

CHAPTER ONE: THE POWER TO ENGAGE

The Power to Engage: A Journey to the Core of Informational Text

Most teachers would agree that the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have been a game changer for all invested in literacy. The creation of CCSS enabled states to share a common vision of literacy and encouraged collaboration among teachers across the United States of America. The timing could not be better. But then perhaps it was not by accident, as the ground was fertile for this endeavor. Everything is aligned. It is the perfect storm: an event arising due to a powerful combined effect of a unique set of circumstances.

Before we discuss our methods of battening down the hatches for that perfect storm, we'd like to assure readers that, first and foremost, we regard ourselves as teachers. Gerri and Cynthia have spent more time teaching than doing anything else. Cynthia still teaches high school English. Gerri became a central office administrator, and Elaine has spent most of her long career as an English language arts consultant at state, county, and district levels. Even when our professional roles have been to assist or guide teachers, we asked them to lend us their students so we could try out strategies. As a result, all three of us know that potholes lurk in the teacher's path. Teaching is not an easy job, despite its many rewards. Some days are even more challenging than others due to the intricacy of some of the work we must do.



Storyteller's View: Why Have We Included the Story Teller's Role?

Today, at the tap of a touchpad, reality provides hefty doses of terror dished out in weighty servings of complex text. How can we cope with the mind-boggling digital memory that slings one text after another before our spinning eyes? Just as important, schools require students to read far more informational text than narration, and the Common Core State Standards reflect that weight. How can teachers help students faced with this monumental text overload to understand it, analyze it, and arrive at some sort of meaning?

This book presents our answer: we can still rely on story as a pathway to understanding informational text. Let's embark on a journey to the core. The chapters ahead present a background of story as a pathway into informational text, for every text has a story behind it or held within it, and often awareness of that story lightens the reader's work.

We, too, have struggled with informational text, usually wondering what we can do to increase the likelihood of *every* student reaching understanding. We have worked with the Michigan Department of Education's literature units adding informational text, with the Macomb County literature units on close and critical reading, and with excerpts from the Common Core Standards' Appendix B.

Informational Text Inside and Out

Just what makes informational texts so challenging? When a scientist writes for other scientists, the reader can usually slice through complexity with nary a concern, for key vocabulary, essential concepts, and critical events tend to be within the "been there, done that" realm of professional experience known by everyone inside the field. A scientist can, in other words, depend on other scientists to know a number of things and therefore does not need to explain them when writing, just as a mathematician, a chef, a surgeon, and a race car driver can expect a certain amount of basic professional knowledge from colleagues. When we address one of those "insider" texts, the reader's work involves a fair amount of knowledge seeking to gain the content background essential to the text.

When writing for the general public, however, or even when developing instructional texts for beginners in the discipline, the wise writer turns to the author's craft and often times even the storyteller's strategies to provide a bridge for the reader to cross the confusion gap. A careful reader can draw on an understanding of authors' strategies to help probe to the depths of challenging text and unlock the meaning that lies as a treasure at its core.

Theme: Global Citizenship

Let's begin with an example of a story underlying an information text—ours. We stumbled upon the theme that ties the texts of this book together for us. Cynthia was driving to Elaine's house for a writing weekend. During her drive, she heard a radio show discussing the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores. The 2011 NAEP scores had revealed the alarming decline of twelfth graders' knowledge of the U.S. government and democracy. Furthermore, a 2012 survey by the Montpelier Foundation revealed that only twenty-eight percent of



Storyteller's View: The Power of Story

Storytelling has played a meaty role in human existence in a history that weaves its way around almost every documented human event—and probably many never recorded. When people had only oral tradition, stories became a reliable method of relating crucial events without losing key pieces. As we moved on through human history, stories continued to intertwine with facts, at times becoming indistinguishable, as the tale of Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast and its impact on a terrified American populace revealed. Through the words and sounds in his radio broadcast, Welles created a reality that lived in the minds of his listeners. We'd like to draw on that power.

the individuals surveyed admitted to reading the entire Constitution of the United States. The facts sent Cynthia on a journey for further data and led to weekend of rich discussion. Some of the facts uncovered through Google are:

