

Reading in the Middle

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The purpose of this group is to provide a network for middle level teachers to share information, ideas, activities, strategies, and techniques. To disseminate pertinent information and research on middle school reading, serve as a forum for expressing varying viewpoints on middle school reading, and promote an interest in further research in the field of middle level reading

Content Area Instruction and the Common Core Standards

The focus of this issue of *Reading in the Middle* is to continue our discussion of the Common Core State Standards in the middle school classroom.

Vicky Zygouris-Coe focuses in on Disciplinary Literacy in Science. Her column describes key skills and strategies for helping students with close reading in science.

The feature article of this issue addresses the challenges of the Common Core Standards for Middle School Students. Lauren Leslie and Jo-Anne Schudt Caldwell present how a formative assessment on content area literacy can support

teachers and students as they work to become successful with the CCSS.

Melanie Koss highlights novels written in multiple perspectives. The complexity of these novels fit the standards of the Common Core. Teachers can use this list to support the implementation of complex text.

The final focus of this edition is to highlight the Middle School Reading Special Interest Group's upcoming presentations at the International Reading Association Conference. The presentations will focus on building teachers' knowledge of texts

that support teaching under the Common Core State Standards and strategies for integrating writing throughout instruction.

First read Erica Perl's tips for writing. "Erica S. Perl is an award-winning children's book author" who shares her love of writing and tips for writing with teachers and students throughout the country.

Then, read about Laura Robb. "Author, teacher, coach, and speaker, Laura Robb has completed 43 years of teaching in grades 4-8. She presently coaches teachers in reading/writing workshop."



Eye on Disciplinary Literacy

Column by Vicky Zygouris-Coe, Ph.D., University of Central Florida

Topic: Disciplinary Literacy in Science and the Common Core State Standards

In 2014, 45 states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity will be implementing the Common Core State Standards (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are designed to focus on student college and career preparation, are clear, specific, rigorous, and coherent and are also internationally benchmarked. The CCSS focus on results, present an integrated model of literacy roadmap, but do not specify how to teach. Instruction is left up to the teachers, the informed practitioners.

What are key shifts of the CCSS?

Students are expected to do the following:

- Read more complex texts.
- Read more informational texts.
- Read, comprehend, analyze, and argue about ideas across multiple texts.
- Learn how to do close reading of texts (staircase of complexity).
- Answer text-dependent questions.
- Build a strong general and domain-specific vocabulary.
- Write to argue, analyze, and synthesize.
- Build literacy and content knowledge and skills in tandem.

- Collaborate, problem-solve, and negotiate meaning with others.
- Engage in evidence-based arguments (orally and in writing).
- Become prepared for college, career, and workforce demands.

Based on this short, but demanding and complex list of knowledge and skills students need to know and be able to do, what type of instruction will they need to have? Instruction that is rigorous, instruction that is discipline-specific and teaches them how to read and think about disciplinary texts, and instruction that promotes metacognitive thinking. For the purpose of this article, I will focus on science and what it means to teach science in middle grades through a disciplinary literacy framework in the era of the CCSS. I will also raise related instructional questions and will offer suggestions for reflection.

Science is the process of discovering how the world works and not just a collection of facts and theories. Questioning, inquiring, searching for evidence, analyzing evidence, and evaluating facts and ideas that are supported by evidence are core goals and processes in science. Reading and writing are not foreign to scientists who spend most of their time reading (text and data) and writing (about text and data). The ability to read science materials/texts requires students to read procedural information, graphical displays, and mathematical expressions.

One of the challenges science teachers face is how to foster these disciplinary skills without sacrificing content.

If you wish to strengthen your students' comprehension of science texts and knowledge of science, consider teaching them about text patterns in science texts. Major text structure patterns in science texts include the following:

- Classification
- Process-description
- Fact-statement
- Problem-solution
- Experiment-instruction
- Combination of all of the above

In addition, teach students how to read and comprehend texts at a deeper level, generate questions, plan and carry out investigations, analyze and interpret data, engage in argument about science, develop and use academic vocabulary, write, and communicate ideas and information in disciplinary-specific ways. For students to become competent in science, they need to develop knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that are specific to the discipline (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Zygouris-Coe, 2012).

To teach in a disciplinary-specific way and in a way that promotes critical understanding requires a learning framework that goes beyond strategy instruction. Think about your role and the role of your students in the learning

process. Reflect on your instruction—what will you need to change, improve, adjust, or eliminate in order to meet these demands on students so that all can learn and succeed in your classroom? Are you teaching in a way that helps students connect scientific ideas and concepts? How do you plan to use close reading in your classroom? Do you teach students about text structure of science texts? In what ways do you build students’ academic vocabulary? What do you do to teach students how to generate good questions? How much time do you spend teaching students how to use evidence from texts to support their conclusions? What role does academic discourse play in your classroom? How about collaborative learning? And, what do you do to teach students to monitor and self-regulate their own understanding? Is your classroom environment conducive to science learning and does it motivate students to want to learn more about science?

Developing students’ disciplinary literacy knowledge, skills, and processes in science is no small feat, and it cannot be achieved through a set of strategies or instructional “add-ons.” To prepare students for college and career readiness, we have to make sure that we are teaching in ways that are specific to scientific inquiry.

The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking.—Albert Einstein

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Challenges of the Common Core State Standards for Middle School Students: A preliminary view

Lauren Leslie, Professor Emerita, Marquette University

JoAnne Schudt Caldwell, Professor Emerita, Cardinal Stritch University

One of the major concerns about the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is assessment. How will we know when our students have *met* the standards? Two major consortia, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC), are responsible for the design of assessments that measure these Standards. Although their assessment systems vary, both consortia agree that their assessments will include open-ended questions and will be administered as well as scored online. Reactions from educators focus on the online method of assessment as it poses a significant resource issue for most schools, as few schools have a sufficient number of computers to allow for simultaneous online assessment of all students in a school (CCSS, March, 2010, p. 4).

