This topic was a difficult one for us to read and write about. On the one hand, we do not support any set of standards that were developed outside of professional organizations, adopted by states as a condition of eligibility for federal monies, tied to very expensive tests, which, in turn, take away monies better used in classrooms by teachers and are grounded on the assumption that schools in the US are deficient. We also do not support the development of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) materials, which reduce teacher autonomy and suggest teachers do not possess sufficient professional knowledge. On the other hand, we are acutely aware that teachers across the country are being told they must incorporate the Common Core State Standards and are in need of texts that help them do so in ways that privilege their knowledge and the best practices already in place. Concurrently, we remain hopeful that teachers will raise their voices in the national conversation and, in the long run, teaching will become a profession self-monitored by practicing professionals and not by corporations or politicians (DS, MS, VO).

Over the past few years, Atticus Finch, Elizabeth Bennet, and Jay Gatsby have welcomed some rather new faces to the literary canon. As newcomers like Katniss, Percy, and Bella arrived, teachers speculated about the long-term effects of replacing challenging texts with less rigorous ones. Some might defend the shift as a sincere effort to interweave engaging and relevant young adult literature. However, in her revised edition of With Rigor for All: Meeting Common Core Standards for Reading Literature, Carol Jago argues that all students, for a variety of reasons, can and should tackle challenging literature. Amidst encouragement, advice, and examples about adjusting to Common Core State Standards, Jago addresses and answers two questions that may interest educators: why do students benefit from the experience of demanding texts, and how can teachers effectively use these texts in their classrooms?

Using provocative quotations from classic literature, Jago alerts readers to the topic and tone of each new chapter. For example, Chapter 1 begins with an excerpt from Jane Eyre, after which Jago sets on a course to defend the merits of demanding literature. She argues that these rigorous reads confront students with ethical dilemmas, bolster vocabulary power, expose new worlds, reveal life’s struggles, challenge beliefs, and provide discussion topics conducive to academic debate. These books, which force us to wrestle with beliefs, confront our fears, and explore the peaks and valleys of humanity, often become the ones we never forget.

Later, Jago concludes future academic success is more connected to challenging literature than a
student’s mastery of objective tests. Jago writes, “Some argue that objective testing prepares students for college, yet the students who go on to do well at the university level are those who read widely with understanding, who speak articulately about what they have learned, and write with confidence” (p. 90). Ultimately, though, Jago encourages teachers to look beyond college and career paths for students. She wants teachers to consider that we are not merely helping students prepare for an entry exam or a future career; rather, we are preparing students for life—one in which they will continue to learn, read, and grow.

After explaining why teachers should avoid the temptation of abandoning texts that tend to stagger students, Jago recommends teachers expose hurdles such as length, vocabulary, syntax, settings, names, and format. The key is to let students know about the challenges ahead of them. “By describing the minefields,” Jago explains, “I hope to prevent student readers from getting blown to bits by a demanding text” (p. 21). She then shares strategies that keep students engaged with the literature: play with language; discuss and debate moral issues; relate to recent events; provide meaningful assessments; model what good readers do; and establish connections to art, movies, YouTube clips, and young adult books.

Throughout, Jago expresses a deep understanding and passion for teaching, teachers, and students. Any educator who has experienced the frustration of teaching a challenging text will find value and encouragement in these pages. In the world of impending changes due to CCSS, it is refreshing to hear the voice of someone who understands the world of teachers—their love of literature, anxiety for the future, and hope for education. (CCB & MES)

**Texts and Lessons for Teaching Literature with 65 Fresh Mentor Texts**
by Harvey Daniels and Nancy Steineke, Heinemann, 2013, 312 pp., ISBN 978-0-325-04435-4

In preparation for a new school year, teachers spend time collaborating, planning, and researching resources that will support them in their day-to-day practice. Because many teachers spend their own money on professional texts, they want the most value for their dollar. With the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, teachers are especially eager to find useful resources that will help them be classroom-ready. *Texts and Lessons for Teaching Literature* by Harvey Daniels and Nancy Steineke is such a resource.

