Curricula as Complements: Inclusive Content-Based Literature and the Goals of Common Core in Secondary Students’ English Achievement

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Curricula as Complements:
Inclusive Content-Based Literature and the Goals of Common Core in Secondary Students’ English Achievement

by

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Abstract

The Common Core State Standards now suggest a 70% nonfiction, 30% fiction reading load for 6th to 12th grade students (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017). To satisfy this curricular push toward nonfiction, many secondary English teachers are shifting away from inclusive literature instruction to a more standardized English Language Arts (ELA) model based on Common Core’s five strands for ELA: reading informational text, reading literature, writing, language, and speaking and listening. This ideological and practical shift within secondary ELA has created a local-level problem of practice. Owing to Common Core’s relative silence on issues of diversity, shifts away from inclusive content-based literature instruction often mean fewer opportunities for multicultural study.

This action research project considers a potential solution to the perceived conflict between the Common Core State Standards and diverse literature study: an inclusive content-based approach to literature instruction could operate as a curricular complement to Common Core. Specifically, through constructivist, dialogic study of diverse literary works, inclusive content-based literature could rectify Common Core’s disregard for diversity and serve as an instructional method for promoting the college and career readiness goals of the Standards.

The study uses a pretest/posttest design to consider the relationship between inclusive content-based literature and students’ college readiness as measured by classroom administration of the ACT, a standardized college readiness benchmark test,
after one semester of culturally responsive instruction in inclusive content-based literature. Posttest data indicated a whole-class average of 1.8 points of scaled growth (a jump from the 31st national percentile of test takers to the 41st) and an even more marked average of 2.8 points scaled growth among students of color (a move from the 31st percentile to the 47th). These findings suggest that inclusive content-based literature, despite an explicit lack of alignment with Common Core’s five-strand model of ELA, could have a positive relationship with students’ college and career readiness, the stated goal of the Common Core State Standards.

With these findings, the study then considered how inclusive content-based literature could complement Common Core in a mutually adaptive process (McLaughlin, 1976) to realign instructional goals, refresh the instructional approach, and promote social justice at the research site.

*Keywords*: English language arts, Common Core State Standards, inclusive content-based literature
Preface

At twenty-one years old, I read Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. After hundreds of hours spent studying Shakespeare, Emerson, Melville, Faulkner, Coleridge, and Fitzgerald (such a diverse array of styles and perspectives, I believed!), I enrolled in a Feminist and Queer Literary Theory course in hopes of making my college transcript more competitive for graduate literature programs. The course seemed a smart, safe bet for the young, suburban, middle-class, ambitious, and oblivious White woman that I was.

But then, I read Danticat and nothing seemed safe anymore. In Sophie, the protagonist of *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, I saw so many of my own experiences—an obsession with studying as a means of independence, a troubled mother-daughter relationship, struggles due to cultural expectations of femininity—and yet every shared trait seemed dwarfed by Sophie’s differences: her race, her poverty, her abuse, her native language, her nation of origin. Danticat made Sophie so real, so relatable, so close, so seemingly similar to me, and yet so unimaginably different. With *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, I had to reconsider who I was and wasn’t in order to consider who Sophie was. And I realized that for all beauty and meaning of Shakespeare’s soliloquies and Coleridge’s couplets, they couldn’t take me where I wanted to go in literature. I needed something that could challenge rather than reaffirm, that could expand rather than restrict, that could include rather than exclude. I needed multicultural, intersectional, and inclusive literature study. And I wanted to share it with others.
My experience with *Breath, Eyes, Memory* thus sparked the interest in teaching and learning inclusive literature that has culminated in this action research project. I studied critical theory as an undergraduate and critical pedagogy as a graduate student, eager to learn how to teach and read diverse works. I entered my first classroom ready to share my knowledge and immediately met what seemed an insurmountable obstacle: curricular requirements strictly constructed around high-stakes testing on college and career readiness standards. I spent four years alternately bowing to the demands and obstinately fighting them before conceiving of this project, an attempt to balance a commitment to diverse literature instruction with standardized test scores.

This research allowed me to marry two of my greatest passions: diverse literature and my students’ success. I am grateful to the sixteen students who joined me in this investigative endeavor, especially as I brought a White, middle-class, East coast, suburban perspective to a small, diverse, rural Mississippi school and community. My research findings focus on students’ remarkable growth in the study, but what stays with me is my own growth—growth spurred by discussions comparing Sherman Alexie’s “Good Hair” to Beyonce’s “Sorry” and from students challenging me in a way no standardized test could ever challenge them.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Sara Lott
November 22, 2017
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INTRODUCTION

Today’s secondary English teachers perceive a conundrum: to teach or not to teach diverse literature. Shifts in both curricular expectations and accountability measures are causing public high school teachers and administrators to reevaluate the content covered in secondary English courses. The Common Core State Standards recommend a 70% nonfiction/30% fiction ratio in high school students’ reading materials (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017). As a result, many secondary English Language Arts (ELA) teachers find themselves shifting from diverse literature instruction to an integrated ELA curriculum focused on Common Core’s five strands for secondary ELA: reading informational text, reading literature, writing, speaking and listening, and language (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017). This integrated approach works toward the Standards’ (2017) express goal of college and career readiness, but because of the absence of any mention of inclusivity or diversity in the Common Core Standards for English, the approach can stifle opportunities for multicultural literature study.

At the research site, a public high school in Mississippi, the new 70/30 nonfiction-to-fiction reading ratio and the accountability demands of Common Core-aligned standardized assessments have resulted in significantly decreased inclusive literature
instruction as teachers are encouraged to pursue Common Core’s singular goal to “ensure students are prepared for today’s entry-level careers, freshman-level college courses, and workforce training programs” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017). School and district policies require that teachers’ curriculum and assessment design is exacting in its alignment to Common Core Standards for ELA. As a result, class time devoted to the content-based study of diverse and inclusive literature has drastically declined in favor of broad instruction in the five-strand model of Common Core’s integrated ELA. This perceived conflict between the sterilized Common Core State Standards and inclusive content-based literature instruction must be investigated; at stake are student achievement, college and career readiness, inclusivity in curriculum and instruction, potential “multicultural competence” (Castaneda, 2008/2013, p. 134), and professional and academic standards for secondary English teachers and their students.

**Statement of the Problem of Practice**

Common Core’s relative silence on issues of multiculturalism spurs a problem of practice: shifts toward the 70/30, five-strand model of ELA frequently result in fewer opportunities for instruction in diverse literature. As teachers and administrators seek quantitative evidence of students’ college and career readiness, inclusive literature instruction and its constructivist, dialogic methods seem incompatible with the scientific curriculum-making of Common Core. At the research site, this perceived conflict jeopardizes students’ academic achievement and cultural awareness while creating ideological discord among teachers and administrators.
Research Questions

The research question for this study was whether Common Core and inclusive content-based literature could serve as complements rather than distractors in defining secondary English curriculum and instruction. Specifically, the study examined whether an inclusive content-based literature curriculum could promote the college and career readiness goals of Common Core and its aligned assessments. The following question guided this study:

- *After one semester of culturally responsive teaching in inclusive content-based literature, what patterns emerged in students’ interim achievement on teacher-administered college readiness benchmark tests?*

Inclusive content-based literature curriculum could also serve as a complement to Common Core in offering instruction that reflects the diverse racial, cultural, gender, socioeconomic, and sexual identities of students at the research site. Unlike inclusive literature instruction, which explicitly includes texts and lenses from diverse perspectives, the Common Core State Standards for high school English are virtually silent on issues of diversity. Because of the unique relevance of inclusive literature instruction to students of color and marginalized students, a second research question was considered:

- *After one semester of this inclusive content-based approach to English instruction, how did patterns in the college readiness scores of students of color compare to scores of the class at large?*
**Purpose of the Study**

The broad purpose of this study was to explore how increased multicultural study through an inclusive content-based literature curriculum might relate to student achievement of the college readiness goals of the Common Core State Standards for secondary ELA. In undertaking this research, the study examined patterns in student achievement on classroom-administered ACT reading exams, a standardized college readiness benchmark measurement, after one semester of culturally responsive instruction in inclusive content-based literature. These student achievement patterns revealed trends in the relationship between inclusive content-based literature instruction, a paradigm many educators believe to be at odds with Common Core, and student attainment of the Standards’ goal: college and career readiness.

The study’s specific focus on culturally responsive teaching in inclusive content-based literature created a second purpose: examination of the English achievement of students of color after instruction in a curriculum that reflects their personal experiences. Inclusive literature focuses explicitly on representing the diverse perspectives and interests of target groups and thus affords students of color and other marginalized students the unique opportunity to see their identities reflected in their school curriculum. Culturally responsive instruction in executing this curriculum used diverse students’ own experiences and identities as a means of helping them succeed academically.

**Overview of Methodology**

This action research study was conducted in an English IV classroom in a Title I high school in Mississippi, a Common Core state. The study arose in response to a local-
level problem of practice: decreased opportunities for multicultural literature study in response to Common Core’s advancement of a 70% nonfiction/30% fiction, five-strand model of ELA instruction.

The study used a quantitative action research design to explore how instruction in an inclusive content-based literature curriculum related to student achievement of the college and career readiness goals of the Common Core State Standards. Student achievement of these goals was measured by pretest/posttest administration of a standardized college readiness benchmark test, the ACT.

The ACT serves as an especially salient measure of student achievement and college readiness because of its importance at the Mississippi research site. School and district administrators consider it a high-value assessment owing to its role in college admissions and Mississippi’s use of the exam for annual reports of student achievement (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012). Furthermore, ACT, Inc.’s (2017) publication of College Readiness Benchmark scores provides a convenient access point for considering students’ college readiness. As ACT, Inc. (2017) explained,

The Benchmarks are scores on the ACT subject-area tests that represent the level of achievement required for students to have a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75% chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses. (para. 1)

ACT, Inc. (2017) bases these Benchmark scores on a national sample of 214 institutions and over 230,000 students. These scores thus provide nationally normed insights into standards of college readiness.
Data collection began the first week of the study with a classroom administration of the pretest, a released ACT reading exam. Students then received one semester of instruction in an inclusive content-based literature curriculum. This curriculum was designed to provide daily opportunities for multicultural study and was based on McKeown, Beck, and Blake’s (2009) studies of content-based reading instruction; Doll Jr.’s (1993) Four R’s of curriculum design; Banks’ (1993) multicultural curriculum; and Gay’s (2002) culturally responsive teaching. At the end of this semester of instruction, students took the posttest, another released ACT reading exam administered within the classroom. Pretest and posttest scores were then compared to examine patterns of overall college readiness and student growth and achievement. Patterns of achievement among students of color received additional analysis because of the unique power and relevance that multicultural literature affords underrepresented students.

**Significance of the Study**

This study provided an opportunity to reconcile the perceived conflict between Common Core’s integrated ELA and an inclusive content-based literature curriculum. Specifically, Common Core-inspired revisions to secondary English curriculum have created ideological discord for many educators at the research site as integrated ELA workbooks have replaced literature anthologies in the English classroom. Undeniably, the high school English curriculum is changing, particularly as educators fight for content-based literature instruction in rejection of the 70/30 reading ratio.
Amid this discord, lost opportunities for diverse literature in secondary ELA classes demand attention and correction. In the push for demonstration of Common Core’s 21st-century skills, standardized tests hold students in the secondary grades minimally accountable for literature content or analysis. For instance, the Common Core-aligned PARCC assessment, adopted by twelve states in 2014–2015 with plans for expansion, structures its questions and passages in direct proportion to the 70% nonfiction, 30% fiction Common Core recommendations (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, 2015).

Still, considering the role of literature in secondary English, the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2017) asserted that

The percentage … reflects the sum of student reading, not just reading in ELA settings. Teachers of senior English classes, for example, are not required to devote 70 percent of reading to information texts. Rather, 70 percent of student reading across the grade should be informational. (footnote 1)

The Initiative (2017) thus insisted that the Standards do not constitute a departure from literature, but rather a shift:

In grades 6-12, there is much greater attention on the specific category of literary nonfiction, which is a shift from traditional standards. To be clear, the standards pay substantial attention to literature throughout K-12, as it constitutes half of the reading in K-5 and is the core of the work of 6-12 ELA teachers. ("Shared Responsibility, para. 4)
However, of the five Common Core strands regularly entrusted to secondary English teachers, only one directly involves literature instruction, and none mention issues of diversity or multiculturalism (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017).

The Brown Center Report on Education (Loveless, 2015) found that instruction in fiction and literature decreased compared to prior years. Changes have also occurred in for-profit education and curriculum. For instance, in the College Board’s SpringBoard curriculum, a model of integrated Common Core alignment, students read a total of only three novels and five full-length dramatic works throughout the course of high school (College Board, 2015). Of the eight writers represented in these anchor texts, only two are women, and only two are people of color (College Board, 2015). The curriculum is already in use in at least eight states, including Texas, California, and Florida (The College Board, 2017).

Potential changes from a content-heavy, literature-based curriculum to integrated English study thus have significant implications for inclusive and multicultural curriculum in public schools. With modern pushes for expanding the literary canon and diverse perspectives in author and text studies, secondary English classrooms at the research site have become a center for exploring issues of race, culture, ethnicity, gender, social class, and sexuality in public schools. While Common Core’s integrated ELA still offers opportunities for diverse or global studies through text selection, the Common Core State Standards (2017) make no mention of diversity or inclusivity in any of their high school ELA standards, including the Reading: Literature or Reading: Informational Text strands. In fact, aside from one 9-10 Reading: Literature standard dictating that students “Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of
literature from outside the United States” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017), no studies of race, culture, gender, class, sexuality, or other issues of inclusive curriculum are mentioned. With the 11-12 Reading: Literature standards, no standards in any category suggest a study of diverse texts or topics.

Furthermore, in Common Core’s (2010) listing of Exemplar Texts, people of color, women, and queer authors are drastically underrepresented. For instance, in its suggestion of 22 stories and dramas appropriate for 9–12 reading, only four works were written by women. Such a dearth of diversity jeopardizes the secondary English classroom’s unique opportunity to build multicultural competence through showing students that “a person’s own way of thinking and behaving is not the only way” (Castaneda, 2008/2013, p. 134).

Regardless of this evidence, the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2017) insists that the Standards do not in fact constitute a shift away from literature. In a list of “myths” about Common Core, the Initiative (2017) included the concerns that “[t]he standards do not have enough emphasis on fiction/literature” (“Myths about content and quality,” para. 5) and “English teachers will be asked to teach science and social studies reading materials” (“Myths about content and quality,” para. 3). In refuting these “myths,” the Initiative (2017) has repeatedly insisted that the English classroom will still focus primarily on literature: “stories, drama, poetry, and other literature account for the majority of reading that students will do in their ELA classes” (“Myths about content and quality,” para. 6).

However, in dispelling the myth that the Standards are not based on research, the Initiative (2017) also insisted that “[i]n English language arts, the standards build on the
firm foundation of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) frameworks in reading and writing” (“Myths about process,” para. 5). Basing the ELA Standards on NAEP’s framework undermines the Initiative’s insistence that ELA teachers should hold literature as their primary focus. As with the PARCC assessment, the NAEP’s distribution of reading questions on its 12th grade assessment was 70% informational, 30% literary (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). In many schools including the research site, the responsibility of preparing students for standardized reading assessments falls almost entirely on ELA teachers. Because of this responsibility and an accompanying concern for students’ tests scores, many English teachers and curriculum designers are shifting instruction away from diverse literature despite the Common Core State Standards Initiative’s stated intentions for ELA.

Regardless of whether Common Core’s shift from literature and multiculturalism is real or perceived, the influence of Common Core State Standards and accompanying accountability measures is sweeping. As of 2017, 42 states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity have adopted the Common Core State Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017). As such, Common Core continues to spur significant revision and reimagining of English curriculum in pursuit of equipping students with 21st-century skills. This study offered an opportunity to examine whether Common Core can operate in conjunction with—rather than in opposition to—inclusive content-based literature instruction that explicitly considers the needs of historically marginalized students.
**Limitations or Potential Weaknesses of the Study**

The primary limitations of this study pertained to its small size: ultimately, only 16 students—all in a single instructional section led by the teacher–researcher—engaged in the inclusive content-based literature treatment condition. This limitation occurred largely because of research site skepticism toward any deviation from Common Core-aligned practices. After hearing the research proposal for a constructivist, fiction-focused approach to ELA, the school and district where the research occurred granted conditional approval: the teacher-researcher would need to restrict the study to a single section of seniors whose achievement scores would not affect the school’s accountability ranking. This condition resulted in the study’s small sample size and limitation to a single instructional section.

With such a small sample size, immediate threats to external validity and generalizability emerged. Furthermore, the study’s reliance on just one treatment group prohibits a direct comparison between student achievement after a Common Core-aligned curriculum to student achievement after inclusive content-based literature. To mitigate these concerns, the study undertook no inferential statistics or determinations of causation. Instead, the methodology and results sections of this report look closely at patterns observed among these 16 students. The discussion section provides suggestions for larger-scale research aimed at rectifying Common Core’s diversity dearth in theory and practice.

Additionally, conducting the study with second-semester seniors in the months leading up to graduation created difficulties in attendance and retention. One of the 18 original participants dropped out of school and the study, and one participant was
unavailable to take the posttest. The semester-long study included 38 class meetings that were 96 min long. The class sessions were spread over 15 weeks. Study participants averaged seven absences each, with only two participants attending every class meeting.

Finally, owing to research site restrictions on the grade level of study participants, the study was conducted without a control group. This limits the comparative power of the study—all study participants engaged with inclusive content-based literature, so direct comparisons between experiences with inclusive content-based literature and five-strand ELA were more difficult to draw. Instead, the study compared participants’ growth with national averages, and the inclusive content-based literature condition was held in contrast with the Common Core-aligned district pacing plan for second-semester seniors (see Appendix D for a copy of that plan).

**Dissertation Overview**

As presented in this Introduction chapter, the purpose of this action research was to explore how increased multicultural study through an inclusive content-based literature curriculum might relate to student achievement of the college readiness goals of the Common Core State Standards for secondary ELA. This study proposed that the assumed dichotomy between instruction aligned to Common Core and instruction focused on multicultural literature analysis might be misleading. The study used a mutually adaptive process (McLaughlin, 1976) to blend both approaches to curriculum design into a program that leverages literature instruction and inclusive studies to advance the college and career readiness standards set by Common Core.
In Chapter Two, the literature review examines the academic and political documents that frame inclusive content-based literature and Common Core’s integrated ELA. Beginning with an exposition of the study’s conceptual framework, the literature review examines the scholarship and instructional practice surrounding the standards movement, Common Core, inclusive literature, achievement testing, and comparative studies of English curriculum approaches. The review also examines the precedent for the study’s methodology and the historical contexts of the seeming divide between Common Core and inclusive content-based literature.

Chapter Three, Methodology, presents the study’s descriptive quantitative design. The chapter explains plans for data collection and analysis, operationalizes inclusive content-based literature in the study, and illustrates the study’s action research design and resultant action plan.

Chapter Four then presents and interprets the quantitative findings through descriptive statistical analysis including mean, median, and standard deviation within students’ pretest, posttest, benchmark, and growth scores. By first considering whole-class data patterns and then examining patterns in the scores of students of color, this analysis of findings examines answers to both research questions and ultimately to the study’s problem of practice.

Finally, with the resultant data, Chapter Five offers discussion, recommendations, and implications concerning whether an inclusive content-based literature curriculum could be compatible with the Common Core State Standards. Specifically, the chapter considers how inclusive content-based literature and the curricula as complements approach could function in a mutually adaptive process (McLaughlin, 1976) to realign
instructional goals, refresh instructional approach, and promote social justice at the research site.

**Definition of Terms**

*Content-based literature*—An ELA curriculum centered on the close reading, discussion, analysis, and criticism of diverse works of literature, modern and canonical. The approach is based on McKeown et al.’s (2009) conception of content-based instruction in which students and teachers form a dialogically interpretative community that uses inquiry to make meaning from texts. It is also heavily informed by Doll Jr.’s (1993) postmodern conception of richness, recursion, relationship, and rigor in curriculum.

*Five-strand model*—A Common Core-aligned method of structuring ELA curriculum that divides learning goals, lessons, and classroom content into the five ELA skill strands delineated by Common Core State Standards. The five strands are reading for information, reading literature, writing, speaking and listening, and language (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017).

*Integrated English Language Arts*—A Common Core-aligned curriculum featuring explicit instruction in the five-strand model of ELA and an approximation of the 70/30 ratio of nonfiction to fiction for high school reading materials. Integrated ELA curriculum centers conceptually and pragmatically on behavioral objectives and scientific curriculum-making in pursuit of Common Core’s 21st-century skills for college and career. Integrated ELA characterizes most commercial publishing aligned to the Common Core State Standards.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Adoption of the Common Core State Standards for ELA has created an ideological divide among secondary English educators that borders on dichotomy: five-strand ELA or multicultural content and literature. This literature review considers whether Common Core’s integrated ELA approach and an inclusive content-based literature approach are conceptually adverse or could be complementary. In doing so, the review explores meaningful contrasts as well as potential commonalities in the history, practice, and theory of Common Core’s integrated ELA model and inclusive models of content-based literature. Ultimately, the review considers whether the solution lies in not abandoning Common Core’s college readiness goals or inclusive literature’s multicultural competence but in merging two complementary approaches. The college readiness goals of Common Core’s integrated ELA might serve as the end, whereas an inclusive content-based literature curriculum might serve as a means.

Commonalities exist across and within Common Core’s five-strand, integrated model and inclusive content-based literature. Even more importantly, gaps in the approaches could serve as an opportunity for a convergent, rather than divergent, merger of the two models. In putting aside tight and often alienating ideological concerns, educators on both sides of the debate might experience an opportunity, through a
mutually adaptive implementation (McLaughlin, 1976), to retain many key features of both.

**Theory and Practice in Considerations of Standards**

In his 2013 consideration of the Common Core State Standards, P. David Pearson, an education professor and member of the Common Core State Standards Initiative Validation Committee, expressed the unique balance necessary in academic and theoretical considerations of standards. In prefacing his considerations, Pearson (2013) stipulated that

As I examine each assumption, I will employ both theoretical and empirical lenses to gauge its validity. I realize that such evidence is a high bar to set for education standards, which more often than not invoke professional consensus (agreement among experts) or best practices (practices enacted by exemplary teachers or standards currently employed by high-performing countries or states) as the most important criteria in evaluating the validity and relevance of a new set of standards. Even so, empirical and theoretical evidence provide a useful touchstone, especially for the basic principles (i.e., assumptions) that underlie a set of standards. (p. 3)

This intellectually blended approach to studying a standards movement that is at once academic, ideological, political, and pragmatic was also echoed in the introduction to the Compendium of Research on the Common Core State Standards collected by The George Washington University (Frizzell & Dunderdale, 2015). The Compendium opens:
Although the compendium includes peer-reviewed research published in academic journals and similar outlets, it is not limited to these types of studies. Also included are studies published by government entities, independent organizations, research universities, and individual researchers and graduate students that provide useful information to practitioners, policymakers, and scholars. (p. i)

This literature review, particularly as it examines the theoretical base of the divide between content-based literature instruction and the five-strand integrated model of Common Core, will employ an approach similar to Pearson’s (2013) and the Compendium’s (2015). Considerations of theory, philosophical underpinnings, and experimental research will be supplemented with considerations of the pragmatic—surveys of teachers, Common Core historical and political documents, and statements from both Common Core proponents and opponents. This dual approach to understanding the theoretical foundations of Common Core, content-based literature instruction, integrated skills instruction, and inclusivity will provide the richest picture of this study’s problem of practice, a modern divide in English curriculum that is at once ideological, theoretical, political, and pragmatic.

**Theory and Practice Informing the Curricular Divide**

In an interview-based study of secondary versus collegiate expectations for ELA skills, Fanetti, Bushrow, and DeWeese (2010) found that high school teachers and college instructors rely on divergent approaches to teaching and assessing English and composition skills. After conducting interviews with English educators at the secondary
and postsecondary levels, the researchers deemed the modern model of high schools strictly aligning to standardized tests a failure (Fanetti et al., 2010). The solution to improving English education, they suggested, is nothing shy of “rethinking the purpose of high school entirely” (Fanetti et al., 2010, p. 83).

Similarly, in a Special Symposium on the relationship between the National Council of Teachers of English and the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Tinberg and Nadeau (2011) argued that high schools are not adequately preparing students to succeed in their postsecondary coursework and require major reform.

Shortly after these studies were published, the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts gained steam as an innovation that could provide high schools with a rigorous framework for student success. The instructional shifts to an integrated focus on academic language, textual evidence, close reading, and nonfiction texts represented a departure from many existing states’ ELA standards. Indeed, in a policy analysis study of Common Core Standards, Porter, McMaken, Hwang, and Yang (2011) used a statistical alignment index to compare the content of existing state standards to Common Core. In their examinations of high school English standards, their study found just a .24 average alignment between Common Core and the existing standards of the 27 states they examined (Porter et al., 2011).

Educators have since become keenly aware of the intentions of the Common Core State Standards in English and of the sweeping changes the Standards represent. However, researchers continue to debate whether these Standards, particularly in comparison to literature-based curricula, have achieved or will achieve their end of higher student achievement, usually measured in terms of student standardized test scores
As Common Core debuted, many educational researchers were quick to review both its development and its content. Their findings both supported and critiqued the program. Many reports supported Common Core’s grounding in research and its ultimate vision for college and career readiness. In an interview-based study of research evidence use in the creation of Common Core, McDonnell and Weatherford (2013) called Common Core “a ‘best-case’ example of research use in education policy making” (p. 19). Although McDonnell and Weatherford (2013) eventually conceded that Common Core’s research base is inadequate in several areas, they ultimately lauded the Common Core State Standard Initiative’s commitment to grounding their work in research.