The assessments developed to measure the CCSS demand closer reading than the current tests designed for adolescents. For example, the majority of current assessments require students to extract literal information from the text and to make inferences. However, none of the tests measure abilities such as, evaluating an author's point of view or writing an essay in response to a piece of literature (Morsy, Kieffer, & Snow, 2010). These authors were also disappointed to find that none of the tests attempted to measure content area reading abilities (e.g., science, history). Rather current assessments that include different content areas average these area scores. Therefore, determining

students' abilities in each area, and comparing scores across areas are impossible. The fact that the CCSS in English-Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (2010) are different for literature and informational text suggests that the authors believed that some skills are more important or are measured differently in one content area than another.

The computer-based assessments of the CCSS will be the high-stakes test used by states to measure students' abilities and thus schools' effectiveness. However, we believe that providing teachers with formative assessments, which help them, understand how the CCSS can be authentically and practically measured in their classrooms, is critical. For this reason, we developed a formative assessment titled, *Content Area Reading Comprehension Inventory (CARCI)*, designed to address the weaknesses of current assessments of adolescent literacy and attempt to assess students' abilities to answer CCSS-type questions. The *CARCI* is currently being piloted and thus, the purpose of this article is to explain our procedures and report what we have learned to date about how middle-school students respond to standards-based questions.

Methods

Materials

We searched for appropriate materials from Literature, History (World and U.S.) and Science (Life and Earth) textbooks pub-

lished since 2005 by Pearson Education as texts representative of materials used in schools. The selection of literature passages was guided by the following criteria. The text was 1.) representative of the type of genre included in the anthology; 2.) long enough to write questions that assessed several of the CCSS; and, 3.) short enough that students could read the passage and answer the questions within a 50-minute class period. These guidelines resulted in short stories that varied in length from almost 2000 to 2800 words. The limited testing-period restricted our use to one literature passage. The criteria used to select the history and science texts were identical to criteria #2 and #3 above, and also included the criteria that the passages be conceptually related within a grade level. For example, the life science passages selected for middle school were about organ systems (i.e., digestive, muscular, and respiratory).

There were many challenges in attempting to measure all of the CCSS. Figure 1 presents the ten standards written for the reading of Literature and Informational Text for Grades 7 and 8 (CCSS, 2010) and our notes on whether we were successful in measuring them. For example, Standard #5, analysis of text structure in literature, was not assessed because we chose to use only short stories, and not poems or drama. Similarly, Standard #6, point of view, was not assessed in science because current science texts are written from one authoritative point of view (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2012). In addition, Standard #7 required students to compare different media. Budgetary con-

straints prevented us from developing a multi-media assessment; therefore, the standard was not assessed in middle school literature and was modified in history and science to include charts and graphs rather than alternative media. Standard #8, which involved assessing the validity of an argument, was not possible to assess using the textbooks we sampled in history or science. For example, despite teaching the scientific method, current science textbooks do not teach students how to assess whether or not a scientist's conclusion is valid based on empirical findings. Instead, texts present the scientific method and well-documented concepts for students to learn. Similarly, current history texts do not explain how to evaluate arguments and how to use criteria for so doing (Shanahan, 2012). The texts simply present a historical account seemingly without bias. Because of the current state of affairs in history textbooks, we chose excerpts from original documents that fit conceptually with our texts. For example, a U.S. History text on the Bill of Rights was paired with an excerpt from a letter of James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, October 17, 1788, that enumerated his thoughts about the value of the Bill of Rights. Students were asked to read the excerpt from the letter and explain two reasons or arguments that Madison presented for having, or for not having, a Bill of Rights. Then they were asked to select one argument and tell why they agreed or disagreed with it.

Finally, as Figure 1 illustrates, Standard #9 was not assessed because either it required a comparison of authors or full texts, which would have made the *CARCI* exceed our criteria of one 50-minute period. Standard #10 required the use of grade-level text and we met that by choosing materials from content texts designated for those grade levels.

Types and Format of questions

We inserted questions throughout the text with a few at the end. The questions designed to assess Standard #1 stated an inference from the text and asked students to find textual evidence supporting the inference. For example, the question would ask, "What evidence in the text supports? We chose this method because asking students to draw an inference could result in many different inferences and make the responses much harder to score.

The question used to assess Standard #2 was designed directly from the standard and was expressed as, "What is the theme (Literature) or central idea (Informational) in this text/or segment of text?" In addition to the question, we asked students to summarize the text or parts of it.

Questions used to assess Standard #3 were based on the major element of the standard that asked students to examine interactions among characters or ideas in the text, how incidences in a story move the plot along, or for informational text how the text made connections among and distinctions between ideas in the text. The questions for literature began with the words *analyze how* or *explain how*. The questions for informational text also used the term *analyze* and depending on the text, it involved several categories from the question taxonomy proposed by Graesser, Ozuru, and Sullins (2010): comparison, causal antecedent, causal consequence, instrumental/procedural, and enablement. Thus, the questions took the following forms for informational text. Analyze how X and Y are alike or different. Analyze why X occurred. Analyze how X occurred. Analyze what would happen if X_____.

We assessed Standard #4 by asking students to explain the meanings of words or phrases in the context of a sentence or paragraph. The challenge we faced designing these questions was words selection. What criteria could we use to justify the selection of one word over another? As directed by the Standards, at least one question asked about figurative language in the literature texts. On informational text, the words came from Levels 1-10 of the Academic Word List (AWL) developed from academic text (Coxhead, 2000). The AWL represents the levels of occurrence of the words across content areas. For example, the word *circumnavigate* would not be on the list because it occurs only in science. However, the words *analyze* and *research* occur frequently enough in several content areas to be listed in Level 1. We also examined each potential word's frequency (Zeno, Ivens, Millard, & Rajduvuri, 1995) and included words of moderate frequency when possible. Finally, the primary determinant for choice was the presence of sufficient context to allow the student to determine word meaning.

We assessed Standard #5 in informational text by asking students to identify the structure of text sections from a list of five possible structures including description, explanation, cause-effect, problem-solution and comparison-contrast (Akhondi, Aziz, Malayeri & Samad, 2011; Meyer, 2003; Meyer & Poon, 2001) and to give a reason why they chose a specific structure. An example question was, "Which text structure best explains how the author organized the above passage? "
____description of important features

- ___ *explanation of steps in a sequence*
- ___ *account of cause and effect*
- ___ *explanation of problem and solution*
- ___ *comparison/contrast of two or more things*

“Give a reason for your answer. For example if you chose description, tell what is being described. If you chose sequence, list two steps. For cause and effect, state a cause or effect mentioned in the text. For problem and solution, tell what the problem is or describe the solution. For comparison, tell what is being compared or contrasted.”

