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COMMON CORE AND INFORMATIONAL TEXTS

Love them or hate them, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have one positive by-product—an increase in the amount of informational text that students will hear, read, and write. Indeed, the standards recommend that fourth-grade students should spend half of their reading time with informational text, with the expectation that there will be even more focus on informational text in later grades.

During the past decade, researchers have learned a great deal related to informational text in American elementary classrooms, which can be briefly summarized as follows:

- Students have limited exposure to informational text through classroom libraries, instructional-reading programs, teacher read-aloud practices, and teacher-guided instruction.
- Students often struggle to comprehend such texts because of their lack of exposure to them and not their inability to comprehend the content. Their test scores are higher when reading narrative fiction than when reading informational text.
- Although many types of informational text exist, students need more experience with expository text. Indeed, some researchers suggest that students will never be successful in school if they fail to learn to read expository text.
- Many students actually prefer reading informational text rather than fiction.

Through implementing CCSS, teachers are able to address many of these issues. However, the standards do not emphasize helping students develop a lifelong habit and love of reading, which should always be a high priority for teachers. By using the standards and carefully selected trade books for young readers as starting points, teachers can make this one of their goals.

What Is Informational Text?

Informational text is defined as text with the primary purpose of expressing information about the arts, sciences, or social studies. This text ranges from newspaper and magazine articles to digital information to nonfiction trade books to textbooks and reference materials.

The CCSS specify four types of informational text: literary nonfiction, expository, argument or persuasion, and

procedural. (Visit the Common Core State Standards Initiative website, at www.corestandards.org, for more information about the excerpts quoted below.)

Literary Nonfiction

Literary nonfiction includes shorter texts, such as “personal essays, speeches, opinion pieces, essays about art or literature, biographies, memoirs, journalism, and historical, scientific, technical, or economic accounts (including digital sources) written for a broad audience.” Autobiographies, biographies, other narrative nonfiction, informational picture books, and informational poetry often fit into this category.

Narrative informational text typically communicates accurate information and has a well-defined beginning, middle, and end; it is written much like a story and is read from beginning to end. For example, Mike Allegra’s *Sarah Gives Thanks* details Sarah Josepha Hale’s role in making Thanksgiving a national holiday. Lita Judge’s *Bird Talk* is a good example of narrative informational text that provides facts about how birds communicate as they hunt, nest, get to know one another, and protect their young.

Informational poetry weaves facts into poems, as in Douglas Florian’s *UnBEElievables*, which includes not only poems but also brief factual paragraphs to accompany each selection. Likewise, Susan Katz’s *The President’s Stuck in the Bathtub* contains poems with little-known facts about the presidents. More factual information can be found in footnotes and a section called “Presidential Notes and Quotes.”

Finally, informational alphabet and counting books allow authors to use a creative format to share factual information, as in Alan Schroeder’s *Ben Franklin: His Wit and Wisdom from A–Z*. Schroeder includes details of Franklin’s life and his sayings in a clever, almanac style.

Expository Texts

Expository texts, such as Carolyn Vaughn’s *Invitation to Ballet*, Peter Chrisp’s *Pirates*, and Stephen Person’s *Saving Animals from Hurricanes*, contain tables of contents, indexes, or other navigational devices so that readers may read only the portions of the books that interest them, making it unnecessary to read the books cover to cover. Even books for younger readers, such as Gail Gibbons’ *Ladybugs*, can include carefully labeled, detailed diagrams that help readers better understand the subject.

Expository texts utilize various text structures, such as description, cause and effect, comparison and contrast, problem and solution, question and answer, and temporal sequence.

Argument or Persuasion Texts

Argument or persuasion texts provide evidence with the intent of influencing the beliefs or actions of the target audience.