Evidence in support of Common Core’s instructional focuses also exists. Central to Common Core is the ability to close read, an exercise that requires purposeful and diligent analysis of texts. Hinchman and Moore (2013) investigated the construct and endorsed it:

We find much promise in having students learn to slow their reading purposefully to meticulously analyze what authors have written. We agree that close reading can be a valuable part of youths’ literacy repertoires, deserving a place among the range of 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking, information literacy, flexibility, and collaboration. (p. 444)

However, Hinchman and Moore’s (2013) findings acknowledged gaps in empirical research, particularly with respect to close reading. The researchers conceded that they could not find any empirical studies explicitly examining the construct (Henchman &

In keeping with this tempered optimism, the non-profit organization Research for Action (2015) conducted a two-year mixed methods study that surveyed instructors nationwide about the effects of the Literacy Design Collaborative, a tool designed to help teachers implement the Common Core State Standards. In a survey of over 1,500 teachers, more than 80% reported that implementing Common Core using specifically designed literacy tools raised rigor and expectations in their classrooms (Research for Action, 2015). Another 80% reported that the tools and the Common Core State Standards helped them teach content (Research for Action, 2015). However, teachers found this implementation to come with a cost. Of the surveyed teachers, 55% reported that the instruction took time away from covering required curriculum topics (Research for Action, 2015). In ELA classes, literature often becomes such a sacrificed curriculum topic.

Amid this tempered support for Common Core, however, concerns about the Standards also arose. Many of these concerns stem more from personal convictions than empirical research. One such personal concern appeared in a 2010 speech to the National Council of Teachers of English. In her speech, the NCTE’s then-president Carol Jago largely predicted the current state of literature instruction. Jago (2011) spoke just months after the release of the Common Core State Standards, but the predictions in her address reflected modern norms and criticism of the Standards. She urged teachers and parents to “to cherish the interests of literature” even as “teachers are urged to discard outdated
practice” and “publishing companies are investing millions in innovation funds to rethink instructional materials” (Jago, 2011, p. 337). Far from embracing the 70/30 call of the Common Core, Jago (2011) told her audience, “I believe that classrooms from preschool through college should be places where that vital experience of literature takes place every day” (p. 340). Despite Jago’s influence in the NCTE and throughout secondary English curriculum design, by the next volume in the NCTE’s Research in the Teaching of English, not a single article published in any of the three issues directly addressed literature instruction (NCTE, 2011).

Many educators offer endorsements of literature instruction beyond that recommended by Common Core. However, recent data on the effectiveness of content-based literature are sparse. For instance, in Fresh Takes on Teaching Literary Elements, Smith and Wilhelm (2010) expressed their conflicting attitudes toward literature instruction in their very first sentence: “This book stems from a deep conviction and an equally deep concern” (p. 7). Their completely qualitative conviction reads much like Jago’s belief statements, yet their concerns echoed those espoused by Common Core writers and advocates; namely, the way literature functions in a classroom may disserve students (Smith & Wilhelm, 2010). But these mantras stem mostly from personal ideologies rather than empirical studies. Though Smith and Wilhelm thoughtfully and frequently sprinkled research references throughout their chapters, their own beliefs and classroom experiences constituted much of the evidence for their practices of literature instruction.

Other objections to the content of Common Core State Standards exist in gray areas between the empirical and the ideological. For instance, in a brief expressing
reservations about Common Core, the National Council of Teachers of English (2012) specifically decried Common Core’s nearly exclusive focus on close reading as means of building literacy. The NCTE stated their disapproval categorically, but the citation they provided as evidence was from Kintsch’s (1988) study of discourse comprehension, the same study Pearson (2014), a Common Core validator, cited in support of close reading.

In contrast to these personal and organizational convictions, one recent empirical study indirectly shed light on the current methods and effectiveness of literature instruction. In a quantitative study of the instructional practices and value-added scores of middle school ELA teachers, researchers specifically coded for literature instruction in the classrooms of top-quartile and bottom-quartile teachers (Grossman, Cohen, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). The researchers found that “high quartile teachers are more likely to teach across content domains and are more likely to focus on writing and speaking, while low value-added teachers are more likely to focus their instruction on reading and literature” (Grossman et al., 2013, p. 15). The researchers stipulated, however, that this finding was not statistically significant at the .05 level and further acknowledged that their best practice analyses were largely exploratory (Grossman et al., 2013). Clearly, additional research is necessary to rectify this void in systematic studies of the relationships between literature instruction and student achievement. Potential objections to Common Core must move out of the ideological and into the empirical realm.

**Theory and Practice at the Adoption of Common Core**

In a study of Common Core State Standards as “the new U.S. intended curriculum,” Porter, McWaken, Hwang, and Yang (2011) undertook an analysis of the
Standards framed around the Standards’ categories of cognitive demand. Porter et al.’s (2011) categories—including memorize, perform procedures, generate, analyze, and evaluate—lend themselves to the type of integrated, skills-based instruction that many teachers believe to be the hallmark of Common Core’s five-strand, integrated ELA model. This skills-based instruction in fact has origins much earlier than Common Core; many state standards called on explicit instruction in skills rather than texts. In helping students toward mastery of the state standards, and of the companion standardized tests, many teachers focused on the how of accessing texts, language, writing, speaking, and listening.

In fact, Finn Jr. and Porter-McGee (2013) argued that Common Core adoption and implementation began as teachers sacrificed content work for instruction in reading skills and strategies. In support of this contention, Shanahan and Duffet (2012) surveyed 1,154 English and reading teachers at schools that had adopted Common Core. In their findings, they asserted:

The majority of elementary and middle school teachers currently place greater emphasis on reading skills than on the text, while high school teachers are evenly divided. In other words, teachers, overall, say that reading skills and strategies are currently their instructional focus and students are expected to apply those skills to whatever texts happen to be used in the classroom...this [question] gets at the heart of how ELA teachers conceptualize their role and that of the texts they select and assign. (p. 42)

Shanahan and Duffet (2012) additionally found that accompanying this focus on reading skills and strategies was a deemphasis on texts themselves and thus on text
complexity. According to the Shanahan and Duffet (2012), because most teachers focus on teaching skills and strategies first, skills instruction takes precedence over text selection and meaning-making.

Even at the time, beliefs in the efficacy of this widespread skills-based approach varied. In its 2012 policy brief, the National Council of Teachers of English asserted that Common Core represents a threat to skills- and strategies-based reading instruction. They argued that teachers should offer explicit skills instruction to bolster students’ engagement with texts and that policymakers have a responsibility to protect this approach (National Council of Teachers of English, 2012). Writing in the same year, however, Shanahan and Duffett (2012) decried this type of skills instruction as limiting the scope and quality of student learning. The solution, they argued, is the Common Core State Standards, “a shift from skills alone to skills implemented in the context of complex texts” (Shanahan & Duffett, 2012, p. 10). Shanahan and Duffett (2012) made this assertion about the intent of Common Core two years after adoption and implementation began. The researchers were clear throughout their report that the shifts called for by Common Core were largely stagnating in the wake of skills-based instruction (Shanahan & Duffett, 2012).

In a national study on 9th, 10th, and 11th grade literacy instruction, Stotsky, Traffas, and Woodworth (2010) also found evidence of skills- and strategies-based reading practices permeating text studies. The researchers speculated about detrimental effects of these nonanalytical instructional practices even as the National Council of Teachers of English (2012) urged teachers to design instruction so that students could practice skills while feeling successful as readers. Stotsky et al. (2010) argued that such
nonanalytical reading approaches and the decreases in text complexity that often accompany them could be a source of the decline in national reading skills. Specifically, Stotsky et al. (2010) linked their concerns about nonanalytical approaches not only to test scores but also to students’ college and career readiness:

An under-use of analytical reading to understand non-fiction and a stress on personal experience or historical context to understand either an imaginative or a non-fiction text may be contributing to the high remediation rates in post-secondary English and reading courses. (p. 3)

Theoretically, the Common Core was a call, even a demand, for teachers to change this nonanalytical, skills- and connections-based approach to English instruction by switching from reader-focused methods of making meaning (strategies, connections, text selection based on interest, etc.) to a text-focused source of understanding (complex texts, close readings, textual analysis, etc.). As stated in Common Core’s “Revised Publishers’ Criteria” (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012), “The Common Core State Standards require students to read increasingly complex texts with growing independence as they progress toward career and college readiness” (p. 3). However, significant evidence exists that even with the nearly national adoption of Common Core, the theoretical and practical change from reader-based skills to text-based content has not occurred.

**Emerging Skepticism of Common Core’s Text-Based Model**

During the stages of Common Core’s introduction and early adoption, Stotsky et al. (2010) first decried state standards as the source of teachers’ pedagogical focus on skill: “It is bad enough that they must use precious instructional time to address the
content-empty and culture-free skills dominating state standards and tests, over which they have little control” (p. 29). They then without hesitation extended this criticism to the Common Core Standards, with additional cautions about the national nature of the initiative. Stotsky et al. (2010) argued that Common Core, with its focus on cognitive process and behavioral objectives, calls for text-based study in theory rather than practice and continues to sacrifice knowledge-building for skill-building.

Stotsky et al. (2010) concluded their paper with suggestions for improvement of secondary ELA instruction. In doing so, they challenged not the existence of standards but rather the content of the standards. They advocated instead for standards with explicit considerations not only of texts but also of the background knowledge and cultural capital they considered necessary for constructing meaning in the text.

Even advocates for Common Core have since expressed skepticism about the learning efficacy of solely text-based instruction. Pearson (2013), a member of the Validation Committee of the Common Core State Standards Initiative and outspoken proponent of the Standards, expressed his approval for the Standards’ initial promise of a text-based model of instruction focused on helping students decipher and retain textual content. Pearson’s (2013) understanding of Common Core reflects content-based instruction both in its emphasis on what the text, rather than the reader, says and in its ultimate goal, an expanded knowledge base. He ultimately saw the strength of the standards in its balance between text study and the integration of prior knowledge (Pearson, 2013). He argued, however, that interpretation and implementation of the Standards have strayed from this content-based model by devaluing texts as a means of building knowledge (Pearson, 2013). Instead, Common Core so focuses on the text that
student construction of knowledge and transfer to long-term memory are subjugated to the text itself.

For instance, in the Common Core Initiative’s “Revised Publishers’ Criteria” (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012), much of the authors’ language seems to support deprioritization of student-led inquiry, a diminished focus on evoking students’ prior knowledge, and a neglect of building new knowledge. Coleman and Pimentel (2012) stated in their introduction,

At the heart of these criteria are instructions for shifting the focus of literacy instruction to center on careful examination of the text itself. In aligned materials, work in reading and writing (as well as speaking and listening) must center on the text under consideration. (p. 1)

To do so, virtually all instructional time focuses on text-dependent questioning—in fact, Coleman and Pimentel (2012) suggested that for proper alignment to the Common Core State Standards, 80 to 90% of curriculum materials must consist of text-dependent questions.

Coleman and Pimentel (2012) ultimately concluded their guidelines for ELA and literacy by mentioning educational research in a manner that recurs through literature published by Common Core and its affiliates: they claimed that educational research is the basis of all decisions but mentioned no specific source of such research. In their assertions about aligned materials, for instance, the authors concluded, “Curriculum materials must have a clear and documented research base. The most important evidence is that the curriculum accelerates student progress toward career and college readiness” (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012, p. 13). However, the authors’ sole suggestion for this
research base and the collection of such evidence is that

as much as possible the works should be based on research and developed and refined through actual testing in classrooms. Publishers should provide a clear research plan for how the efficacy of their materials will be assessed and improved over time. (p. 13)

A gap thus emerged. Coleman and Pimentel (2012) did not cite any research for any of their 19 pages of guidelines and instead shifted the responsibilities for researching and validating these guidelines onto commercial, for-profit publishers. Similarly, in Common Core’s “Appendix B: Text Exemplars and Sample Performance Tasks,” the Initiative (2010) stated that all contributions came from researchers who have experience working with students. However, the Initiative provided no specifics about these researchers or their research.

Equivocation of this kind may be behind some teachers’ doubts about the effectiveness and necessity of Common Core State Standards, particularly in their five-strand approach and 70/30 nonfiction/fiction ratio. In a study by the Center for Education Progress, Rentner and Kober (2014) surveyed school district leaders and found that resistance among educators to the Common Core State Standards has actually increased since 2011. Seventy-four percent of school district leaders surveyed in 2014 reported resistance to Common Core State Standards from within the education system as a challenge (Rentner & Kober, 2014). Additionally, 86% of school district administrators surveyed agreed that fundamental changes in instruction will be necessary to implement Common Core, up from only 50% in 2011 (Rentner & Kober, 2014). These reported changes suggest that as time has passed and implementation measures have continued,
administrators have increased their estimation of necessary reforms while teachers have increased their resistance to them.

Amid this resistance, many English teachers, including those at the research site, have begun to look to other curricular approaches. In the face of increasing demands for alignment to the Standards, many English teachers are resisting. At the research site, this resistance has manifested itself in calls to return to content-based literature curriculum.

The Curricular Divide in Commercially Produced Curricula

At the research site, the English department adopted a commercially produced curriculum closely aligned to the Common Core State Standards and their five-strand model for secondary English instruction. In the curriculum’s emphasis on text-dependent questioning, text complexity, and alignment with Common Core’s selected exemplars, it embodies the integrated five-strand approach, and the faculty’s reaction embodies the ideological divide at the heart of this study’s problem of practice. The curriculum and the faculty thus serve as useful illustrations of the reform and resistance captured in the surveys of Rentner and Kober (2014). As such, the theoretical basis of this specific situation deserves explicit consideration.

The curriculum is organized at the daily, unit, and yearly levels around clearly articulated performance standards, behavioral objectives, and learning targets in a 21st-century attempt to provide the same “equality of opportunity” (p. 266) that Spring (2014) argued underlay 20th-century attempts at developing human capital in schools. This Common Core-aligned curriculum also employs a heavy focus on standardized, prescribed content and identical instruction for all.
In concordance with Au’s (2007) conception of curriculum, this program, although not technically scripted, nevertheless dictates everything from vertically aligned scopes and sequences to daily objectives and learning activities to the formative and summative assessments used to gauge mastery on a scale determined by the program. In its provision of not only lesson plans but also student materials, unit plans, and even curriculum maps, the program seems almost ideologically Herbartian, a movement that Spring (2014) associated with greater administrative control over the teacher. And much like the teachers described in Spring’s (2014) *The American School*, teachers at the research site soon conceived of this imposed order and prescribed planning as a limitation on their own professional discretion.

More specifically, Bernstein’s (1975) codes of power, as put forth by Sleeter and Stillman (2005), offer insight into this Common Core-aligned program and why teachers at the research site became so resistant to continuing its implementation. With strict scaffolding toward discrete and cumulative learning targets, the program has a “strong classification… in which teaching moves sequentially from basic facts toward the deep structure of a given discipline” (Sleeter & Stillman, 2005, p. 254). The program’s scaffolded and hierarchal knowledge structure further contributes to its status as a collection code curriculum (Sleeter & Stillman, 2005) that is at odds with the department’s preference for less regimented curriculum models. Additionally, teachers found the curriculum to have strong framing and thus offer “little decision-making power to teachers or students” (Sleeter & Stillman, 2005, p. 254). Because of the program’s strong framing and strong classification, teachers and students experienced a shift away from preexisting curricular focuses on what Sleeter and Stillman (2005) called “the most
helpful instructional principles and processes…the importance of contextualized rather than skills-driven instruction, and the connections between language, thinking, values, culture, and identity” (p. 255). Justifications for these shifts stemmed, as Sleeter and Stillman (2005) predicted, from the use of “science to justify certain pedagogies” (p. 256).

Science, at least in the context of scientific curriculum making, was in fact the primary justification for implementation. The program adaptation was led not by teachers but by school administrators with a firmly singular, synthesized belief in scientific methods of teaching and curriculum development. The program offers “a pre-set functionalism” (Doll Jr., 1993, p. 216) that aligns with Doll Jr.’s conception of Tyler’s (1949) rationale. In the program, “goals are pre-determined as are the experiences and methods for developing those experiences. All are firmly in place before any interaction with students occurs” (Doll Jr., 1993, p. 216). However, the English department at the research site did not uniformly identify with Tyler (1949). Instead, Doll Jr.’s (1993) “Four R’s,” put forth as a distinct “alternative” to Tyler (1949), better embody driving instructional forces in the department, particularly in the department’s reliance on inquiry, dialogue, interpretation, and meaning-making.

The program also embodies Hlebowitsh’s (2010) conception of divergence in curriculum theory and design. Because of the curriculum program’s devotion to Common Core’s five-strand model of integrated ELA, it exemplifies a divergence that “results in pushing new things in while pushing other (less desirable) things out” (p. 226). At the research site, those less desirable things being pushed out are the teachers’ educational ideologies, curriculum preferences, and teaching practices. In fact, this constriction in
framing and classification as well as its divergence in curriculum design directly reflects one explicit goal Coleman and Pimentel (2012) set forth in their “Revised Publishers’ Criteria”: “paring away elements that distract or are at odds with the Common Core State Standards” (p. 1).

With the adoption of this new curriculum, research site faculty found a situation that mirrors the one explored by Sleeter and Stillman (2005) in their study of California public schools after the 1997 adoption of new state ELA standards. Like the California teachers some 20 years before, with this new Common Core-aligned implementation, teachers found their courses moving away from constructivist literature instruction to more teacher-led direct instruction (Sleeter & Stillman, 2005).

The magnitude of this shift is largely due to English’s unique position within the academic core but without strong consensus on what the subject entails or how it should be taught (Siskin, 2001). As a result, English is virtually always assessed on high-stakes accountability measures yet is virtually never uniformly or unanimously defined. As such, it becomes highly susceptible to the effects of high-stakes testing as explored by Au (2007). The new five-strand integrated curriculum was selected in part because alignment to the Common Core State Standards meant better alignment to statewide high-stakes assessment and better student achievement on overlapping college readiness tests. In implementing this aligned curriculum, teachers at the research site experienced the same curricular effects that Au (2007) identified in his metasynthesis: “narrowing curricular content to those subjects included in the tests, resulting in the increased fragmentation of knowledge forms into bits and pieces learned for the sake of the tests themselves, and compelling teachers to use more lecture-based, teacher-centered pedagogies” (p. 246).
Somewhat ironically, the teachers’ reactions, like those of the curriculum writers, are divergent: they want to push out the undesirable thing, the new standards-aligned curriculum, and return to principles such as a historical grounding in postmodernism and constructionism (Doll Jr., 1993).

**Commonalities in the Two Approaches**

However, in eschewing a divergent approach to considerations of content versus Common Core, theoretical and practical similarities began to emerge between the five-strand integrated ELA model and an inclusive content-based literature approach grounded in McKeown et al.’s (2009) content-based approach. Content-based literature instruction and Common Core’s integrated approach to ELA most notably share a commitment to close reading. In fact, McKeown et al.’s (2009) description of executing the content-based approach sounds remarkably like the text-dependent questioning of Common Core’s integrated approach:

Content instruction focused student attention on the content of the text through general, meaning-based questions about the text. Reading was stopped and discussion initiated at purposely selected points when, for example, a key character was introduced, some important event had occurred, or where we judged some confusion might arise for readers. (p. 223)

Such guidelines correlate with Coleman and Pimentel’s (2012) guidelines for text-dependent questioning.

In addition to this shared focus on the pragmatic exercise of close reading, Common Core-integrated ELA and content-based literature share a theoretical lineage:
both trace their approach to textual meaning-making to Kintsch’s construction-integration model (1998). Pearson (2013), a Common Core writer and validator, pointed specifically to Kintsch’s (1998) construction-integration model of comprehending texts as a theoretical foundation for literacy in Common Core. McKeown et al. (2009)—advocates of content-based literacy instruction—also relied on Kintsch’s text-processing model of textual study in their explanations of their content-based condition. In fact, McKeown et al. (2009) directly stated that Kintsch was at the theoretical center of content-based approach Questioning the Author, just as Pearson directly stated that Kintsch was the center of Common Core’s Reading program.

In these assertions, Pearson (2013) and McKeown et al. (2009) suggested that approaches often assumed to be divergent or even contradictory share a theoretical approach and structure. For instance, Stotsky (2010) decried standards in suggesting that although literary scholars articulate approaches to literary study with sophistication and nuance, curriculum specialists and K-12 teachers have tended to express and teach them simplistically and reductively, to judge by the way in which they appear in state English language arts standards. (p. 34)

Yet, according to Pearson (2013), Common Core uses the same nuanced approach to constructing meaning that advocates for content and dialogue support.

**Contrasts in the Two Approaches**

Of course, the Common Core integrated model and content-based literature have several defining differences, particularly in their divergent stances on student-created interpretation and on building knowledge in students. For instance, McKeown et al.’s
study (2009) on content-based versus skills-based instruction assumed that any literacy work would include building relevant background and vocabulary knowledge before undertaking a new reading with students. However, in Common Core’s Revised Publishers’ Criteria, Coleman and Pimentel (2012) discouraged teachers from engaging students in studies of theme or vocabulary prior to the consideration and close reading of a text.

Common Core and content-based literature also differ in their expectations for student-constructed interpretations. The Revised Publisher’s Criteria (2012) stated,

The Common Core State Standards call for students to demonstrate a careful understanding of what they read before engaging their opinions, appraisals, or interpretations. Aligned materials should therefore require students to demonstrate that they have followed the details and logic of an author’s argument before they are asked to evaluate the thesis or compare the thesis to others. (p. 10)

In rather stark contrast, content-based literature conceives of engaging opinions and appraisals as a key part of the interpretative, community-based process of meaning-making (McKeown et al., 2009).

The greatest, and most divisive, difference in Common Core’s integrated ELA model and content-based literature instruction is, of course, the literature itself. One of the greatest criticisms of Common Core is its policy on the ratio of nonfiction to fiction reading across the curriculum. Critics have characterized the Standards’ 70/30 ratio as a subjugation of literature and content to skills. The Common Core State Standards Initiative (2017) has responded vehemently to this criticism, frequently decrying it as an unsupported and superficial attack designed to undermine all the valuable work of the
Standards. For instance, on a list of “Myths vs. Facts,” the Initiative (2017) explicitly listed two common criticisms leveled by advocates of content-based literature instruction: (1) “The standards do not have enough emphasis on fiction/literature” (“Myths about content and quality: English,” para. 5) and (2) “The standards only include skills and do not address the importance of content knowledge” (“Myths about content and quality: General,” para. 5). The Initiative (2017) proceeded to right these “myths” with professed “facts.” The rhetorical choice of labeling outside criticism as “myths” and the Initiative’s counterarguments as “facts” illustrate the often defensive divide that exists between advocates of Common Core’s integrated model and advocates of content-based literature curriculum.

In Common Core’s denouncing of these “myths,” the Initiative (2017) used the same language to refute both criticisms: “In addition to content coverage, the standards require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening” (“Myths about content and quality: English,” para. 6; “Myths about content and quality: General,” para. 6). As support for this statement, the Initiative (2017) referenced indirectly just three specific standards, two of which (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.7 and CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.8) do not appear until grades 11 and 12. Such evidence suggest that there may be more ground for debate about the appropriateness of Common Core’s literature instruction than the Initiative acknowledges.

Apparent discrepancies in the Initiative’s published statements further cloud the question of literature instruction in the Common Core State Standards. For instance, in “Myths versus Facts” (2017), the Initiative stated, “stories, drama, poetry, and other
literature account for the majority of reading that students will do in their ELA classes” (“Myths about content and quality: English,” para. 6). However, in the most current Revised Publisher’s Criteria, Coleman and Pimentel (2012) suggested change in the opposite direction and urged English teachers to undertake more nonfiction reading with students. Coleman and Pimentel (2012) clearly signaled a departure from conventional literature-based instructional methods:

The shift in both reading and writing constitutes a significant change from the traditional focus in ELA classrooms on narrative text or the narrative aspects of literary nonfiction (the characters and the story) toward more in-depth engagement with the informational and argumentative aspects of these texts….it is just as essential for teachers and students to follow the details of an argument and reasoning in literary nonfiction as it is for them to attend to issues of style. (p. 8)

Many English teachers, often trained in and comfortable with literature (Grossman et al., 2010), have leveled criticism at such approaches. Common Core (2017), however, claimed that

[e]xtensive research establish[es] the need for college and career ready students to be proficient in reading complex informational text independently in a variety of content areas. Most of the required reading in college and workforce training programs is informational in structure and challenging in content. (“Shared Responsibility,” para. 2)

But the content-based literature framework suggests that necessary reading skills—in informational and fiction genres—can be developed through study of exclusively, or near
exclusively, literary texts. As such, many teachers, including those at the research site, seem to second Stotsky, Traffas, and Woodworth (2010) and their sponsors in the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers in their call for English standards based on culturally significant texts.

Considered both in theory and in practice, then, Common Core and content-based literature have several defining differences and striking similarities. For additional insight into content-based literature as contrasted with Common Core’s five-strand integrated ELA model, Table 2.1, “Comparison of Integrated ELA versus Content-Based Literature Curricula in the Study,” offers a side-by-side comparison of theory and practice in each approach. Table 2.2, “Comparison of a Hypothetical Class Period in Accordance with Each Curricular Approach,” then contrasts how instructional time might be allocated in a single 80-min class period based on theoretical and practical applications of each type of curriculum.

