

On Common Core | Cultivating Collaboration

By Mary Ann Cappiello, Myra Zarnowski, and Marc Aronson on September 4, 2012

Cultivating Collaboration: The First “C”

The Common Core (CCSS) has arrived. We’ve had time to study the standards, peruse the list of recommended materials, and explore the suggested curriculum maps and assessments. Now, how do we begin to put this nationwide initiative into operation? What meaningful steps forward can we take? In this column, we’ll focus on the ideas that shape our approach to the standards. All start with the letter “C” — we call them “The 10 C’s.” We begin with the concept that holds all the others together: collaboration.

Librarians, teachers, administrators, parents, and children must work in concert. Why? Because we bring different strengths, abilities, and interests to the conversation. Teachers are familiar with grade-level curricula, and they get to know their students’ needs and interests early in the year. Librarians are adept at finding the best resources, whatever the subject matter, or reading ability of the student. Administrators understand the importance of librarian-teacher collaboration and can provide common planning time and guidance. Add the enthusiasm and support of parents and children for a rigorous curriculum and all the stakeholders have entered the picture.

The best place for the collaboration to begin is around the topic of quality nonfiction. Under the Common Core, the expectation is that 50 percent of elementary grade reading is in informational texts; at the high school level, the percentage increases to 70 percent. That’s a challenge, but it also offers educators an opportunity to launch a conversation in their school communities. Begin with these two essential questions: What is quality nonfiction? Where can I find it?

Identifying Quality Nonfiction Literature

While there are no hard and fast rules on what constitutes quality nonfiction, there is consensus on some basics. Begin the dialogue by sharing the criteria used by award and book selection committees. How do they go about selecting the titles? What do articles and reviews in journals such as *School Library Journal*, *The Horn Book Magazine*, *Journal of Children’s Literature*, *Reading Teacher*, and *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* contribute to this discussion? For starters, consider accuracy, organization, style of writing, visual material, documentation, and connections to the curriculum in relation to specific titles.

Finding Quality Nonfiction Literature

Educators have an immediate need to identify quality nonfiction literature in all the content areas. Lean on your librarians. As one colleague put it, librarians “have the keys to the castle.” They know good literature and they know how to find it. We suggest that together teachers and librarians begin by examining yearly professional book lists to see which books fit either established curriculum or current topics of interest.

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Here is our starter list and a brief description of what each offers.

NCTE Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children

<http://www.ncte.org/awards/orbispictus/>

Each year, one nonfiction title and up to five honor books in any content area are recognized. The website lists titles selected each year since 1990.

Notable Social Studies Trade Books For Young People

<http://www.socialstudies.org/notable>

A list of K-8 titles of recommended books for teaching social studies. The website lists titles selected each year since 2000.

Outstanding Science Trade Books for Students K-12

<http://www.nsta.org/publications/ostb/>

Lists recommended science books since 1996. Since 2010, the list contains links to activities related to selected books.

Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal

<http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/sibertmedal>

Lists winners and honor books since 2001. Books are selected for their engaging, distinctive language, visual presentation, documentation, and being “respectful and of interest to children.”

As this school year begins, collaborating with colleagues to identify nonfiction that supports a content-rich curriculum is essential to the success of the CCSS. Working together we can identify the raw materials we need to support teaching and learning. From there, we can decide on the best use these resources. As we take these steps together, we work towards building an effective school community, whose hub should clearly be the school library.

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Don't Fear the Reaper - Demystifying Common Core

Marge Lock-Wouters

With the adoption of Common Core State Standards in the vast majority of states, youth librarians are looking at and thinking hard about the impact for public libraries of this sweeping educational change. The trepidation some feel is palpable. Do we need to change our approach, our collections, or the manner in which we work with our schools and families?

While I don't have all the answers, I am fairly sanguine about this educational change. I have been working through various reading paradigms (Reading Recovery! Fountas and Pinnell! Lexile Levels!) throughout my career. I have adapted to whatever my local districts have adopted - I figure it's my job to connect kids and books and that's what I do with a joy and with a vengeance.

Not for me the intricate educationese. I am the big picture person at the public library that listens to the query and the quest and provides just the right resources for the seeker. CCSS is no different in my opinion.

I took part in an unconference focus group on CCSS at the SLJ Think Tank on April 5 in New York. I was reassured in my thoughts during that hour. This group discussed what CCSS means to public libraries and came up with a helpful array of visions, solutions and ideas to help us navigate through the sea change.

My take-aways?