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CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS:
COMMON CORE AND INFORMATIONAL TEXTS
BY TERRELL A. YOUNG AND BARBARA A. WARD

These texts typically include claims, evidence, and warrants to explain how the evidence is linked to the claims. Writers of persuasion or argument also make appeals—appeals to the author’s credibility, to the audience’s needs, or to reason and evidence. Good examples of biographies that offer persuasive arguments about issues related to women’s rights include *Tillie the Terrible Swede*, by Sue Stauffacher; *Wheels of Change*, by Sue Macy; and *Write On, Mercy!*, by Gretchen Woelfle. These books argue that although legislation and suffrage were important for the rights of women, so were means of transportation, such as the bicycle, and writing under one’s own name.

Procedural Texts

Procedural texts provide step-by-step guidelines that describe how to complete a task. They often include a materials-needed section and graphics that illustrate the process, as found in Doug Stillinger’s *The Klutz Book of Paper Airplanes*. Jane Drake and Ann Love’s *Get Outside* provides readers with rules for games and directions for making things like bird feeders, kites, and sundials.

Looking Closely at the Reading Standards

Below, we provide an overview of the 4 reading standard categories and discuss 10 reading anchor standards. We also zero in on individual standards and provide trade books on social-studies topics that can be used to accomplish the standard across grade levels.

Key Ideas and Details

“Key Ideas and Details” is the first category of the reading standards. These standards require students to (1) “read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text”; (2) “determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas”; and (3) “analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.” These standards require that the students look closely at the text (literary or informational) to determine what the author is communicating.

Teachers and librarians will notice how the standards build on one another as students progress through the grades. First-graders are to “ask and answer questions about key details in a text” (RI.1.1.), while second-graders are expected to “ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text” (RI.2.1.). By the time students are in grade five, they are expected to “quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from

the text” (RI.5.1.). Second-graders can respond to the *w* and *h* questions by reading Rachel Victoria Rodriguez’s *Through Georgia’s Eyes* and responding to inquiries about picture-book biographies such as the life of Georgia O’Keeffe presented in the book.

Craft and Structure

The second set of anchor standards are “Craft and Structure,” which specify that students will (1) “interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone”; (2) “analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole”; and (3) “assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.”

Kindergartners are expected to be able to “identify the front cover, back cover, and title page of a book” (RI.K.5.). This can be accomplished with almost any trade book, and Richard Sobol’s engaging *The Story of Silk* is an ideal book for addressing fourth-grade “Craft and Structure” objectives, such as “determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text relevant to a grade 4 topic or subject area” (RI.4.4.). Sobol’s writing provides contextual clues for some word meanings, and others can be addressed through the glossary. Students are also expected to “describe the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text” (RI.4.5.).

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

“Integration of Knowledge and Ideas” is the third band of standards, where students are to (1) “integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words”; (2) “delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence”; and (3) “analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.” These standards require that students synthesize information across texts, an important aspect in critical reading and thinking.

Third-graders are expected to “compare and contrast the most important points and key details presented in two texts on the same topic” (RI.3.9.). This could be accomplished by having students read two recent titles about Susan B. Anthony—Ann Malaspina’s *Heart on Fire*, and Alexandra Wallner’s *Susan B. Anthony*—and then compare and contrast the important points and details.

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CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS:
COMMON CORE AND INFORMATIONAL TEXTS
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Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

The final anchor standard addresses the “Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity,” with the expectation that students will “read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.” Teachers must help students approach complex texts and remind them that difficult texts provide a signal to slow down and use strategies to understand each author’s message.

An expectation for second-graders is that, by the end of the school year, they should be able to “read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, in the grades 2–3 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range” (RI.2.10.). *Looking at Lincoln*, by Maira Kalman, and *Those Rebels, John and Tom*, by Barbara Kerley, could be paired together in a second- or third-grade social-studies unit that explores the complexities of war and peace while satisfying the core objectives of the standards.

Whereas previous standards have focused on skills and strategies, the Common Core State Standards emphasize text types. In this overview of the anchor standards, we have emphasized literary nonfiction and social-studies themes. Look for our follow-up article in the November 2012 issue of *Book Links*, when we will highlight science through expository, procedural, and persuasive texts.

Bibliography

Ben Franklin: *His Wit and Wisdom from A–Z*. By Alan Schroeder. Illus. by John O’Brien. 2011. 32p. Holiday, \$16.95 (9780823419500); paper, \$7.95 (9780823424351). 973.3092. Gr. 1–3.