**Inclusivity in the Curricular Approaches**

Even beyond considerations of interpretative communities or shared meaning-making, many progressive educators’ commitment to teaching literature is strengthened by the natural opportunity it affords for creating an inclusive curriculum that represents and examines a diverse array of cultural, racial, gender, socioeconomic, religious, and queer perspectives. Although informational reading also offers many opportunities for considering diverse views, some theorists have argued that reading fiction offers a special power of insight owing to the imaginative nature of constructing fictional worlds, models, and characters (Athanases, 1998; Sumara & Davis, 1999).
### Table 2.1: Comparison of Integrated ELA versus Content-Based Literature Curricula

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Goal</th>
<th>Common Core’s Integrated ELA Curriculum</th>
<th>Inclusive Content-Based Literature Curriculum</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Student progress toward college and career readiness</td>
<td>Student progress toward college and career readiness and multicultural competence</td>
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</table>

| General Definition | A contemporary Common Core approach to ELA that emphasizes instruction in nonfiction, close reading, and the five skill strands of ELA: reading information, reading literature, writing, speaking and listening, and language | A postmodern, multicultural, content-based approach to ELA that emphasizes systematic study of diverse literature, writing in response to literature, and query-based collaborative discussion of literature |


| Sample Textbook | College Board’s *SpringBoard English Language Arts: Grade 9* (2014) | *The Bedford Introduction to Literature, 9th Ed.* (2013) |

| Approximate Reading Ratios | 70% Nonfiction, 30% Fiction | > 90% Fiction |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Skills Addressed</th>
<th>Reading Information, Reading Literature, Language, Speaking and Listening, Writing</th>
<th>Reading Literature, Creating Meaning and Interpretations, Analytical Discussion, Writing to Respond to Texts, Multicultural competence, Critical considerations of power, culture, and history, Multicultural knowledge construction</th>
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<td></td>
<td>• To Persuade, To Inform, To Respond to Texts, To Present Narratives</td>
<td>• To Double-check, To Elaborate, To Synthesize, To Extend, To Analyze</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Daily Objective</th>
<th>Common Core’s Integrated ELA(^1)</th>
<th>Inclusive Content-Based Literature</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students will be able to explain</td>
<td>Students will be able to explain</td>
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<td></td>
<td>how a writer or speaker uses</td>
<td>how a writer or speaker uses</td>
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<td></td>
<td>rhetorical appeals to advance</td>
<td>rhetorical appeals and social</td>
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<td>his/her purpose</td>
<td>constructs to advance his/her</td>
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<td></td>
<td>purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbook</td>
<td>College Board’s <em>SpringBoard</em></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>English Language Arts: Grade 9</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2014)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anchor Text</td>
<td>Obama’s 2009 “Speech to America’s</td>
<td>Ellison’s <em>Invisible Man</em>: the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Schoolchildren”</td>
<td>narrator’s first public speech as</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a member of the Brotherhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Activities</td>
<td>• <strong>Bell Work</strong>: Nonfiction</td>
<td>• <strong>Bell Work</strong>: Literary reading of</td>
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<td></td>
<td>reading on rhetorical appeals</td>
<td><em>Invisible Man</em> Chapter 16 as the</td>
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<td>such as ethos, pathos, and</td>
<td>context of the narrator’s speech</td>
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<td>logos</td>
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<td>• <strong>Learning Activities</strong>:</td>
<td>• <strong>Learning Activities</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>o Skim-and-Scan Prediction</td>
<td>o Shared oral reading as an</td>
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<td></td>
<td>pre-write</td>
<td>interpretative community</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o Question-Heard-Teach (QHT)</td>
<td>o Construction and integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>review of rhetorical devices</td>
<td>through Questioning the Author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Viewing of the speech</td>
<td>o Collaborative discussion to</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o Annotating for rhetorical</td>
<td>facilitate meaningful talk</td>
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<td></td>
<td>devices</td>
<td>▪ Open questions</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>o SMELL (Speaker, Message,</td>
<td>▪ Collaborative formation</td>
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<td>Emotional Strategies, Logical</td>
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<td>Strategies, Language) Graphic</td>
<td>▪ Teacher as facilitator</td>
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<td>Organizer</td>
<td>▪ Dialogic instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Writing prompt constructing an</td>
<td>o Critical considerations of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>argument using rhetorical appeals</td>
<td>race, the collective vs. the</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>similar to those in Obama’s</td>
<td>individual, and the limits of</td>
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<td>speech</td>
<td>ideology</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Writing prompt advancing an</td>
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<td></td>
<td>interpretation of the speech and</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>its use of rhetorical appeals</td>
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</table>
For instance, in a year-long ethnographic study that included multiple follow-ups over the following two years, Athanases (1998) observed, interviewed, and recorded two 10th grade teachers and their students as the teachers began a social justice-minded multicultural literature curriculum. Athanases’ (1998) primary interest was the students’ own reactions, including students’ opinions on the works themselves and students’ perceived effects of reading and studying a diverse set of literary works. Up to two years after the conclusion of the study, students could still point to specific literary texts and even specific classroom discussions as personally and academically enriching. Students’ primary reported effects included development of their own cultural identities, personal identification with characters both within and outside their own ethnic group, and a challenge of their own stereotypes of other races, ethnicities, genders, and sexualities. Based on his findings, Athanases (1998) validated the claims of proponents of multicultural literature and called for a transition within the movement “beyond debates of what should be taught, to analyses of how” (p. 21).

In two research studies exploring queer curriculum theory, Sumara and Davis (1999) used literature as a catalyst for interrupting heteronormativity in both a research project with queer teachers and in a participant–observer study of a teaching project with a 5th/6th grade class reading Lowry’s The Giver. In both cases, the researchers directly attested to the power of literature and its discussion in prompting individuals to (re)consider their own identifications, the identifications of others, and the ramifications of both blatant and more subversive social pressures. The authors declare, “For us, these shared responses to literature text create possibilities for an interesting ‘literary anthropology’—an interpretative activity where the relationships among memory,
history, and experiences of subjectivity are made available for analysis” (Sumara & Davis, 1999, p. 317).

Teaching and discussing literature in schools can afford this same experience to students, as the researchers clearly showed in their conversations with 5th- and 6th-graders studying *The Giver*. Sumara and Davis (1999) specifically endorsed literature study as a highly accessible and effective means of interrupting heteronormativity in schools.

Thornton (2003) also cited literature study as a means of providing inclusive curriculum in his considerations of gays and lesbians in social studies curricula. Thornton (2003) declared unequivocally that “[t]eachers have choices. All teachers are curricular-instructional gatekeepers—they largely decide the day-to-day curriculum and activities students experience” (p. 338). Even in acknowledging modern limitations such as high-stakes testing, Thornton (2003) argued that all teachers can include at least some queer material in the curriculum. As an example of a teacher incorporating queer-inclusive content, Thornton (2003) cited not a social studies teacher but an English teacher who taught a novel about an adolescent boy and his relationship with his gay father. This profiled teacher served as evidence for Thornton’s (2003) contention that teachers today do have choice, and the English teacher made an inclusive choice because he or she was afforded the professional autonomy to teach inclusive literature.

Of course, inclusive content-based literature instruction also brings challenges beyond those potentially experienced in a less diverse curriculum aligned to Common Core’s college readiness goals. As Chan (2006) acknowledged in her field work as a participant–observer at Canada’s Bay Street School, sometimes “even good intentions and specific ideas about ways in which culture may be acknowledged through school
practices are insufficient and leave some important questions unresolved” (p. 311). This inadequacy is certainly a possibility in any inclusive literature study, and at times, bold text and topic selections in English classes potentially have alienating consequences. Nevertheless, as Chan (2006) asserted, “a culturally-sensitive curriculum is sine qua non of contemporary schooling” (p. 307). For many English teachers, inclusive content-based literature curriculum serves as a structure in which to undertake these risks.

Conclusions from Valenzuela’s (1998) study of “subtractive schooling” (p. 289) at Seguín High School also seem to support high school English courses—particularly those based in dialogue-driven considerations of inclusive literature—as potential places for fostering the caring culture that results in additive versus subtractive schooling. In her considerations of the (un)caring culture at Seguín High School and its detrimental consequences for students, Valenzuela (1998) observed student withdrawal and even rebellion in face of the school’s superficial care for students and their realities. Open, inclusive, and dialogue-driven English and literature courses can reverse this emphasis away from the form and nonpersonal. In authentic close readings, interpretations take precedence over facts, and meaning depends on considerations of students’ subjective realities.

**State Standards: A Roadblock to Inclusivity?**

According to many critics of standards movements, however, curriculum has little room for students’ subjective realities when learning targets and instruction are delineated and predetermined via standards. In a qualitative study of inclusivity in state standards, Sleeter and Stillman (2005) conducted a systematic coding and analysis of
California’s pre-Common Core curriculum standards to consider whether the standards actually served as a means of restoring conventional male, European–American power structures in response to growing multiculturalism and the redistributive effects of the Civil Rights Movement. Sleeter and Stillman (2005) found that the new standards in ELA and History–Social Studies featured strict collection code curricula and strong framing, both of which functioned to disempower teachers, disregard students’ racial and ethnic identities, and subordinate students’ personal understanding to the knowledge disseminated by schools. Then, as Sleeter and Stillman (2005) reported, to ensure compliance with these standards, California instituted high-stakes testing and limited textbook choices to further increase the standardizing hegemony of the state and its conventional notions of what culture and knowledge should be present in schools.

Sleeter and Stillman (2005) ultimately argued that these state standards were in fact not about improving student outcomes but about reasserting the legitimacy of existing white-dominated power structures and social orders. Though Sleeter and Stillman (2005) focused on California standards in place five years before the widespread adoption of Common Core State Standards, many of the researchers’ criticisms of the ELA standards have also been levied at Common Core. These criticisms included an overreliance on heavily prescribed scientific curriculum-making, the discounting of student experiences in favor of strict New Criticism focus on texts, and merely occasional literature instruction (Sleeter & Stillman, 2005).

Several curricular theorists and historians have also questioned the feasibility of creating inclusive learning experiences in curricula structured around standards and standardized tests. Noddings (2007) argued, for instance, that any curriculum demanding
rote memorization and constant preparation for standardized tests would struggle to promote students’ personal search for meaning and engagement in problem-solving.

Eisner (2001), in asking “What Does It Mean to Say a School Is Doing Well?” (p. 279), additionally probed into problems in implementing less aligned, more holistic inclusive curricula in the modern era of standards and standardized testing: “One of the consequences of our approach to reform is that the curriculum gets narrowed as school district policies make it clear that what is to be tested is what is to be taught” (p. 281). Sensitivity and inclusivity are assigned no rubric points or value-added measures, so many public school English classrooms teach students to find supporting details rather than ways of supporting each other.

Furthermore, the same manipulation of ideology that Spring (2014) presented as a controlling influence in schools after World War II continues to inform conceptions of what is and is not appropriate for instruction. Overall, the Common Core State Standards for high school ELA are virtually silent on issues of diversity. Other than one standard referencing world texts, there are no mentions in the 9–12 ELA standards of cultural, racial, gender, or queer studies; no explicit consideration of diverse perspectives exists (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017). Perhaps in an avoidance of controversy, Common Core’s suggested texts, particularly at the 9–10 grade levels, are mostly devoid of feminist considerations and entirely devoid of queer studies (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). Some genre suggestions are racially exclusive as well. For instance, in their listing of exemplar dramas for grades 9–10, all six suggested plays are written by white men (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010).
Inclusivity in Content-Based Literature Curriculum

In contrast, inclusivity in content-based literature exists in both the content integration and knowledge construction elements of Banks’ (1993) model for multicultural education. Specifically, critical considerations of meaning through dialogue around a diverse array of texts use content integration as a pathway to knowledge construction. As Banks explained,

Using this concept, content about ethnic groups is not merely added to the curriculum. Rather, the curriculum is reconceptualized to help students understand how knowledge is constructed and how it reflects human interests, ideology, and the experiences of the people who create it. Students themselves also create interpretations. They begin to understand why it is essential to look at the nation's experience from diverse ethnic and cultural perspectives to comprehend fully its past and present. (p. 37)

In inclusive content-based literature, rich, recursive, and relational student and teacher interpretations of texts and culture could advance the goals of Friere’s (1968) concept of true education and of Banks’ (1993) concept of multicultural education. At least at the classroom level, an inclusive curriculum might instigate reform that promotes equity for students regardless of race or class (Banks, 1993).

Inclusive content-based literature’s call for diverse texts and representation of target groups also reflects Bender-Slack’s (2010) critical consideration of the existing literary canon of high school English. Writing in the same year the Common Core State Standards were introduced, Bender-Slack (2010) used a qualitative study based on the phenomenological interviews of 22 secondary ELA teachers to challenge the white, male,
Euro-centric canon that drives English instruction, a challenge that Bender-Slack suggested is a powerful component in building critical literacies and teaching for social justice. In finding that even teachers who voiced a commitment to social justice often shielded students from confrontational or uncomfortable aspects of critical pedagogy, the study called for teachers to critically reexamine the existing canon in English curriculum and expand it to include both more contemporary works and a more deliberate examination of sociopolitical powers. This call went drastically unheeded two years later with the release of Common Core’s Revised Publisher’s Criteria (2012) and its nearly exclusive focus on heterosexual white male authors and overwhelming absence of multicultural content integration.

Of course, Banks (1993) argued that content integration alone is insufficient in crafting a multicultural curriculum; instead, teaching must intentionally foster diversity-minded knowledge construction that reflects communal considerations of the relationships among power, oppression, history, and identity. Similarly, Gay (2002) applied the influences of critical pedagogy in arguing that inclusivity in curriculum and instruction depends not just on content integration but also on “culturally responsive teaching” (p. 106), a framework designed to use diverse students’ own racial, cultural, and ethnic experiences and identities as the means of helping them succeed academically. Gay’s (2002) five-part framework for culturally relevant teaching depends on developing teachers’ knowledge base about diversity, incorporating diverse content in the curriculum, strengthening communities of learning, communicating with students in culturally sensitive ways, and structuring instruction in accordance with ethnic diversity.
Inclusivity in Text Selections

Despite this preponderance of academic work on the importance of multiculturalism and diversity in education, many high school English classrooms are not culturally responsive beacons of thoughtful, aware inclusivity (Noddings, 2007). Instead, Noddings (2007) argued,

The usual way of selecting literary works is to list authors who should be read and then select those works that seem appropriate for a given age group. Sometimes…
existential and social themes are paramount, but they are often ignored in favor of discussion of literary style, use of metaphor, and vocabulary. (p. 399)

She argued that literature should and does play a central role in English courses but that for literature instruction to remain powerful into the 21st century, teachers should select a literary work not for its canonical status but for its social relevance (Noddings, 2007).

Yoon, Simpson, and Haag (2010) echoed Noddings in their suggestions for selecting texts based on relevance to social issues and the specific messages conveyed about the people and cultures the texts purport to represent. In a study of 12 picture books found in the multicultural section of a public middle school’s library, Yoon et al. (2010) analyzed each text for one of two distinct approaches to multicultural education:

assimilation or cultural pluralism. Yoon et al. (2010) found that the assimilationist works, far from advocating for changes to existing cultural and power structures, communicated that marginalized groups must yield to the dominant group and its power to achieve equity. With this finding, Yoon et al. (2010) stressed that multicultural education teachers must select texts not just for their literary elements or representations of diverse cultures but also for the implicit ideologies and messages present in the works. The researchers
specifically offered three criteria for multicultural literature teachers to consider in selecting texts that support an inclusive content-based literature curriculum: “1. Ideology through inferred messages 2. Representation of all people 3. Promotion of critical pedagogy” (p. 116).

Reconciling the Forces: Inclusivity as an Improvement to Common Core

Through knowledge construction, content integration, and culturally responsive teaching, inclusive content-based literature could help achieve Kirkland’s (2008) goals of a “new English education” (p. 69) based on postmodern literacies and acknowledgement of students’ diverse identities and perspectives in a changing world. Kirkland’s (2008) interviews, analysis, and critical reflection ultimately led him to conclude that today’s students seem to understand the world more acutely than do their English teachers, who process teaching, learning, and their students through narrow conceptions of the literary canon and a Euro-centric pedagogy.

Such pedagogical insensitivity as well as a dearth of culturally responsive teaching has arguably been exacerbated by a Common Core curriculum that focuses explicitly and narrowly on the academic and cognitive skills required for success in the workplace. In pulling on the work of Banks (1993), Yoon et al. (2010), and Gay (2002), inclusive content-based literature might rectify Common Core’s callous approach to inclusivity, sensitivity, and diversity in the curriculum and in the classroom.

With this goal in mind, this study explores a convergent, rather than divergent, approach to secondary ELA. To attempt this “centripetal form of thinking” (Hlebowitsh, 2010, p. 232), the inclusive content-based literature condition executes curriculum design
and instruction that incorporates both Common Core-aligned methods such as close reading and content-based literature instruction’s constructivist, dialogic approach. Ultimately, the study thus explores whether an inclusive content-based literature curriculum at the research site could have an additive and enriching effect when integrated with Common Core and its related testing.

For more information on this study’s conceptual framework toward inclusivity, Table 2.3 explores how Banks’ (1993) multicultural education, Yoon et al.’s (2010) guidelines for text selection, and Gay’s (2002) culturally responsive pedagogy inform inclusive instruction as an improvement to Common Core.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Guiding principles and influence in the study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Banks’ (1993) multicultural education** | **Content Integration**  
| | • The study used content from a wide variety of cultures and groups to ground subject-area instruction. Groups were considered across intersectionalities with explicit consideration of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, language, and ability. |
| | **Knowledge Construction**  
| | • Instruction facilitated communal considerations of the relationships among power, oppression, history, and identity through considering texts and student responses through an intersectional framework. |
| **Yoon et al.’s (2010) criteria for multicultural texts** | **Culturally pluralist text selection**  
| | • Texts were selected based on cultural pluralism rather than assimilationist ideology. Each text was explicitly considered based on its ideology through inferred messages, its representation of all people, and its promotion of critical pedagogy. |
| **Gay’s (2002) culturally responsive pedagogy** | **Developing teachers’ knowledge base about diversity**  
| | • The teacher-researcher studied the historical and social underpinnings of groups represented in texts. She critically examined her own race and class privilege, both alone and with her class, and considered how her own intersectionality might affect her understanding of a text. |
| | **Incorporating diverse content in the curriculum**  
| | • The study used content from a wide variety of cultures and groups to ground subject-area instruction. Underrepresented groups were studied across intersectionalities with explicit consideration of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, language, and ability. |
| | ** Strengthening communities of learning**  
| | • Instruction was centered around dialogic, collaborative meaning-making involving all students. Discussions and responses were conducted in both written and oral modes to accommodate diverse learning styles and comfort levels. |
| | **Communicating with students in culturally sensitive ways**  
| | • The teacher-researcher prepared culturally sensitive and people-first language for class discussions and materials. In preparing for class discussions, she planned for a variety of potential student reactions, insights, and misunderstandings. |
| | **Structuring instruction in accordance with ethnic diversity**  
| | • The teacher-researcher allowed students greater choice and accommodation in how they engaged with content. Instruction thus allowed a diverse group of participants to engage in diverse ways rather than bending to the teacher-researcher’s conception of engagement. Furthermore, students were encouraged to actively consider their own intersectionalities in engaging with texts. |
CHAPTER THREE

ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Problem of Practice

The Common Core State Standards Initiative’s (2017) recommendation of a 70/30 split between nonfiction and fiction has spurred a problem of practice for today’s secondary English teachers and curriculum designers. As schools increasingly align with the Common Core State Standards, many English classrooms are shifting from literature instruction to an integrated ELA curriculum focusing on reading for information, expository and argumentative writing, speaking and listening skills, and language skills. Further complicating this shift is the Common Core State Standards’ relative silence on issues of diversity and the resultant loss of opportunities for meaningful integration of inclusive literature.

Closer examination of this seeming dichotomy of Common Core’s integrated ELA versus inclusive content-based literature, however, suggests that the two approaches could potentially function in tandem rather than in opposition. Specifically, inclusive content-based literature could promote culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002) that rectifies Common Core’s disregard for diversity and serves as the instructional method of achieving the college and career readiness goals of Common Core.
Research Questions

In response to the problem of practice posed by Common Core’s diminished opportunities for diverse literature study, the study’s first research question considered whether Common Core and inclusive content-based literature could serve as complements in defining secondary English curriculum and instruction. Specifically, the study examined whether an inclusive content-based literature curriculum could use a fiction-focused, multicultural approach in conjunction with the college and career readiness goals of Common Core and its aligned assessments.

• After one semester of culturally responsive teaching in inclusive content-based literature, what patterns emerged in students’ interim achievement on teacher-administered college readiness benchmark tests?

Inclusive content-based literature curriculum could also serve as a complement to Common Core in offering instruction that reflects the diverse racial, gender, socioeconomic, and sexual identities of students at the research site. Because of the unique relevance of inclusive literature instruction to students of color, a second research question guided the study:

• After one semester of this inclusive content-based approach to English instruction, how did patterns in the college readiness scores of students of color compare to scores of the class at large?

Purpose Statement

The broad purpose of this study was to consider whether inclusive content-based literature could serve as a complement to the Common Core State Standards and their
aligned assessments by rectifying Common Core’s neglect of diversity and promoting the college and career readiness goals set forth in the Standards. In undertaking this research, the study examined patterns in student achievement on classroom-administered ACT reading exams, a standardized college readiness benchmark measurement, after a semester of culturally responsive instruction in an inclusive content-based literature curriculum. These achievement patterns revealed trends in the relationship between inclusive content-based literature instruction and student attainment of the Standards’ ultimate goal: college and career readiness.

The study’s specific focus on culturally responsive teaching in inclusive content-based literature created a second purpose: examination of the English achievement of students of color after instruction in a curriculum that reflects the experiences of underrepresented groups. Inclusive literature focuses explicitly on sharing the diverse perspectives and interests of target groups and thus affords students of color and other marginalized students the unique opportunity to see their identities reflected in their school curriculum. Culturally responsive instruction in executing this curriculum used diverse students’ own experiences and identities as means of helping them succeed academically. After exposing these targeted students to such a curriculum and method of instruction, the study compared patterns in their English achievement to patterns of the class at large and of their more privileged peers.

**Action Research Method and Design**

*Action Research Overview*

One primary goal underlay this study’s research objectives, problem statements, purpose statements, and research questions: the improvement of instructional and
curricular practices at one high school, the research site. As a result, the research philosophy in this study was based in action research. In keeping with the action research approach, this study followed the four-step process of conducting action research as outlined by Mills (2003): identifying an area of focus, collecting data, analyzing and interpreting the data, and developing an action plan.

Because of this study’s action research model, there was no intention to generalize findings or seek to prove greater effectiveness of one curricular approach over another. Indeed, the study did not mean to suggest any causal relationship or to undertake any inferential statistical analysis of findings. Rather, the study design focused on describing students’ patterns of achievement after instruction in an inclusive content-based literature curriculum. Data collection and analysis, then, featured descriptive statistics examining the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation of baseline student achievement data, summative student achievement data, and growth or change in student achievement data between the pre- and posttests. In accordance with the research questions, such data analysis featured both the class at large and the population of students of color within the class.

**Positionality**

In planning and executing this action research design, the researcher’s professional and academic positionality provided significant influence at the research site and beyond. Professionally, the researcher worked as a secondary English teacher and instructional coach at a public school in Mississippi, a Common Core state. Her role as a practicing certified teacher leading a secondary ELA classroom allowed her immediate
access and firsthand insight to the parties and policies most significantly impacted by the curricular divide presented in the problem of practice. Furthermore, her role as an educational leader in her instructional coach position widened her influence beyond her classroom. At a micro level, research findings about the seeming divide between Common Core and inclusive content-based literature instruction informed curriculum design not only in the researcher’s classroom but also in the English classrooms she coached—incidentally, all English classrooms at her school.

Additionally, the researcher’s prior experience in successfully teaching both the integrated ELA and content-based literature curricular models allowed her a more faithful understanding of inclusive content-based literature, the five-strand approach of Common Core, and the college and career readiness goals of the Common Core State Standards. The study’s problem of practice stemmed from a seeming dichotomy, but the researcher’s prior experience on both sides of the curriculum divide allowed for both greater awareness and greater reflection in examining inclusive content-based literature curriculum and its possible relationships with student achievement.

As action research has grown in popularity, some researchers and educators have raised concerns ranging from gaps in ethics (Nolen & Vander Putten, 2007) to lack of rigor (Mertler, 2015). With this mindfulness, the teacher–researcher chose to conduct this investigation as a recursively reflective action research study because of the immediate reality of the problem of practice. As Coghlan and Brannick (2014) argued, “It is the dynamic of this reflection on reflection that incorporates the learning process of the action research cycle and enables action research to be more than everyday problem solving” (p. 13). This action research study, then, afforded the researcher an opportunity
to systematically reflect on and improve her curricular practices, and the researcher’s positionality as both a professional and a student suggested the potential for even greater influence. According to Coghlan (2007), “The knowledge that emerges has the capacity to be actionable, that is, at the service of both the academic and practitioner communities” (p. 301). As such, the researcher’s positionality as both a practitioner and an academic increased the study’s capacity for actionable knowledge.

Setting

To protect the identity of the participants and setting, pseudonyms are used throughout the report.