We assessed Standard #6 in literature and history by asking students to identify an author or character’s point of view (literature). For history, like science, the author/text’s purpose clearly was to inform; however, the passages described the purpose of individuals (Roman patricians, the founding fathers) etc., so history questions for Standard #6 focused on such components.

We modified questions designed to assess Standard #7 from the language of the Standard to assess the interpretation of visual information such as charts or graphs in informational text. This modification occurred because our assessment could not include video components due to budgetary constraints.

Questions for Standard #8 in history were phrased as, “explain two arguments made by the author, then choose one of them and explain why you agree or disagree with it.”

Teacher Review

Although we were careful to write questions that we believed met the intent of the standards, we did not trust our limited experience, so we recruited teachers to review our materials (Cresswell, 2009). We sent them three passages including answer keys designed to be used at their grade level. We asked them to address two questions for each of the 10 questions and the summary from each text. The two questions were:

Does this question meet the Common Core State Standard listed?

Is the answer provided in the Answer Key sufficient as a correct answer? If not, provide alternative answers.

Fifty-four public school teachers reviewed materials at their grade level. The feedback provided by the teachers was invaluable. Suggestions for rephrasing of questions and additional answers were the most common type of feedback. We in-

serted the questions throughout the text as opposed to placement at the end of the passage and teachers often suggested a different placement to provide more contexts for answering the question. After examining science and history text, teachers recommended that we limit number of structure choices for grade 4 from five to three and to insert places for student to check their choice of structure as opposed to writing it out.

Rarely did teachers question the relationship of the question to the specific standard. However, when they did, they noted that the question only partially addressed the standard. For example, Standard #4 for Grade 8 states, “Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts. The first iteration of this question did not include the cumulative impact of word choice on tone, prompting the middle school teachers to draw this omission to our attention. It was gratifying that teachers were very interested in participating in our pilot project.

Student Pilot

After revising our materials based on teacher feedback, we solicited the same teachers to test the materials with their students. Students were asked to read the texts and answer the questions. The middle school data reported here came from 11 middle school classrooms from districts ranging in size from 740 to 13,000 students and resulted in data from 260 7th graders and 201 8th graders, for a total of 461 students.

Scoring. Each question had one or two parts and one point was awarded for each correct answer. An example of a one-part question was, “Describe the evidence that most strongly suggests that the narrator is crazy.” An example of a two-part question was, “Analyze how your view of the narrator compares with his view of himself and explain how this increases the story’s suspense.” On several questions from a history passage, we asked students to provide two sources of evidence that supported an inference. Alternatively, a question could be phrased as: “Analyze why patricians and plebeians were against each other. Give two reasons.” Students received one point for each correct reason given.

As we were scoring the answers to questions, we found numerous correct answers that differed from the answers on the Answer key. This occurred because students' manners of expression were quite different from ours. For example, on a question asking students to identify the theme of Poe's *The Tell Tale Heart* the answer on the Answer Key was, "*The theme that emerges is despite careful planning a murderer often either gives him/herself away by his/her own behavior OR his/her guilt may eventually consume him/her..*" An answer provided by several students was "*What goes around comes around.*" Although this response is not as detailed as the ones we had written, it sums up the theme rather nicely.

Scoring students' summaries was another area we found that needed improvement. Our initial scoring system counted each clause in a short-story summary that matched a similar clause in the text. Summaries of nonfiction text counted matches between the proposition in the summary and the one in the text (Kintsch, 2003). However, after looking at student summaries, scoring changes became necessary. Students' summaries of literature sometimes contained clauses of minor importance to the overall story and these were scored equally with the clauses of major importance. Matching to Kintsch's detailed units was unwieldy and often ignored some perfectly valid paraphrases and/or acceptable content that indicated student understanding. Students' summaries of informational text were very sparse and often did not answer the question. For example, the summary question for a seventh grade US history text was, "Summarize what the text says about the different compromises that played an important role in the process of forming our Constitution." An example of a student summary was, "Compromise played a very important role. It saved us from bad fights. It allowed people to have a voice like the small states. Compromise solved important problems. It lets both sides come to an agreement. Without compromise we would be a mess." This summary does not address the process of forming the Constitution except for one reference to "small states. Furthermore, it only addresses the concept of compromise in general and even this response is not text based.

Based on student data we decided to write a model summary of each text including only the major causal events in a story (van den Broek & Trabasso, 1986) and the main ideas and supporting details in history and science. Therefore, we scored student summaries by matching their statements with the model summary. The words used in the summary needed not be the

same as the text, but the same underlying semantic content was required to earn points.

Results

We present findings that were consistent over all content areas first, then findings specific to only certain content areas, and finally the students' performance on the CCSS.

A consistent finding was a difference in students' accuracy in answering one-part versus two-part questions. Recall that students received one point if they answered part of a two-part question correctly. We conducted an analysis of these question types for each middle-school text using paired-sample *t*-tests. Of the eleven texts on which we collected data, the percent correct on six of them was significantly greater on one-part questions (mean = 54%) than on two-part questions (mean = 37%). Typically, students answered the basic question in the two-part question, but did not provide evidence from the text to support their answer. On three texts the differences were not significant (means = 45% and 44%) and on two texts answers were higher on two-part questions (mean = 69%) than on one-part questions (mean = 51%).

Another consistent finding illustrated that while students' ability to answer questions across the content areas were similar, their abilities to summarize what they read were greater on literature texts (mean = 27%) than on informational texts (mean = 12%). In addition, students' interpretation of what *to summarize the text* meant, varied across literature and informational texts. Most students summarized the short stories by citing the most important events and occasionally students provided their reaction or opinion of the story. In contrast, many summaries of informational text contained material that was in the text, but not related to the summary question. In addition, students often included information that was not present in the text; we can only hypothesize that such information came from prior knowledge. Erroneous information was also included and suggested lack of understanding of text content. The poor summaries indicated either a misunderstanding of what *to summarize* means, misinterpretation of the question, or a lack of experience with writing text-based summaries.

