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Making Sense of the Common Core: ELA & Literacy

Sample Pages



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Course Overview

Making Sense of the Common Core: ELA & Literacy is an activity based course focusing on practical understanding and application of the goals of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects and your classroom practices, K-12.

Support your understanding of the Common Core by reading *Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Achievement* (2012) by Lucy Calkins, Mary Ehrenworth and Chris Lehman. This text provides a practical overview of the key ideas of the Common Core for English Language Arts and Literacy in the content areas.

Using the study guide for this course, *Making Sense of the Common Core*, gain an overview of the purpose and intent of the standards through guided reading of the Common Core State Standards primary documents. Study the College and Career Anchor Standards to understand the building blocks for developing the spiral progression of the standards through each literacy strand: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language.

Study Appendix A for an understanding of the research supporting the development of the Common Core State Standards and the emphasis on text complexity. Review the criteria suggested to select complex texts that are worthy of study for your grade level or content area. Appendix B provides text exemplars and annotations to explore the concept of text complexity. Appendix C shows samples of student writing for grade levels, types of writing and content area, with annotations to provide models of expectations from the Common Core.

The *Revised Publisher's Criteria* (2012) is helpful for teachers to develop curriculum and instruction to meet the rigors of the Common Core. Review released assessment items from PARCC and Smarter Balanced to get a preview of the kinds of assessments that will be used to measure student's end of year performance in meeting grade level Common Core expectations.

Apply the principles of the Common Core State Standards to your curriculum and instructional practice. Choose from a myriad of activities suggested in the study guide, *Making Sense of the Common Core* or choose activities from *Pathways to the Common Core* or create activities of your own design. Actively engaging with translating the Common Core into practice will help you determine how the goals of CCSS/ELA can be met in your classroom with your students. Convert theory into practical application. Invite discussion with colleagues, watch informational videos and tap into resources that will support the implementation of the CCSS/ELA in your curricular practices.

Leave this course feeling empowered, charged and ready to take on the Common Core to enhance the learning opportunities you provide for your students at your grade level or content area in literacy.

Use the study guide, outside reading and writing activities to complete the course work.

A syllabus is available on www.collegecoursesonline.com

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Introduction

This course, *Making Sense of the Common Core for ELA & Literacy* (CCSS/ELA) is an activity based learning course to engage with the key ideas and the framework of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy for History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects, K-12. The activities are suggestions to help you develop curriculum and instructional practices for your grade level and content area to meet the demands of the Common Core State Standards. Use the Common Core as a tool to enhance the learning opportunities of your students.

You may already know quite a bit about Common Core and the framework of standards or you may have very little knowledge about the standards; take this course from where you are and deepen your knowledge and expertise. One of your course requirements is to read *Pathways to the Common Core* by Lucy Calkins, Mary Ehrenworth and Christopher Lehman (2012). This is an excellent overview and introduction to the Common Core. If you prefer to delve into another text, feel free to propose another text that will enlighten you and deepen your knowledge of the Common Core. You may also choose other activities than the ones suggested here. For instance, you might be in a position to train others through staff workshops and want to familiarize yourself with activities and strategies for professional development. I would encourage you to check out the companion text to *Pathways to the Common Core*, the “Study Guide for Pathways to the Common Core “ by the same authors as the book. The Study Guide is focused on activities. Try out the activities yourself as a way to prepare for your staff development and meet the requirements of this course. Prepare curriculum to meet the needs of training teachers. The bottom line is this course is for you to make sense of the Common Core for your professional needs.

In the end, it is hoped that *Making Sense of the Common Core* will help you really dig into the Common Core, understand its construction, the principles and translate the rigorous expectations of the goals into meaningful curricular and instructional practice. It is the intention of this course to encourage you to actively engage in this endeavor through reading, writing and activities of your choice so that when you are done, you see the standards as a guide that empower you as a teacher and offer students the opportunity to be actively engaged in the business of learning.