Research for the study was conducted at a public Title I secondary school in rural Mississippi in one section of the researcher’s own English IV course. Prior to the beginning of the study, English instruction at the research site and in the English IV course was based on the five-strand integrated ELA model aligned with Common Core, leading to ideological and pragmatic divides over the direction of English curriculum and instruction. The study and its application of inclusive content-based literature was undertaken with explicit permission from both school- and district-level administrators.

The research site served 368 total students over grades 7–12. One hundred seventy-nine students (48.6%) were male; 189 students (51.4%) were female. Approximately 32% of students at the research site were people of color. For additional demographic information on the school’s racial and ethnic makeup, please see Table 3.1: Student Ethnicity at the Research Site.
Table 3.1: Student Ethnicity at the Research Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Percentage of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Island</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research site earned a “C” rating from the Mississippi Department of Education for the 2015–2016 school year and was categorized as “Typical Status, Typical Growth” (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016). In 2016, the school’s four-year adjusted graduation rate was 90.7% (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016). Table 3.2: “2015–2016 Proficiency and Growth at the Research Site” details student achievement rates as released by the Mississippi Department of Education (2016).

Table 3.2: 2015–2016 Student Proficiency and Growth at the Research Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Proficiency</th>
<th>Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>64.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2014–2015, 68% of students at the research site were eligible for free or reduced school lunch (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Because of the school’s high percentage of low-income students, the school received Federal Title I, Part A funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The demographic, economic, and achievement data of the research site show some evidence of the achievement gap common in American public schools. Although the research site earned a C rating and a “Typical” status from the Mississippi Department of Education, its scores on the state assessment showed that students’ academic achievement was a primary source of both need and challenge. Although students showed some growth in both math and reading, proficiency rates of 27.1 and 34.4, respectively, suggested that students were not receiving a minimally adequate education (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016). Proficiency rates in history (61.9%) and science (54.9%) also demonstrated that many students were not meeting grade-level expectations (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016).

As further evidence of a race- and class-influenced achievement gap at the C-rated research site, the site’s school district—home to some of the largest and most affluent schools in the state—received an overall A rating from the Mississippi Department of Education. The research site’s high concentration of students in poverty, lagging achievement scores, and relative diversity aligned well with the research objectives concerning the college and career readiness of marginalized students.

**Timeframe**

The study ran from January to early May for a total of 15 instructional weeks. The action research was conducted through the creation and execution of a constructivist,
dialogic, inclusive content-based literature curriculum administered over the 38 spring semester meetings of the teacher–researcher’s English IV course. Study participants received and engaged with this inclusive content-based literature instruction during 96-min sessions two to three times per week in accordance with the school’s rotating A-Day/B-Day block schedule.

Participants in the Study

Sixteen high school seniors served as participants in the study. Participants were selected for the study based on their prior enrollment in the researcher’s English IV class. At the research site, all seniors were required to earn an English credit, and class options were tracked based on ability as measured by GPA and standardized test scores. English IV was the lowest track option and thus generally pulled students who were not eligible for upper track classes such as dual credit English Composition or British Literature. Study participants’ average Lexile reading level at the start of English IV was just 973, a Lexile level that fell within the 4th and 5th grade “Text Complexity Grade Band in the Standards” according to the Common Core State Standards Appendix A (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010).

Demographically, the study’s 16-member sample included more male students and more people of color than the research site’s overall enrollment patterns would predict. Of the 16 participants, nine students (56.2%) identified as men and seven students (43.8%) identified as women. There were no transgender or gender nonconforming participants. Nine of the 16 participants (56.2%) were students of color: eight students identified as Black/African-American, and one student identified as mixed
race, White and Black. Three students identified as LGTBQ: two as bisexual and one as lesbian.

At the outset of the study, participants’ ages ranged from 17 to 19 years old. One of the participants was graduating early; one had previously been retained. Widespread adoption of the Common Core State Standards began in 2010, when participants were in the 4th, 5th, or 6th grades, so the study served as participants’ first exposure to a constructivist, dialogic approach to secondary ELA instruction.

**Research Methods**

*Inclusive Content-Based Literature in the Study*

This action research study examined the relationships between an inclusive content-based literature curriculum and student achievement of Common Core’s college and career readiness skills. In the study, inclusive content-based literature adhered to Doll Jr.’s (1993) postmodern constructivism, Banks’ (1993) multicultural education, McKeown et al.’s (2009) content-based approach, and Gay’s (2002) culturally responsive teaching. Inclusive content-based literature used systematic study of literature to help students create meaning, craft interpretations, question the text, and collaboratively discuss texts and ideas in ways that celebrated and empowered diverse and marginalized perspectives. Text selection adhered to Yoon et al.’s (2010) three-pronged test for evaluation of cultural pluralism in multicultural literature: “1. Ideology through inferred messages 2. Representation of all people 3. Promotion of critical pedagogy” (p. 116).

This approach stood in contrast to the research site’s existing approach to literature: the five-strand integrated ELA that neglects diversity issues and focuses on a
strict construction based on Common Core. The existing five-strand curriculum was characterized by delineated adherence to the Common Core State Standards, specifically Common Core’s five ELA skill strands and its 70% nonfiction/30% fiction reading load. In this curricular approach, no texts, writing tasks, or other curricular materials were specified. Instead, curriculum was structured around only standardized student goals with most language coming directly from the Common Core State Standards for ELA. To illustrate the research site’s existing five-strand approach, Table 3.3 presents a truncated version of the school district’s pacing plan for the second semester of English IV. For a full version of the District’s pacing plan for the spring semester of English IV, see Appendix D.

Tables 3.4 and 3.5 provide more insight into inclusive content-based literature as it functioned in this study. Table 3.4 presents the reading list of the anchor texts used in the study. Table 3.5 provides a general overview of learning activities that the class completed in conjunction with the reading of each anchor text.

*ACT Scores as a Measure of Achievement of College Readiness*

The study used classroom-administered released ACT exams to measure student progress toward the college and career readiness goals of Common Core. These exams allowed the collection of nationally scaled interval data on students’ achievement of college readiness benchmarks. Data procured with this nationally quality controlled exam offered both greater reliability and validity than data from teacher- or state-created exams.
Table 3.3: *Five-Strand Integrated ELA in the District Pacing Plan for English IV, Semester Two*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Core skill strand</th>
<th>Number of standards and substandards in each strand</th>
<th>Skill categories within each strand</th>
<th>Sample standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Literature</td>
<td>• 10 standards</td>
<td>• Key Ideas and Details</td>
<td>RL 12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Craft and Structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Integration of Knowledge and Skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Range of Reading and Text Complexity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Informative Text</td>
<td>• 10 standards</td>
<td>• Key Ideas and Details</td>
<td>RI 12.2 Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze in detail their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an accurate summary of the text based upon this analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Craft and Structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Integration of Knowledge and Skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Range of Reading and Text Complexity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>• 10 standards</td>
<td>• Text Types and Purposes</td>
<td>W 12.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 7 substandards</td>
<td>• Production and Distribution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Research to Build and Present Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Range of Writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking and Listening</td>
<td>• 6 standards</td>
<td>• Comprehension and Collaboration</td>
<td>SL.12. 3 Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 4 substandards</td>
<td>• Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>• 4 standards</td>
<td>• Conventions of Standard English Knowledge of Language</td>
<td>L.12.3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 7 substandards</td>
<td>• Vocabulary Acquisition and Use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.4: *Reading List for Inclusive Content-Based Literature*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anchor Text</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Target Groups Represented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Theme for English B”</td>
<td>Langston Hughes</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>• African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Harlem”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“April Rain Song”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I, Too”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Good Hair”</td>
<td>Sherman Alexie</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>• American Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Harlem Hopscotch”</td>
<td>Maya Angelou</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>• African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Traveller”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Low SES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Oranges”</td>
<td>Gary Soto</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>• Latino/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Low SES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Abuelito Who”</td>
<td>Sandra Cisneros</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>• Latino/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Disabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hairbands”</td>
<td>Julia Alvarez</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>• Latino/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The World We Want Is Us”</td>
<td>Alice Walker</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>• African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• LGBTQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Low SES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Siren Song”</td>
<td>Margaret Atwood</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>• Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Thaw”</td>
<td>Jane Wong</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>• Asian-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Of Darker Ceremonies”</td>
<td>Phillip B. Williams</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>• African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Low SES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| “Sorry”                       | Wynter Gordon           | Song               | • African-American  
• Women                                                                   |
| “American History”            | Judith Ortiz-Cofer      | Short Story        | • Latino/a  
• Women                                                                   |
| “Quality Control”             | Edwidge Danticat        | Short Story        | • Haitian-American  
• Women                                                                   |
| “Story of an Hour”            | Kate Chopin             | Short Story        | • Women  
• Disabled                                                               |
| “Thank You, Ma’am”            | Langston Hughes         | Short Story        | • African-American  
• Low SES                                                                  |
| “Mother Tongue”               | Amy Tan                 | Memoir             | • Asian-American  
• Women  
• Non-native English speakers                                             |
| Persepolis                    | Marjane Satrapi         | Graphic Novel      | • Religious minorities (Islam and the non-religious)  
• Women  
• International                                                            |
| Flight                        | Sherman Alexie          | Novel              | • American Indian  
• Low SES  
• LGBTQ                                                                   |
| Raisin in the Sun (excerpted) | Lorraine Hansberry      | Drama, Screenplay  | • African-American  
• Low SES  
• Women                                                                   |
| How to Read Literature Like a Professor (for Kids) | Thomas C. Foster | Literary Criticism | • None—used as a framing text for literary analysis |
Table 3.5: *Inclusive Content-Based Literature Learning Activities and Theoretical Bases*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Activities</th>
<th>Theoretical Bases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previewing Texts</strong></td>
<td><strong>Theoretical Bases</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sociocultural background</td>
<td>• Banks’ (1993) content integration in multicultural literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Historical background</td>
<td>• Gay’s (2002) development of teachers’ knowledge base about diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Perspective</td>
<td>• Gay’s (2002) incorporation of diverse content in the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Position in power systems</td>
<td>• McKeown’s (2009) content-based instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guided</strong></td>
<td>• Gay’s (2002) learning communities in culturally responsive teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Choral</strong></td>
<td>• Doll Jr.’s (1993) rigor in postmodern reading instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared</strong></td>
<td>• Banks’ (1993) knowledge construction in multicultural instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partner</strong></td>
<td>• McKeown et al.’s (2009) learning communities in content-based reading instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Text-based discussions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Gay’s (2002) communicating with students in culturally sensitive ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Doll Jr.’s (1993) recursion as the center of constructivist discussions of literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Banks’ (1993) content integration in multicultural literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• McKeown et al.’s (2009) questioning the author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Dialogue around differences</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Gay’s (2002) structuring of instruction in accordance with ethnic diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Doll Jr.’s (1993) relationship in inclusive considerations of cultural relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Banks’ (1993) knowledge construction in multicultural instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Development and defense of interpretations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Doll Jr.’s (1993) richness in postmodern reading instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• McKeown et al.’s (2009) interpretation as meaning-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Banks’ (1993) knowledge construction in multicultural instruction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of course, student progress can be accurately measured through both qualitative and quantitative means, and many in education would argue that standardized college readiness tests are insufficient in measuring student achievement. As with any measure, using a standardized test such as the ACT to track achievement carried its own challenges and potential limitations. Nevertheless, standardized college readiness exams hold immense importance for today’s students and schools. As a result, these standardized test scores were valuable not just as an operational measure of achievement but also in their own right; an ACT score of 36 carries meaning not just inside this study but also in the world of education at large. At the research site, the ACT reading exam was considered a high-value assessment owing to its role in college admissions and Mississippi’s use of the exam for annual reports of student achievement (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012).

Furthermore, ACT, Inc.’s (2017) publication of College Readiness Benchmark scores provided a convenient access point for considerations of students’ college readiness. As ACT, Inc. (2017) explained,

The Benchmarks are scores on the ACT subject-area tests that represent the level of achievement required for students to have a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75% chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses. (para. 1)

ACT, Inc. (2017) bases these Benchmark scores on a national sample of 214 institutions and over 230,000 students. These scores thus provide nationally normed insights into standards of college readiness.
Because of the ACT’s validity, reliability, availability, and value at the research site, classroom administrations of released teaching copies allowed collection of meaningful data on students’ progress toward the college and career readiness goals of the Common Core State Standards.

Procedure

Descriptive Quantitative Approach

In keeping with this study’s descriptive action research design, the study did not undertake any inferential statistics or the associated attempts at determining causation. Instead, this study sought to provide data in line with Nolen and Putten’s (2007) conception of action research. As they conceded in their critique of action research, action research has a specific value in education as a source of data-based problem solving (Nolen & Putten, 2007). As such, this study utilized a quantitative approach to align its descriptive findings with the research site’s most valued data points: student achievement scores on standardized tests. The instrument used to conduct this measure of student achievement scores on standardized tests was the ACT reading exam. The researcher proctored the exam during regularly scheduled class meetings. Testing conditions—including exam instructions, prohibition of unauthorized aids, time limits, etc.—were strictly controlled in accordance with ACT, Inc.’s (2015) ACT Test Administration Manual.

With the ACT reading test as its instrument and standardized test scores as its measure of student achievement, the study undertook a fundamentally quantitative
approach and employed descriptive statistics in analyzing and reporting student achievement scores after one semester of instruction in inclusive content-based literature.

Additionally, because the content-based literature curriculum explored in this study focused explicitly on works inclusive of minority group perspectives, it afforded the rare opportunity for students of color to see their cultural histories reflected in the school curriculum. This curricular approach thus exhibited a focus on inclusive curriculum beyond the call of the Common Core State Standards. Because of this unique opportunity for culturally responsive teaching, the study included another level of quantitative analysis on the achievement scores of students of color to consider how patterns in their achievement compared to those of the class at large and to their more privileged peers.

This study’s quantitative approach to description offered some advantages. As Mertler (2014) suggested, the use of the ACT reading exam, a quantitative measurement instrument, provided the advantage of efficient data collection. The use of descriptive statistical analysis of test scores provided the additional advantage of quantitative analysis that aligned with the research site’s most prized and influential data points: students’ achievement scores on standardized tests. In this age of ever-increasing data awareness in schools, the quantitative nature of the study appealed to school leaders at the research site who were primarily interested in the new bottom line of education, student test scores. Thus, a quantitative approach offered this action research study a more salient, cohesive, efficient, convincing, and relevant study.
Plan for Collecting Data


Data collection began the first week the course met. Students took a diagnostic pretest to determine baseline scores. The pretest was a classroom-administered teaching copy of the ACT reading test. This teaching copy of the reading test was pulled exactly from the “full-length practice test” (ACT, Inc., 2016, p. 1) that ACT, Inc. published in the 2015–2016 edition of its annual booklet, “Preparing for the ACT Test” (ACT, Inc., 2016). ACT, Inc. (2016) explained that this booklet “contains complete practice tests—‘retired’ ACT questions that were administered to students on a national test date” (p. 2). Because of this particular ACT reading exam’s significance as the study’s pretest, a copy of the exam as well as its scoring key and scaling tables is included in Appendix B.

After administration of this 2015–2016 released exam, baseline data were collected in four measures:

1. Raw Score: the number of correct answers out of the 40 total questions on the reading portion of the exam
2. Scaled Score: a score reported on a 1–36 scale based on the student’s raw score. The scaled score was calculated using the 2015–2016 edition of ACT, Inc.’s “Explanation of Procedures Used to Obtain Scale Scores from Raw Scores” (ACT, Inc., 2016, p. 59). For a copy of 2015–2016 version of this document, see Appendix B.

3. Social Studies/Sciences Subscore Area: a raw score and scaled score based on the number of correct answers from the exam’s social studies passage and the exam’s science passage (ACT, Inc., 2016).

4. Arts/Literature Subscore Area: a raw score and scaled score based on the number of correct answers from the exam’s arts/humanities passage and the exam’s literature passage (ACT, Inc., 2016).

These reading scores provided baseline data for each participant in the study and thus served as a pretest measure of student achievement on standardized college readiness tests. These scores also provided initial insight into students’ college and career readiness based on ACT Benchmarks.

The final data collection occurred during week 16 of the study with the students’ posttest, again an ACT reading exam. This exam was pulled from the 2014–2015 edition of ACT, Inc.’s “Preparing for the ACT” Booklet (2015). (For a copy of this posttest as well as its scoring key and scaling tables, see Appendix C). Because both tests were published by ACT, Inc. and consisted of retired ACT questions, the pretest and posttest had the advantages of high test/retest reliability and high parallel forms reliability. This reliability was enhanced by the scaling process in which raw scores (the correct number
of questions out of 40) were converted to scaled scores out of 36. Posttest data, like pretest data, were collected across four areas:

1. **Raw Score**: the number of correct answers out of the 40 total questions on the reading portion of the exam

2. **Scaled Score**: a score reported on a 1–36 scale based on the student’s raw score. The scaled score is calculated using the 2014–2015 edition of ACT, Inc.’s “Explanation of Procedures Used to Obtain Scale Scores from Raw Scores” (ACT, Inc., 2015, p. 59). For a copy of the 2014–2015 version of this document, see Appendix C.

3. **Social Studies/Sciences Subscore Area**: a raw score and scaled score based on the number of correct answers from the exam’s social studies passage and the exam’s science passage (ACT, Inc., 2015)

4. **Arts/Literature Subscore Area**: a raw score and scaled score based on the number of correct answers from the exam’s arts passage and the exam’s literature passage (ACT, Inc., 2015)

With this two-point data collection, pretest and posttest student achievement data were available after one semester of instruction in an inclusive content-based literature curriculum. These data were then descriptively examined considering the problem of practice. These data helped the teacher–researcher consider whether, through a mutually adaptive process, content-based literature could complement the college and career readiness skills of the Common Core State Standards while expanding opportunities for diverse and multicultural instruction.
Data Analysis

Mertler (2014) explained that in conducting action research, “depending on the nature of the investigation, teacher-researchers will utilize either descriptive or inferential statistics or perhaps a combination of the two” (p. 169). Because this study undertook a descriptive rather than experimental design, the study did not attempt to generalize findings or seek to prove greater effectiveness of inclusive content-based literature over the five-strand integrated ELA model. Indeed, no suggestions of any causal relationship or inferential statistical analysis of findings were made. Instead, data analysis considered potential solutions to the problem of practice—namely, whether inclusive content-based literature could enrich curricular inclusivity without detracting from the college readiness goals set forth in the Common Core State Standards.

In this consideration, descriptive statistics including medians, means, and standard deviations of each set of pre- and posttest scores informed analysis of the assessment data. Because the ACT reading exam provided four measures of student achievement (raw score, scaled score, social studies/science subscore area, and arts/literature subscore area) with each administration, pretest/posttest data on baselines, growth, and summative college readiness scores were examined both holistically and by discipline. In reporting these data, visual representations including line graphs and data tables were useful in descriptively presenting the study’s findings.

In accordance with the study’s two research questions, two levels of data analysis took place: first, student achievement data from the class at large were descriptively analyzed for patterns in baselines, growth, and summative college readiness scores. Then,
achievement scores from students of color underwent the same descriptive analysis. Patterns in these achievement scores were then compared to those of the class at large.

For more information on plans for analyzing data across the two administrations, their four distinct measures, and multiple student groups, consult Table 3.6, “Relevant Data Points for Analysis.”

**Plan for Reflecting with Participants on Data**

In keeping with the cyclical and recursive natures of both action research and classroom instruction, data were shared with participants through cycles of formative and summative assessment. Specifically, students received formal formative data about their college and career readiness immediately following their completion of the pretest. Students were provided with their raw scores and the ACT scales to determine their baseline ACT growth.

Then, as students underwent the treatment condition, instruction in inclusive content-based literature, data and reflection became more constructivist and less formal. Through postmodern study of the works listed in Table 3.4, students read, questioned, reacted to, discussed, critiqued, and wrote about the content and craft of the literature. Daily instructional activities such as quick writes and class discussion offered students formative assessment opportunities including feedback on their writing and speaking, student and teacher responses to their discussion points, and scaffolded questioning to deepen textual understanding. Some of the formative assessments—particularly writing exercises and text-based questioning—were graded to allow participants to track their developing mastery through the research site-mandated grading system.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Achievement Scores</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Relevant Descriptive Statistics</th>
<th>Student Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Baseline College Readiness** | Pretest: ACT reading 2015–2016 | • Raw scores  
• Scale scores  
• Social studies/science subscore  
• Arts/literature subscore | • Mean  
• Median  
• Range  
• Standard Deviation  
• Difference relative to ACT College Readiness Benchmark | • Whole Class  
• Students of Color |
| **Summative College Readiness** | Posttest: ACT reading 2014–2015 | • Raw scores  
• Scale scores  
• Social studies/science subscore  
• Arts/literature subscore | • Mean  
• Median  
• Range  
• Standard Deviation  
• Difference relative to ACT College Readiness Benchmark | • Whole Class  
• Students of Color |
| **Changes in College Readiness** | Pretest → Posttest Comparison | • Raw scores  
• Scale scores  
• Social studies/science subscore  
• Arts/literature subscore | • Mean  
• Median  
• Range  
• Standard Deviation  
• Difference relative to ACT College Readiness Benchmark | • Whole Class  
• Students of Color |
Participants then received and reflected on their own formal summative data at the conclusion of the study. After completing the posttest, students received their raw score and the ACT’s scaling guide. Students compared their baseline scores to their posttest scores to consider any potential changes in their scores or subscores. The culminating act of reflection consisted of a whole class discussion of how inclusive content-based literature might have influenced participants’ learning, thinking, or college and career readiness.

**Plan for Devising an Action Plan**

In his practitioner guide for action research, Mertler (2015) argued that “the purpose of action research is to solve local-level problems, not to generalize solutions to larger populations” (p. 175). In pursuing the solution to the local-level problem of ideological and pragmatic divides spurred by Common Core’s five-strand approach to ELA, this study followed a systematic action research process, including “the clear delineation of a problem, a systematic means of collecting and analyzing data, and the development of a plan for changing future practice” (Mertler, 2015, p. 175).

As such, this study’s action plan used a mutually adaptive process (McLaughlin, 1976) to reciprocally blend administrator demand for Common Core adherence and instructor commitment to content-based literature instruction. The first iteration of this mutually adaptive process was this study’s conception and trial of using inclusive content-based literature in conjunction with college and career readiness goals in an English IV class. As will be shown in Chapters Four and Five, participant data showed strong growth in college readiness scores after instruction in inclusive content-based
literature, so future implementation cycles could involve expanding the approach to other secondary English sections. To continue data collection and refinement of the inclusive content-based literature approach, the curricula as complements solution should first be adapted to and implemented in the researcher’s other instructional sections, specifically the English II curriculum. During English II implementation, school-level curriculum administrators including the school’s literacy coach and the school’s English department chair can be looped in as contributors, developers, and critics. Involving these school-site leaders allows for feedback, adaptation, and improvement of inclusive content-based literature instruction before encouraging other teachers’ use of the approach.

After implementation with the researcher’s other sections and recursive cycles of feedback and development from curricular administrators, an inclusive content-based literature approach could be shared with other teachers at the research site as a means of correcting the curricular divide that underlies the local-level problem of practice. Through additional recursive series of action, data collection, analysis, and reflection, the approach could continue to be refined before being shared at district or state levels. Ultimately, the approach could help spur revision of Common Core’s strict construction and relative silence on issues of diversity.

For a visual representation of this proposed action research plan, see Figure 3.1: Taking Mutually Adaptive Action with Inclusive Content-Based Literature.
Figure 3.1: Taking Mutually Adaptive Action with Inclusive Content-Based Literature
CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS FROM THE DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

This action research study explored how instruction in an inclusive content-based literature curriculum related to student achievement of Common Core’s college readiness goals in the researcher’s own high school English classroom. The study arose in response to a local-level problem of practice that reflected a nationwide controversy surrounding secondary English instruction. The adoption of a Common Core-aligned, 70% nonfiction/30% fiction integrated ELA curriculum diminished opportunities for inclusive literature study and divided English teachers on ideological and practical distinctions of curriculum design. To address this problem of practice, the study used a descriptive quantitative action research design to explore how an inclusive content-based approach to ELA might relate to student achievement on college readiness benchmark tests, specifically the ACT reading exam. In this descriptive analysis, the study considered patterns in students’ achievement of the college and career readiness goals of Common Core after culturally responsive instruction in content-based literature. In this chapter, findings from the pretest and posttest, including student growth, student benchmark scores, and achievement among students of color, are descriptively analyzed in accordance with the study’s two research questions.
Research Questions

Two research questions guided the study’s investigation of whether Common Core and inclusive content-based literature could serve as complements rather than competitors in defining secondary English curriculum and instruction. The first considered inclusive content-based literature and student achievement of college and career readiness.

- *After one semester of culturally responsive teaching in inclusive content-based literature, what patterns emerged in students’ interim achievement on teacher-administered college readiness benchmark tests?*

The second research question arose from the unique relevance of inclusive content-based literature instruction to students of color and other marginalized students. It considered whether marginalized student groups might experience different achievement results after seeing diverse perspectives represented in the curriculum.

- *After one semester of this inclusive content-based approach to English instruction, how did patterns in the college readiness scores of students of color compare to scores of the class at large?*

Purpose of the Study

Closer examination of the seeming dichotomy between Common Core’s integrated ELA and inclusive content-based literature suggests that the two approaches could potentially function in tandem rather than in opposition. The broad purpose of this study was to consider whether inclusive content-based literature could rectify Common Core’s disregard for diversity and serve as an instructional method in accordance with the college and career readiness goals of Common Core.
The study’s specific focus on culturally responsive teaching in inclusive content-based literature then created a second purpose in the study: examination of the English achievement of students of color after instruction in a curriculum that reflects underrepresented perspectives.