Table 1 presents the mean proportion correct on the CCSS by content area (Literature, History, and Science). A quick glance at the means in the Table suggests that our middle school students achieved

above what NAEP results would predict (Fang, 2012). An examination of the grand means for the four standards measured in all content areas shows that Standards #1 and #3 are met by about 50% of the students, and Standard #4 is met by almost 60% of the students. Students' ability to meet Standard #2 was lower and clearly differed between literature and informational text. Questions that addressed Standards #2 (theme or main idea) and #3 (Analyze how elements or ideas in the text were related) were easier to answer in literature than in informational

Table 1

Means and standard deviations of Proportion Correct on Standards by Content Area

Standard	Content Area			Grand Mean
	Literature ^a	History ^b	Science ^c	
#1	.52 (.30)	.49 (.43)	.64 (.39)	.53
#2	.44 (.49)	.25 (.43)	.36 (.48)	.38
#3	.51 (.35)	.46 (.32)	.42 (.29)	.49
#4	.60 (.36)	.58 (.33)	.56 (.34)	.59
#5	na	.44 (.40)	.58 (.41)	
#6	.46 (.34)	.37 (.46)	na	
#7	na	.58 (.47)	.64 (.43)	
Grand Mean	.51	.45	.53	

^a n = 316 on Literature

^b n = 120 on History

^c n = 66 on Science

text. No other differences were significant.

Summarizing literature is easier because literature is usually written with a uniform structure of character, problem, events and resolution. In contrast, informational text writers use many structures, so summarization involves a variety of different structures also. The same five structures that underlie expository text apply to the structure of a text-based summary: description, cause/effect, problem/solution/ sequence and comparison. The majority of science summaries were not acceptable because they were not text-based or they did not address the question. An examination of acceptable summaries showed that students followed the structure suggested by the question stem. While students seldom included an introductory statement that indicated purpose and/or structure, they used appropriate signal words. For sequence, their summaries contained such words as “first,” “last,” “next,” and “finally.” For comparison, summaries included “is” versus “is not” and sentence constructions where the first clause described one entity and the second clause, joined by “and” or “while,” provided a contrast.

History versus Science

Students' abilities to answer standards-based questions differed in history compared to science on Standard #1 (provide evidence for an inference) and Standard #5 (text structure) and were easier in science than in history. Examination of the history questions suggests that while text justification for the answer was present in the text, it was more evident in science texts. While one could argue that the topic of the Constitutional Convention, for example, was conceptually less difficult than bodily systems and/or fossil formation, evidence was not as clearly signaled. That is, determining evidence involved more than just locating signal words and/or examples. For example, evidence that state population did not play a role in the ratification process was indicated by the following sentence: “Without the ratification of nine states, the Constitution would not go into effect.” Note that the text did not contain the word “population.” The reader must infer that number of states was the key issue and work backward to infer that population was not. This observation reveals the naturally occurring differences among texts.

The structure question for informational text offered students five choices (description, sequence, cause-effect, problem/solution and comparison/contrast) and asked them to explain their choice. Each passage present-

ed a choice of two or three possible answers because more than one structure was applicable. Topic headings in the science passages clearly indicated description as a structure option. Students who wrote correct answers primarily chose description for all science passages suggesting that they attended to headings. Students were also better able to explain why they chose description as a structure. Another possible explanation may be that students expect science to describe things. Topic headings in history text clearly signaled either description or comparison as possible structures. The average number of correct answer for structure choice on the history passages was relatively similar with no distinct advantage demonstrated for any structure.

Implications for Instruction

The first implication of our results is that middle school students need instruction in using text data to support answers to questions. Students often answered a question correctly but provided no text evidence to support it. This occurred most frequently in two part questions. Although students received one point if they answered a two-part question correctly, in order to receive full credit they needed to provide text evidence to support their answers. The CCSS are clear that students understand “what the author says and be able to defend their opinions and ideas with evidence from the text (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2012, p. 108).” We recommend that this practice become an essential element in classroom discussions.

Furthermore, our data suggest that middle school students need more instruction, scaffolding, and practice in determining the main idea of an informational text and in writing a summary of informational text. Summarization has been described as one of the most complex of comprehension skills perhaps because it requires that students understand what is important in what they read, synthesize their understanding, and express those ideas in writing. One way of teaching summarization is to ask students to use key vocabulary (given to them) to write a three-sentence summary (Buehl, 2011, pg. 239). For example, a teacher might choose five central themes of U.S. history: opportunity, rights, equality, democracy and liberty. Then he or she would write questions such as, “What was the impact of the Civil War on opportunity? Identify and explain how each of the following increased or decreased opportunity: the 15th Amendment, the Freedman’s Bureau, and sharecropping (Buehl, 2011, pg. 239).” Also recommended, is providing students with the vocabu-

lary to use in their summary, in this case *opportunity* and *important events of the post-Civil War era* give them a place to start in writing a summary. Another suggestion made by Buehl (2011) provides students with a list of terms and requires them to write a summary using the terms in the order listed.

Our findings implied another area of needed instruction. That is learning to use the structure of texts to understand the main ideas and write summaries. The examples given in the paragraph above show two common structures in history: cause-effect and sequence. Common structures in science include not only description, but also problem-solution and cause-effect. Teaching students to identify these structures and using them to summarize their understanding of texts will avoid the tendency to try to remember everything they read rather than the important ideas. We suggest that instruction in informational text structure be integrated with summary writing, as both involve the same basic frameworks.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The limitations of this study are many. Our findings might be different if other passages from literature, science, and history were used and students of higher or lower academic ability might have scored differently on the Standards. Although we have studied inter-rater reliability using the answer keys for sixth grade passages, and the inter-scorer agreement ranged from 87% - 93%, we do not have such data on the answer keys for middle school passages. Therefore, teachers’ ability to use our answer keys on the middle school passages has not been determined to be reliable. We were not able to measure all of the Common Core State Standards, so students’ abilities to compare and contrast authors or texts (Standard #9) as well as their ability to compare information from different forms of media (Standard #7) were not assessed.

