

# Sharing Complex Text and the CCSS

## COMPLEX TEXTS FOR EVERYONE

The Common Core State Standards fulfill a longstanding goal of ensuring that all students, regardless of ability, are college and career ready upon graduation. Students who meet the expectations of the standards are able to comprehend complex text closely and extract meaning and information from it. They are close readers, delving into texts in order to unearth evidence, construct knowledge, and broaden their understanding of the text and world. As thinkers, such students are able to reason logically and use what they read to discuss options, construct arguments, convey information, and make decisions. Central to their readiness in these areas is the ability to independently read complex text.

All students upon graduation will be faced with either entering the workforce or going on to post-secondary education. But what is inescapable about either choice is the need for graduates to be able to navigate complex texts. Both paths after graduation critically rely on students being able to independently understand the complex texts that they are reading whether on the job or in college. Hence it is critical that all students have the opportunity to grapple with complex text across a range of types and disciplines at all grade levels in order to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful upon graduation.

## WHY READING COMPLEX TEXT IS ESSENTIAL

Research shows that the key ingredient to success after graduation in college was the ability to read complex text. Surprisingly, the results showed that it was not what students could do with the text that they read that determined their success in college coursework, but whether or not they could read complex text itself. This result held across all racial and ethnic groups, for both male and female students, and even for students of varying socio-economic backgrounds. And the converse held true as well – regardless of the background of a student, if they struggled as a reader, they were more likely not to earn a post-secondary degree. Hence the CCSS, instead of stressing particular teaching methodologies, instead stresses exposing all students to complex text in the classroom.

And what holds true in the workplace and in college holds true in general for adults. If students cannot master complex texts in those arenas, they are more likely to turn to non-text sources for information, such as video, podcasts, or even tweets. While a valuable source of evidence, these mediums do not require the same skill, concentration, and stamina as reading complex text does, and are not as rich a source of information. Unfortunately, research also shows that students and adults can get caught in a vicious circle: if not exposed to complex text, they will not build the skills to be able to understand complex text, which means they will not seek out complex text, furthering the decline in their understanding of this rich source of knowledge.

## TEXT COMPLEXITY AND THE CCSS

The CCSS equally emphasizes not only the skill with which students read texts but the complexity of the text that they read. **ANCHOR READING STANDARD 10** articulates a grade by grade ladder of increasing text complexity bands (grades 2–3, 4–5, 6–8, 9–10, and 11–CCR) for students to traverse over the course of their K-12 education. Students who enter a band will need initial scaffolding to help them grasp complex text, but by the end of their time within a band are expected to be able to comprehend complex text within the band independently.

Yet the CCSS recognizes that students' ability to read complex text does not always proceed in a linear fashion. Students must be given the opportunity to read text that both stretches them skill wise as well as text that is easy to negotiate. The difficulty level of a particular text is oftentimes dictated by the situation and context, with factors such as the experiences, motivation, and knowledge base of students coming into play. What remains central to text selection is that all students are moving in the direction of mastering ever increasing complex text.