This book is teacher-friendly and easy to navigate. It addresses the CCSS for the English Language Arts Reading Standards for Literature 6–12 in 12 chapters. Chapters 3–9 present 37 strategy lessons that are accompanied by a “one-page wonder” (p. 6)—a short, engaging, yet challenging piece of narrative text (poem, short story, essay, or image). Chapter 10 presents eight text-set lessons with a thematically connected assortment of reading selections designed to be studied, compared, and debated together. Chapter 11 focuses on keeping kids at the center with three commonly taught whole-class novels: *The Giver* by Lois Lowry; *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee; and *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Chapter 12 presents ways teachers can either find their own collection of one-page wonders or write their own. Valuable features of this book include prominent sidebars that connect lessons to common core skills and a chart in the appendix that correlates the lessons with relevant standards. Although this book focuses on Reading Standards for Literature, the authors also address other Common Core Standards in Speaking and Listening, Language, and Writing, providing an integrated approach to teaching and learning that is the cornerstone of best-practice teaching.

The literature selections offered are interesting, challenging, and sure to engage adolescents. The
Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Achievement


In their book, Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman offer their interpretation of the best way to approach CCSS in literacy. The authors present their understandings of the Standards and offer instructional suggestions. Most of their recommendations for instruction are solidly grounded in current literacy research. However, we question how the authors frame teachers in regard to the CCSS.

In the reading section, the authors describe methods teachers can use to support students in employing complex thinking skills and deep comprehension. They suggest teachers scaffold students into more complex texts and critical analysis than the CCSS requires by providing copious amounts of practice time. In the writing section, the authors unpack the Standards in a nonlinear fashion and, based on their experiences as writing teachers, comment on what they believe will be useful for other teachers. They show teachers how the spiral connection among the writing Standards helps students build high levels of craft so they make steady progress throughout their education. In the speaking and listening section, the authors invite educators to foster student-to-student conversations by purposely planning and facilitating classroom talk. Finally, in the assessment section, the authors discuss the new SMARTER Balanced assessments that “may prove to be innovative and able to assess higher-level thinking, reading, and writing skills” (p. 190).

Despite the helpfulness of these sections, we are concerned about how the authors position teachers in relation to the CCSS. Calkins and her colleagues posit in the first chapter, “You can view the standards as a curmudgeon—or as if they are gold” (p. 3). However, the authors argue that to teach productively from the Standards, readers should spend their time “embracing what is good in this document” (p. 8), allowing for, but quickly dismissing the questions they might ask. We see questions as vital conversation starters in legislative, collegial, and administrative arenas that could initiate change and promote teacher agency; such questions should be supported.
As educators, we believe teachers should use skillful discernment and professional reflection to determine for ourselves why and how we will make use of the CCSS. All texts and readings are complex. Teachers have a responsibility to read professional texts from a stance that will support genuine professional reflection and transformative classroom practice. Calkins, Ehrenworth and Lehman provide potential pathways to addressing the CCSS, but it is in teachers’ hands to take these suggestions and choose resources and engagements that will best support their learners. (EW, PA, & EB)

Unlike the authors of some books about the Common Core State Standards, Long, Hutchinson, and Neiderhiser take the broadminded stance of “protecting the role of teacher as wise and knowledgeable decision maker” (p. vii). Instead of encouraging teachers to accept new mandates and “CCSS aligned curriculum” (since the CCSS clearly states it is not a curriculum), the authors respect teaching as an art that should start with the child.

The book is written for teachers “deeply committed to their students and their literacy learning” (p. 2) as well as for administrators and policy makers. Part I examines the CCSS; Part II showcases teachers, students, and families meeting the CCSS through culturally responsive teaching; and Part III views the Standards in relation to the bigger picture. Readers of this book will see guiding principles woven throughout the text, which include: starting with the child; developing caring relationships; and practicing culturally responsive teaching. The authors stress the importance of demystifying the Standards. Instead of viewing them as a novel, intimidating set of mandates, they argue we should see them as what teachers already do on a daily basis in their classrooms.