We are continuing to pilot the *CARCI* with students ranging from fourth grade to ninth grade. We are continuing to learn from our data how to ask questions so that students recognize when text support is required. We are also learning the areas where students appear able to address the CCSS and where they struggle. One research area important for the future is to determine whether standards-based instruction can be useful in raising students’ achievement. However, to answer that question reliable and valid measures of students’ abilities to answer standards-type questions are needed. Research on the assessment of CCSS is in its infancy so more research on formative and summative assessment is needed. Research on students’ abilities to acquire information from different media is vitally important in our multime-

dia age. Computer administered assessments should be able to assess multimedia learning, but research is sorely needed. The CCSS provide challenges for teachers, students and assessment designers. We must all work together to meet them.

Figure 1.

Description of Question Stems for Standards # 1 through #10 for 7th and 8th Grade.

Standard #1: Provide evidence for inference. Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support (or at 8th grade, that most strongly supports) analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Standard #2: Main idea or theme and summary.

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.

Standard #3: Interaction of elements Analyze how....

Literature- particular elements of a story or drama interact, (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot) or for 8th grade particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story propel the action, reveal aspects of a character or provoke a decision.

Informational text- interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events) or for 8th grade how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).

Standard #4: Word meaning from context. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text.

Literature: analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds on a specific section of a story; or for 8th grade, analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

Informational text: technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone (and for 8th grade, including analogies or allusions to other texts).

Standard #5: Text structure Analyze how.....

Literature: how a drama's or poem's form or structure (e.g., soliloquy, sonnet) contributes to its meaning. Or for 8th grade, Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style. Not applicable to a single text style.

Informational text: Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas. Or, for 8th grade, analyze in detail the structure of a specific paragraph in a text, including the role of particular sentences in developing and refining a key concept.

Standard #6: Point of View Analyze how

Literature: an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text, or for 8th grade how differences in points of view between the author or narrator and the audience or reader create such effects as suspense or humor.

Informational text: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others, or for 8th grade how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints. Note: this is not applicable to science in which texts are written from a single authoritative point of view.

Standard #7: Compare and Contrast

Literature: a written story, drama, or poem to its audio, filmed, staged, or multimedia version, analyzing the effects of techniques unique to each medium (e.g., lighting, sound, color, or camera focus and angles in a film). Note: not applicable to a print based assessment.

Informational text: a text to an audio, video, or multimedia version of the text, analyzing each medium's portrayal of the subject (e.g., how the delivery of a speech affects the impact of the words). Note: not assessed in this way, rather the assessed through examining the use of visual versus text information.

Standard 8: Evaluate arguments Not applicable to literature

Informational text: Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims (and for 8th, recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced).

Standard 9: Compare and contrast different texts

Literature: Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history, or at 8th, analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new. Note: Not applicable to a single text.

Informational text: Analyze how two or more authors writing about the same topic shape their presentations of key information by emphasizing different evidence or advancing different interpretations of facts. Or, for 8th, analyze a case in which two or more texts provide conflicting information on the same topic and identify where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation. Note: Not applicable to a single text.

Standard 10:

By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature (including stories, dramas, and poems) and literary nonfiction in the grades 6–8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range, or for 8th, independently and proficiently.

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Call for Manuscripts

The International Reading Association's Middle School Reading Special Interest Group seeks manuscripts for *Reading in the Middle* an independent peer-reviewed publication. The journal publishes two issues a year sharing original contributions on all facets of language arts learning, teaching, and research focusing on young adolescents. *Reading in the Middle* offers middle level educators a practical guide to best practices in middle schools.

Reading in the Middle disseminates pertinent information and research on middle school reading, serves as a forum for expressing varying viewpoints on middle school reading, and promotes an interest in further research in the field of middle level reading. Manuscripts focus on quality programs, promising classroom practice, middle level author viewpoints, book lists for the middle level student, and teaching resources.

Presenters at the annual conference as well as other recent professional development events are invited to submit articles based on their work.

The deadline for articles is February 15, with Spring publication scheduled for May/June.

***Reading in the Middle* follows specific submission guidelines. Articles should:**

- be approximately 3,500 words and, when appropriate, include photocopied (originals will be requested upon acceptance) samples of students' work, photographs of students working, charts, diagrams, or other visuals (work submitted by students may be of any length up to 3,500 words);
- offer specific classroom practices that are grounded in research;
- be double-spaced with 1-inch margins in 12-point font;
- include 100-word abstract and bulleted list of key points;
- follow the current edition of the publication manual of the *American Psychological Association*—please do not include an abstract, footnotes, endnotes, or author identification within the body of the text.
- identify any excerpts from previously published sources; should their use require a reprint fee, the fee payment is the responsibility of the author.

To submit a manuscript:

- submit a copy of your manuscript for blind review as a Microsoft Word file to MSRSIG@gmail.com attach a separate cover letter that includes your name, affiliation, home and work addresses and telephone numbers, fax number, email address, and issue for which you are submitting. Your name should not appear anywhere in the text.

Complex Texts: Novels with Multiple Perspectives and/or Narrators

Column by: Melanie D. Koss, Ph.D., Northern Illinois University

On everyone's minds, these days is the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and how we can best incorporate them into our teaching. One of the critical components of the CCSS is the idea of measuring and focusing on text complexity. Text complexity can be defined and measured in a multitude of ways, including looking at the variety of perspectives told in a piece of literature. The use of multiple narrators or the telling of a narrative from multiple perspectives adds a level of text complexity by developing students' critical thinking skills through reading and interacting with multifaceted texts. The following titles incorporate different points of view through the use of multiple narrators and/or multiple perspectives and can create more challenging reading experiences for students.

Because of Mr. Terrupt by Rob Buyea. 2010. Random House. (978-0375858246).

Seven fifth grade students share their own perspectives of fitting in and learning about their lives due to the influence of their new teacher, Mr. Terrupt. When a prank goes awry, students realize just how much they have learned from their teacher and their peers. Told in short chapters and alternating narratives and organized by months of the school year, characters share a bit about their home lives and backgrounds that set them apart. It is only by the reader connecting the narratives that the whole story is revealed.

Candymakers by Wendy Mass. 2010. Little Brown Books for Young Readers. (978-0316002592).