- In the 2010 NAEP, only 23 percent of fourth graders were able to point out the significance of President Washington (first U.S. President, Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, participant in the Constitutional Convention, or person of significance in the French and Indian War). Twenty-four percent entered inappropriate responses, forty-five percent received partial credit, and seven percent did not respond (Institute of Education Sciences).
- Of the seniors taking the 2010 NAEP, only 12 percent scored “proficient” in history. Seventeen percent grade eight students and 20 percent of grade four students scored “grade-appropriate” levels (Murray1).
- In a 2011 poll, *Newsweek* found that of 1,000 Americans, 70 percent could not correctly answer the question “What is the supreme law of the land?” (Dwyer 1).

Reading for an Educated Citizenry

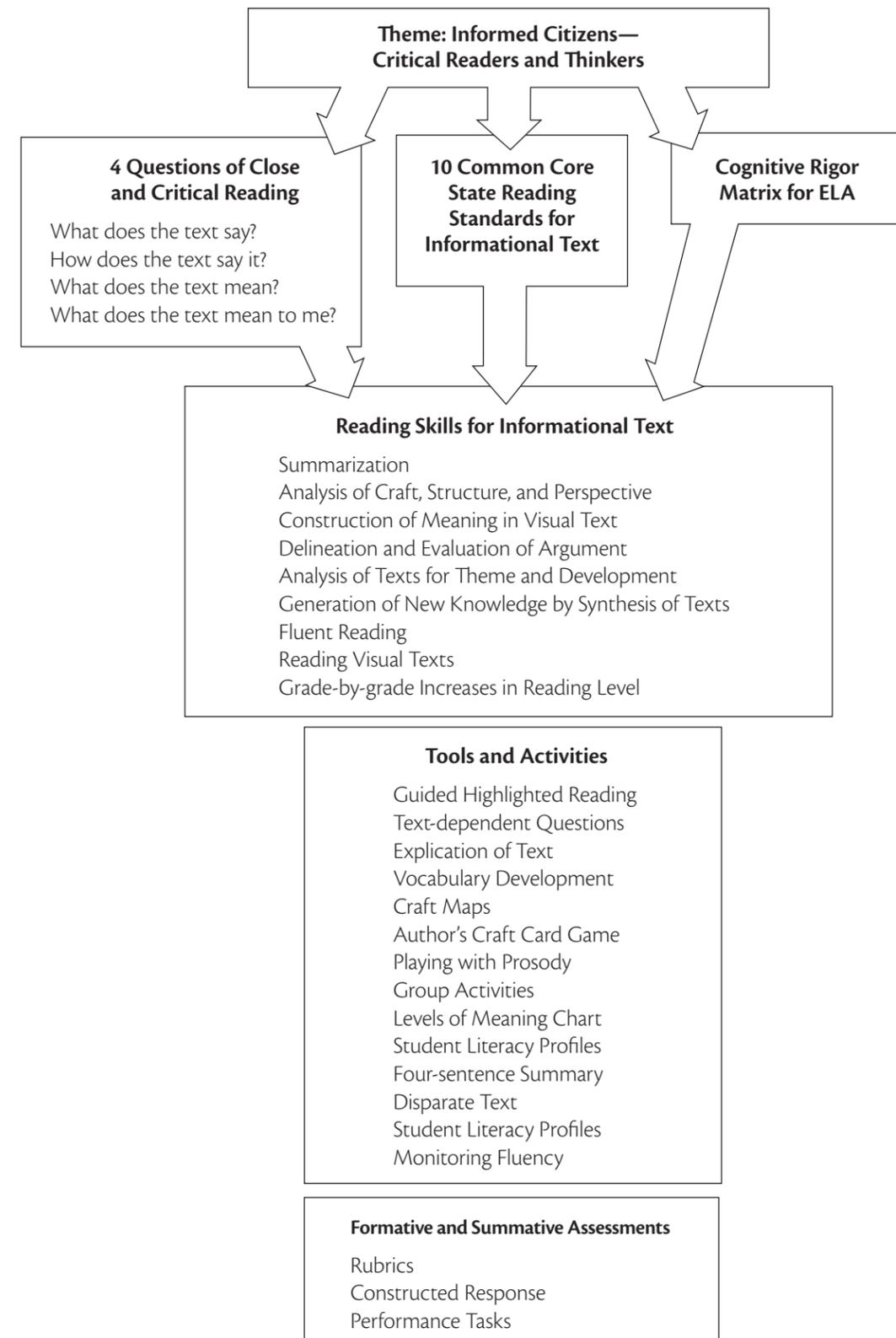
We pondered what an educated citizen would look like in the twenty-first century. We knew it would require not only having the information all citizens should know, but also