Arranged alphabetically and filled with amusing and often fanciful artwork, this entertaining miscellany of facts about Franklin presents a great deal of information in a format that will appeal to young children.

Bird Talk: *What Birds Are Saying and Why*. By Lita Judge. Illus. by the author. 2012. 48p. Flash Point, \$17.99 (9781596436466). 598.159. Gr. 1–3.

Beguiling illustrations will draw readers to this unusual book that looks at the communications of backyard birds as well as more exotic varieties. A glossary and a short list of references are also appended.

The Boston Tea Party. By Russell Freedman. Illus. by Peter Malone. 2012. 40p. Holiday, \$17.95 (9780823422661). 973.3. Gr. 1–5.

Freedman allows readers to witness one of the tide-turning events in American history—from the arrival of British ships carrying tea to the eventual dumping of the ships’ contents into the harbor.

Buried Alive! *How 33 Miners Survived 69 Days Deep under the Chilean Desert*. By Elaine Scott. 2012. 80p. illus. Clarion, \$17.99 (9780547707785); e-book, \$17.99 (9780547691787). 363.11. Gr. 4–7.

This dramatic account of the harrowing entrapment and eventual rescue of the 33 Chilean miners in 2010 details how unity became the crux of the men’s survival.

Dare to Dream . . . Change the World. Ed. by Jill Corcoran. Illus. by J. Beth Jepson. 2012. 40p. Kane Miller, \$15.99 (9781610670654). 811. Gr. 1–8.

Thirty poems and brief biographical accounts celebrate people who dared to dream and as a result made the world a better place through their contributions to the arts, civil rights, sciences, and other fields.

Get Outside: *The Kids Guide to Fun in the Great Outdoors*. By Jane Drake and Ann Love. Illus. by Heather Collins. 2012. 176p. Kids Can, paper, \$16.95 (9781554538027). 796.083. Gr. 1–4.

This title encourages kids to get off the couch and away from the screen with seasonal outdoor activities for a variety of ages.

Heart on Fire: *Susan B. Anthony Votes for President*. By Ann Malaspina. Illus. by Steve James. 2012. 32p. Albert Whitman, \$16.99 (9780807531884). 324.6. Gr. 2–4.

Accompanied by realistic illustrations, this lively narrative focuses on one significant event in Anthony’s life—when the activist cast her ballot for president, was arrested, and was put on trial for voting at a time when women were not allowed to do so.

The Horse and the Plains Indians: *A Powerful Partnership*. By Dorothy Hinshaw Patent. Illus. by William Muñoz. 2012. 112p. Houghton, \$17.99 (9780547125510); e-book, \$18 (9780547533070). 978.004. Gr. 5–8.

Patent traces the bond between Native Americans and horses, describing how many First Nations people relied on the animals to assist them in hunting buffalo and how the intrusion of white settlers spelled disaster for their way of life.

Invitation to Ballet. By Carolyn Vaughn. Illus. by Rachel Isadora. 2012. 32p. Abrams, \$16.95 (9781419702600). 792.8. Gr. 2–5.

Featuring the works of painter Edgar Degas, this volume offers young dancers an introduction to ballet, beginning with a typical class, ballet wear, and ballet history. Each double-page spread presents a single topic in a few paragraphs of text.

The Klutz Book of Paper Airplanes. By Doug Stillinger. 2004. 56p. illus. Klutz, \$16.95 (9781570548307). 745.5. Gr. 4–8.

Short physics lessons are integrated into this clearly organized and illustrated guide to making 10 different models of paper airplanes.

Book Links

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS:
COMMON CORE AND INFORMATIONAL TEXTS
BY TERRELL A. YOUNG AND BARBARA A. WARD

Ladybugs. By Gail Gibbons. Illus. by the author. 2012. 32p. Holiday, \$17.95 (9780823423682). 595.76. K–Gr. 3.

This bright and informative picture book introduces ladybugs through colorful mixed-media artwork and short paragraphs of information on the beetle's body parts, food, development, predators, and defenses.