A candymaking contest is on, providing the chance of a lifetime for four lucky contestants. Logan, Miles, Daisy, and Philip all have their own reasons for competing and wanting to win. But what happens when the factory's secret ingredient

is stolen? Each of the four children tells their perspective in alternating chapters as they work to solve the mystery. Stand-out features include rich descriptions and strong character building, as well as a growing pace with a satisfying conclusion.

Criss Cross by Lynne Rae Perkins. 2005. Greenwillow. (978-0060092740).

There are small moments in everyone's lives that, unknowingly, alter the course of our futures. Over the course of a summer, Debbie and Hector wish something interesting would happen, and realize that they are facing a crossroads that will more their lives forward. Using narration, poems, question-and-answer formats, photographs, and drawings, the story and its characters are quietly interconnected.

Every Soul a Star by Wendy Mass. 2009. Little Brown Books for Young Readers. (978-0316002578).

Thousands have gathered at Moon Shadow campground to see the rare event of a total eclipse of the sun; perhaps a once in a lifetime experience. Among the watches are three unrelated teens whose lives are about to become intertwined forever. Told from the three teens voices and perspectives, this interconnected novel tells about making new friends in unlikely places and believing in oneself. Included in the book is an author's note with additional information about eclipses.

Flipped by Wendelin Van Draanen. 2001. Knopf Books for Young Readers. (978-0375811746).

Juli and Bryce met in second grade. He ran, she flipped. That hasn't changed. Now in eighth grade, the two are still opposing and connecting magnets.

Through farcical misunderstandings and missed opportunities, this tale of romance is told via alternating chapters narrated by Juli and Bryce.

Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! Voices from a Medieval Village by Laura Amy Schlitz. 2007. Candlewick Press. (978-0763650940).

Life in an English manor in 1255 is explored by this series of interconnected monologues by different individuals who would have made up life in a medieval village. Twenty-three characters, such as the falconer's son and the villain's daughter, take turns, in unique voices and style, telling their experiences. Rather than a collection of facts, each character shares personal stories, memories, and desires, pulling together a complex overall look at how different individuals come together to create a whole. Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! Includes historical notes and essays, and is illustrated by watercolor and ink drawings inspired by medieval Bible illustrations.

Moon Over Manifest by Clare Vanderpool. 2010. Delacorte Press. (978-0385738835).

A multilayered mystery unfolds in Moon Over Manifest, weaving together the history of a town from WWI through the Great Depression. In 1936, Abilene Tucker's father sends her to live with her father's friend, The Pastor, in Manifest, MO while he finds work with the railroad. The story of The Pastor and her father's friendship is revealed through Abilene's narrative mixed with WWI-era newspaper columns, soldiers' letters home, and stories told by related characters. Mysteries uncovered include elements of the KKK, bootlegging, murder, and the real reason Abilene's mother had to go away.

Schooled by Gordan Korman. 2008. Hy-



perion Books. (978-1423105169).

Cap Anderson grew up with his hippe grandmother on a farming commune. He's never seen television or interacted with the outside world, and he has always been homeschooled. Until the day his grandmother gets injured and Cap is forced to move to town and attend the local middle school. Cap is smart, but 'unschooled' in all things middle school. He is the perfect target for bullying, but his reactions to pranks are unexpected and memorable, and show that conformity is not always the name of the game. Cap alternates with other characters, including the social worker, the bully, the bullied, a football player, and others that interact with Cap at school in some way.

The View from Saturday by E. L. Konigsburg. 1998. Atheneum Books for Young Readers. (978-0689817212).

Mrs. Olinski pulled together an award winning sixth grade Academic Bowl team, but no one knows how she chose the four winning students and how they worked so well together. Alternating short stories told by the four team members help the story on these four unlikely students working together to not only achieve academic success, but solve the mystery of why they were pulled together and how their create such a winning combination.

Wonder by R. J. Palacio. 2012. Random House. (978-0375869020).

Born with a significant facial deformity, August (Auggie) Pullman has never attended school. Until now. Auggie will be entering fifth grade at a nearby school, and he just wants to fit in. But it isn't easy to blend into the crowd when your looks make you stand out. Told from the points of view of Auggie, his sister, his classmates, and others, the full picture of Auggie's experience comes to life. Exploring compassion, bullying, sticking up for what you believe in, and ultimately, acceptance, Wonder is a book that will stay with you long after you put it down.

How Does the Middle School Reading SIG Serve Its Members?

- This SIG provides its members with information regarding the teaching of literacy in grades 5-9. This group provides a forum for teachers, students, and researchers to share teaching ideas, book lists, and research applications.
- The SIG publishes a peer-reviewed newsletter twice a year with teaching ideas, book lists, and research applications
- The SIG presents an interactive professional development session as part of the Annual Convention of the International Reading Association.



IRA 58TH ANNUAL CONVENTION
MAKING A DIFFERENCE | SAN ANTONIO
APRIL 19-22, 2013

Using Literature to guide writing instruction in the middle grades

Sunday April 21, 2013: 9:00 AM - 11:45 AM

San Antonio Convention Center

Room 203AB

Nance S Wilson
Lourdes University
Sylvania, OH

Erica Perl
Author, *Random House Books*

Laura Robb
Consultant/Language Arts Teacher/Scholastic & Heinemann Author
Winchester, VA

Description:

This session demonstrates how middle grades teachers motivate middle school students to write using literature. Teachers, authors, and middle grade experts come together to present interactive demonstrations for interweaving reading and writing instruction. Attendees will gain classroom strategies for motivating and engaging middle grades students to deal with text complexity and academic vocabulary in reading and writing.



Write What You Love

By Erica S. Perl

They say, “write what you know” but I always say, “write what you love”. After all, writing anything – a book, a poem, a paragraph – takes effort and time and guts. If you’re going to do it, and I do think that everyone should, you owe it to yourself to write about something that you’re truly passionate about. It doesn’t have to be something “big”. I have been known to write passionately about cookies. And animals. And sometimes people, real and fabricated, for whom I fall so deeply in love that I won’t let them leave my stories even if they want to.