- reading closely and learning what a text literally says.
- determining all the mechanisms that authors use to argue a point.
- understanding the power of language to persuade or convince.
- analyzing text critically for bias, marginalizing, and accuracy.
- understanding the text in a larger, critical context.
- responding empathetically to the plight of other human beings.

But what else would be required? We began to ponder what texts would best nurture the identified traits of an educated citizenry. We started to focus on texts that would inform students as well encourage engaging dialogue. We argued over texts, discovered texts, and finally determined the texts. We expanded our thinking through the collaborative dialogue. The result of our conversation and thinking is this book.

Structure of the Book

The following diagram represents the structure of the book.



A Winding Road—from What to What?

We have all been charged with reading more informational text. The 2009 NAEP had a text distribution of 50 percent informational in middle school and 70 percent in high school (National Assessment Governing Board 11). We have, in fact, been reading more informational text, yet how can we maximize that process?

For many years, we have worked with teachers and students to develop close and critical reading skills that now align with CCSS. Through four questions, we developed a focus on accessing text first at a literal level; then with inferences and conclusions; then understanding the craft, structure, and perspectives; and finding the bigger ideas, arguments, theories, and life lessons.

We now know that just gathering knowledge, sorting it, and analyzing it are not enough. We need to do something with it. We added generative reading because we realized that today's students have access to incredible amounts of text. They need to understand how to synthesize those texts to come to new knowledge. We now have the tools to lead students to a point at which they can do that generative thinking with CCSS, the Cognitive Rigor Matrix, and our four questions:

- What does the text say?
- How does the text say it?
- What does the text mean?
- So, what? (What does it mean to me?)

The four questions and their alignment to the Common Core Standards are provided here and in Appendix 1a. Note that additional questions are provided beneath the four questions. The extra questions will not apply to every text, but they will generate thinking and scaffold students to independent close and critical reading skills. They could easily be made into bookmarks for struggling students.

Questions for Close and Critical Reading

CC designations refer to standards from Common Core College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading.

Question #1—Restatement:

What Does the Text Say?

Write a shortened version of the text containing only the main points and logical inferences.

- How would you summarize or write a shortened version of the text containing only the main points? *CC1, CC2*
- What is the gist/central idea? *CC1, CC2*
- What is the specific textual evidence used to support the central idea? *CC1*
- What are the most important ideas/events? *CC1, CC2*
- What are the ideas in order of importance or presentation? *CC1*
- What ideas might the author be suggesting rather than directly stating? What can you infer (obvious, logical inferences) from these hints or suggestions? *CC1*

Question #2—Description:

How Does the Text Say It?

What techniques of craft and structure does the author use in the text? What are the genre, organization, features, word choice, figures of speech, etc.?

- How is the information organized (e.g. time, topic, argument, chapter, scene, stanza, etc.)? *CC5*
- What genre does the selection represent? *CC5*
- How does the piece open—exposition, lead, etc.? *CC5*
- Whose voice did the author choose as narrator? *CC3*
- From what point of view was this written? *CC3*
- What are the sources of information and fact? Is there more than one source of information? *CC3*
- What role does dialogue play in the text? *CC3*
- What kind of language is used—dialect, variant spellings, archaic words, etc.? *CC4*
- What are the style, mood, and tone? *CC4*
- What word choice, imagery, and figures of speech (e.g. simile, metaphor, alliteration, irony, repetition, personification, etc.) does the author use? *CC4*
- What diction and sentence structure does the author use, and how do the sections of the text relate to each other—from the sentence and paragraph levels to the section and chapter levels? *CC4*

From *Guided Highlighted Reading* by Weber, Schofield, and Nelson (Maupin House, 2012)

Questions for Close and Critical Reading

CC designations refer to standards from Common Core College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading.