Findings of the Study

Overview

Sixteen English IV students engaged in inclusive content-based literature curriculum as participants in this study. Student achievement data were collected in a pretest/posttest design that used the ACT reading exam as a measure of college and career readiness in ELA. The 40-question pretest—the 2015–2016 released ACT reading exam—was administered during the first class meeting in the study; the posttest—the 2014–2015 released ACT reading exam—was administered 15 weeks later during the 35th class meeting.

Two sets of findings are presented in accordance with the study’s two research questions. The first findings considered achievement data, growth data, and benchmark data from the whole class of 16 students. The second set covered the achievement data, growth data, and benchmark data from the nine students of color in the class.

Whole Class Student Achievement Scores

Both the study’s pretest and posttest were 40-question ACT reading exams that students had 35 min to complete. Each ACT reading exam consisted of four passages, roughly 700–800 words each, with 10 analytical questions on each passage. For copies of the pretest and posttest, see Appendices B and C, respectively.
On the pretest, students correctly answered an average of 16.6 of the 40 questions. Using ACT, Inc.’s (2016) 36-point scale (see Appendix B) to ensure parallel-form reliability, students’ average scaled score was a 17.0. Fifteen weeks later, after a semester of instruction in inclusive content-based literature, students took the posttest (see Appendix C). Students’ average raw score on the posttest increased to 21.3 of the 40 questions correct. Their corresponding average scaled score grew to an 18.8 on ACT’s 36-point scale.

Table 4.1 presents basic descriptive data for whole class student achievement scores on the pretest and posttest.

Table 4.1: Whole Class Achievement Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pretest: Raw Scores</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pretest: Scaled Scores</strong></td>
<td><strong>Posttest: Raw Scores</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions correct out of 40 total pretest questions</td>
<td>Calculated using ACT, Inc.’s (2016) 36-point scale</td>
<td>Questions correct out of 40 total pretest questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median raw score: 16.8</td>
<td>Median scaled score: 17.0</td>
<td>Median raw score: 20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average raw score: 16.6</td>
<td>Averaged scaled score: 17.0</td>
<td>Average raw score: 21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation: 6.5</td>
<td>Standard deviation: 4.8</td>
<td>Standard deviation: 5.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Whole Class Growth in Student Achievement**

Of the 16 total study participants, 11 students (69%) saw growth in their raw scores from pretest to posttest for an average raw score increase of 4.6 additional questions correct. After pretest and posttest scores were scaled according to ACT, Inc.’s
(2015) 36-point system, 10 of the 16 participants (63%) saw growth in their scaled scores from pretest to posttest. Because this scaled score uses nationally normed data to account for differences in test difficulty, scaled scores have the statistical validity and reliability necessary for comparison across tests and test performances.

The average growth in students’ scaled scores from pretest to posttest was 1.8 points. These 1.8 points of growth in scaled score represents movement from the national 31st percentile of test takers (pretest scaled score of 17.0) to roughly the 41st percentile (posttest scaled score of 18.8) according to ACT, Inc.’s (2017) “National Distributions of Cumulative Percents for ACT Test Scores.” After 15 weeks of instruction in inclusive content-based literature, the whole class average scaled score thus increased an entire decile on the national distribution of ACT reading test performance.

Table 4.2 presents basic descriptive data for whole class pretest-to-posttest ACT reading growth scores.

**Table 4.2: Whole Class Pretest-to-Posttest Growth**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw Score Growth</th>
<th>Scaled Score Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions correct out of 40 total pretest questions</td>
<td>Calculated using ACT, Inc’s (2015) 36-point scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of participants showing raw score growth: 11/16 (69%)</td>
<td>Number of participants showing scaled score growth: 10/16 (63%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median raw score growth: +3.8</td>
<td>Median scaled score growth: +1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average raw score growth: +4.6</td>
<td>Averaged scaled score growth: +1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation: 5.15</td>
<td>Standard deviation: 3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Whole Class Benchmark Scores**

As ACT, Inc. (2017) explained, its ACT Benchmarks are scores on the ACT subject-area tests that “represent the level of achievement required for students to have a
50% chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75% chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses” (para. 1). On the study’s pretest, only one of the 16 study participants attained the ACT reading benchmark scaled score of 22. After one semester of instruction in inclusive content-based literature, one additional study participant met the reading benchmark scores. Despite these low benchmark attainment rates, however, students did show progress toward the benchmark after participation in the study. Students’ average distance from the benchmark score of 22 moved from 5.0 points below benchmark on the pretest to 3.2 points below on the posttest—an average increase of 1.8 scaled points.

Table 4.3 provides descriptive data about students’ progress toward benchmark ACT reading scores.

**Table 4.3: Whole Class Progress toward ACT’s Reading Benchmark Score of 22**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>Progress toward benchmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students meeting benchmark: 1/16 (6%)</td>
<td>Number of students meeting benchmark: 2/16 (12.5%)</td>
<td>Increased by 1 student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average distance from benchmark: −5.0 points</td>
<td>Average distance from benchmark: −3.2 points</td>
<td>Average distance from benchmark: Decreased 1.8 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Findings among Students of Color**

With these whole class scores providing baseline data on student achievement after one semester of instruction in inclusive content-based literature, findings now focus on the results of the nine students of color in the 16-member class. Of these nine students
of color, eight students were African-American/Black, and one was mixed race, White and African-American/Black. All nine students of color were of low socioeconomic status, as defined by each one’s qualification for free or reduced school lunch, ACT fee waivers, and/or Pell Grants.

On the pretest, students of color correctly answered an average of 16.7 of the 40 questions—slightly outperforming both the whole class average (16.6) and their White classmates (16.6). Using the ACT, Inc.’s 36-point scale to convert this raw score, students’ of color averaged scaled score on the pretest was 17.1. After one semester of instruction in inclusive content-based literature, students’ of color average raw score on the posttest increased to 22.6 of 40 questions correct for an average posttest scaled score of 19.9. With this average posttest score, students of color outperformed the whole class average by 1.3 raw points and 1.1 scaled points—a larger margin than in pretest scores. Table 4.4 presents data for students’ of color achievement on the pretest and posttest.

**Table 4.4: Students of Color Achievement Scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.4: Students of Color Achievement Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pretest</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pretest: Raw Scores</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Questions correct out of 40 total pretest questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median raw score: 16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average raw score: 16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation: 8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pretest: Scaled Scores</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Calculated using ACT, Inc’s (2016) 36-point scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median scaled score: 16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Averaged scaled score: 17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation: 6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Posttest</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Posttest: Raw Scores</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Questions correct out of 40 total pretest questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median raw score: 22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average raw score: 22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation: 6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Posttest: Scaled Scores</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Calculated using ACT, Inc’s (2015) 36-point scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median scaled score: 19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Averaged scaled score: 19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation: 6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students of Color Growth in Achievement

Of the nine students of color who participated in the study, eight students (89%) saw growth in their raw scores from pretest to posttest. Students of color thus experienced a higher percentage of students showing growth than the whole class rate of 69%. On average, students’ of color raw score increased by 7.0 additional questions correct. This growth in raw score was markedly higher than the whole class average of 4.3 additional questions correct (see Table 4.3), and more than double their White peers’ average raw growth of 3.0 additional questions correct.

After pretest and posttest scores were scaled according to ACT, Inc.’s (2016) 36-point system, seven of the nine (78%) participants of color saw growth in their scaled score from pretest to posttest. Because this scaled score uses nationally normed data to account for differences in test difficulty, scaled scores have the statistical validity and reliability necessary for comparison across tests and test performances.

The average growth in students’ of color scaled score was 2.8 points, significantly higher than the whole class average of 1.8 scaled points of growth (see Table 4.2) and more than four times higher than White students’ average growth of 0.6 scaled points. Students’ of color 2.8 points of scaled score growth represents movement from the national 31st percentile of test takers (pretest scaled score of 17.1) to roughly the 47th percentile (posttest scaled score of 19.9) according to ACT, Inc’s (2017) “National Distributions of Cumulative Percents for ACT Test Scores”—an increase of 16 percentile points among national ACT reading test performances.

Table 4.5 presents basic descriptive data for students’ of color pretest-to-posttest ACT reading growth scores.
Table 4.5: *Students of Color Pretest-to-Posttest Growth*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw Scores Growth</th>
<th>Scaled Scores Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Questions correct out of 40 total pretest questions</td>
<td>• Calculated using ACT, Inc’s (2015) 36-point scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students of color showing raw score growth: 8/9 (89%)</td>
<td>Number of students of color showing scaled score growth: 7/9 (78%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median raw score growth: +7</td>
<td>Median scaled score: +3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average raw score growth: +5.9</td>
<td>Averaged scaled score: +2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation: 4.2</td>
<td>Standard deviation: 3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Benchmark Scores for Students of Color*

On the study’s pretest, just one of the nine students of color in the study attained the ACT reading benchmark scaled score of 22. After one semester of instruction in inclusive content-based literature, no additional students of color met the reading benchmark score. (The originally proficient student did show proficiency a second time, though.) Despite these low benchmark attainment rates, students of color did show progress toward the benchmark after participation in the study. Students’ of color average distance from the benchmark score of 22 moved from 4.9 points below benchmark on the pretest to 2.1 points below on the posttest—an average increase of 2.8 scaled points. This growth far outpaced the whole class average increase of 1.8 scaled points and dwarfed White students’ average increase of 0.6 scaled points.

Table 4.6 provides descriptive data about students’ of color progress toward benchmark ACT reading scores.
### Table 4.6: Students of Color Progress toward ACT Reading Benchmark Score of 22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>Progress toward benchmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students</td>
<td>meeting benchmark: 1/9 (11%)</td>
<td>Number of students of color</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meeting benchmark:</td>
<td></td>
<td>meeting benchmark: 1/9 (11%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average distance</td>
<td>−4.9 points</td>
<td>−2.1 points</td>
<td>Decreased 2.8 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from benchmark</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Growth in Achievement across Other Demographic Groups**

Descriptive analysis thus shows that after one semester of culturally responsive instruction in inclusive content-based literature, most study participants demonstrated growth in their scaled scores of college reading readiness. Additional analysis of achievement among students of color revealed that students of color in the study were both more likely to experience scaled score reading growth and more likely to experience it at a higher rate than their White peers. Expanding on these findings, Figure 4.1 and Table 4.6 present more specific growth data for demographic groups in the study. In these figures, data are amalgamated and dissected across class average, students of color, and White students with information about how genders performed across racial groups.

These data comparisons illustrate that students of color showed greater average growth than their White peers and that male students showed greater average growth than female students. Only one demographic group, white women, failed to show pretest-to-posttest growth. This was also the smallest demographic group in the class, having only two members. On average, male study participants grew more than female participants.
Black men had the highest score growth, in terms of both the percentage of students showing growth (100%) and the magnitude of growth (+4.0 scaled points). In fact, men of color began with the lowest average pretest score (15.3) of the four race/gender demographic groups but finished with the second highest average posttest score (19.3).

Figure 4.1: Demographic groups’ average growth
Table 4.7: *Demographic groups’ average growth, ranked lowest to highest*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Group</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Number of Students Showing Growth</th>
<th>Average Scaled Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White, women only</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0/2 (0%)</td>
<td>-1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, all genders</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3/7 (43%)</td>
<td>+0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women, all races</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4/7 (57%)</td>
<td>+0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women of color</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4/5 (80%)</td>
<td>+0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, men only</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3/5 (60%)</td>
<td>+1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All students</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>11/16 (69%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>+1.8</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men, all races</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7/9 (78%)</td>
<td>+2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students of color, all genders</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8/9 (89%)</td>
<td>+2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men of color</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4/4 (100%)</td>
<td>+4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interpretation of the Results of the Study**

**Overview**

Inclusive content-based literature is a viable complement to the Common Core State Standards’ goal of increased college and career readiness. Descriptive analysis shows that after one semester of culturally responsive instruction in inclusive content-based literature, most study participants demonstrated growth in their scaled scores of college reading readiness. The whole class average scaled growth of 1.8 points was great enough to represent an entire decile of improvement on the ACT’s National Distribution of Test Scores (2017). Growth was especially marked for students of color, in terms of
both the percentage of students showing growth (78%) and how much average growth they demonstrated (2.8 points, an increase in 16 national percentile points).

To contextualize the magnitude of the whole class average of 1.8 points of growth and students’ of color 2.8 points of growth, their data could be compared to national growth trends published in ACT, Inc.’s (2009) study “How Much Growth toward College Readiness is Reasonable to Expect in High School?” ACT Inc.’s (2009) study longitudinally tracked average scores of approximately 150,000 students who took the ACT Explore test in grades 8/9, the ACT Plan test in grade 10, and the ACT in grades 11/12. Of the 150,000-student sample, roughly 32,000 students, like this study’s participants, were off target in hitting ACT benchmark scores. For these off-target students, the average reading growth between the 10th grade Plan test and the 11th/12th grade ACT test was only 1.6 scaled points (ACT, Inc., 2009). This means that participants in this study averaged more college readiness growth in fifteen weeks of content-based literature instruction than 32,000 sampled off-target students averaged in an entire calendar year in ACT, Inc.’s (2009) study.

Of course, this higher rate of growth cannot be directly attributed to inclusive content-based literature methods, but patterns of student growth in this study suggest that inclusive content-based literature does not necessarily prohibit student growth in college readiness. As such, inclusive content-based literature might function as a complement to the Common Core State Standards in promoting the Standards’ goal of college and career readiness. In contrast to Common Core’s suggestion of a 70% nonfiction/30% fiction reading load and instruction split across five strands of ELA (reading information, reading literature, writing, speaking and listening, and language), content-based literature
instruction in the study holistically focused on the shared construction of meaning from literary texts, including four book-length works. In the study, students’ reading load was over 90% fiction and literature, including short stories, novels, poetry, drama, song, and graphic novels. Despite inclusive content-based literature’s seeming lack of alignment with Common Core’s specifications for secondary ELA, most study participants achieved ACT reading gains that demonstrated above-national-average progress in the ultimate goal of the Common Core State Standards: college and career readiness. These gains were particularly notable for students of color in the study, who grew, on average, at a rate four times higher than their White peers.

Study data thus suggested that inclusive content-based literature could serve as a mutually adaptive solution to the local-level problem of practice: the curricular divide and loss of multicultural study spurred by Common Core’s strict constructionist five-strand model of ELA. The next two subsections, organized by research question, interpret these basic trends in more detail with specific insight into how inclusive content-based literature could complement college and career readiness goals for secondary English students.

**Whole Class Findings**

During the study, 10 of the 16 participants (63%) saw an increase in their college reading readiness with an average increase of 1.8 points on the ACT’s nationally normed 36-point scale. Despite an instructional program focused on fiction, this achievement growth was more pronounced in the social studies/sciences subscore than in the arts/literature subscore, which saw scaled subscores decrease by 0.2. Figure 4.2 traces
whole class student growth from the pretest to the posttest with data from both reading subscores and students’ reading composite.

Figure 4.2 Whole Class Growth Trends

These whole class growth trends suggested an overall pattern of increased college and career readiness in English and reading, even in skill strands such as social studies/science not directly covered by inclusive content-based literature’s postmodern approaches to English instruction and culturally pluralist approaches to text selection. Of the four passages in the posttest, only one was a work of fiction (the literary narrative passage), and only one was written by a person of color (incidentally, also the literary narrative passage), yet students showed growth across modes of reading even without the direct, aligned, skills-based, and nonfiction instruction recommended by Common Core. This suggests that inclusive content-based literature could be a powerful curricular and instructional complement for increasing college and career readiness in secondary English students even outside the academic realm of fiction and literature.
Of course, pushing all students toward college and career readiness requires an approach that works for more than 63% of students, and additional research, refinement, and experimentation will be necessary parts of the study’s continuing action plan if inclusive content-based literature is to become a widely implemented solution to the study’s problem of practice. However, considering that study participants were high school seniors taking a posttest during their final week in the K–12 system, investment in and performance on the posttest becomes more inspired. In fact, with the study’s application of instruction in inclusive content-based literature, supermajority growth was observed in a student sample facing distraction, disengagement, and disinvestment during their literally final days as secondary students. Nevertheless, additional research aimed at increasing the percentage of students who experience growth after instruction in inclusive content-based research is a necessary next step that will be further explored in Chapter Five.

Findings among Students of Color

Although the whole class percentages of students showing growth seem modest at 63%, growth among students of color was far more marked. In perhaps the study’s most significant finding, growth among students of color far outpaced growth in the whole class average and growth among White students—in terms of both the percentage of students showing growth and the average amount each student grew. In fact, eight of the nine students of color (89%) in the study showed growth in their ACT raw scores, and seven of nine (78%) showed growth in their scaled scores. The amount of growth is even more notable: whereas the whole class averaged 1.8 scaled points of growth, students of
color averaged 2.8 points of growth. This average amount of growth was more than 4.5 times higher than the average growth shown by their White peers, who averaged 0.6 scaled points of growth. Perhaps most remarkably, 100% of male students of color in the study showed growth in their raw and/or scaled scores with average growth reaching 4.0 scaled points. These 4.0 scaled points of growth represented a move from the 26th percentile of national test takers to the 45th percentile (ACT, Inc., 2017)—a 19-percentile point increase after 15 weeks of instruction.

These strong growth trends among students of color suggest, as the whole class averages did, an overall pattern of increased college and career readiness in English and reading after one semester of inclusive content-based literature instruction. This pattern of growth was present even in skill strands such as social studies/science not directly covered by inclusive content-based literature’s postmodern approaches to English instruction and culturally pluralist approaches to text selection. In the study, students of color showed growth across modes of reading even without the direct, aligned, skills-based, and nonfiction instruction recommended by Common Core.

Figure 4.3 traces students’ of color growth from the pretest to the posttest with data from both reading subscores and students’ reading composite.

The fact that students of color in the study experienced higher-than-average growth in terms of both the percentage of students showing growth and the amount of growth suggests that inclusive content-based literature could be an asset in instructing students from historically marginalized racial groups. The reading list for the study included 15 authors of color across five literary genres. Though not all texts focused explicitly on issues of race, ethnicity, or nationality, texts were chosen with an eye for
Figure 4.3: Students of Color Growth Trends

Yoon et al.’s (2002) cultural pluralism in inclusive instruction. In leading students through constructivist, postmodern meaning-making in the texts, all content-based literature instruction was steeped in Banks’ (1993) multicultural content integration and knowledge construction and Gay’s (2002) culturally responsive teaching.

This instructional awareness and sensitivity often cultivated high degrees of interest and investment from students of color during the study, and posttest achievement scores suggested that a culturally responsive inclusive content-based literature curriculum is not incompatible with English growth for students of color. Although inclusive content-based literature and the culturally pluralist texts used in the study could not be attributed as causes of students’ of color achievement gains, such a markedly positive growth trend for these students suggested that the inclusive-content based literature approach deserves further study and consideration at the research site.
Conclusion

After one semester of inclusive content-based literature instruction, most study participants saw an increase in their college readiness reading scores as measured by the ACT reading exam. Average gains after 15 weeks of culturally responsive, constructivist, postmodern literature instruction increased students’ reading scores an average of 10 percentile points on ACT, Inc’s (2017) National Distributions scale. Furthermore, the 1.8 average points of growth in 15 weeks tops the national average of 1.6 points of growth in an entire calendar year as seen in ACT, Inc.’s (2009) study of off-target test-takers. Among students of color in the study, college readiness reading growth was even higher in terms of both the percentage of students experiencing growth and the average points of growth. Seventy-nine percent of students of color showed scaled score growth on their posttests; they achieved an average of 2.8 points of growth, an increase of 16 percentile points on ACT, Inc’s (2017) National Distributions scale.

These student growth data, attained after one semester of culturally responsive instruction in inclusive content-based literature, suggest that the dichotomy between the Common Core State Standards and inclusive content-based literature might be a false one. Indeed, student growth suggests that Common Core and inclusive content-based literature could function as complements rather than competitors in secondary English instruction, especially for students of color. Specifically, these research findings suggest that with additional inferential research and refinement, inclusive content-based literature might complement the college and career readiness goals of the Common Core State Standards and their 21st century literacy goals.
Chapter Five further discusses these implications and offers recommendations on how a mutually adaptive process and the study’s action research plan can further rectify the curricular divide described in the study’s problem of practice.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This action research study used a quantitative, pretest–posttest design to consider a solution to a local-level problem of practice. As the research site increasingly aligned to the Common Core State Standards and their suggestion of a 70% nonfiction/30% fiction reading load for secondary students, many English classrooms shifted from literature instruction to an integrated ELA curriculum focusing on reading for information, expository and argumentative writing, speaking and listening skills, and language skills. Further complicating this shift was the Common Core State Standards’ relative silence on issues of diversity and the resultant loss of opportunities for meaningful integration of inclusive literature.

This study considered whether inclusive content-based literature—a constructivist, postmodern approach to ELA—might serve as a solution to the loss of opportunities for diverse literature study in strictly aligned Common Core curricula. Specifically, inclusive content-based literature could serve as a complement to the Common Core State Standards by promoting Common Core’s goal of increased college and career readiness through the dialogic study of culturally pluralist texts. Because inclusive content-based literature has the additional benefit of allowing marginalized student groups the opportunity to see their own identities reflected in the curriculum, the
study additionally considered the achievement of students of color after this culturally responsive instruction.

**Research Questions**

Two research questions guided the study’s investigation of whether Common Core and inclusive content-based literature could serve as complements rather than distractors in defining secondary English curriculum and instruction. The first considered inclusive content-based literature and its relationship with college and career readiness growth.

- After one semester of culturally responsive teaching in inclusive content-based literature, what patterns emerged in students’ interim achievement on teacher-administered college readiness benchmark tests?

The second research question came from the unique relevance of inclusive content-based literature instruction to students of color. It considered whether marginalized student groups, specifically students of color, might experience different achievement results after seeing diverse perspectives represented in the curriculum.

- After one semester of this inclusive content-based approach to English instruction, how did patterns in the college readiness scores of students of color compare to scores of the class at large?

**Purpose of the Study**

The broad purpose of this study was to consider whether inclusive content-based literature could serve as a complement to the Common Core State Standards and their
aligned assessments by rectifying Common Core’s neglect of diversity and promoting college and career readiness goals set forth in the Standards.

The study’s specific focus on culturally responsive teaching in inclusive content-based literature then created a second purpose in the study: examination of the English achievement of students of color after instruction in a curriculum that reflected and explored the experiences of underrepresented groups.

**Overview/Summary of the Study**

The study was conducted with 16 English IV students in one section of the teacher–researcher’s own English class. Study participants were in their final semester of K–12 education in a small, rural, Title I high school in Mississippi, a Common Core state. The study lasted 15 weeks, during which study participants engaged in a rigorous inclusive content-based literature curriculum. During instructional time, students and the teacher–researcher practiced collaborative meaning-making through shared readings, discussions, and written analyses of an array of culturally pluralist texts. More than 90% of reading materials were fiction or literature from genres including novels, poetry, graphic novels, short stories, drama, and song. All works of fiction and literature explored the perspectives of one or more underrepresented minority groups across constructs such as race, gender, class, religion, and sexuality. The other 10% of reading and instruction was devoted to a literary criticism framing text designed to help students access and apply an analytical lens to their reading.

The pretest—the official released ACT reading exam from 2015–2016—was given during the first class of the study. The posttest—the official released ACT reading
exam from 2014–2015—was administered 15 weeks later during the last class. On average, students grew 1.8 scaled points on the ACT reading exam, increasing from the 31st national percentile on the pretest to the 41st national percentile on the posttest.

Growth among students of color was even more dramatic: on average, the 9 participants of color grew 2.8 scaled points, moving from the 31st national percentile on the pretest to the 47th national percentile on the posttest. The 1.8 average points of growth shown in this study in fifteen weeks vastly outpace what ACT, Inc. (2009) found to be reasonable in their study of over 32,000 off-target test-takers. In ACT, Inc.’s (2009) national study, off-target students averaged only 1.6 points of reading growth in an entire calendar year.

This level of student growth, demonstrated on a posttest given during participants’ distraction-riddled final week in the K–12 education system, suggested that inclusive content-based literature could be used in conjunction with Common Core’s goals for increasing students’ college and career readiness. Inclusive content-based literature seems to offer particular opportunity to students of color, who saw a rate of reading growth more than four times higher than that of their White peers. With additional research and refinement through a mutually adaptive process of sharing and expanding the curriculum, inclusive content-based literature could serve as a solution to the research site’s curricular divide and promote the study of diverse works of literature in pursuit of the college and career readiness goals of Common Core.

**Action Plan: Implications of the Findings of the Study**

This study’s findings have significant implications at the research site, both in the researcher’s own classroom and throughout the school.
Implications for Implementation

First, development and execution of the study as well as conclusions based on study data support the professional weigh-in and buy-in necessary for an effective mutually adaptive process (McLaughlin, 1976) in improving the research site’s approach to secondary English curriculum. The catalyst for this study’s problem of practice—the schoolwide adoption of a new strict-constructionist, Common Core-aligned English curriculum for ELA classes—demonstrated the disruption and conflict that can occur when school site reforms are undertaken without a shared sense of possibility, responsibility, and investment among stakeholders. In response, the study and its action plan suggest a means to repair this ideological and practical divide among teachers and administrators through both a product (inclusive content-based literature) and an incremental, collaborative process of implementation.

