

Introduction

The *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* (CCSS for ELA/Literacy) focus on building student ability to read and understand grade-level complex texts and express that understanding clearly through writing and speaking. Teachers must ensure students are independently and proficiently meeting the expectations of the CCSS for ELA/Literacy in the context of reading complex texts, and organizing a curriculum around a series of text sets can provide a rich context.

What is a text set?

A text set is a collection of texts (e.g., novels, passages, articles, film, art, websites, etc.) organized around an anchor text. Each set has a purpose based on the way the texts are related. When texts are organized to “talk to one another,” students are able to build knowledge about the way complex texts represent certain topics, comment on life, and provide insight into different cultures, perspectives, or time periods.

Strong Text Set	Weak Text Set
Anchor Text: <i>Fahrenheit 451</i> , Ray Bradbury	Anchor Text: <i>Fahrenheit 451</i> , Ray Bradbury
Related Texts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Burning a Book,” William Stafford (Poem) • “The Book Burnings,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Informational) • “You Have Insulted Me: A Letter,” Kurt Vonnegut (Informational) • Excerpts from <i>The Book Thief</i>, Marcus Zusak (Appendix B Exemplar) • “Learning to Read and Write,” Frederick Douglass (Informational) • “The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me,” Sherman Alexie (Informational) 	Related Texts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “‘Chaos:’ Gunman Ambushes, Kills Two Firefighters at New York Blaze,” Catherine Shoichet and Greg Botelho (CNN) (Informational) • “Johannes Gutenberg and the Printing Press,” Mary Bellis (About.com) (Informational) • <i>Fahrenheit 451</i>, Francois Truffaut (Film) • “About Ray Bradbury: Biography” (Informational) • “The Pedestrian,” Ray Bradbury (Literary) • <i>The Children’s Story</i>, James Clavell (Literary)
What makes this a strong set?	What makes this a weak set?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connections build knowledge about censorship • Thematic connections encourage students to think about the social and political effects of literacy • Encourages purposeful rereading and deep analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connections are sometimes superficial or tangential • Unclear how a teacher would use texts to support student understanding about a topic or themes • Encourages reading the text once and moving on

Selecting Texts

Selecting appropriate texts is critical for aligning to the CCSS for ELA/Literacy. While there are no set criteria, the following questions can help guide the selection of texts.

1. Will the text interest students or does it provide opportunities for building stamina and perseverance?
2. Is the content age-appropriate?
3. Does the text meet the [text complexity standards](#) of the CCSS, or is it included in [Appendix B](#) of the CCSS?
4. Does the text offer multiple opportunities for students to meet the expectations of various CCSS strands¹?
5. Is the text authentic and high quality? Does it contain accurate and meaningful information and content?
6. Does the text represent or include diverse perspectives from different cultures?
7. Is the [text available](#) (through an anthology, electronically, or easily available for purchasing)?

¹ For example, RI.5.6 asks students to analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting similarities and differences in the point of view they represent. Some of the texts for the year/course must support the specific CCSS.

Creating a Text Set

Organizing text into sets is best done in collaboration with others. While the following steps can be used as a guide for getting started, the process is likely to include many cycles of drafting and revision.

Step 1: Select anchor texts based on understandings to be gained through text

Consider the knowledge and skills students should have at the end of the grade or course as well as the [above text selection criteria](#) to select anchor texts.

Consider the following questions for this step:

- What [skills](#) do literate college and career ready students possess?
- What are the [end-of-year student performance expectations](#)?
- What aspects of complex texts based on the grade-level CCSS should students understand at the end of the year? (e.g., “Texts provide insight into different cultures” ([RL.2.9](#) or [RL.9-10.6](#)) or “The way an author structures a text contributes to its meaning” ([RI.6.5](#) or [RI.11-12.5](#)))
- How might a student’s experience of the school day be more integrated across the disciplines? (e.g., What knowledge in history, science, and the arts can be gained, reinforced, extended, challenged, or fictionalized through texts? What knowledge in history, science, or the arts can help students build knowledge that would be useful for understanding texts in English language arts?)

Step 2: Determine a purpose for the set, select related texts, and organize the sets

A text set can serve multiple purposes based on the way the texts connect: topically (including content from other disciplines), conceptually or thematically, by style (author, genre, or treatment), or by providing needed background information for the anchor text or offering a different perspective from the anchor text.

Most sets should incorporate a variety and balance of text formats (print, media, art, visual texts, etc.), lengths, and types (defined on pages 31 and 57 of the [CCSS for ELA/Literacy](#)).

Once the text sets are formed, organize the sets across the year, paying attention to building knowledge and increasing text complexity. Make sure to collaborate with teachers from different grade levels, so that the knowledge and text complexity is also built across the grade levels or courses.

Consider the following questions for this step:

- Do the texts in the set relate in a clear and purposeful way?
- Do the sets build knowledge within and across grades?
- Do the sets support text complexity requirements of the CCSS and increase over time?
- Have considerations been made for variety and balance of text formats, lengths, and types?

Step 3: Identify the appropriate standards and possible student inquiry tasks

The [PARCC Model Content Frameworks chart](#) illustrates how reading, writing, and research are integrated around complex texts. There is no checklist of standards to be taught—teachers will likely teach every grade-specific standard multiple times throughout the year in the context of different text sets. What changes from text set to text set is the focus and emphasis on the types of texts read and written about; what remains constant is the cultivation of students’ [literacy skills](#).

Consider the following questions for this step:

- What standards are met through the text set?
- What areas for student investigation will deepen or extend students’ understanding of the texts and concepts of the set?

Step 4: Refine the text set

Evaluate your sets for the following criteria and make necessary revisions so they are strong and provide opportunities for students to meet the expectations of the CCSS for ELA/Literacy:

Strong text sets	Weak text sets
Build students' knowledge and include texts with focused and purposeful connections	Contain texts that are not related across sets or are superficially connected
Increase in text complexity within and across sets to support student achievement of grade-level complexity demands of CCSS ²	Have erratic text complexity levels that do not support the staircase of text complexity in the CCSS ³
Contain accurate and authentic texts worthy of study	Contain inaccurate texts or only commissioned texts from textbooks
Meet several CCSS from multiple strands	Only align to a single strand or a few standards

Resources for Locating Texts

Texts and resources for locating texts for classroom use are available through a variety of electronic sites.

- Bartleby.com: A free online collection of public domain texts
- Lit2Go: A free online collection of classic texts, including PDF and audio versions
- American Literature: Another free online collection of texts
- TumbleBook Library and TumbleBookCloud Junior: Free online collections of contemporary texts with audio
- The Learning Network (*The New York Times*): A blog that highlights useful articles and content for classrooms
- National Geographic Explorer: A subscription-based classroom magazine with free public online access
- Article of the Week (Kelly Gallagher) and an explanation for how this is done (grades 6-12)
- The Reading & Writing Project (Columbia University): Resources for building classroom libraries and text sets
- Additional search engines for similar books based on topic and/or readability level: Scholastic Book Wizard, ReadKiddoRead, Book Pig, Carol Hurst's Children's Literature Site, and GoodReads
- Public libraries and school libraries often publish similar book lists or "If you like x, then try reading y" lists

² While choice of books is allowable, make sure the options are comparably complex (i.e., such as in literature circles, when groups of students select different books to read, discuss, and then share with the class).

³ For example, students read different, leveled versions of the same text for whole-class instruction or a teacher selects books for whole-class instruction that are from several grade levels below to match student reading ability, not grade-level expectations.