Looking at Lincoln. By Maira Kalman. Illus. by the author. 2012. 32p. Penguin/Nancy Paulsen, \$17.99 (9780399240393). 973.7092. K–Gr. 3.

A young girl passes a man who looks like Lincoln, prompting her to dive into research about the president and his legacy as well as wonder about certain aspects of his life. Endnotes fill in more facts and cite sources.

Pirates. By Peter Chrisp. 2011. 48p. illus. Kingfisher, \$12.99 (9780753466117). 910.45. Gr. 3–6.

This installment in the Navigators series delves into the ever-popular subject of pirates at hand with nuggets of easily digestible information in the form of text boxes, word definitions, engaging photographs and artwork, and labeled diagrams.

The President's Stuck in the Bathtub: Poems about the Presidents. By Susan Katz. Illus. by Robert Neubecker. 2012. 64p. Clarion, \$17.99 (9780547182216); e-book, \$17.99 (9780547677835). 811. Gr. 2–5.

In humorous yet informative rhymes, Katz's nod to presidential quirks and foibles offers details that will pique young readers' interests. A footnote and a cartoon-style illustration accompany each poem.

Sarah Gives Thanks: How Thanksgiving Became a National Holiday. By Mike Allegra. Illus. by David C. Gardner. 2012. 32p. Albert Whitman, \$16.99 (9780807572399). 394.2649. Gr. 1–3.

Allegra recounts how magazine editor Sarah Josepha Hale worked for more than three decades to make Thanksgiving "a national festival." An author's note and source bibliography round out this look at the history of a cherished holiday.

Saving Animals from Hurricanes. By Stephen Person. 2011. 32p. illus. Bearport, lib. ed., \$25.27 (9781617722905). 636.08. Gr. 3–5.

Brief text boxes and large, colorful artwork tell the moving, true stories of animal rescue—some successful, some not.

The Story of Silk: From Worm Spit to Woven Scarves. By Richard Sobol. Illus. by the author. 2012. 40p. Candlewick, \$17.99 (9780763641658). 595. Gr. 1–4.

The award-winning creator of the Traveling Photographer series offers this fascinating introduction to silk production, illustrated with Sobol's excellent color photographs.

Susan B. Anthony. By Alexandra Wallner. Illus. by the author. 2012. 32p. Holiday, \$16.95 (9780823419531). 324.6. K–Gr. 3.

Although Wallner recounts Anthony's childhood, the author mostly focuses on the activist's "uncertain career battling for reform," particularly in the arena of woman's suffrage. A time line, a bibliography, and source notes are appended.

Those Rebels, John and Tom. By Barbara Kerley. Illus. by Edwin Fotheringham. 2012. 48p. Scholastic, \$17.99 (9780545222686). 973.4. Gr. 2–4.

This double portrait of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson shines a light on how different these two Founding Fathers were from each other. However, they soon formed a bond of mutual respect and used their complementary styles to rally a nation behind them.

Through Georgia's Eyes. By Rachel Victoria Rodriguez. Illus. by Julie Paschkis. 2006. 32p. Holt, \$17.99 (9780805077407). 759.13. K–Gr. 3.

Rodriguez tells O'Keeffe's story in present tense with sentences that are short, direct, and poetic. After the book describes her childhood, career, and life in New Mexico, the final page expands on the story to give a more standard, detailed account of the artist's life.

Tillie the Terrible Swede: How One Woman, a Sewing Needle, and a Bicycle Changed History. By Sue Stauffacher. Illus. by Sarah McMenemy. 2011. 40p. Knopf, \$17.99 (9780375844423); lib. ed., \$20.99 (9780375944420). 796.62092. K–Gr. 3.

In the 1890s, seamstress Tillie Anderson decided to try bicycling. Refusing to heed objections to her skirtless costume, she ended up breaking the women's record in a 100-mile event. An author's note offers more about this unsung heroine of women's history.