This study guide is organized around the assignments for this course: An introduction to the outside reading - an overview of the text *Pathways*, its supporting study guide, and the primary documents of the Common Core. You will be asked to keep a reflection journal responding to thought and insights from your outside reading, synthesized in a paper you will submit to the instructor of this course. Throughout this study guide, the text, *Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Achievement* and the *Study Guide for Pathways* there are suggestions of activities. Choose from these suggestions or create 10 activities that will help you actively engage in making sense of the Common Core for your professional work. Feel free to adapt and modify. Finally, you will be guided to taking what you are learning about the Common Core and create a lesson plan, or curriculum unit or a scope and sequence of curricular and instructional moves that

translate the Common Core into practice. And last but not least, review the course requirements and end your work with a short reflection paper. Please review the course requirements in the beginning pages or on the syllabus for this course.

This course is for you. Tailor designing the course work to meet your needs is invited. Please contact the instructor if you have questions, modifications or ideas that will make this course more meaningful to you.

Suggestions for other texts:

Beers, K. & Probst, R. (2012). *Notice & Note: Strategies for Close Reading*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Fisher, D., Frey, N. and Lapp, D. (2012). *Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Zweirs, J. & Crawford, M. (2011) *Academic Conversations: Classroom Talk that Fosters Critical Thinking and Content Understandings*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

An Inventory

Please take a moment and complete the following inventory. Where are you in your process of learning about the CCSS and using the standards in your curriculum and instructional practices? If the statements do not describe you, please write a few sentences to more accurately reflect where you are today on understanding and using the CCSS.

Please tell a little about yourself and your experience in the field of education.

Choose as many as apply to you. Add comments. Where are you on your road to understanding and incorporating CCSS in your curricular and instructional practice?

- a. I am clueless.
- b. I am resisting.
- c. I am not going to study the CCSS. As soon as I do, they'll change it, or my state will repeal it.
- d. I am so overwhelmed with every thing that is asked of me as a teacher and feel conflicted about where to begin.
- e. I've heard about it.
- f. Our Department of Education has incorporated the CCSS in our state standards.
- g. I just barely got my state standards understood and now they've added reference to the CCSS.
- h. The way my state interpreted the CCSS confuses me. Which one should I use?
- i. My state is on the fence about adopting/ repealing the CCSS.
- j. I have read the literacy standards for CCSS for my grade level.
- k. I understand the literacy standards for CCSS for my grade level.
- l. I apply the literacy standards for CCSS for my grade level.
- m. I am a master at literacy standards for CCSS. I understand them and know how to apply them. I want to train teachers to feel confident in using them to guide instruction.

Additions / Comments:

What are your intentions for taking this course? What do you hope to gain that will be personally and professionally meaningful to you?

Intention/ goal/ wish/ hope: I am taking this course because I want _____.

At the end of this course, I want _____

In 2 to 3 years I want to know this course helped me to _____

Feel free to send this in to your instructor as a way of introducing yourself. At the end of the course work, come back to your responses to the Inventory as a benchmark. Use this exercise as a measure of growth. Reflect what you have learned in your final Reflection Paper.

Mapping out your Course: Organization

Gather your reading materials. Some texts may need to be ordered. Organize the reading materials for this course in a way that works for you. I find this kind of study often means I am reading more than one text at a time, or reading between texts, so printing the documents from the web is my choice of “what works for me.”

Outside Reading Required Text: * *Pathways to the Common Core* (2012) Calkins, L., Ehrenworth, M, and Lehman, C.

*If you choose a different text, choose one that enlightens you about the Common Core and offers you practical advice about implementing the CCSS for literacy in your classroom or professional life. Suggestions are offered. Please also see the bibliography at the end of this study guide for some suggestions.

Common Core State Standards: <http://www.corestandards.org/>

From the web, download and print (optional) or create a digital copy of the primary documents for CCSS/ELA. You may find it helpful to print and put the documents in a 3 ring binder. You may also want to keep a digital copy on your desktop and/or iPad.

Reading strategies vary by how close you read or how much you want to simply familiarize yourself with content. You may find that you read word for word in some of the following texts and for some a skimming or previewing will be adequate. It is expected that you will invest about 50 hours reading and the same amount of time writing in a reflection journal culminated by a synthesis paper.

- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). 2010a. *Common Core State Standard for English Language Arts & History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*. Washington D.C.: NGA Center and CCSSO. <http://www.corestandards.org/>
- _____ 2010b. *Common Core State Standard for English Language Arts & History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: Appendix A: Research Supporting Key Elements of the Standards; Glossary of Key Terms*. Washington D.C.: NGA Center and CCSSO. <http://www.corestandards.org/>
- _____ 2010c. *Common Core State Standard for English Language Arts & History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: Appendix B: Text Exemplars and Sample Performance Tasks*. Washington D.C.: NGA Center and CCSSO. <http://www.corestandards.org/>
- _____ 2010d. *Common Core State Standard for English Language Arts & History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: Appendix C: Samples of Student Writing*. Washington D.C.: NGA Center and CCSSO. <http://www.corestandards.org/>
- Coleman, D., Pimentel, S. (4-12-12) *Revised Publishers' Criteria for the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy, Grades 3–12*. http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Publishers_Criteria_for_3-12.pdf

Bookmark the Assessment Systems

- PARRC www.parcconline.org/
- Smarter Balanced <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/>
- NAEP <http://nces.ed.gov/>
- ACT <http://www.act.org/>
- Achieve <http://www.achievethecore.org/>

A Suggested Plan of Action:

- Preview this course Study Guide. There are over 40 suggested activities to choose from. The activities are interspersed throughout the text AND collected on one page for your convenience.
- Read *Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Achievement*. * Write in your reflection journal. Highlight any activities that interest you.
- Read the Study Guide to *Pathways* Write in your reflection journal. Highlight any interesting activities.
- Read the Common Core State Standards primary documents. Write in your reflection journal. Highlight any activities.
- Review your Reflection Journal. Write the synthesis paper.
- Choose 10 activities. Complete the activity. Document what you did and what you learned in a 1-2 page paper for **each** activity.
- Review all you have learned from your reading and activities to make sense of the Common Core. Complete this course by writing a final summary paper.

* Or choose a text that supports your understanding of the Common Core. See Bibliography for other suggestions.

Change is Common in Education

Change comes frequently in the world of education. Change offers opportunity for growth, development and a chance to examine and re-examine educational practices. The first reaction to change is usually resistance. The introduction of the Common Core State Standards creates some anxiety and resistance in teaching communities, with the anticipation of yet another set of standards to get to know, the advent of either learning or creating curriculum and instruction to meet standards and questions about how assessment will effect, modify or dictate the application of the Common Core. In addition, tight budgets, oversized classes, and insufficient and inadequate materials put a strain on where policy meets the pavement- the classroom teacher.

So, if you are struggling with wrapping your head and heart around the CCSS, you've come to the right place. Learning about the Common Core, understanding the research and the drive behind the standards, translating theory into practice and actively engaging in application are tools to empower you to make the Common Core useful to your professional practice. Allow yourself to look for the contributions of the Common Core standards that will deepen and improve your knowledge and practice of teaching. If you've been in education awhile, you will recognize the recursive nature of English Language Arts instruction. Think of the decades of debate on phonics and whole language, or the movement for values education and personalizing education that directed what was read in school and how it was read. Studying the underpinnings of the Common Core is a reminder of "New Criticism", an educational and philosophical movement from the 1930's (Calkins, L., et.al., 2012) and opportunities for new insights and an invitation to dig deeper into topics that are back again, like "text complexity." (Fisher, D., et.al.2012.)

The language of the Common Core is couched in many "should's." Though the intent is to create importance, "should-ing" often leads to resistance. Reframe this language of demands to words of preference and choice. Choose activities that help you take ownership of the standards and review your curricular and instructional practices. More than likely, you are already meeting many of the demands of the CCSS, and some housekeeping will help you hone curricular and instructional practices to better serve you and your students' learning. Above all, as one teacher told me, "Don't lose sight about what is good for students and learning."

Activity 1: If you have some resistance or trepidation to the Common Core State Standards Initiative, I would encourage you to complete this activity. It is best done in discussion with a group or with a colleague. It is also worthy of your journal. Permission has been granted by Heinemann to make this activity and the study guide available to you online.