Question #3—Interpretation: What Does the Text Mean?

What is the theme/thesis of the text and how do the author’s choice of content, structure, and craft combine to achieve his/her purpose?

- What is the central idea/thesis/theme of the text? CC2
- How does the author support the central idea, thesis, or theme with ideas and details? CC2
- What are the purposes, ends, and objectives? CC2
- What is the author’s stance/perspective towards the topic? CC6
- How does the author use language: dialect, variant spellings, archaic words, formal or informal words, etc. to shape the tone (the author’s attitude toward the subject) and the meaning of the piece? CC6
- How does the author use point of view, style, mood, tone, text features, imagery, figures of speech (e.g., simile, metaphor, alliteration, irony, repetition, onomatopoeia, personification, etc.) and the lead, etc. to achieve his/her purpose (author’s intent)? CC6
- Why does the author choose the method of presentation? CC8
- What are the concepts that make the reasoning possible, what assumptions underlie the concepts, and what implications follow from the concepts? CC7, CC8
- What does the author want the reader to believe? CC7, CC8
- What is the quality of information collected; Are the sources sufficient, relevant, credible, current? CC7, CC8
- Who or what is not represented? Why? CC7, CC8

Question #4—Application: So, What?

Evaluation and integration: What does the theme/thesis mean in your life and/or in the lives of others—text-to-self, text-to-text, and/or text-to-world?

Text(s)-to-self: CC7

- What does this remind me of in my life?
- What is this similar to in my life?
- How is this different from my life?
- Has something like this ever happened to me?
- How does this relate to my life?
- What were my feelings when I read this?

Text(s)-to-text: CC9

- What does this remind me of in another book I’ve read?
- How is this text similar to other things I’ve read?
- How is this different from other books I’ve read?
- Have I read about something like this before?

Text(s)-to-world: CC7

- What does this remind me of in the real world?
- How is this text similar to things that happen in the real world?
- How does this differ from things that happen in the real world?
- How did that part relate to the world around me?

Before continuing on our journey, it is important to review the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading. Though we will refer to them throughout the book, it is helpful to read them in their entirety and observe the interrelationships between them. They have played a crucial role in the rethinking of literacy and in the dialogue and collaboration between states. They have expanded the dialogue, a dialogue which we are entering through this text.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading

Key Ideas and Details
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.
3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
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.
5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

From *Guided Highlighted Reading* by Weber, Schofield, and Nelson (Maupin House, 2012)

Depth of Knowledge (DOK) and Cognitive Rigor Matrix

The College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading drive instruction; in addition, they place high expectations upon students. However, it is the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) component that adds another dimension to the standards by expanding the rigor of curriculum and assessments. It impacts instruction and encourages the close, critical, and generative reading students will need in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, it promotes a deeper discourse in the classroom and between teachers.

DOK is particularly effective in helping teachers develop performance tasks. DOK levels reflect the complexity of cognitive processes required by an assessment. Therefore, when developing a performance task, a teacher needs to provide a series of constructed responses at lower DOK levels prior to the performance task at a higher DOK level. The scaffolding of DOK levels provides a teacher and the student with crucial information as to where the student is proficient and scaffolds him or her to the higher-order thinking processes he or she needs to integrate into daily life.

Hess's Cognitive Rigor Matrix

DOK will be discussed throughout the chapters, but closely peruse the following chart, Hess's Cognitive Rigor Matrix & Curricular Examples: Applying Webb's Depth of Knowledge to Bloom's Cognitive Process Dimensions—ELA.