Specifically, the study’s action plan used a mutually adaptive process (McLaughlin, 1976) to reciprocally blend administrator demand for Common Core adherence and instructor commitment to content-based literature instruction. Beginning with even the earliest conceptions of how “curricula as complements” might function, designing and implementing inclusive content-based literature as a curricular pilot program allowed “goals and methods to be reassessed, refined, and made explicit during the course of implementation, and that fosters ‘learning-by-doing’” (McLaughlin, 1976, p. 348). In approaching the ideological, even politicized, problem of practice with a lens for how Common Core and inclusive literature instruction can serve as complements rather than distractors at the school site, the research reassessed and refined the school’s new initiative in secondary English curriculum design.
Because the study’s preliminary data suggested positive relationships in student growth in college and career readiness after instruction in inclusive content-based literature, next steps in the mutually adaptive process at the school site include expansion of the approach into other sections and grade levels taught by the teacher–researcher. Additionally, other teachers and curricular leaders should be brought in to examine and critique these expanded field trials with an eye for strengthening the design and execution of inclusive content-based literature. After another recursive cycle of feedback and development from fellow teachers and curricular leaders, an inclusive content-based literature approach could be shared with other teachers at the research site as a means of correcting the curricular divide that underlies the local-level problem of practice.

As such, the study’s most immediate implication was the potential to expand inclusive content-based literature through a mutually adaptive plan for implementation at the research site. Study findings suggested that the development of inclusive content-based literature through a mutually adaptive process allowed for a new curricular approach that meets both teacher and administrator demands in supporting student learning and college and career readiness in secondary English instruction.

**Implications for Instruction**

Beyond the study’s action plan for a mutually adaptive process, the study’s development of and conclusions about inclusive content-based literature suggest that a more inclusive, postmodern approach to English curriculum and instruction might enhance student academic achievement at the research site and thus promote compromise in rectifying the research site’s problem of practice. Specifically, study findings
suggested that the implementation of inclusive content-based literature would spur mutually desired changes in instructional goals and approach while meeting instructor demands for increased inclusivity and diversity in the curriculum.

In terms of realignment of instructional goals, the study findings suggested that Common Core’s conception of “21st-century skills” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017) in college and career readiness could serve as the ultimate goal of an inclusive content-based literature curriculum. This conception of measurable and behavioral objectives for workplace readiness as the goals of ELA differs significantly from the conventional goals of content-based literature instruction, which often considers the creation of a dialogically interpretative community and the use inquiry to make meaning from texts as its goals. However, study participants’ growth patterns on standardized college-readiness tests suggest that a literature-heavy, deliberately inclusive English curriculum marked by richness, recursion, relationship, and rigor (Doll Jr., 1993) can substitute for scientific curriculum-making (Bobbitt, 1918) and not prohibit the goals of Common Core, at least in terms of increased college and career readiness in reading skills. This implication—that the postmodern, content-based methods can be compatible with standards-based goals—suggests that content-based English teachers at the research site can rethink, redefine, or reorient their ultimate goals for student achievement without sacrificing their commitment to more open, constructivist methods than those typically associated with Common Core.

The study’s findings also revealed potential implications for curricular and instructional approach. Currently, the use of a commercially produced curriculum grounds the research site’s secondary English courses primarily in integrated ELA, the
Common Core-aligned curriculum featuring explicit instruction in the five-strand model of ELA. This scientific curriculum-making approach features minimal attention to diversity, strict collection code criteria, strong framing, the 70/30 ratio of nonfiction to fiction, and behavioral objectives in pursuit of Common Core’s 21st-century skills for college and career. This study’s findings of positive student college readiness growth after instruction in inclusive content-based literature challenged the exclusivity of integrated ELA at the research site. Demonstrated positive relationships in student achievement scores after instruction in the postmodern, dialogic approach of inclusive content-based literature suggested that the research site might need to offer teachers greater choice in the instructional approach they employ to meet college readiness goals.

Based on the student reading list employed in the study, one major manifestation of such changes could occur in text selection. Despite the heavy emphasis on fiction and literature in the study, students demonstrated even stronger growth patterns in nonfiction ACT reading passages than in fiction/literature passages, suggesting that the research site’s shift toward greater focus on informational texts and the 70/30 nonfiction-to-fiction ratio might be unnecessary restrictions on text selection. Furthermore, the Common Core State Standards Initiative’s prescribed shift from “the traditional focus in ELA classrooms on narrative text or the narrative aspects of literary nonfiction (the characters and the story) toward more in-depth engagement with the informational and argumentative aspects of these texts” (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012) can also be reconsidered in light of broad student reading growth after culturally responsive pedagogy.
With the expansion of text selection beyond the 70/30 nonfiction-to-fiction ratio, English classrooms could again provide ample opportunities for meaningful multicultural content integration through instruction on works from diverse authors and perspectives. This opportunity proves especially salient when considering the strong growth scores among students of color in the study and the opportunities inclusive content-based literature provide for underrepresented students to see themselves reflected in their school curriculum.

**Implications for Social Justice**

This study’s explicit focus on inclusive literature study also has implications for social justice at the research site. The deliberate integration of culturally diverse material in the curriculum in accordance with Banks’s (1993) multicultural education, Yoon et al.’s (2010) culturally pluralist text selection, and Gay’s (2002) culturally responsive teaching is a new initiative at the Mississippi school. The study’s inclusive content-based literature curriculum paired content integration (Banks, 1993) of diverse works with culturally responsive teaching practices such as strengthening communities of learning, communicating with students in culturally sensitive ways, and structuring instruction in accordance with ethnic diversity (Gay, 2002). The research study thus functioned as a curriculum pilot program at the school: for the first time, the curriculum represented and explored diverse racial, ethnic, gender, class, and sexual identities in its execution. Student achievement patterns in the study suggested that academic growth is possible with this cultivation of diversity in the curriculum. As such, the lesson plan journals, unit plans, and scope and sequence documents used in the study’s implementation of inclusive
content-based literature could function as a model and exemplar for replication in other classes in later stages of the action plan. In this way, culturally sensitive and inclusive content and methods can be broadly implemented throughout classrooms at the research site.

In addition to this replicable pilot program potential, the study’s second research question fostered a systematic analysis of patterns in the achievement scores of students of color, who are underrepresented in college and underacknowledged by modern curriculum. Specific analysis of these students’ college readiness scores with content-based literature suggested that inclusion of diverse texts, deliberate focus on underrepresented perspectives, and direct discussion of issues of power and identity can occur in conjunction with academic growth for the school’s most frequently neglected and marginalized students. This finding yields new insight into the needs and potential of target group students in their pursuit of college readiness and success on gate-keeping standardized assessments such as the ACT. As such, study findings about the relevance of inclusive content-based literature for students of color could now influence the school-wide planning and execution of an English curriculum incorporating inclusivity, textual study, and explicit dialogue on social issues.

**Implications for Student Engagement**

The levels of student participation observed with inclusive content-based literature suggest that culturally responsive pedagogy is a viable tool for engaging students in critical discourse at the research site. For instance, during an early lesson in Satrapi’s *Persepolis*, three African American students connected a Muslim character’s
considerations of Allah to a Christian hymn about God’s commitment to followers. In accordance with Gay’s (2002) culturally responsive pedagogy, discussion had been opened to student choice in how to participate, and these three African American students began singing the hymn aloud in unison. As they sang, other students commented on connections between the Muslim perspective in this excerpt of *Persepolis* and the Christian view expressed in the spiritual.

In another example of critical discourse among students, the class discussed the problems of assigning identities to others based solely on what outsiders might observe or project. The context of the original discussion was a consideration of the identity of the mixed race protagonist of Alexie’s *Flight*. During the lesson, the class transitioned from *Flight* to a study of Langston Hughes’ “April Rain Song” and the teacher-researcher made an observation in which she arbitrarily referred to the unidentified speaker as “he.” One of the most conservative students in the class, a White, heterosexual, male student, called out, “Wait! You can’t just assign a gender identity like that!”

Both of these instances are illustrative of the high level of critical discourse and meaning-making present during inclusive content-based literature instruction in the study. As other teachers in the research site struggle to engage students in delineated skill strands, inclusive content-based literature could provide a new way to spark student interest and engagement through diverse text selection and a willingness to confront prominent social issues.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

In keeping with an action research design, this study’s primary concern remains the research site and a potential solution to its local-level problem of practice. However,
the issues considered—including cultural pluralism in text selection, fostering students’ college and career readiness, standardized testing as a benchmarking tool, the importance of literature in ELA instruction, and expanding curricular efficacy for students of color—are relevant issues in English instruction nationwide. Their relevance is amplified only when considered in conjunction with the Common Core State Standards, arguably the most influential curricular initiative in our country’s history. English education is at a crossroads not only at the research site but anywhere teachers must choose between reading *The Color Purple* or a series of 300-word informational passages about the lives of Black Americans in the rural South during the Great Depression. As such, further research is needed into how and whether literature instruction—particularly postmodern, constructivist, and inclusive literature instruction—can help with ever-evolving demands for literacy skills in our new century.

Specifically, more experimental, comparative, and inferential research is needed to discern whether college and career readiness can be attained through literature instruction or whether, as Common Core (2017) asserted, modern literacy requires more instructional time in the realm of the informative and argumentative. Randomization, larger sample sizes, inferential statistics, and the use of control groups could facilitate comparative examinations of the instructional efficacy of contrasting curricular approaches and methods of text selection. A randomized and experimental comparison of student achievement scores with inclusive content-based literature versus five-strand integrated ELA could be a logical place to start such inferential and comparative research. Resultant findings could then inform revisions of standards and commercially produced curricula.
Additionally, more research is needed to ensure that Common Core, largely silent on issues of diversity and inclusivity, does not propagate whitewashed, colorblind, or otherwise culturally hegemonic curricula in schools. Nationally, public schools today are more diverse than at any time in our nation’s history, yet the Common Core State Standards (2010; 2017) largely attempt to sidestep issues of multiculturalism and inclusivity in both the Standards themselves and in their listing of Exemplar Texts. Additional research should examine social and cultural patterns present in the texts taught with Common Core and should question what ideological messages they impart to students. Special attention should be paid to marginalized student groups and the potential that more diverse, culturally pluralist texts can have in their academic and personal development.

In conjunction with these considerations of curricular sensitivity, more research and development are needed in assessing and cultivating social justice awareness in school staff—including faculty and administrators. This action research examined an inclusive curriculum through the lens of a classroom teacher, but wider understanding and implementation of curricular inclusivity demand the perspective of administrators, counselors, district officials, and other school leaders. Furthermore, many teachers remain reticent to tackle social justice issues in class, so additional research into teachers’ attitudes, confidence levels, and potential sticking points is necessary with wider implementation of inclusive curriculum.

Finally, though this action research took a quantitative approach and embraced a standardized test as its measure of achievement, future research should also consider the less quantified effects literature instruction might have on student development,
particularly in terms of students’ own identity development and their ability to cultivate empathy for individuals with backgrounds unlike their own. In this pursuit, a mixed methods or qualitative approach could capture social–emotional intricacies and engagements neglected by the quantitative nature of this study. If, as Common Core promises, our goals for students are college and career readiness with 21st-century skills, we must acknowledge that secondary English will need to teach more than reading for information, reading literature, writing, language, and speaking and listening; it will need to foster the inter- and intrapersonal sensitivity necessary for navigating a global culture that is simultaneously polarized and interdependent.

Future research should ultimately examine whether instruction in literature—admittedly an imaginative and often fantastical mode of writing—is actually out of touch with modern specialized, technological culture and economy or can be leveraged for greater student outcomes academically and personally.

**Conclusion**

The Common Core State Standards Initiative’s (2017) recommendation of a 70/30 split between nonfiction and fiction has spurred a problem of practice for today’s secondary English teachers and curriculum designers. As schools increasingly align with the Common Core State Standards, many English classrooms are shifting from literature instruction to an integrated ELA curriculum focusing on reading for information, expository and argumentative writing, speaking and listening, and language skills. Further complicating this shift is the Common Core State Standards’ relative silence on
issues of diversity and the resultant loss of opportunities for meaningful integration of inclusive literature.

This study’s closer examination of this seeming dichotomy of Common Core’s integrated ELA versus inclusive content-based literature, however, suggested that the two approaches could potentially function in tandem rather than in opposition. Specifically, inclusive content-based literature could promote culturally responsive teaching that rectifies Common Core’s disregard for diversity and complements the college and career readiness goals of Common Core.

Strong student growth patterns after the study’s 15 weeks of instruction in inclusive content-based literature ultimately suggested that the “curricula as complements” approach could provide the solution to the study’s problem of practice: decreased curricular inclusivity amid the divide between Common Core’s 70/30 integrated ELA and a content-based literature curriculum. The study’s specific focus on inclusivity and culturally responsive teaching provides insight into the unique growth potential of students of color, who grew, on average, at a rate four times higher than their White peers after working in inclusive content-based literature curriculum.

Using social justice-minded problem solving, the “curricula as complements” method explored in this action research suggested that today’s secondary English practitioners should consider Common Core and inclusive literature instruction in terms of cooperation rather than conflict and problem solving rather than protectionism. Perhaps in doing so, we can craft an English curriculum that leads more students to those colleges on hills above Harlem and leaves fewer dreams deferred.
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Page 1 of 2
Appendix B: Pretest (2015–2016 Released ACT Form 1572CPRE) with Scoring Key and Scaling Tables

Passage 1

PROSE FICTION: This passage is adapted from the novel The Ground Beneath Her Feet by Salman Rushdie (2009 by Salman Rushdie)

Art Deco is an architectural and decorative style that was popular in the first half of the twentieth century. When you grow up, as I did, in a great city, during what just happens to be its golden age, you think of it as eternal. Always was there, always will be. The grandeur of the metropolis creates the illusion of permanence. The peninsula Bombay into which I was born certainly seemed perennial to me. Malabar and Cumballa hills were our Capitol and Palatine, the Brabourne Stadium was our Colosseum, and as for the glittering Art Deco sweep of Marine Drive, well, that was something not even Rome could boast. I actually grew up believing Art Deco to be the “Bombay style,” a local invention, its name derived, in all probability, from the imperative of the verb “to see.” Art deko! Lo and behold, art. (When I began to be familiar with images of New York, I first felt a sort of anger. The Americans had so much else did they have to possess our “style” as well? But in another, more secret part of my heart, the Art Deco of Manhattan, built on a scale so much greater than our own, only increased America’s allure, made it both familiar and awe-inspiring, our little Bombay seem large.)

In reality that Bombay was almost brand-new when I knew it; what’s more, my parents’ construction firm of Merchant & Merchant had been prominent in its making. In the ten years before my own coming into the world, the city had been a gigantic building site; as if it were in a hurry to become, as if it knew it had to provide itself in finished condition by the time I was able to start paying attention to it. No, no, I don’t really think along such self-conscious lines. I’m not over-attached to history, or Bombay. Me, I’m the anti-attachment type.

But let me confess that, even as a child, I was intensely jealous of the city in which I was raised, because it was my parents’ other love. They loved each other (good), they loved me (very good), and they loved her (not so good). Bombay was my rival. It was on account of their romance with the city that they drew up that weekly roster (list) of shared parental responsibilities. When my mother wasn’t with me— when I was riding on my father’s shoulders, or staring, with him, at the fish in the Taraporewala Aquarium— she was out there with her, with Bombay; out there bringing her into being. (Of course construction work never stops completely, and supervising such work was Amery’s particular genius. My mother the master builder, like her father before her.) And when my father handed me over to her, he went off wearing his khaki uniform, or a khaki jacket (full of pockets), to dig in the foundations of building sites for the secrets of the city’s past, or else sat listless and careless at a designing board and dreamed his lo and behold dreams.

Maps of the early town afforded my father great joy, and his collection of old photographs of the edifices and streets of the vanished city was second to none. In these faded images were resurrected the demolished Fort, the “breakfast bazaar” market outside the Taus Devazia or Bazaar gate, and the humble cotton shops and umbrella hospitals of the poor, as well as the fallen palaces of the great. The early city’s relics filled his imagination as well as his photo albums. It was from my father that I learned of Bombay’s first great photographers, Raja Deen Dayal and A. B. Haseler, whose portraits of the city became my first artistic influences, if only by showing me what I did not want to do. Dayal climbed the Rajabai tower to capture his sweeping panoramas of the birth of the city; Haseler went one better and took to the air. Their images were awe-inspiring, unforgettable, but they also inspired in me a desperate need to get back down to ground level.

From the heights you see only pinnacles, I learned for the city streets, the knife grinders, the water carriers, the pavement moneylenders, the peripatetic soldiers, the railway houses, the chess players in the Fasti restaurants, the snake-hailed schoolchildren, the beggars, the fishermen, the motion-makers, the dockers, the book sellers, the lamp operators, the priests. I learned to love life.

When I said this to my father he showed me photos, still lives of storerooms and piers, and told me I 86 was too young to understand; “See where people lived and worked and shopped,” he clarified, with a rare flush of irritation, “and it becomes plain what they were like.” For all his digging, Vyvy Merchant was content with the surfaces of his world. I, his photographer son, was set not to prove him wrong, to show that a camera can see beyond the surface, beyond the trappings of the actual, and penetrate to its flesh and heart.

GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE.
1. The passage as a whole can primarily be characterized as the narrator’s: A. explanation of the relationship the narrator and his parents had with the city of Bombay.
B. description of important buildings and locations in Bombay.
C. argument for Bombay’s prominence in the world of architecture.
D. concerns about the emotional environment in which the narrator was raised.

2. The narrator describes the photos by Bombay’s first great photographers as primarily inspiring the narrator to: A. turn away from a career in photography.
B. create grand panoramas of the new Bombay.
C. produce images that his father would add to his collection.
D. photograph subjects that depict everyday life on Bombay’s streets.

3. In lines 25–31, the narrator muses over, then rejects, the notion that: A. Merchant & Merchant played an important role in the building of Bombay.
B. he started paying attention to Bombay at a young age.
C. his anticipated birth was one of the causes of the rush to finish the building of Bombay.
D. Bombay had been a gigantic building site in the years before he was born.

4. In lines 32–43, the narrator uses which of the following literary devices to describe Bombay?
A. Alliteration
B. Assonance
C. Personification
D. Simile

5. Which of the following statements best captures how the narrator’s parents balanced their parental duties with their work at the construction company?
A. The narrator’s mother did a majority of the work at the construction company, while the narrator’s father took care of the narrator.
B. The narrator’s parents traded off responsibility for taking care of the narrator and working at the construction company.
C. The narrator’s father worked on his designing board, while the narrator’s mother took the narrator along to building sites.
D. The narrator’s parents both worked at the construction company, while the narrator stayed home with a babysitter.

6. As it is used in line 9, the word sweep most nearly means: A. overwhelming victory.
B. wide-ranging search.
C. complete removal.
D. broad area.

7. In the context of the passage, the primary function of lines 6–10 is to: A. compare architectural landmarks in Bombay to those elsewhere.
B. help illustrate how the term “art deco” was derived.
C. contrast the idea that Bombay was in its golden age when the narrator was a child.
D. provide examples of “Bombay style” architecture in Rome.

8. The narrator as a child viewed work his parents did for Merchant & Merchant with a strong sense of: A. joy: the work provided the family with enough money to live extravagant lives.
B. fear: the narrator knew his parents were often so exhausted they were careless about safety.
C. jealousy: the work pulled the narrator’s parents away from him and directed their attention to the city.
D. respect: his parents were known for their quality workmanship throughout the city.

9. As it is used in line 38, the phrase drew up most nearly means: A. extended.
B. prepared.
C. approached.
D. straightened.

10. In the last paragraph, the narrator’s father shows the narrator the photos of storefronts and piers in order to: A. teach the narrator about the commercial progress the people who work in Bombay have made.
B. convince the narrator that Dayal and Haseler were Bombay’s first great photographers.
C. illustrate his claim that his photo collection was not about modern-day Bombay but rather about the early twentieth century.
D. illustrate that photos of places can reveal as much about the people who spent time there as photos of the people themselves.
SOCIAL SCIENCE: This passage is adapted from Great Waters: An Atlantic Passage by Deborah Cramer (2001 by Deborah Cramer).

The Sargasso Sea is a part of the northern Atlantic Ocean.

As the Cramer idles through the Sargasso Sea, waiting for the wind to rise, the sea is flat and empty. Nothing demarcates or divides the smooth expanse of water dissolving into the horizon. This vast, unearthly surface, this breadth of uniform sea, deceives. But for a few lonely oceanic islands, the unperturbed surface offers no hint of the grand and sweeping energies hidden below.

Only one thousand miles offshore, the Cramer has already sailed through some of Atlantic's deepest waters. Contrary to what one might guess, Atlantic's deepest waters, like those in other oceans, are along her edges. As we continue east toward the middle of the sea, the bottom rises. The unmarked plains of the abyss, here blanketed by layers of sediment, give way to rising foothills and then to mountains. The first maps of Atlantic seafloor noted, albeit crudely, this rise. Early efforts to plumb Atlantic's depths proved outrageously inaccurate: one naval officer paid out eight miles (thirteen kilometers) of hemp rope from a drifting ship and concluded the sea had no bottom. Eventually, sailors more or less successfully calculated depth by hearing overboard cannonballs tied to sailing lines. When they hit bottom, the sailors measured and assigned the depth and then moved on, leaving a trail of lead strings across the seafloor. These crude soundings, forming the basis of the first map of Atlantic's basin, published in 1854, identified a prominent rise halfway between Europe and America.

For many years no one could explain why the basin of Atlantic, unlike a bowl, deepened as it edges and shored in its center. People assumed that this "Middle Ground," "Telegraph Plateau," or "Dolphin Rise," as it was variously called, was an ancient and drowned land bridge, or a lost continent, but sailors reporting transatlantic telegraph cable unknowingly produced evidence to prove otherwise. Wreathing with the broken cable, they accidentally twisted off a piece of the "plateau" and dredged up a twenty-one-pound (ten-kilogram) chunk of dense black volcanic rock. It was some of the youngest, freshest rock on earth, and it was torn not from a piece of continent sunk beneath the waves, but from the very foundation of the sea.

Today, highly sophisticated sound waves bring the busy images of these early soundings into sharp focus, revealing that one of the largest and most salient geographies, features on the planet lies on the floor of the ocean. Hidden beneath the waves is an immense submerged mountain range, the backbone of the sea. More extensive, rugged, and imposing than the Andes, Rockies, or Himalayas, it covers almost as much of earth's surface as the dry land of continents. Winding like the seams of a baseball, it circles the planet in a long, anaous path, running the entire length of Atlantic, slashing the basin nearly in two. Its mountains arc stark and black, as black as the sea itself, lit only at their peaks by a thin patchy covering of white, the skeletal remains of any microscopic animals that once lived at the surface. Peaks as high as Mount St. Helens sit in a watery world of blackness. More than a mile below the surface, beyond the reach of light, beyond the sight of sailors.

A great valley, eclipsing any comparable feature on dry land, runs through these mountains. Arizona's Grand Canyon, one of earth's most spectacular places, extends for about 230 miles (370 kilometers). A lesser-known canyon of similar depth but considerably greater length lies hidden in the mountains of the ridge. Although infrequent breaks in the mountains, the rift valley, as the canyon is called, extends the length of Atlantic for 11,000 miles (17,700 kilometers). Here in this bleak and forbidding place, where the water is almost freezing, submarine fires have lifted mounds of fresh lava onto the seafloor. Scientists visiting the rift valley for the first time named the volcanic hills in this otherworldly setting after distant, lifeless planets.

Yet, what had seemed so foreign to scientists is an integral part of earth's very being, for at the ridge our own planet gives birth. The floor of the rift valley is torn from the gashes has sprung the seafloor underlying all of Atlantic. Here the youngest, newest pieces are made. Earth is still cooling from her numinous birth four and a half billion years ago. Heat, leaching from the molten core and from radioactive decay deep inside the planet, rises toward earth's surface, powering the volcanoes that deliver the ridge to the sea.

11. The author's attitude toward the main subject of the passage can best be described as:
A. awe and fascination.
B. disbelief and cynicism.
C. amusement and nostalgia.
D. boredom and indifference.

12. The passage makes clear that "Middle Ground," "Telegraph Plateau," and "Dolphin Rise" were names that people gave to what was actually:
A. an island in Atlantic.
B. a transatlantic telegraph cable.
C. an ancient and drowned land bridge.
D. the immense mountain range in Atlantic's basin.
13. In the first paragraph, the author describes the stillness of the Sargasso Sea as the Crater passes through it primarily to emphasize that the stillness:
   A. won’t last long, for the sea will become rough when the wind rises.
   B. makes it easy for a passenger on the Crater to spot oceanic islands that break the water’s surface.
   C. is in dramatic contrast to the power of what exists on and under the seafloor far below.
   D. makes it seem as if the Crater’s wake is dividing the unbroken expanses of water into two.

14. The passage states that compared to Arizona’s Grand Canyon, the canyon that lies within the mountains in Atlantic’s basin is considerably:
   F. deeper.
   G. older.
   H. wider.
   J. longer.

15. The main purpose of the information in lines 71–75 is to:
   A. describe in detail scientists’ expectations for their first trip to the rift valley.
   B. characterize the rift valley as an alien, seemingly barren place.
   C. provide statistics about several geographic properties of the rift valley.
   D. list the names that scientists gave to the volcanic hills in the rift valley.