UnBEElievables: Honeybee Poems and Paintings. By Douglas Florian. Illus. by the author. 2012. 32p. Beach Lane, \$16.99 (9781442426528). 811. Gr. 2–5.

Florian's poems touch on bee-related topics such as body structure, life cycles, and roles in the hive. Facts and full-page illustrations appear alongside the verse, and brief lists of recommended books and websites are appended.

Wheels of Change: How Women Rode the Bicycle to Freedom (with a Few Flat Tires along the Way). By Sue Macy. 2011. 96p. illus. National Geographic, \$18.95 (9781426307614); lib. ed., \$27.90 (9781426307621). 796.6082. Gr. 6–9.

This look at the emancipating impact that bikes had on late-nineteenth-century U.S. women features archival images,

Common Core Connections

In addition to the suggestions included in the accompanying article, the following activities offer more ideas for implementing specific Common Core State Standards with informational texts.

In the Classroom: In *The Boston Tea Party*, Russell Freedman allows readers to witness one of the tide-turning events in American history—from the arrival of British ships carrying tea and its controversial tax to the protest meetings and the eventual dumping of the ships' contents into the harbor. First, discuss with students how a single sentence can introduce the content of an entire passage. Students can then be assigned to small groups that will determine the main ideas for two predetermined passages and discuss how the text uses key details to support the main idea. Afterward, students can discuss the process, what they learned, and how determining main ideas and supporting details can help their comprehension and learning.

Common Core Connections

- **RI.5.2.** Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.
- **RI.5.3.** Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.

In the Classroom: Elaine Scott's *Buried Alive! How 33 Miners Survived 69 Days Deep under the Chilean Desert* describes the 2010 Chilean mine accident that left 33 men underground for more than two months. It also delves into earlier accidents at the San Jose mine, the activities of those below the surface and those above, and what happened to the men, all of whom survived, after they were rescued from the mine. Divide students into small groups for a team mapping exercise. Assign a passage from *Buried Alive!* to each group, and have the students summarize the passage's main idea on a large sheet of white paper, writing with a marker in a color assigned to their group. Groups can then rotate from map to map, reading the designated passage and main idea and then adding a supporting detail from the passage's text, writing in their group's color. After each group has visited each map, the students can discuss as a class what they learned from the activity. The teacher or librarian can then point out how one of the maps can form the basis of a passage summary.

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In the Classroom: In *Dare to Dream . . . Change the World*, edited by Jill Corcoran, 30 poets have created 30 poems to celebrate people who dared to dream and as a result made the world a better place through their contributions to the arts, civil rights, sciences, and other fields. Readers will learn about a range of extraordinary people, and many of the poems are accompanied by a brief nonfiction piece that highlights the subjects' accomplishments. Working in pairs, students can read a poem and the information selection about one of the subjects, and then write a paragraph about the individual's experiences and accomplishments.

Common Core Connection

- **RI.4.3.** Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.

In the Classroom: Dorothy Hinshaw Patent traces the bond between Native Americans and horses in *The Horse and the Plains Indians: A Powerful Partnership* and describes how many First Nations people relied on dogs to transport their possessions until the Spaniards brought horses to Mexico in 1519. Native Americans quickly realized that horses could assist them in hunting buffalo, making them a most valued possession. Patent also shows the impact of the later intrusion of white settlers and the intervention of the U.S. Army on the Plains Indians' way of life. Have students identify and discuss key events in the relationship between Plains Indians and horses. Have students use a graphic organizer to record and organize those events, showing the many ways that horses were incorporated into Plains Indians' daily lives.

Common Core Connection

- **RI.4.3.** Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.

research, direct quotes, and historical overviews that put the facts into context.

Write On, Mercy! *The Secret Life of Mercy Otis Warren*. By Gretchen Woelfle. Illus. by Alexandra Wallner. 2012. 40p. Calkins Creek, \$16.95 (9781590788226). 973.3093. Gr. 2–5.

Mercy Otis Warren wrote both journalistic pieces of advocacy and a three-volume history of the American Revolution, and in choosing her as a subject, Woelfle offers young readers a view of the colonial period that veers away from typical battle-driven, male-dominated accounts.

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