Hess's Cognitive Rigor Matrix & Curricular Examples: Applying Webb's Depth-of-Knowledge to Bloom's Cognitive Process Dimensions—ELA

Revised Bloom's Taxonomy	Webb's DOK Level 1 Recall & Reproduction	Webb's DOK Level 2 Skills & Concepts	Webb's DOK Level 3 Strategic Thinking/Reasoning	Webb's DOK Level 4 Extended Thinking
<p>Remember Retrieve knowledge from long-term memory; recognize, recall, locate, identify</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recall, recognize, or locate basic facts, details, events, or ideas explicit in texts Read words orally in connected text with fluency & accuracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specify, explain, show relationships; explain why, cause-effect Give non-examples/examples Summarize results, concepts, ideas Make basic inferences or logical predictions from data or texts Identify main ideas or accurate generalizations of texts Locate information to support explicit-implicit central ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain, generalize, or connect ideas using supporting evidence (quote, example, text reference) Identify/ make inferences about explicit or implicit themes Describe how word choice, point of view, or bias may affect the readers' interpretation of a text Write multi-paragraph composition for specific purpose, focus, voice, tone, & audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain how concepts or ideas specifically relate to other content domains or concepts Develop generalizations of the results obtained or strategies used and apply them to new problem situations
<p>Understand Construct meaning, clarify, paraphrase, represent, translate, illustrate, give examples, classify, categorize, summarize, generalize, infer a logical conclusion, predict, compare/contrast, match like ideas, explain, construct models</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify or describe literary elements (characters, setting, sequence, etc.) Select appropriate words when intended meaning/definition is clearly evident Describe/explain who, what, where, when, or how Define/describe facts, details, terms, principles Write simple sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use context to identify the meaning of words/phrases Obtain and interpret information using text features Develop a text that may be limited to one paragraph Apply simple organizational structures (paragraph, sentence types) in writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply a concept in a new context Revise final draft for meaning or progression of ideas Apply internal consistency of text organization and structure to composing a full composition Apply word choice, point of view, style to impact readers'/viewers' interpretation of a text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Illustrate how multiple themes (historical, geographical, social) may be interrelated Select or devise an approach among many alternatives to research a novel problem
<p>Apply Carry out or use a procedure in a given situation; carry out (apply to a familiar task), or use (apply) to an unfamiliar task</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use language structure (pre/suffix) or word relationships (synonym/antonym) to determine meaning of words Apply rules or resources to edit spelling, grammar, punctuation, conventions, word use Apply basic formats for documenting sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use language structure (pre/suffix) or word relationships (synonym/antonym) to determine meaning of words Apply rules or resources to edit spelling, grammar, punctuation, conventions, word use Apply basic formats for documenting sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply a concept in a new context Revise final draft for meaning or progression of ideas Apply internal consistency of text organization and structure to composing a full composition Apply word choice, point of view, style to impact readers'/viewers' interpretation of a text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Illustrate how multiple themes (historical, geographical, social) may be interrelated Select or devise an approach among many alternatives to research a novel problem

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Revised Bloom's Taxonomy	Webb's DOK Level 1 Recall & Reproduction	Webb's DOK Level 2 Skills & Concepts	Webb's DOK Level 3 Strategic Thinking/Reasoning	Webb's DOK Level 4 Extended Thinking
<p>Analyze Break into constituent parts, determine how parts relate, differentiate between relevant/irrelevant, distinguish, focus, select, organize, outline, find coherence, deconstruct (e.g., for bias or point of view)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify whether specific information is contained in graphic representations (e.g., map, chart, table, graph, T-chart, diagram) or text features (e.g., headings, subheadings, captions) Decide which text structure is appropriate to audience and purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Categorize, compare literary elements, terms, facts/details, events Identify use of literary devices Analyze format, organization & internal text structure (signal words, transitions, semantic clues) of different texts Distinguish: relevant-irrelevant information; fact/opinion Identify characteristic text features; distinguish between texts, genres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze information within data sets or texts Analyze interrelationships among concepts, issues, problems Analyze or interpret author's craft (literary devices, viewpoint, or potential bias) to create or critique a text Use reasoning, planning, and evidence to support inferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze multiple sources of evidence, or multiple works by the same author, or across genres, time periods, themes Analyze complex/abstract themes, perspectives, concepts Gather, analyze, and organize multiple information sources Analyze discourse styles
<p>Evaluate Make judgments based on criteria, check, detect inconsistencies or fallacies, judge, critique</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cite evidence and develop a logical argument for conjectures Describe, compare, and contrast solution methods Verify reasonableness of results Justify or critique conclusions drawn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate relevancy accuracy, & completeness of information from multiple sources Apply understanding in a novel way, provide argument or justification for the application
<p>Create Reorganize elements into new patterns/structures, generate, hypothesize, design, plan, produce</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brainstorm ideas, concepts, problems, or perspectives related to a topic or concept 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generate conjectures or hypotheses based on observations or prior knowledge and experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Synthesize information within one source or text Develop a complex model for a given situation Develop an alternative solution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Synthesize information across multiple sources or texts Articulate a new voice, alternate theme, new knowledge or perspective