The vignettes in Part II give the reader a snapshot of what effective, purposeful teaching looks like and how it aligns with the CCSS. Part III sets this text apart from other books about the CCSS. Instead of stopping at a text-level interpretation of the CCSS and its implications in a classroom setting, the authors challenge educators to view the Standards in the context of the larger whole, including reflection and professional study, planned instruction, and educational advocacy. They include an appendix of professional resources by topic, suggested outlines to organize professional learning communities in school faculties, and ways to utilize the experience of fellow teachers as professional development resources. Teacher-driven professional development, they assert, is the best way for teachers to grow as professionals to meet students’ needs.

This book is not for educators who wish to maintain the status quo. However, teachers who seek to incorporate child-centered, culturally responsive instruction that aligns with the CCSS will find this book a transformational resource. (CS & MS)
the authors provide a brief summary of the four basic ELA strands (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) and overarching Anchor Standards, and address questions educators may have regarding the CCSS Standards. Such concerns include the relationship between CCSS and state standards, topics and genres of exemplar texts, rigor of the CCSS Standards, integrated models of literacy, and how to align instructional practices with the CCSS. The authors also highlight patterns in the CCSS, including: synthesizing across diverse texts, developing independence, transferring learning across content areas, spiraled instruction, the inclusion of nonfiction or informational texts across all content areas, and text complexity.

In the second section, readers are introduced to six teachers in grades three through five. Each vignette provides background on the teaching context and information about one teacher’s journey and growth. Both rural and urban populations are featured. Collaboration among students (e.g., think/pair/share) is emphasized in all the vignettes. In addition, each teacher utilizes formal and informal assessments to guide instruction and assists students in connecting reading and writing. Following each vignette is a chart that shows how each teacher’s practice supports the CCSS. A possible enhancement of this resource would be for teachers to work in professional learning communities to read the vignettes, identify CCSS connections, and compare and contrast findings to those in each chart. Section two closes with discussion questions that aid readers in looking closely at each of the vignettes in connection with CCSS.

In the final section, the authors provide suggestions for planning and integrating the CCSS. They focus on individual and collaborative approaches to building instruction that is consistent with CCSS and argue for teachers as advocates. This book would be a beneficial resource for teachers, administrators, and literacy coaches. The vignettes, charts and Web resources included in this text will help educators plan collaboratively. The emphasis on collaboration and professional development throughout the book connects to both CCSS and NCTE’s position that teachers should decide how to help students reach the Standards. (EB)

**Supporting Students in a Time of Core Standards: English Language Arts Grades 6–8**


Perry and Manery begin by providing the reader a description of what the Common Core State Standards are and addressing many reservations teachers may have regarding them. For example, they dispel teachers’ fear that CCSS will lead to mandated, scripted instruction by quoting the CCSS where it states teachers should be allowed to make curricular decisions based on the needs of the students in their classrooms. Their unifying theme is that the student should lie at the heart of all instruction. The authors emphasize that only a teacher knows exactly what a student may need instructionally and should be trusted to provide it.

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different paths a teacher could take to a similar learning goal.

An important message in this book is that if you are already following best practices established by NCTE, then the transition into CCSS should be a smooth one. Some of these practices include honoring diversity, collaborating, making connections, and contextualizing learning. The layout of the text includes helpful symbols to label these values/themes throughout the reading, as well as a few graphic organizers showing the relationship between the Standards, instruction, and—in the center of it all—the student.

Middle school teachers specifically benefit from this book since the observed classrooms featured are from the middle grades, but anyone else who is curious about transitioning to CCSS may appreciate this text as well. (SHT)

In the first section of this book, the authors discuss the implications of the CCSS, addressing many of the issues teachers are questioning as the CCSS are implemented across the country. Wessling, Lillge, and VanKooten suggest use the CCSS as an opportunity for reflecting on and refining their teaching practices by examining the CCSS document, considering the needs of students, and then integrating the CCSS into their already established best practices. This discussion is frank and allows skeptics of the CCSS to think about these Standards differently.