- As public librarians, while we need to be aware of the standards, we do not necessarily have to KNOW the standards to be effective in our reader's advisory and recommendations.
- As a corollary, public libraries don't need to be schools or function on that level to support CCSS. We are and remain an access point for materials.
- We are children's literature experts and, as such, can connect kids and school staff with great fiction and non-fiction books on multiple subjects and levels.
- Don't get lost in lists of exemplars and booklists that are part of CCSS support materials. Often these titles are outdated and there as examples rather than a guide for purchase.
- If you have been developing an excellent information collection that has strong narrative or literary non-fiction (think of many excellent and award winning nonfiction by authors like Freedman, Adler, Sheinkin, Kerley, Sayre and more), you are ready.

Don't Fear the Reaper - Demystifying Common Core (cont'd)

Marge Lock-Wouters

- If your non-fiction collection is weak, make the case in light of CCSS for increased budget money to strengthen it.
- Communication with local schools to be aware of changes in assignments for grade levels (for instance, biography taught in 2nd grade rather than 5th grade; space science addressed in 3th grade rather than 4th grade) helps with collection building to meet the needs of community kids. If you can't get the information from busy librarian/classroom staff, reach out to the Director of Curriculum to update you.
- Support of school media colleagues and school staff can be as simple as keeping dialog open and asking your colleagues how you can support them.
- Seek out collaborative learning opportunities with your school colleagues or ask to attend some of their meetings to bring you up to speed.
- Consider STEAM and STEM programs that connect kids to amazing non-fiction that opens up the wonder of these books. It connects you to Common Core in a fun way. Abby Johnson wrote an [American Libraries column](http://www.americanlibrariesmagazine.org/article/nonfiction-programming) <http://www.americanlibrariesmagazine.org/article/nonfiction-programming> on this and Amy Koester at the [Show-Me Librarian](http://showmelibrarian.blogspot.com) <http://showmelibrarian.blogspot.com> has been blogging about outstanding science programs for some time.
- Browse the beginning of the excellent [Information Fluency Continuum](http://www2.lhric.org/libsys/IFC/Empire_IFC_Oct_2012.pdf) http://www2.lhric.org/libsys/IFC/Empire_IFC_Oct_2012.pdf document, a librarian's perspective based on Barbara Stripling's 2003 work.
- Look at Mary Ann Cappiello's *Teaching with Text Sets* for another perspective on how CCSS is approached.

I find myself excited about the change and the focus on literary non-fiction, a type of book I hold deep and abiding respect for. I don't fear the reaper. How about you?

FAQ – Kristin Fontichiaro

In what ways can public libraries best assist school libraries?

This is a great question! First I want to suggest that we focus our language a bit and ask, “How can public librarians support school librarians?” I say this because I worry about the number of school districts that, for financial or other reasons, are eliminating school librarians but keeping school libraries opened and staffed by paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals can do great work managing collections and circulation, but they lack the vigorous coursework and teaching praxis to provide instructional support.

First of all, we need to acknowledge that public libraries have larger budgets, bigger staffs, and longer hours than school libraries. So that triumvirate of benefits means that public libraries can fill in collection gaps, access gaps, and face-time gaps that a single school librarian may not be able to fill.

Secondly, if there is any way for a public library to negotiate digital subscriptions that can also be used in the public school environment, that is a huge benefit for cash-strapped districts.

Next, public librarians can continue to engage in high-quality, literacy-focused preschool activities with and for young learners that prepare kids for school. These don’t need to be hard sells, full of flashcards and worksheets. Simply adding some informational text to your storytime or asking kids to predict or tell you the main idea of a story starts those wheels turning early.

Finally, public librarians who participated in last year’s webinar, “Common Core Opportunities for Librarians: Strategies for Leading the Way,” told us that many parents felt uncomfortable reading nonfiction (or informational texts, as CCSS calls this genre) with their children. In response, Katie McMahon, one of our graduate students, created a flyer (it was distributed as part of last week’s thank-you email to participants in the webinar “Common Core State Standards: Getting Ready for K–8 Research”) that you can customize and share with parents. It gives an introduction to CCSS and talks to parents about how they can share informational text with their kids.

Where can we find the books mentioned in the webinar? In what formats can we get them?

You can find [Navigating the Information Tsunami: Engaging Research Projects that Meet the Common Core State Standards, K-5](#), on the Cherry Lake Publishing site or via Titlewave.com. It’s quickly being added to other vendor sites. It’s currently available in paperback only. We also showed titles from the Language Arts Explorer Junior, Information Explorer, and Information Explorer Junior series. These books are available in paperback, library binding, or eBook format.

Will you be having a webinar on research for grades 9–12? We won’t have one featuring Cherry Lake resources on 9–12 research, as our books go up through 8th grade. (We’d like to know how large the interest is; email me to let us know!)