This activity is described in *Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Achievement* (2012, 3-13) by Lucy Calkins, Mary Ehrenworth and Chris Lehman, and in "The Study Guide for Pathways to the Common Core" by Lucy Calkins, Mary Ehrenworth and Chris Lehman, available online

http://www.heinemann.com/shared/studyGuides/E04355/Study%20Guide_Pathways_FINAL.pdf

Directions: Use two sheets of paper or two columns. Label one “Curmudgeon”, label the other “Gold.” Refer to the discussion in *Pathways to the Common Core* (book), pages 3-7, and either in a group, or with a colleague or by yourself, discuss your concerns, resistance or confusions about the CCSS. Write them under the heading of “Curmudgeon”. Review pages 7-13 in the text. Again, discuss or think of ways the CCSS Initiative is “gold”; what’s good about the Common Core?

Bryan Harris, Director of Professional Development and Public Relations for the Casa Grande Elementary School District in Casa Grande, Arizona, describes the Common Core as a “game changer.” A study of the language of the Common Core State Standards describes what students **do**. “Our job, as teachers, is to cause learning to happen,” says Harris who believes that setting the stage so students are “having fun, thinking-talking-writing-wondering, making connections” and leave at the end of the school day exhilarated and motivated. Harris sees the CCSS as an opportunity to shift the focus on actively engage students in the learning process. Harris conducts professional development on using academic conversation as a primary tool for engaging students in active learning. His contention is whoever is doing the talking is doing the learning. (Retrieved from www.eyoneducation.com free webinar *7 Easy to Use Conversational Strategies for the Common Core Classroom*. 6/5/13.) Harris writes a blog site and has published several professional books. Check out his website <http://www.bryan-harris.com/> The following activity comes from Harris.

Activity 2: Make a list of verbs. The Common Core uses the language of activity, listing the expectations of what students should be able to DO by the end of the year. Study the language of the Common Core standards for your grade level or content area for any one of the ELA strands: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, or Language. Choose one of the ELA strands such as the 10 standards for your grade level or content area for Reading Informational Texts or 6 standards for Speaking and Listening. Make a list of the verbs used in the standards to describe what students are expected to do. Repeat the verbs as they are repeated in the grade level standards.

Enter this data into a word cloud, such as Wordle. Word clouds look for repetition of word patterns and identify what’s important. Find out what’s important in this Standard.

Submit your word cloud and your observation about what CCSS is asking your students to be able to do to be college and career ready. Take this one step further, and name one way you could accent one of the main verbs in your curricular and instructional practice.

Activity 3: Before you start reading, define the words according to YOU. (This activity is from Wendie Thomas, a teacher and researcher.)

Common -

Core -

State -

Standard –

Research the history and development of the Common Core. What is the impetus for this educational reform? Write a brief background.

Activity 4: Analyze the title, “Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects.” Use the directive for CCR: RL.4

Craft and Structure

4. “Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.”

Consider:

- Why do you think the authors chose the words in the title? What other ways could they have titled these standards?
- What meaning is conveyed in these words?
- What is the tone of the title?
- Explore changing any one or all the words. How does it change the meaning and/or tone?
- What tone does the ampersand create? The authors could have used “and”.

Activity 5: The main purpose of the CCSS is to “ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school” (2010, 3)

1. What kinds of skills do students need to be able to succeed in college? Through out the CCSS documents, reference is made to the kind of reading that students will need to be able to do when they get to college. Use your experience, knowledge of college materials to define “college ready” skills.
2. Define “career ready.” Very little mention is made in the CCSS documents about the literacy skills needed for 21st century careers, nor is there a distinction between “jobs” and “careers”. What kinds of literacy skills do students need to be career ready? Use your experience and knowledge to support your thinking.
3. Perhaps more importantly, what do *you* want for students to be able to do when they exit high school? No matter what grade level or content area you teach, how

do you defend your literacy practices as a means to the end, not just your grade-level end, but how do your literacy practices build on the previous grade, aim for the next grade and ultimately fit into the scheme preparing students for college and career readiness? What is your vision of “what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century?” (3)

Activity 6: Respond to this quote from *Notice and Note* (2012) Beers, K. & Probst, R.

“Helping students be ready for college or for a career is certainly an important mission for our schools. We think, though, that there’s another mission, perhaps one that, if accomplished, makes the world a better place by making each of us a better person. School ought to be a place where you go to develop a passion for learning – for a lifetime of learning.... We think a part of reaching that goal is helping students become independent, engaged, readers - readers who will, for a lifetime, want to turn to books to learn more about themselves, other and the world around them.” (Beers & Probst, 2012, 62)

END OF SAMPLE PAGES.

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