It was certainly that way with Ace, the grandfather in my book, *When Life Gives You O.J.* Ace started talking to me one day, and I happily went along for the ride. It was like a fabulous reunion with my relatives, most of whom are no longer around to press danishes on me. Ace is loud like my Grandpa Benny was. He’s opinionated like my Grandpa Alan was. He collects rubber bands like my Grandma Dearie and deep down underneath it all he’s sweet like my Grandma Florence. He speaks Yiddish like my Great Grandpa Meyer and Great Grandma Molly and Great Uncle Mac (who, at the age of 96, proofread the book). And Ace calls Zelly ‘Kid’, just like my Grandpa Benny used to call me.

As a result, *When Life Gives You O.J.* practically begs to be read aloud, which is one of the things I love about it. I will do my Ace voice at the drop of a hat, and I’m always excited to hear teachers and kids try out theirs. I also love to hear kids create new voices for their own characters, especially character who – like Ace – are Frankenstein’s monsters of borrowed parts from people they know. Their best friend’s laugh. Their mom’s raised eyebrow. The tuneless hum of their school bus driver. This is a secret of writing fiction I love to tell kids: it involves research. I just don’t call it that. If I slip up and use the dreaded “r” word with kids, it’s all over. (Don’t even get me started on that other “r” word... revision).

What do I tell them instead? Actually, I don’t tell them anything. Instead, I like to take them on a walk. A nature walk, of sorts. Only what we’re studying today is human nature. We walk down the hall, notebooks in hand. We hang out. Sometimes we draw, or pretend to draw. Mostly we look and listen. We swap our “r” word for the kid-friendly “s” words: Sneaking. Snooping. Spying.) We eavesdrop on public conversations in public spaces (even writers have their limits). We write down dialog verbatim, phonetically, spelling things wrong deliberately to accentuate inflection and resisting the impulse to fix grammatical inconsistencies. We return to our classroom to download all of our observations, the details still hot out of the oven. These details will inspire, inform, and invigorate our fiction. Because it is true what they say: you can’t make this stuff up. Or rather, you can, but your fiction will be better if you don’t.

It was a picture book that shifted things for me. I wrote a book called *Dotty* about a girl named Ida whose imaginary friend outlasted those of all her classmates. In it, Ida is mocked in the most insidious way by her so-called friends (a girl named Katya teases that Ida’s shoe is untied, when in fact she is calling attention to the “leash” Ida still carries). I find it interesting to watch the way children react to this scene. They’ll tell you why Katya was out of line, and also why Ida’s satisfying reaction was also a bad choice, but you can see their gratitude for telling it like it is about playground bullies. Again, this was also a write what you’re passionate about moment for me – I loved reclaiming the moment by revealing what it is like to be a kid who is considered babyish by her peers. After all, I was that kid. It was personal for me.

Wait a second. How did we get onto bullying? This was supposed to be about funny books. Right. Let’s talk about *Chicken Butt!*

Chicken Butt! was a turning point for me in a different way. Sure, it’s fun to have a book kids scream for by name and laugh so hard over they sometimes wet themselves (I take it as a compliment). No one is a reluctant reader when it comes to a book with a name like *Chicken Butt!* BUT I take the silly stuff seriously, and I realized I needed to show people the power of the Butt, if you will, to keep it from getting written off as just a joke. This also tapped into another write-what-you-love: I love theater so I love writing things, like plays and scripts, that can be performed.

So I started to do the book as *Readers’ Theater* – it is essentially a four act play with three characters, easy to do with a large group provided you have a big screen to project the images on – and I started to encourage kids after every rhyme to come up with alternatives. As in: “You know what? *Chicken Nut!* *Chicken Gut!* *Chicken Hut!*” :You know why? *Chicken Spy!* *Chicken Fly!* *Chicken Die!*” With a teacher at the ready writing down every rhyme, a class full of kids could conjure up a boatload of rhymes in no time flat, and then be perfectly poised to write their own joke/story/poetry books.

With *Chicken Butt!*, I began to see my stories as jumping off points for student creativity as much as an outlet for my own. So when I wrote *When Life Gives You O.J.* (and the sequel, *Aces Wild*, which comes out in June, 2013), I gave some thought not just to what kids would make of it, but what they could do with it. Turns out the answer is: a lot.

The first idea I suggested, which kids took off and ran with, was creating your own *O.J.* The next thing I knew, I was receiving them (and photographs of them) from classrooms, as well as individual kids. Libraries did “make your own pet” activities based on *O.J.* and

encouraging kids to make all kinds of animals (even lizards and giraffes) out of a wide range of recyclable items, not just juice jugs. Just this week I heard from a teacher and a librarian who took this idea one step farther by having students write in the voices of their animals. The class is also considering using their animals to spotlight animals up for adoption at their local animal shelter, and raising money using the jugs as “doggie banks.”

I have also encouraged the use of *When Life Gives You O.J.* as the basis for a math and economics project. What does it cost to keep a pet? How would you budget money and time for it. If you had to care for it like Zelly takes care of O.J., how long could you keep it up. It also makes a fabulous middle school classroom debate topic: is Zelly’s decision to take Ace’s advice likely to result in success or not. And, even if it seems likely, is it worth it when there’s a strong risk of total public humiliation if anyone sees her (and, in a small town, how could they not?). You can also do amazing Venn diagrams with the book, seeing how you overlap with Zelly, Ace, Allie, and Jeremy (as well as how they do and don’t overlap with each other) and creating a Venn diagram for your own family or characters in other books.

When I meet with kids, either via Skype or in person, to talk about my books, I try to emphasize several things. First, if you want to be a writer, you need to write. Kids love to talk about the books they want to write. I say, go for it! Put those ideas to paper! Second, I emphasize the importance of taking risks in your writing – putting characters in tough spots and not throwing them a lifejacket (when I teach writing, I bring in lifesavers candy to make this point). Third, I try to make writing as accessible as possible. Kids who don’t like to write are more likely to do so anyway if the stakes are lower. Drawing and making audio recordings of stories, poems, dialog and lyrics are great entry points, and I am proud to say that I make use of both techniques as methods to get my ideas flowing.

And fourth, of course, is write what you love. It’s the “dance like no one’s watching” approach to writing. Write about stuff that blows your mind, or scares you to death, or makes you collapse giggling. Shake your literary (chicken) butt – and yes, I’m talking to you, grown-ups as well as kids - because no one can dance your dance, or tell your stories, better than you. Or have more fun doing it.



