Alternatively, create a podcast, video clip, or PowerPoint presentation that uses media to communicate your memories.

2. It is important to become actively involved with any set of standards; otherwise, they will feel remote from daily life. Look at the list of the Common Core State Standards in this chapter and unpack them by enumerating what students will need to know (nouns) and what students should be able to do (verbs). Brainstorm the activities that would demonstrate successful mastery. Remember to include teachers in disciplines other than literacy. (We have witnessed students as young as first grade who take responsibility for their own learning by unpacking standards and designing and implementing appropriate activities and products for assessment.)

3. Write “I Believe” statements that addresses the principles summarized in Figure 1.4. At the end of the semester, revisit this piece and make changes based on your new knowledge and understanding.

4. Set up a blog or a wiki to collect ideas from the entire class that link children's literature, media, technology, and the Common Core State Standards. Categorize each idea under a broad topic that makes this collaborative work more useful.