Section two contains a series of teaching vignettes that demonstrate how the CCSS can be integrated with best teaching practices and long-established NCTE principles for teaching English language arts. In one vignette, for example, topics directly related to the CCSS, such as text complexity and rigor, are addressed through Wessling’s use of “conceptual reading circles” (p. 24). In these circles, Wessling combines the use of context, fulcrum, and texture texts in order to build the text complexity and rigor of a unit and the conceptual, skill-based learning within a unit. Teachers should find the teaching practices presented in these vignettes very familiar, the lesson ideas useful, and the teachers’ voices relatable. A chart mapping the CCSS, teaching practices, learning practices, and NCTE principles presented in each vignette can be found at the end of each chapter. This chart is extremely helpful in demonstrating how the CCSS can be aligned with NCTE teaching principles and in reminding readers that there are many effective ways of addressing each Standard.

In the third and final section of the book, the authors focus on student-centered planning, collaboration, and advocacy. The planning chapter reminds teachers to be intentional and, with specific students in mind, use familiar practices such as spiraling instruction and backward design. Collaboration is key to successfully integrating the CCSS; the CCSS literacy goals for students in their senior year are shared goals across subject areas, and teachers must collaborate in order to satisfy these goals. The authors encourage teachers to become active advocates who contribute to the conversations about the CCSS and other relevant topics to ensure professional, knowledgeable teachers remain in control of their classrooms.

Ultimately, this book will encourage high school teachers who are struggling with the CCSS by acknowledging their concerns and encouraging them to use the CCSS as a tool to increase the complexity of what they already do in their instruction. While teachers will not find many new teaching practices presented in the book, the information provided and the discussion of how to integrate the CCSS into current teaching practices could prove to be useful. (BD)

Supporting Students in a Time of Core Standards: English Language Arts, Grades 9-12
by Sarah Brown Wessling, Danielle Lillge, and Crystal VanKooten.

In the first section of this book, the authors discuss the implications of the CCSS, addressing many of the issues teachers are questioning as the CCSS are implemented across the country. Wessling, Lillge, and VanKooten suggest the CCSS as an opportunity for reflecting on and refining their teaching practices by examining the CCSS document, considering the needs of students, and then integrating the CCSS into their already established best practices. This discussion is frank and allows skeptics of the CCSS to think about these Standards differently.

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Candidates Announced for Section Elections; Watch for Your Ballot

The Elementary Section Nominating Committee has named the following candidates for Section offices in the NCTE spring elections:

For Members of the Elementary Section Steering Committee (four to be elected; terms to expire in 2018): Jane Bean-Folkes, Rowan University, New Jersey; Kathy Collins, Durham, New Hampshire; Bobbie Kabuto, Queens College, Flushing, New York; Julia Lopez-Robertson, University of South Carolina, Columbia; Prisca Martens, Towson University, Maryland; Erin T. Miller, University of North Carolina, Charlotte; Karen Terlecy, Glacier Ridge Elementary School, Dublin, Ohio; Kathryn F. Whitmore, University of Louisville, Kentucky.

For Members of the Elementary Section Nominating Committee (three to be elected; terms to expire in 2015): Sally Brown, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro; Tracey Flores, Arizona State University, Phoenix; Chuck Jurich, University of Alaska, Fairbanks; Maria Perpetua ‘Perpie’ Liwanag, State University of New York, Geneseo; Deborah MacPhee, Illinois State University, Normal; Patty McGee, Harrington Park, New Jersey.

Members of the 2013–14 Elementary Section Nominating Committee are Thomas Marshall, Stony Lane Elementary School, Paramus, New Jersey, chair; Koomi Kim, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces; and Sandra L. Osorio, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.