Short Biography: Laura Robb

Author, teacher, coach, and speaker, Laura Robb has completed 43 years of full time teaching in grades 4-8 and published more than 18 books. She presently coaches teachers in Powhatan School in Boyce, Virginia, and in Staunton and Amherst, Virginia. In addition, Robb returns to the classroom for a semester in the winter and teaches in grades 1 to 8 and selects three different grades to work in each year. She has also started an innovative approach to staff development by initiating follow-up workshops via a video conference for teachers who need support and encouragement in school districts across the country.

Robb graduated Queens College, part of the city university system in New York City with a BA in English and French Literature. A member of Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society, Robb graduated Queens College Magna Cum Laude, and received her Masters in and Instruction, Summa Cum Laude, from Shenandoah University, in Winchester, VA. Robb recently received an honorary doctorate from Shenandoah University for her work in literacy as well as the literacy award for supporting teachers from the Nassau County Reading Council.

Robb has written more than 17 books for teachers about reading and writing. Her most recent Scholastic titles are a sec-

ond edition of *Teaching Reading in Middle School*, *Teaching Nonfiction Writing*, and *Assessment Tools for Differentiating Reading Instruction* which includes a CD with 100 assessment forms. She's also published a 500 page binder, *Teaching Reading: A Differentiated Approach* and the book, *Differentiating Reading Instruction* which shows teachers in grades 4 and up how to meet the diverse needs of classes with mixed reading levels. Grade four and five teachers will find the *Reading Strategies Toolkit: Nonfiction* helpful for teaching students how to read nonfiction; it also contains differentiated work for students. Presently, Robb is working on the teaching guides for *XBooks* for the School Library Group and a new professional book, *Teaching Adolescents to Comprehend Short, Complex Texts*—both for

Scholastic

For Heinemann, Robb has published *Teaching Middle School Writers: What Every English Teacher Needs to Know*. Coming soon is Robb's First Hand Project for Heinemann: Smart Writing: Practical Teaching Units for Middle School Writers which aligns with the common core writing standards. She's also published a book on staff development and early literacy for Heinemann.

Robb has designed Classroom Libraries for Scholastic for stu-

dents in grades three though nine. Her mission is for every school in this country to have a school library, a certified librarian, and classroom libraries with 500 to 700 books and other reading materials; she works with school districts to set and achieve these goals.

Robb has also created materials for students with The Great Source Education Group. She is the lead author for *Reading Advantage*, an intervention program for students in grades 6 to 12 reading three or more years below grade level. In addition, Robb has co-authored a *Reader's Handbook* for students in grades 4 and 5 and grades 6 to 8.

Robb completed a three-year term on the National Council of Teacher's of English's Commission on Reading. Nominated by her peers in education to serve on the Commission, Robb was also invited to write a chapter for a book that NCTE published called: *What Research REALLY Says About Learning to Read*. Robb, with five other NCTE Commission members met with staffers and congressmen on Feb. 3, 2009, to discuss the teaching of reading: Robb discussed differentiation and access to books for middle grade and middle school students.

Robb is a keynote speaker at conferences all over the country and in Canada. She speaks annually at conferences sponsored by the National Council of Teachers

of English and the International Reading Association. Robb also trains teachers on differentiating reading instruction so that teachers can reach and teach every learner in a class.



Application to Join the Middle School Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association

Name: _____

School: _____

Home Address: _____

Home Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Please complete the attached survey and enclose a check for \$10 payable to:

Billie Jo Dunaway
4640 Secret River Trail
Port Orange, FL 32129

(We are a non-profit organization.)

Are you a member of the International Reading Association?

If so, Membership #: _____

<https://sites.google.com/site/middleschoolreadingsig/>

msrsig@gmail.com



Examining the Middle Grades Canon

Saturday, April 20, 2013: 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

San Antonio Convention Center

Room 203AB

Nance S Wilson
Lourdes University
Sylvania, OH

Melanie D. Koss
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, IL

This interactive session will provide attendees with the opportunity to discover the texts most commonly taught in middle grades throughout the United States. The session will include book talks, hands-on opportunities for textual complexity analysis, and introductions to new texts that connect to those already in use.

This interactive workshop will offer participants opportunities to become familiar with current texts used in the middle grades classroom. The presenters in this session will provide hands-on activities and share experiences in classrooms that will invite participants to reflect on their own school efforts to achieve authentic, engaging, and effective instruction with current materials and the Common Core Standards. Participants will have hands-on opportunities to evaluate the text complexity of the texts as well as learn about additional texts to provide multi-text experiences for students.

Traditionally, books deemed as classics are taught in the high school English classroom. The reasons for this are many, including the often-mentioned reason that the classics, or books that are considered to be members of the canon, have stood the test of time (Bushman & Haas, 2006; Crowe, 2001; Santoli & Wagner, 2004). This is reinforced by the traditional nature of the English curriculum, wherefore teachers are most comfortable teaching what they, themselves, are familiar with and have been taught (Bushman & Haas; Crowe; Santoli & Wagner), added to the fact that the public expects and demands that the classics be taught, again because that is what is familiar and accepted (Bushman & Haas; Santoli & Wagner). Some also argue that the classics are classics because of their quality (Crowe) or because they examine the human condition in ways that are challenging, complex, and deep, something that other, non-classic texts cannot be counted on to do (Crowe; Jago, 2001, in Knickerbocker, 2002). One last often-cited argument is that the classics are taught because of cultural literacy, or that teachers fear they may be depriving students of information everyone else may be reading or learning, if they veer away from teaching the status-quo (Bushman & Haas; Santoli & Wagner). So, due to the new Common Core State Standards and issues of text complexity, what should middle school students be reading? A developmental viewpoint is taken by many researchers and theorists, who believe that adolescent literacy development is a crucial factor in determining what reading materials are appropriate for readers (Carlsen, 1980; Herz, 1996, in Knickerbocker, 2002; Knickerbocker, 2002). These researchers believe that cultural background, developmental level, and school ability all affect what is useful, interesting, relevant, and readable for students, and that each classroom has a wide range of students. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all mentality of prescribed books to cover may not be the best approach for teaching students to read critically and for fostering a love of reading.