However, Booklist Publications has lots of CCSS ideas up its sleeve this year. Visit the new dedicated Common Core landing page on Booklist Online for links to Common

Core-related material from Booklist and Book Links magazines, Quick Tips e-newsletter, and Booklist Online, including the Bookends blog. You'll also find Booklist's growing links to Common Core-related webinars. This single-point access to Common Core materials, including pdfs of CCSS-related columns and articles, allows for easier group sharing during professional development workshops and in-service training. Also, keep an eye out for Library Media Connection (LMC) and its slate of webinars this year. And, in my role as the "Nudging Toward Inquiry" columnist for School Library Monthly, we're looking for and publishing strategies about CCSS implementation all year. One of our upcoming columns will focus on research for grades 9-12.

So . . . Cherry Lake is the sole publisher of the original information on the CCSS?

Nope! While I think we did the first book on CCSS research projects, we aren't a formal affiliate of CCSS. The original CCSS standards were published by the National Governors' Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Almost every publisher is working to align its materials with CCSS.

Speaking personally, I publish with Cherry Lake because it was already publishing materials about how to build strong literacy skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and research before CCSS came on the horizon. I think it was ahead of its time, presenting hard and soft skills that kids need to thrive in their uncertain future. CCSS presents very few "new" ideas. Librarians who do a close read of CCSS often discover that they and their classroom colleagues are already incorporating many of the standards into their practice. So while publishers are labeling their titles as CCSS-aligned, the better solution is to read the standards and trust your instinct on the texts that are the best match.

Where can we find Lexile levels? What are the ways in which we define text complexity in CCSS?

You can learn more about the Lexile method of measuring reading difficulty at Lexile.com. Remember that Lexile measures reading difficulty quantitatively; CCSS defines text complexity by how we measure it quantitatively (e.g., word/sentence length), qualitatively (e.g., human-measured levels of difficulty such as use of figurative or metaphorical language), and reader and task (e.g., what does the reader already know? What does the reader need to do with the text?).

Is information literacy part of CCSS exit skills?

Yes, but they are not labeled as "information literacy skills." We looked at writing standard 7 from K-8 and saw research in every grade, and that pattern continues through 12th grade. And there are many more info lit-related standards beyond that. If you read the beginning of the English Language Arts standards document, you'll find a paragraph that points out the importance of research in CCSS and the fact that it has intentionally been spread throughout the Standards, not siloed in its own section. Look in the Reading Informational Text, Writing, and Speaking and Listening sections throughout CCSS for examples. Keep in mind that CCSS only claims to cover English Language Arts and Math, so they don't cover everything in a child's learning day; there are no CCSS for art, music, physical education, science, social studies, civics, or

industrial arts! Also, as we discussed in the webinar, there are many standards regarding information literacy or research that have very vague language. It's our job to go in and infuse those standards with the multidimensionality we know they deserve!

What do I think of information literacy? Do I think it is a well-understood concept?

I think the goals of information literacy are very valuable and necessary. However, they are often misunderstood or not acknowledged at all. At other times, they are seen as important but, due to financial or time constraints, not as urgent as the skills that are currently being tested. At the college level, "information literacy" seems to have taken hold as an expression more than at the K–12 level. I'm starting to see more discussion in non-library K–12 settings about information literacy skills, even if they are not labeled as such. I teach an inquiry-based course on information literacy for teaching and learning, and we talk a lot about barriers to success: time, priorities, knowledge, perception of search skills that may be stronger than they are, improvement in search algorithms over time that make it easier for us to find stuff than it used to be, etc. We have documented those inquiry-driven explorations in the free eBook *Information Literacy in the Wild*.

The good news about CCSS is that there are standards that deal directly with search, credibility, use of multiple print and digital sources, synthesis, writing, and presentations. This gives librarians unprecedented opportunities to open and broaden the conversation about information literacy and inquiry-based learning.

With all of the digital depositories out there, how can we help students navigate that raw information?

This a tip-of-the-iceberg response to a question that deserves much more space than this blog post can hold. I assume you mean the combination of open Web and subscription database repositories of content. One thing we cannot underestimate is the need for our students and classroom colleagues to navigate their favorite sources (e.g., Google, Bing, Wikipedia) effectively. Subscription databases can be great, and they are essential for scholarly use, but the great majority of questions that we try to solve in our lives are solved with free, open Web searches and sources. I highly recommend Google's encore *Power Searching with Google* course; take it with your classroom colleagues and/or students! Also, I'm intrigued by the potential of the National Archives and Records Administration's visual and keyword-driven DigitalVaults.org as a way for students to begin to search visual images in a web of interrelated topics. Those primary sources can drive great questions!

Anything else?

Sure. This past weekend, I had a lot of fun doing a workshop for the Massachusetts School Library Association on the Common Core State Standards. One of the activities we did was to look at the "exit grade" standards (e.g., 2nd, 5th, 8th, and 12th) so that librarians could get a snapshot of what their students need to be able to do before leaving their school. We organized the standards into a chart form. You can find that activity, as well as an archive of the presentation, [here](#).