16. One of the main purposes of the last paragraph is to state that the:
   F. gashes in the rift valley continue to increase in width.
   G. seafloor of Atlantic has cooled.
   H. entire Atlantic seafloor has issued from the gashes in the rift valley.
   J. volcanoes on Earth’s dry land have created the newest, youngest pieces of Atlantic seafloor.

17. The author most strongly implies that people commonly assume the deepest waters of an ocean are:
   A. about one thousand miles offshore.
   B. at the middle of the ocean.
   C. dotted with islands.
   D. located in trenches.

18. As it is used in line 19, the phrase petri dish most nearly means:
   F. dispersed.
   G. ascertained.
   H. suggested.
   J. complicated.

19. According to the passage, the mountain range in Atlantic’s basin covers nearly the same amount of Earth’s surface as does:
   A. Mount St. Helens.
   B. the Himalayas.
   C. the Pacific Ocean.
   D. the dry land of continents.

20. According to the passage, the white cover on the peaks of the mountains in Atlantic’s basin is:
   F. skeletal remains of microscopic animals.
   G. thin layers of sedimentary volcanic ash.
   H. patches of ice.
   J. salt deposits.
Passage II

HUMANITIES: Passage A is adapted from the essay "Just This Side of Byzantium" by Ray Bradbury (1975) by Ray Bradbury, which is the introduction to a later edition of Bradbury's 1957 novel Dandelion Wine. Passage B is adapted from Dandelion Wine (1957) by Ray Bradbury.

Passage A by Ray Bradbury

I began to learn the nature of surprises, thankfully, when I was fairly young as a writer. Before that, like every beginner, I thought you could beat, pummel, and thrash an idea into existence. Under such treatment, of course, any decent idea folds up its paws, turns on its back, fixes its eyes on eternity, and dies.

It was with great relief, then, that in my early twenties I floundered into a word-association process in which I simply got out of bed each morning, walked to my desk, and put down any word or series of words that happened along in my head.

I would then take arms against the word, or for it, and bring on an assortment of characters to weigh the word and show me its meaning in my own life. An hour or two hours later, to my amazement, a new story would be finished and done. The surprise was total and lovely. I soon found that I would have to work this way for the rest of my life.

First I rummaged my mind for words that could describe my personal nightmares, fears of night and time from my childhood, and shaped stories from these.

Then I took a long look at the green apple trees and the old house I was born in and the house next door where lived my grandparents, and all the laws of the summers I grew up in, and I began to try words for all that.

I had to send myself back, with words as catalysts, to open the memories out and see what they had to offer.

So from the age of twenty-four to thirty-six hardly a day passed when I didn’t stroll myself across a recollection of my grandparents’ northern Illinois grass, hoping to come across some old half-burnt fir-tree, a rusted toy, or a fragment of letter written to myself in some young year hoping to contact the older person I became to remind him of his past, his life, his people, his joys, and his drenching sorrows.

Along the way I came upon and collided, through word-association, with old and true friendships. I borrowed my friend John Huff from my childhood in Arizona and shipped him East to Green Town so that I could say good-bye to him properly.

Along the way, I sat down to breakfasts, lunches, and dinners with the long dead and much loved.

Thus I fell into surprise. I came on the old and best ways of writing through ignorance and experiment and was startled when truths leaped out of bushes like quail before gunshot. I blundered into creativity as any child learning to walk and see. I learned to let my senses and my Past tell me all that was somehow true.

Passage B by Ray Bradbury

The facts about John Huff, aged twelve, are simple and soon stated. He could find any trail that anyone since time began, could leap from the sky like a chimp from a vine, could live underwater two minutes and slide fifty yards downstream from where you last saw him. The baseballs you pitched him he hit in the apple trees, knocking down harvests. He ran laughing. He sat easy. He was not a bully. He was kind.

He knew the names of all the wild flowers and when the moon would rise and set. He was, in fact, the only god living in the whole of Green Town, Illinois, during the twentieth century that Douglas Spaulding knew of.

And right now he and Douglas were hiking out beyond town on another warm and marble-round day, the sky blue blown glass reaching high, the creek bright with mirror waters lamming over white stones. It was a day as perfect as the flame of a candle.

Douglas walked through it thinking it would go on this way forever. The sound of a good friend whistling like an oriole, pegging the softball, as you horse-danced, key-jingled the dusty paths; things were at hand and would remain.

It was such a fine day and then suddenly a cloud crossed the sky, covered the sun, and did not move again.

John Huff had been speaking quietly for several minutes. Now Douglas stopped on the path and looked over at him.

"John, say that again."

"You heard me the first time, Doug."

"Did you say you were—going away?"

"John took a yellow and green train ticket solemnly from his pocket and they both looked at it.

"Tonight?" said Douglas. "My gosh! Tonight we were going to play Red Light, Green Light and Statues! How come, all of a sudden? You been here in Green Town all my life. You just don't pick up and leave!"

"It's my father," said John. "He's got a job in Mil-

waukee. We weren't sure until today . . ."

They sat under an old oak tree on the side of the hill looking back at town. Out beyond, in sunlight, the town was painted with heat, the windows all gaping. Douglas wanted to run back in there where the town, by its very weight, its houses, their bulk, might unclose and prevent John’s ever getting up and running off.

GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE.
21. When Bradbury claims, “Thus I fell into surprise” (line 45), he is most nearly referring to the:
A. discovery that for him the secret to a creative outpouring was to use a word-association method to write fiction.
B. long-forgotten experiences he would remember when he would talk with his childhood friends in person.
C. realization that he wrote more effectively about his current experiences than about his past.
D. several methods other writers taught him to help him write honest, authentic stories.

22. Passage A indicates that Bradbury believes all beginning writers think that they can:
A. learn the nature of surprises.
B. force an idea into creation.
C. use one word as a catalyst for a story.
D. become a good writer through experiment.

23. Bradbury’s claim “I would then take arms against the word, or for it” (line 12) most strongly suggests that during his writing sessions, Bradbury would:
A. attempt to find the one word that for him was the key to understanding John Huff.
B. often reject a word as not being a catalyst for meaningful writing.
C. deliberately choose to write only about a word that inspired his fears.
D. feel as though he were struggling to find a word’s significance to him.

24. In the seventh paragraph of Passage A (lines 30–37), Bradbury explains his habit, over many years as a writer, of almost daily:
A. looking at and writing about objects from his childhood that he had saved.
B. reviewing his grandparents’ property, hoping to notice something that would remind him of his past.
C. driving past his grandparents’ property, hoping to notice something that would remind him of his past.
D. thinking about his grandparents’ property, hoping to remember something that would bring his past into focus.

25. Passage A explains that when writing about the character John Huff, Bradbury had:
A. placed John in a town in Arizona, where Bradbury himself had grown up.
B. included John in stories about a town in Arizona and in stories about Green Town.
C. “moved” John to a town other than the town in which the real-life John Huff had grown up.
D. “borrowed” John to use as a minor character in many of his stories.

26. In the first paragraph of Passage B (lines 52–63), the narrator describes John Huff in a manner that:
F. emphasizes John’s physical strength and intelligence, to indicate John’s view of himself.
G. exaggerates John’s characteristics and actions, to reflect Douglas’s distillation of John.
H. highlights John’s reckless behavior, to show that John was most fond of John’s rebelliousness.
J. showcases John’s talents, to make John the one child and adult admired John.

27. Within Passage B, the image in lines 74–76 functions figuratively to suggest that:
A. John’s leaving on a stormy night was fitting, given Douglas’s madness.
B. John’s disappointment about moving was reflected in his mood all day.
C. the mood of the day changed dramatically and irreversibly once John told his secret.
D. the sky in Green Town became cloudy at the moment John told Douglas he was moving.

28. Both Passage A and Passage B highlight Bradbury’s use of:
E. a first person omniscient narrator to tell a story.
F. satire and irony to develop characters.
G. allegory to present a complex philosophical question.
H. sensory details and imaginative description to convey ideas.

29. Based on Bradbury’s description in Passage A of his writing process, which of the following methods hypothetically depicts a way Bradbury might have begun to write the story in Passage B?
A. Taking notes while interviewing old friends after first deciding to write a story about two boys.
B. Forming two characters, determining that he would like to tell a story about loss, and then beginning to write a scene.
C. Writing down the words train ticket and then spending an hour writing whatever those words brought to his mind.
D. Outlining the plot of a story about two boys that would end with one boy leaving on a train.
Elsewhere in the essay from which Passage A is adapted, Bradbury writes:

Was there a real boy named John Huff?

There was. And that was truly his name. But he didn’t go away from me. I went away from him.

How do these statements apply to both the information about Bradbury’s approach as a storyteller provided in Passage A and the story of John Huff provided in Passage B?

E. They reveal that Bradbury believed that to surprise readers is a fiction writer’s most important task.

G. They reinforce that Bradbury used his life experiences to create fiction but also altered those experiences as he pleased.

H. They prove that Bradbury felt such pain over losing John that he had to reverse events to be able to write the story.

J. They indicate that Bradbury rarely used his life experiences to create fiction.

Passage IV

NATURAL SCIENCE: This passage is adapted from the article ‘The Jaws That Jump’ by Adam Summers (©2000 by Natural History Magazine, Inc.).

Recently I was reminded of just how powerful ants can be when inflicting damage on intruders. A team of biomechanists has studied the incredibly speedy bite of a group of Central and South American ants. The team clocked the bite as the fastest on the planet—and discovered that it also gives the ants the unique ability to jump with their jaws, adding to an impressive array of already known defenses.

Trap-jaw ants nest in leaf litter, rather than underground or in mounds. They often feed on well- armored and elusive prey, including other species of ants. As they stalk their dinner, the trap-jaws hold their mandibles wide apart, often cocked open at 180 degrees or more by a latching mechanism. When minute trigger hairs on the inner edge of the mandible come in contact with something, the jaws snap shut at speeds now known to reach 145 miles per hour. No passerby could outrun that. The astounding speed gives the jaws their light weight, enough force to crack the armor of most prey and get at the tasty meat inside.

The key to the jaws’ speed (and their even more amazing acceleration) is that the release comes from stored energy produced by the strong but slow muscles of the jaw. Think how an archer slowly draws an arrow in a bowstring against the flex of a bow: nearly all the energy from the archer’s muscles goes into the flexing of the bow. When released, the energy stored in the bow wings the arrow toward its target much faster than the archer could by throwing the arrow like a javelin. The biomechanics of energy storage is the domain of South N. Patel and Joseph E. Buehler, both biomechanists at the University of California, Berkeley. They teamed up with two ant experts, Brian L. Fisher of the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco and Andrew V. Suarez of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, to look at the trap-jaw ant Odontomachus bauri.

Fisher, Suarez, and other field biologists had already known that catching O. bauri was like grabbing Popcorn Goo—very hot and sticky at that, because a painful sting goes with an ant’s trap-jaw bite. The insects bounced around in a dizzying frenzy and propelled themselves many times their body lengths when biologists or smaller intruders approached them.

Fisher and Buehler made high-speed video images of their movements, and discovered that the secret of their self-propulsion was the well-executed ‘firing’ of their mandibles. They also observed that mandibles started to decelerate before they met—possibly to avoid self-inflicted damage. Most important, the ants had two distinct modes of aerial locomotion.

In the so-called escape jump, an ant orients its head and jaws perpendicular to the ground, then strikes its feet straight down. That triggers the cocked mandibles to release with a force 400 times the ant’s body weight, launching the insect ten or more body lengths nearly straight into the air. The ant doesn’t seem to go in any particular direction, but the jump is presumably fast and unpredictable enough to throw the insect evade, say, the probing tongue of a lizard. Not only can the jumping ant gain height and new confusion, but it may also get a new vantage point from which to launch an attack.

The second kind of jaw-propelled locomotion is even more common than escape jumping, if an intruder enters the ants’ nest, one of the ants hurls its jaws against the intruder, which triggers the trap-jaw and propels the intruder (if small enough) in one direction, out of the nest, and the ant in the other. Often the force sends the ant skittering an inch off the ground for nearly a foot. The attack, for obvious reasons, is known as the ‘boucer defense.’ In the wild, gangs of defending ants team up to attack hostile strangers, sending them head over heels out of the nest.

From an evolutionary point of view, the trap-jaws are an intriguing story. The ants clearly evolved an entirely new function, propulsion, for a system that was already useful—swinging up prey. Several lineages of trap-jaw ants have independently hit on the tactic of storing energy in their jaws to penetrate well-defended prey. In Odontomachus, the horizontal, bouncer-defense jump could have arisen out of attempts to bite mandibles, but the high, escape jump—with jaws aimed directly at the ground—must have arisen from a different, perhaps accidental, kind of behavior. Such a serendipitous event would have been a rare instance in which hanging one’s head against the ground got good results.
31. The primary purpose of the passage is to:
   A. provide an overview of the mechanics and key operations of the jaws of trap-jaw ants.
   B. analyze Patock and Bais's techniques for filtering two defensive maneuvers of trap-jaw ants.
   C. compare the jaws of Odontomachus bauri to the jaws of other species of ants.
   D. describe the evolution of the ability of trap-jaw ants to perform an escape jump.

32. The sentence in lines 73–75 and the last sentence of the passage are examples of the author's rhetorical technique of:
   E. weaving sarcasm into a mostly casual and playful article.
   F. interjecting a lighthearted tone into a primarily technical article.
   G. integrating a slightly combative tone into an article that mostly praises two scientists' work.
   H. incorporating personal anecdotes into an article that mostly reports data.

33. As it is used in lines 81–82, the phrase well-defended prey most nearly refers to prey that:
   A. have a hard outer shell.
   B. attack with a lethal bite.
   C. travel and attack in groups.
   D. move quickly.

34. The passage makes clear that the main source of the speed of the jaws of the trap-jaw ant is:
   E. case movement of the hinge of the jaw.
   F. continuous steady flexing of the jaw's mandibles.
   G. light weight of the jaw in relation to the ant's body weight.
   H. release of energy stored by muscles of the jaw.

35. The author uses the analogy of trying to grab popcorn as it pops in order to describe the trap-jaw ant's ability to:
   A. generate heat with their jaw movements.
   B. move their hind legs in order to attack prey.
   C. attack intruders by tossing them out of the nest.
   D. bounce around (metaphorically) when intruders approach.

36. One main purpose of the last paragraph is to suggest that unlike the bouncer-defense jump, the trap-jaw ant's escape jump may have arisen through:
   F. the ants' trying and failing to bite intruders.
   G. a change in the structure of the mandibles of several lineages of ants.
   H. an accidental behavior of the ants.
   J. the ants' experiencing a positive outcome when they would attack in a large group.

37. As it is used in line 31, the word domain most nearly means:
   A. living space.
   B. area of expertise.
   C. taxonomic category.
   D. local jurisdiction.

38. The passage points to which of the following as a characteristic of trap-jaw ants' mandibles that prevents the ants from harming themselves with their powerful bite?
   F. A hinge prevents the mandibles from snapping together forcefully.
   G. Mandibles with cushioned inner edges provide a buffer when the mandibles snap shut.
   H. A latch mechanism prevents the mandibles from closing completely.
   J. The mandibles began to decelerate before they meet.

39. As described in the passage, one benefit of the trap-jaw ant's escape jump is that it allows an ant to:
   A. land in position to launch a new attack on a predator.
   B. confuse a predator with a quick, sudden sting.
   C. signal to other ants using a predictable movement.
   D. point itself in whichever direction it chooses to escape.

40. When a trap-jaw ant uses the bouncer-defense jump effectively on an intruder, which creature(s), if any, will be propelled either out of the nest or in another direction?
   F. The intruder only.
   G. The attacking ant only.
   H. The attacking ant and the intruder.
   J. Neither the attacking ant nor the intruder.

END OF TEST 3
STOP! DO NOT TURN THE PAGE UNTIL TOLD TO DO SO.
DO NOT RETURN TO A PREVIOUS TEST.
### Test 3: Reading—Scoring Key

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*Reporting Categories
KID = Key Ideas & Details
CS = Craft & Structure
KI = Integration of Knowledge & Ideas

Number Correct (Raw Score) for:
- **Key Ideas & Details (KID)** (23)
- **Craft & Structure (CS)** (14)
- **Integration of Knowledge & Ideas (KI)** (3)
- **Total Number Correct for Reading Test (KID + CS + KI)** (40)

### Test 4: Science—Scoring Key

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*Reporting Categories
IOD = Interpretation of Data
SIN = Scientific Investigation
EMI = Evaluation of Models, Inferences & Experimental Results

Number Correct (Raw Score) for:
- **Interpretation of Data (IOD)** (15)
- **Scientific Investigation (SIN)** (11)
- **Evaluation of Models, Inferences & Experimental Results (EMI)** (15)
- **Total Number Correct for Science Test (IOD + SIN + EMI)** (40)
### TABLE 1
Explanation of Procedures Used to Obtain Scale Scores from Raw Scores

On each of the four multiple-choice tests on which you marked any responses, the total number of correct responses yields a raw score. Use the table below to convert your raw scores to scale scores. For each test, locate and circle your raw score or the range of raw scores that includes it in the table below. Then, read across to either outside column of the table and circle the scale score that corresponds to that raw score. As you determine your scale scores, enter them in the blanks provided on the right. The highest possible scale score for each test is 36. The lowest possible scale score for any test on which you marked any responses is 1.

Next, compute the Composite score by averaging the four scale scores. To do this, add your four scale scores and divide the sum by 4. If the resulting number ends in a fraction, round to the nearest whole number. (Round down any fraction less than one-half; round up any fraction that is one-half or more.) Enter this number in the blank. This is your Composite score. The highest possible Composite score is 30, and the lowest possible Composite score is 1.

#### ACT Test 16720PERE

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<th>Test 3 Reading</th>
<th>Test 4 Science</th>
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NOTE: If you left a test completely blank and marked no items, do not list a scale score for that test. If any test was completely blank, do not calculate a Composite score.

To calculate your writing score, use the rubric on pages 61-62.
### TABLE 2

**Explanation of Procedures Used to Obtain Scale Subscores from Raw Scores**

For each of the seven subscore areas, the total number of correct responses yields a raw score. Use the table below to convert your raw scores to scale subscores. For each of the seven subscore areas, locate and circle either the raw score of the range of raw scores that includes it in the table below. Then, raw scores in either column of the table and circle the scale subscore that corresponds to that raw score. As you determine your scale subscore, write the letter of the column into the blank provided to the right. The lowest possible scale subscore is 1. The highest possible scale subscore is 36.

If no raw scores apply, blank and mark no responses, do not list any scale subscores for that test.

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<td>Algebra/Geom. 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plane Geometry/Trigonometry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
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### Scale Subscores Table

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### Scale Subscores Key

- **Usage/ Mechanics**: Usage and Mechanics.
- **Rhetorical Skills**: Rhetorical Skills.
- **Pre-Algebra/Elem. Algebra**: Pre-Algebra and Elementary Algebra.
- **Algebra/Geom. 1**: Algebra and Geometry 1.
- **Plane Geometry/Trigonometry**: Plane Geometry and Trigonometry.
- **Social Studies/Science**: Social Studies and Science.
- **Arts/Literature**: Arts and Literature.

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Appendix C: Posttest (2014–2015 Released ACT Form 67C) with Scoring Key and Scaling Tables

**READING TEST**

35 Minutes—40 Questions

**DIRECTIONS:** There are several passages in this test. Each passage is accompanied by several questions. After reading a passage, choose the best answer to each question and fill in the corresponding oval on your answer document. You may refer to the passages as often as necessary.

---

**Passage I**

**LITERARY NARRATIVE:** This passage is adapted from the short story "Fremont's Last Trail" by Kimberly M. Glasser (2007) by Kimberly M. Glasser, which appeared in *Earth Song, Sky Spirit: Short Stories of the Contemporary Native American Experience*.

The passage begins with a female narrator traveling to her hometown.

The moon gives some light and I can make out the contours of the land, see the farm reflection in the lakes and ponds we pass. Several times I see or imagine I see glowing eyes staring back at me from a patch of woods beside the track. When we pass through the town, I try to read their signs, catch their names from their water towers or grain elevators. Occasionally the train stops at ... Portage ... Winona ... Red Wing.

In my sleeping compartment, watching the night countryside, so much world rolls by my window. Like a voyeur I watch the various reunion scenes. I feel these scenes add up to something, some meaning or lesson about all life, and I try to put it into words for myself but find I can't. I finally give up, roll over, go to sleep, 15 and dream.

But now I am awake, keeping my vigil over the Midwest's past and present kingdom Chicago, over Minneso- 20 lis seems a long way away. A few hours later still in the deep night hours, the train arrives at my stop, 20 Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, the closest I can get to my destination.

Suddenly, as I descend the two steps from the train, the porter hands me into one of the reunion scenes. "Hi, honey, how was the trip? Did you get any sleep?" "A little. Been waiting long? Long enough to beat your dad in two games of cribbage..." Glancing back at the train windows, I imagine I am looking into eyes hidden behind mirrored sunglasses.

***

50 I think about progress a lot in the next few days and about what passes for progress. Nightly we walk about town, talk about marriages and funerals, then sit on the newly installed benches on Main Street. Together we assemble from our memories the town as it was twenty 20 or twenty-five years ago. We remember the little Model Meat Market and the old Pioneer office. We rebuild the Landmark Hotel, take down the vinyl fronts from the grocery store, change the light posts, the awnings, the names of the current businesses. I put back the old 40 depot, you the corner funeral home. But soon we are distracted and leave things half-constructed when we begin to add the people, what's-his-name, the square dance caller, Edd, the fire chief, and Lydia, the town's best gossip. On the walk back home, we have begun to list very specific things, which is the closest we get to the intangibles: the rental meat lockers, the four-digit telephone numbers, the free ice cream during dairy month.

Late at night in my old bed, I listen to the night 50 sounds of the house and think about the changes that have come to my little hometown: The park is open at night, after dark now, the football field is fenced in, one-hour photo has come to town along with 55 a running salon and a pizza parlor. The dry goods store is gone, the dairy, long gone. People lock their houses now more than once a year when the carnival comes to town. But all of these changes pale in comparison to what has replaced the bait shop, the used car lot, and Mr. Morten's small farm, which has sprung up on High- 60 way 59 at the edge of town. Las Vegas-style gambling.

***

Taking the train back, I decide to put on pajamas and crawl under the sheets, hoping to trick myself into a good night's sleep. It seems to work. I have slept 60 soundly for several hours, but then the dreams start. I fall in and out of them. But they are not the usual nightmares. I am in a place where folks know you ten, fifteen, twenty years after you've left and still see in your face that of your grandfather or aunt or cousin. I know I 70 am home and I feel safe.

I have an early breakfast with a would-be journalist 60 and some ski vacationers who want to talk about election prospects. I merely feign attention. I nod or laugh or converse while I try to read a story down a story in the would-be journalist's paper that has caught my eye. It is about the Russian space station and the cos- 70 monaut who had been up in orbit during the takeover attempt and ultimate dissolution of the Soviet Union. After sixteen long months, they are bringing the capti- 70 ural back. While the train carries me back to my current home and away from my former, I keep thinking about

**GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE.**
that poor cosmonaut coming back to find his whole world changed, to find himself a man without a country—at least without the country he left behind.

55. I watch the ten o'clock national news broadcast. I see him emerge from the capsule. I see him try to stand and have his knees buckle. I know they said it was because he hadn't been able to exercise for such a long time, but I wonder if his weak-kneed feeling might not have more to do with what he saw out the window of the space station and with how the world was happening around without him.

1. The point of view from which the passage is told is best described as that of:
   A. a young adult riding a train through the small towns of the Upper Midwest.
   B. a young adult preparing to move away from her hometown.
   C. an adult missing the new home she has established.
   D. an adult reflecting on the past and pondering the present.

2. The passage contains recurring references to all of the following EXCEPT:
   A. dreams.
   B. photographs.
   C. train trips.
   D. photographs.

3. The first three paragraphs (lines 1–21) establish all of the following about the narrator EXCEPT that she is:
   A. passing through a number of towns.
   B. originally from Chicago.
   C. traveling by train.
   D. observer of the landscape.

4. It can reasonably be inferred from the passage that the narrator thinks her hometown has:
   A. improved significantly over the years.
   B. remained about the same as it was years ago.
   C. a chance of being rebuilt as it used to be.

5. Based on the narrator’s account, all of the following were part of the past, rather than the present, in her hometown EXCEPT:
   A. four-digit phone numbers.
   B. the fenced-in football field.
   C. free ice cream during dairy month.
   D. the depot.

6. According to the narrator, which of the following businesses is relatively new to her hometown?
   A. The livery stable
   B. The dry goods store
   C. The used-car lot
   D. The new library

7. When the narrator refers to the cosmonaut as “a man without a country” (lines 83–84), she is most likely directly referring to the:
   A. cosmonaut’s feeling that he is now a citizen of space, not the former Soviet Union.
   B. cosmonaut’s unrealized expectation that he will be treated like a hero.
   C. political transformation that occurred while the cosmonaut was in space.
   D. six months that the cosmonaut spent in orbit around Earth.

8. Details in the passage most strongly suggest that the people meeting the narrator at the train station include:
   A. her father.
   B. her sister.
   C. a neighbor.
   D. a journalist.

9. The narrator indicates that the most significant change to her hometown has been the addition of:
   A. square dancing.
   B. vinyl storefronts.
   C. benches on Main Street.
   D. Las Vegas–style gambling.