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Guiding Questions for our Readers

Thinking is never an isolated event. Even when we are alone, we carry the words, thoughts, and questions of others in our internal dialogues. Each of us has been shaped by the people and events of our lives. The majority of our lives have been spent with teachers, so, as you begin your journey through this book, we encourage you to consider the following questions. These queries by fellow teachers have served as our guideposts. When we wandered off the trail, they remained visible and led us back to our quest. We realize that some have been answered in greater depth and detail than others. However, we have included them because the dialogue must continue and this book is merely an interruption in the conversation.

- How can I use informational text to help my students develop deeper understanding?
- If I am an English teacher,
 - How can I marry informational text with literature to enrich/enhance the reading experience? (How might recent research about the underdeveloped adolescent brain help my students understand *Romeo and Juliet*?)
 - How can I expand the ideas in literature to help develop understanding of informational text? (What can I do with the ideas in *The Outsiders*?)
- If I am a content-area teacher,
 - How can I help my students read literally and critically to determine author's intent and perspective? (How can I help my students recognize the biases that are shaped by the author's perspective? The author's presentation of details and choice of words can privilege some concepts and marginalize others.)
 - How can I help my students understand how to access the specific content and the big ideas in the texts they read? (How might I work with informational texts to help students begin with the life cycle of the caterpillar and move to an understanding of order and organization?)
- What strategies, tools, and activities are available for me to use with complex informational texts?

Chapter One Works Cited

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CHAPTER TWO: CLOSE READING

Discovering What the Text Is Saying?

Close and Critical Reading in Michigan

Danielle McNamara and her writing partners in an article in the 2007 text *Reading Comprehension Strategies: Theory, Interventions, and Technologies*, note: "It [close reading] involves almost everything, from the smallest linguistic item to the largest issues of literacy understanding and judgment" (McNamara et al 480).

Over the past decade, many reading initiatives in Michigan have used four basic questions packaged under the heading "Close and Critical Reading" to move students' thinking with text from a "literal" understanding of the text's message to a critical analysis of how the text was constructed to determine its meaning or big idea and finally to the personalization of the meaning to the individual reader. Around 2006, the newly adopted Michigan high school content expectations for English language arts guided the development of literature units using the four close and critical reading questions to weave together disparate and related texts to determine overarching themes. Since that time, Mission Literacy, the result of a network of Michigan educators' efforts to improve adolescent literacy, has added other work being done in Michigan featuring the four questions to guide students' thinking with complex text. (Do a search for "mission literacy." The site should come up under "Michigan Mission's possible.")



Story Teller's View: Supreme Court Justices

Controversy over how to interpret subtle text is surprisingly common—reaching even Supreme Court justices. As a *New York Times* opinion piece reveals, Justice Antonin Scalia, writing the *majority* opinion, included a famous line about fences from Robert Frost's poem "Mending Wall," giving it an interpretation many believe a close reading of Frost's poem reveals. An exchange between two Supreme Court justices shows just how far reaching controversy over text can be. To involve students in this, read enough about the controversy between Justices Scalia and Breyer (search directions below) to explain it to students. Then, give students a copy of Frost's "Mending Wall" and a prompt: **What is Robert Frost's most likely belief about walls/fences as revealed in this poem?** Then, provide students with the following *New York Times* articles, each of which defends a *different* interpretation of the poet's position on fences. Ask students if *their* position has changed after reading the articles.

1. Find the *New York Times* article by doing a search on "Justice Scalia's Poetic License."
2. Find the opposing point of view in a letter to the editor by doing a search on "Scalia Wasn't Wrong on Frost."