10. According to the passage, news reports attributed the cosmonaut’s knees buckling to:
    A. his gratitude at being back on Earth.
    B. political changes in the world.
    C. a lack of exercise.
    D. his dismay at what he had seen from the space shuttle.
Passage II

SOCIAL SCIENCE: This passage is adapted from the article “Green Music in the Rain Forest” by Suzanne Ghali, which appeared in the Fall 2002 Ford Foundation Report.

OELA is an acronym based on Portuguese words rather than the English words used in this article. A luthier is a master of stringed musical instruments.

The Amazonian Workshop School for Fabrication of Stringed Instruments (OELA) is a small part of a larger effort to create a sustainable harvest of the great Amazon forest and to give employment to the region’s burgeoning population.

"Few people know that the Amazon is one of the most rapidly urbanizing regions of the world," observes José Gabriel López, a Ford Foundation program officer in Brazil. The city of Manaus, for example, has grown in the past decade from 55,000 to 1.5 million. "This rural-urban migration and the resultant urban shantytowns stand as living symbols of failed or nonexistent rural development policies," López says. "In many places, small-scale rural producers have been abandoned—second to health and education services, credit, technical assistance and opportunity. What Rubens Gomes, founder of the workshop school, and his colleagues have created in Manaus is hope."

Gomes knows how to build hope. The school, he notes proudly, is the first to make stringed instruments in the Amazon. And it is the first in all of the Americas to construct instruments exclusively of timber harvested in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner certified by the Forest Stewardship Council.

"Officially, there are 10 million cubic meters of wood cut in the Amazon annually," Gomes says. "Twenty million of this is wanted—raw dust, scrap, unwanted wood left to rot. And these are the official numbers. The motive of this school is to transform what is lost into things of value. Many people could do this—but there are no schools teaching carpentry in the Amazon."

OELA is meant to help fill the void. To graduate, each student must make a stringed instrument. All the guitars are made from certified wood. Gomes explains that traditionally, Brazilian rosewood and chouch were used in the construction of guitars. But because of intense harvesting, these trees are close to extinction. "I've been working for years, trying to find Amazon woods that are unknown on the market, that are in plentiful supply and that can be used in instrument making," Gomes says. He experimented with dozens before he found types that have the right strength and sound. (Like other master luthiers, he can tell by touching the wood whether it will resonate well.) Once he identified the woods as possible substitutes, he sent them to a laboratory to be tested for the right grain and density. Today, Brosimum rubescens is substituted for rosewood, Aniba catenella for chouch, and Protium species for Brazilian mahogany and cedar. These and some 25 other undervalued tropical hardwoods have found their way into the luthiers' workshop, taking the pressure off the better-known woods.

For the past year, master luthier Raul Lage from the Fernando Ortiz Instrument-Making School of the Cuban Music Institute has been working with the students. There are hurdles, he cautions. A number of them are technical. The high humidity in Manaus means that the wood will crack in dryer climates unless properly treated. Oil frequently doesn't hold. These problems are slowly being resolved.

There is also a major obstacle outside the workshop: The resistance of buyers to new woods. Thus far, most of the instruments have been sold to environment activists, some of whom "adopt" a student by paying his or her tuition; the student's "project guitar" is then given to the donor as a gift.

There is also the possibility of contract work from outside the Amazon. Gomes's hopes were raised considerably when the president of a well-known guitar company based in Nashville, Tennessee, ordered 15 guitars to be auctioned off for the Rainforest Alliance.

Lage cautions that it will be a long time before any of the students can command a master luthier's fee. "There is a saying," Lage says. "Anyone can make one good guitar, it takes a master to make one every time."

José Lucio de Nascimento Rabelo, director of the technical school, says, "By learning this skill, students come to look at the forest in a new way; there are ways other than logging for plywood and firewood to earn a living, to better the life of the people." One of the woods being used as a replacement for the precious rosewood, he notes, is typically used to make charcoal.

Such an appreciation for the forest, says Rabelo, could have a huge effect on the survival of the rain forest; some 80 percent of the students come from other parts of the state of Amazonas, and virtually all of them return to their home towns. "Some," he adds, "go on to become politicians who will have a direct influence on the future of the forest."

II. Which of the following assumptions would be most critical for a reader to accept in order to agree fully with the author's claims in the passage?

A. Shantytowns in the Amazon need to be relocated if the forest is to be saved.
B. Learning to make consistently good guitars requires access to the best materials available.
C. Small-scale rural producers in the Amazon can help preserve the forest by being innovative.
D. Consumers outside of the Amazon can do little to help prevent deforestation.
12. In the context of the passage, the statement “All the guitars are made from certified wood” (lines 34–35) most nearly suggests that Gomes’s workshop:
   F. uses environmentally sustainable woods in its guitars.
   G. isn’t doing enough to stop unnecessary deforestation in the Amazon.
   H. has little chance of pleasing both musicians and environmentalists.
   J. uses only traditional woods in making its guitars.

13. It can most reasonably be inferred from the passage that regarding OELA, the author feels:
   A. skeptical of the workshop’s aims.
   B. dismayed by the workshop’s low productivity.
   C. supportive of the workshop’s goals.
   D. confident that the workshop could be duplicated in other places.

14. The main purpose of the second paragraph (lines 6–18) is to:
   F. draw attention to the Amazon’s tremendous population growth.
   G. explain the necessity for ventures such as Gomes’s.
   H. explain the presence of the Ford Foundation in the Amazon.
   J. justify raising taxes to increase social services in the Amazon.

15. The main function of the fifth paragraph (lines 33–33) is to:
   A. demonstrate the woodworking skills required to be a master luthier.
   B. explore the limitations of science as compared to intuition.
   C. outline the scientific reasons why one type of wood cannot be replaced by another.
   D. show that experiments led to the discovery of good substitutes for rare woods.

16. The passage notes all of the following as problems that the fledgling Amazon guitar industry has experienced EXCEPT that:
   F. glue on the guitars sometimes doesn’t hold.
   G. the wood used may crack in drier climates.
   H. woods usable for guitars have become extinct.
   J. buyers resist guitars made with nontraditional woods.

17. The passage indicates that, as a group, the OELA students may impact the survival of the rain forests because most of them:
   A. care deeply enough about music to spend their lives making musical instruments.
   B. will return to their homes and spread their environmental knowledge.
   C. are willing to endure personal hardships in order to use their new skills.
   D. will have political careers after they return home.

18. In the passage, Gomes indicates that of the wood cut in the Amazon rain forest each year, approximately how much wood is wasted?
   F. One-fourth
   G. One-third
   H. One-half
   J. Two-thirds

19. The passage states that all of the following are woods traditionally used for making stringed instruments EXCEPT:
   A. Aniba canescens.
   B. rosewood.
   C. Brazilian mahogany.
   D. ebony.

20. According to the passage, when an OELA student is “adopted” he or she receives:
   F. tuition.
   G. room and board.
   H. food and clothing.
   J. a musical instrument.
HUMANITIES: This passage is adapted from an article "Finding Philosophy" by Colin McGinn (2000 by Prospect). 

Descartes (1596-1650) refers to René Descartes (1596–1650), a French mathematician, philosopher, and scientist. 

I have been an academic philosopher for the past 30 years. I came from an academically disinclined background in the northeast of England, my relatives being mainly coalminers and other manual workers. I was the first in my family to attend university, and indeed had no thought of it until age 17, when a teacher mentioned it at school. My father had become a successful builder, so we were not materially deprived, and it was expected that I would become some sort of technical worker. The idea that I might one day become a professional philosopher was inconceivable in those days, to me and everyone else. I was simply not living in a place where that kind of thing ever happened; it was far likelier—though still not at all likely—that I would become a pop star (I played drums in a rock band). 

The paperback British edition of my memoir The Making of a Philosopher has a photograph on the cover of a man sitting on a bench, placed in a grey and listless landscape. He is overlooking the sea on a misty grey day, and the atmosphere is bleak and melancholy. The man, hunched up, immobile, coiled almost, has a passive posture, as if frozen in thought. This picture is based on a story I tell in the book about sitting on a bench in Blackpool, aged 18, pondering the metaphysical question of how objects relate to their properties. Is an object just the sum total of its properties, a mere coalescence of general features, or does it somehow lie behind its properties, supporting them, a solid peg on which they happen to hang? When I look at an object do I really see the object itself, or just the appearance its properties offer to me? I remember the feeling of fixation that came over me when I thought about these questions—a kind of floating fascination, a still perplexity.

When I look back on this period in my life, I recall the harnessing of undirected mental energy by intellectual pursuits. Up until then, my mental energy had gone into things like reading Mystery Maker, which contained fairly common articles about pop music. I always knew the top 20 off by heart, and studied the articles about drummers intensely, hoping to improve my own technique. I suspect that this kind of aimless mental energy is fairly typical of boys that age. School doesn’t seem to connect with it, and it goes off in search of some object of interest, often invalid, sometimes destructive. In my case, it was philosophy that seized that energy and converted it into a passion—though one that took several years to form fully. It is a delicate and fastidious energy that I am speaking of, despite its power, and it will only be satisfied by certain employments, which of course vary from person to person. I had had a similar passion for chemistry when I was ten, and for butterflies and lizards before that.

How to harness such passions to formal education remains a great and unresolved problem.

It was—of course—a teacher who tapped into my formless and fizzle ling mental energy. Mr Marsh, teacher of divinity, brimmingly Christian, a man with very active eyebrows and sharp evanescence, to love with scholarship (oh, how he relished that word)—it was he who first brought out my inner philosopher. From him I heard of Descartes, locked up in his room, wondering whether anything could really be known beyond his own existence. But what I mainly got from the enthusiasm Mr Marsh was the desire to study. His own passion for study shone through, and he managed to make it seem, if not glamorous, then at least exhilarating—when done the right way and in the right spirit. Pencils and stationery were made to seem like shiny toots, and the pleasure of making one’s mark on a blank sheet of paper hymned. Choosing a good spot to study was emphasised. Above all, I learned a very valuable lesson, one that had hitherto escaped me: make notes.

Thinking and writing should be indissoluble activities, the hand ministering to the thought, the thought shaped by the hand. Today, if I find myself without pen and paper and thoughts start to arrive, my fingers begin to twitch and I long for those implements of cogitation. 

With such rudimentary tools you can perform the miracle of turning an invisible thought into a concrete mark, bringing the ethereal into the public external world, refining it into something precious and permanent. The physical pleasure of writing, which I find survives in the use of a computer, is something worth dwelling on in matters of education.

21. The passage is best described as being told from the point of view of a philosopher who is: 
A. discussing metaphysical questions that have troubled philosophers since the time of Descartes. 
B. presenting in chronological order the key events in his thirty-year professional career. 
C. reflecting on his own early developing interest in philosophy and in scholarship generally. 
D. advising professional educators on how to get more students to study philosophy.

22. Based on the passage, which of the following was most likely the first to engage the author’s passionate interest?
F. Drumming 
G. Philosophy 
H. Chemistry 
J. Butterflies
23. The main purpose of the last paragraph is to:
   A. reveal the enduring impact of Mr. Marsh's lessons on the author.
   B. acknowledge that the author came to doubt none of Mr. Marsh's teachings.
   C. describe a typical class as taught by Mr. Marsh.
   D. present a biographical sketch of Mr. Marsh.

24. The passage indicates that the man in the book-cover photograph represents:
   F. Descartes, wondering what could be known.
   G. Mr. Marsh; deep in scholarly thought.
   H. the author at age seventeen, thinking about enrolling in college.
   J. the author at age eighteen, contemplating a philosophical issue.

25. The author mentions Melody Maker, the top 20, and articles about musicians primarily to suggest that his:
   A. early interest in music has remained with him to the present.
   B. time spent playing music should instead have been spent reading.
   C. fascination with pop music and musicians gave focus to his life for a time.
   D. commitment to study enabled him to perfect his drumming technique.

26. In the third paragraph (lines 36–56), the author most nearly characterizes the energy he refers to as:
   E. potent but difficult to channel in a constructive way.
   G. powerful and typically leading to destructive results.
   H. delicate and inevitably wasted in trivial entertainments.
   J. gentle yet capable of uniting people who have different interests.

27. Viewed in the context of the passage, the statement in lines 55–56 is most likely intended to suggest that:
   A. schools should require students to take philosophy courses.
   B. students can become passionate when learning about science in school.
   C. schools need to keep searching for ways to tap into students' deeply held interests.
   D. students should resolve to take school courses that interest them.

28. The author calls pen and paper "rudimentary tools" (line 80) as part of his argument that:
   F. the use of computers has made the use of pen and paper obsolete.
   G. students should become skilled with pen and paper before moving on to better tools.
   H. while writing with pen and paper can be pleasant, it can also be physically painful.
   J. although seemingly simple, pen and paper allow people to perform great feats.

29. In the context of the passage, lines 17–23 are best described as presenting images of:
   A. gloom, tension, and fascination.
   B. anger, bitterness, and betrayal.
   C. stillness, peacefulness, and relaxation.
   D. frustration, surprise, and satisfaction.

30. Which of the following does NOT reasonably describe the transition the author presents in lines 80–84?
   F. Precious in commonplace
   G. Fertile to permanent
   H. Invisible to visible
   J. Private to public
Passage IV

NATURAL SCIENCE. This passage is adapted from *Consider the Eel* by Richard Swinburne (1992). It is written by Richard Swinburne.

The known facts, as they are pretty much universally accepted among biologists and naturalists today, are that all the eels in the rivers of eastern North America and the Caribbean countries, and all the eels in all the rivers of eastern and western Europe, are born in the same area of the Sargasso Sea, a large area within the Atlantic Ocean, between Bermuda and the Azores, the surface of which is frequently covered with sargasso seaweed. In fact, the word "Sargasso" comes from the Portuguese *sargazos*, meaning seaweed. The sea is about 2,000 miles long and 1,000 miles wide, set off from the surrounding waters of the Atlantic by strong currents. It includes the area known in popular legend as the Bermuda Triangle.

Eels hatch in the Sargasso as larvae and are carried by the ocean currents to either Europe or the United States, a journey that can cover thousands of miles and take years. Where they settle varies on which of two similar species they belong to. Those that are Anguilla anguilla invariably wind up in European rivers, and those that enter North American rivers always belong to the species *Anguilla rostrata*. The first person to find eel larvae in the Sargasso Sea was Danish researcher Johannes Schmidt, who published his findings in 1924, after spending 18 years hunting eels in search of eels.

The larva of both species are shaped like small oval leaves and are called leptocephali. Each leptocephalus begins to assume the form of a tiny eel, called a silver or glass eel, when it gets close to the coasts of either Europe or the Americas. By the time it reaches brackish water, where fresh and salt water mix, it is thin and transparent, hardly bigger than a hair, with a pair of eyes like black dots at one end.

From the estuaries and mouths of rivers, the tiny eels frequently continue upstream, particularly the females, who sometimes go great distances inland. American eels have been found as far up the Mississippi River system as the rivers of Iowa. They keep going upstream until something tells them they've reached home, and then they stop. Whatever it is that signals to eels that they are home is definitive—they settle in and live there for as long as 20 years, growing up to a yard long before beginning their journey back to the Sargasso Sea. Scientists determine an eel's age using a microscope to read the growth rings of its otolith—a small, hard calcium deposit at the base of its skull.

In preparation for the return journey to the Sargasso, sexually mature female eels feed voraciously and change color from the muddily-yellow/green of adult eels, often called yellow eels, to a darker green on top and snow-white on their bellies. At this stage, they are called silver eels. They swim downstream in the fall, on the first leg of their journey to the Sargasso, and when they reach estuarine waters, they rest, completing their final transformation as silver eels. They will have eaten heavily and will be about 25 percent body fat. They will not eat again, and their digestive systems will atrophy. Their pupils will expand and turn blue. They will need a new kind of sight adapted to the depths of the sea, where there is little light. They will also have to go through a drastic adjustment, via metamorphosis, in their blood chemistry, to prepare for the tremendous change in water pressure, going from some 14 pounds of fresh-water pressure per inch of their bodies to over a ton of ocean pressure per inch. Once they are back in the Sargasso Sea, the females produce eggs for the males to fertilize, and then the adults die.

At least that is what today's marine biologists and naturalists tell us, although adult eels have never been seen swimming, reproducing, or dying in the Sargasso. In fact, live adult eels have never been seen there at all. The only two adult eels ever reported in the Sargasso Sea were dead, found in the stomachs of other fish. The eel's migration back to its birthplace and what it actually does when it gets there are assumed to take place far below the water's surface and, as of the year 2001, were still completely unobserved. However, the eel larva—the leptocephali that Schmidt found in the Sargasso—were so small that it was certain they had been swimming, and nearby. Each small larva has never been seen elsewhere, and while eels have never been observed reproducing in the Sargasso, they have never been seen doing so anywhere else either. Scientists believe the larva hatch out of eggs at a depth of 100-300 yards and rise slowly toward the light at the sea's surface.

31. One of the main ideas established by the passage is that
A. researchers have nearly exhausted their resources after spending decades investigating the Sargasso Sea.
B. significant gaps still remain in researchers' understanding of the life cycle of eels.
C. eels live their entire lives in the Sargasso Sea, but no one has ever seen them there.
D. female eels turn into silver eels toward the end of their lives.

32. Learning about which of the following had the largest impact on scientists' current understanding of where eels breed?
A. The direction in which ocean currents carry eel larvae.
B. The relationship of the yellow eel stage to the silver eel stage.
C. Schmidt's discovery of eel larvae in the Sargasso Sea.
D. The adult eels found in the stomachs of other fish.

GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE.
33. The main purpose of the fourth paragraph (lines 34–47) is to describe that:
A. eels’ transition from freshwater to the ocean.
B. method of determining the age of eels.
C. complexity of the Mississippi River system.
D. river stage of the eel lifecycle.

34. The passage states that the Sargasso Sea is set off from the rest of the Atlantic Ocean by:
F. the Azores.
G. several Caribbean countries.
H. powerful winds.
J. strong currents.

35. The passage notes that the Sargasso Sea includes:
A. the eastern North American shore.
B. the Bermuda Triangle.
C. certain coastal estuaries.
D. the mouth of the Mississippi River.

36. As it is used in line 13, the word popular most nearly means:
F. well liked.
G. commonly known.
H. scientifically accepted.
J. most admired.

37. As it is used in line 45, the word need most nearly means to:
A. learn from print.
B. observe.
C. think about.
D. predict.

38. The passage indicates that female eels’ pupils expand and turn blue because the eels:
F. must adapt to see in an environment with much less light than they are used to.
G. are about to undergo a change in their blood chemistry.
H. no longer need to be able to recognize food sources since they have stopped eating.
J. need to be able to recognize the male eels that will fertilize their eggs.

39. The passage most strongly emphasizes that the process of coming is necessary for the eels’ transition from:
A. shallow to deeper water.
B. feeding to non-feeding.
C. immature to mature form.
D. silver to yellow eel.

40. According to the passage, which of the following characteristics of the eel larvae found by Schmidt provided the best evidence that the larvae were hatched in the Sargasso Sea?
F. Size
G. Shape
H. Color
J. Species

END OF TEST 3
STOP! DO NOT TURN THE PAGE UNTIL TOLD TO DO SO.
DO NOT RETURN TO A PREVIOUS TEST.
### Test 3: Reading—Scoring Key

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**Number Correct (Raw Score) for:**

| Social Studies/Sciences (SS) Subscore Area | (20) |
| Arts/Literature (AL) Subscore Area | (20) |
| Total Number Correct for Reading Test (SS + AL) | (40) |

*SS = Social Studies/Sciences, AL = Arts/Literature

### Test 4: Science—Scoring Key

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**Number Correct (Raw Score) for:**

| Total Number Correct for Science Test | (40) |

1257C

57
# TABLE 1

**Explanation of Procedures Used to Obtain Scale Scores from Raw Scores**

On each of the four multiple-choice tests on which you marked any responses, the total number of correct responses yields a raw score. Use the table below to convert your raw scores to scale scores. For each test, locate and circle your raw score or the range of raw scores that includes it in the table below. Then, read across to either outside column of the table and circle the scale score that corresponds to that raw score. As you determine your scale scores, enter them in the blanks provided on the right. The highest possible scale score for each test is 36. The lowest possible scale score for any test on which you marked any responses is 1.

Next, compute the Composite score by averaging the four scale scores. To do this, add your four scale scores and divide the sum by 4. If the resulting number is not an integer (i.e., it contains a fraction), round it to the nearest whole number. (Round down any fraction less than one-half; round up any fraction that is one-half or more.) Enter this number in the blank. This is your Composite score. The highest possible Composite score is 144; the lowest possible Composite score is 1.

**NOTE:** If you left a test completely blank and marked no items, do not list a scale score for that test. If any test was completely blank, do not calculate a Composite score.

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**ACT Test 67C**

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Composite score (sum of 4)
**TABLE 2**

Explanation of Procedures Used to Obtain Scale Scores from Raw Scores

For each of the seven subscore areas, the total number of correct responses yields a raw score. Use the table below to convert your raw score to scale scores. For each of the seven subscore areas, find your raw score either in the middle column of the table below. Then, read across to either subscore column of the table and select the scale score that corresponds to your score. As you determine your scale scores, when there in the limits provided on the right. The highest possible scale score is 36. The lowest possible scale score is 1.

If you fail a test completely (i.e., all marked responses are not to any scale scores for that test.

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### Reading Literature

#### Key Ideas and Details

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<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RL.12.1</td>
<td>Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RL.12.2</td>
<td>Determine themes or central ideas of a text and analyze in detail their development over the course of the text, including how details of a text interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an accurate summary of the text based upon this analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RL.12.3</td>
<td>Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a literary text (e.g. where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).</td>
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#### Craft and Structure

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<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RL.12.4</td>
<td>Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RL.12.5</td>
<td>Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RL.12.6</td>
<td>Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).</td>
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</table>

#### Integration of Knowledge and Skills

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<th>Standard</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RL.12.7</td>
<td>Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least on play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RL.12.9</td>
<td>Demonstrate knowledge of period-appropriate foundational works of British literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>RL.12.1 By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 12-CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Reading Informational Text</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Ideas and Details</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RI.12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RI.12.2 Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze in detail their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on another to provide a complex analysis; provide an accurate summary of the text based upon this analysis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RI.12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.</td>
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<th><strong>Craft and Structure</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>RI.12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RI.12.5 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RI.12.6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.</td>
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<th><strong>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>RI.12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RI.12.8 Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal texts specific to British literature.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RI.12.9 Analyze seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century foundational British documents of historical and literary significance for their themes, purposes, and rhetorical themes, purposes, and rhetorical features.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RI 12.10 By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the grades 12-CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.</td>
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<th><strong>Writing</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Text Types and Purposes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>W.12.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. (master)</td>
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</table>
| W.12.1a Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claims(s), distinguish the claims(s) from alternate or opposing claims,
and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

<p>| W.12.1b | Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases. |
| W.12.1c | Use words, phrases, and clauses as well as varied syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and counterclaims. |
| W.12.1d | Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing. |
| W.12.1e | Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented. |
| W.12.2 | Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content. (master) |
| W.12.2a | Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension. |
| W.12.2b | Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic. |
| W.12.2c | Use appropriate and varied transitions and syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts. |
| W.12.2d | Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic. |
| W.12.2e | Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing. |
| W.12.2f | Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic. |
| W.12.3 | Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences. (master) |
| W.12.3a | Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events. |
| W.12.3b | Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters. |
| W.12.3c | Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution). |</p>
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<th>Standard</th>
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<tr>
<td>W.12.3d</td>
<td>Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.</td>
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<tr>
<td>W.12.3e</td>
<td>Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Production and Distribution of Writing</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>W.12.4</td>
<td>Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>W.12.5</td>
<td>Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grades 11-12.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>W.12.6</td>
<td>Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.</td>
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<td><strong>Research to Build and Present Knowledge</strong></td>
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<td>W.12.7</td>
<td>Conduct short and/or more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem, narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>W.12.8</td>
<td>Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>W.12.9</td>
<td>Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</td>
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<tr>
<td>W.12.9a</td>
<td>Apply grades 11-12 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of British literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics”).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Range of Writing</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>12.12.10</td>
<td>Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Speaking and Listening</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>SL.12.1</td>
<td>Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SL.12.1</td>
<td>Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SL.12.1</td>
<td>Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SL.12.1</td>
<td>Propose conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusion; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL.12.1</td>
<td>Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL.12.2</td>
<td>Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL.12.3</td>
<td>Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas</strong></td>
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<td>SL.12.4</td>
<td>Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SL.12.5</td>
<td>Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL.12.6</td>
<td>Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating a command of formal English when indicated or appropriate. (See grades 11-12 Language standards 1 and 3 for specific expectations.)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>L.12.1</td>
<td>Demonstrating command of the conventions of standard English Grammar and usage when writing or speaking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>L.12.1a</td>
<td>Apply the understanding that usage is a matter of convention, can change over time, and is sometimes contested.</td>
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<tr>
<td>L.12.1b</td>
<td>Resolve issues of complex or contested usage, consulting references (e.g., Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary of English Usage, Garner’s Modern American Usage), as needed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>L.12.2</td>
<td>Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>L.12.2a</td>
<td>Observe hyphenation conventions</td>
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<td>L.12.2b</td>
<td>Spell correctly</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge of Language</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>L.12.3</td>
<td>Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.12.3a</td>
<td>Vary syntax for effect, consulting references (e.g., Tufte’s Artful Sentences) for guidance as needed; when analyzing complex texts, demonstrate an understanding of how syntax contributes to the purpose or meaning of the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocabulary Acquisition and Use</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.12.4</td>
<td>Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11-12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.12.4a</td>
<td>Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word’s position, or function in a sentence as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.12.4b</td>
<td>Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech (e.g., conceive, conception, conceivable).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>