



# Your Classroom

## COMMON CORE: Victory Is Yours!

Our activities will leave you feeling “rosy” about tackling the new standards.  
By Jennifer L. W. Fink

**F**eeling anxious about implementing the Common Core State Standards? Fear not—it is easier than you might think.

“Common Core pulls out the essential pieces so that you have fewer things to teach and a longer period of time to dig into them,” explains Susan Riley, an arts integration specialist in Maryland who helps teachers implement the standards.

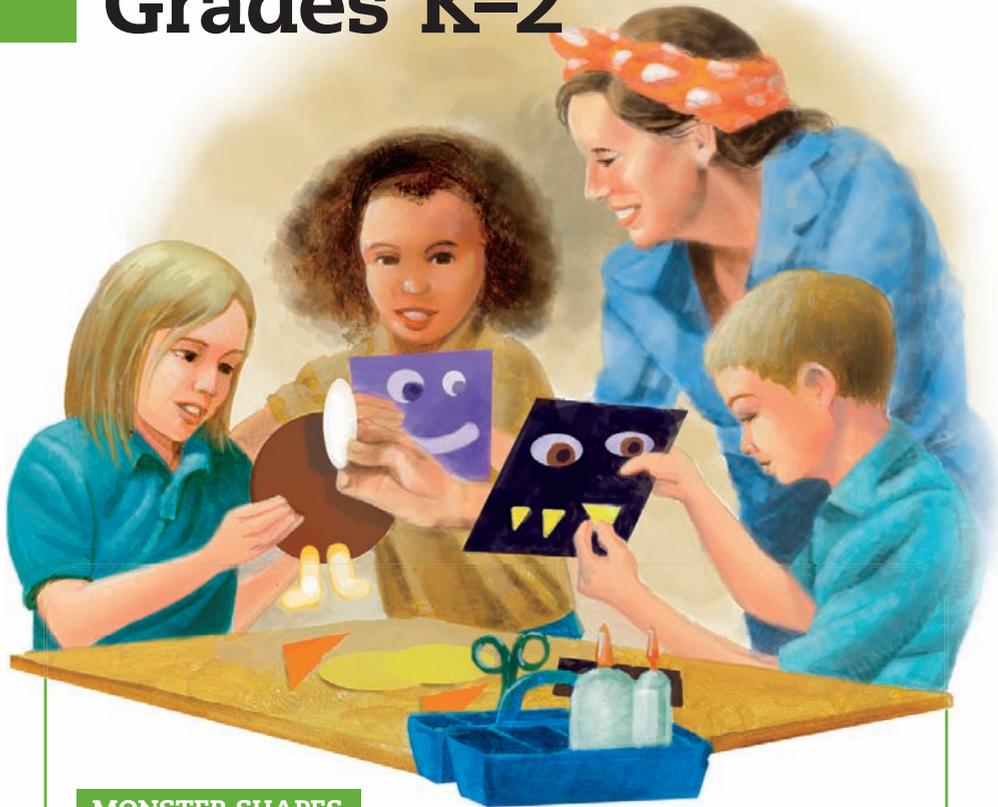
“What we were required to teach previously was a mile wide and an inch deep.”

Andrea Smith, a sixth-grade math teacher at E. L. Haynes charter school in Washington, D.C., says the guidelines have made her life easier, not harder. They allow her students more time to explore things like fractions. “Now we spend at least two and a half weeks dividing fractions. At the end, my students have a much richer understanding of fraction division because they don’t just invert and multiply. That’s the beauty of Common Core.”

Not quite convinced? We get it—you want more examples of how to do it in your classroom. On the next pages, we break down important benchmarks and show you how other teachers are doing it—and loving it!

ILLUSTRATIONS: ROBERT CRAWFORD

# Grades K-2



## MONSTER SHAPES

**GEOMETRY:** Reason with shapes and their attributes.

**ACTIVITY:** Tamra Shaw, a master teacher at Horizon Community Learning Center in Phoenix, has students make a community map, using construction-paper shapes (triangle, circle, etc.) to signify various land-

marks. They can also combine shapes to form local buildings. Challenge them to create “Shape Monsters” and write stories about them.

**HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR TEACHING?** You will emphasize the process of working with shapes, rather than the final product.

## UNIFIX QUEEN

**MATHEMATICAL PRACTICES:** Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them. Reason abstractly and quantitatively. Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.

**ACTIVITY:** Don a cape and crown, grab your scepter (a stack of 10 or more Unifix cubes), and dub yourself the Queen (or King) of Ten. Allow some cubes to fall off your scepter. Ask your students how many fell. Then ask, “How do you know?” Shaw says: “When students explain their thinking, it helps them understand that there are many ways to get to the answer.”

## HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR TEACHING?

You’ll be focusing more on problem solving. Rote memorization is out; critical thinking is in.

## MORE ON THE CORE

- **ACHIEVE THE CORE:** The nonprofit has free resources, links to videos about the Common Core, and inspirational stories from teachers who are already using it. [achievethecore.org](http://achievethecore.org)
- **MATH SOLUTIONS:** From webinars to videos to school-based coaching, Marilyn Burns’s Math Solutions can help you make an easy transition to the new standards. Check out the Common Core Quick Start Series and multiday institutes. [mathsolutions.com](http://mathsolutions.com)
- **TEACHING CHANNEL:** Another nonprofit with a storehouse of videos, the Teaching Channel breaks down effective teaching and serves as a forum for teacher discussion on the Common Core, critical thinking, research methods, and more. [teachingchannel.org](http://teachingchannel.org)

## TIME BINGO

**MEASUREMENT & DATA:** Tell and write time using analog and digital clocks.

**ACTIVITY:** Start by creating a basic awareness of time. Set a timer for five minutes so students can feel how long it is. Challenge them to see what they can accomplish in five minutes, and then in 10 and 20 minutes. Play Telling Time Bingo with older students: Create bingo cards with pictures of analog clocks showing various times.

**LOST AND FOUND**

**WRITING:** Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to narrate a single event or several loosely linked events, tell about the events in the order in which they occurred, and provide a reaction to what happened.

**ACTIVITY:** “We immerse kids in a particular kind of writing for a

period of time. We might spend three to five days reading aloud several examples of that kind of text,” says Jeff Williams, a reading recovery teacher and literacy coach at Solon City Schools in Ohio. “Then we start to name some of the qualities: In a lost-and-found story, you have a character who values something. They lose it.

And usually at the end, they find it and there’s some emotion. After several days of reading and discussion, students create their own lost-and-found story.”

**HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR TEACHING?** You’ll be doing more writing projects, and in longer units. That’s a good thing!

**S-H-O-P KEEPER**

**READING:** Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds (phonemes).

**ACTIVITY:** Wisconsin kindergarten teacher Paula Storck divides her class into “shoppers” and “storekeepers.” Shoppers get a handful of pennies; storekeepers sell objects represented by picture cards. If a shopper wants to buy a dog, “they have to figure out how many pennies they need by counting the sounds *d-o-g*,” Storck says. “The clerk checks to make sure that’s correct.”

**HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR TEACHING?** You’re emphasizing real-world applications and teaching across subjects.

**WHAT’S THE BIG IDEA?**

**LITERATURE:** Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.

**ACTIVITY:** Talk about “big ideas” that are frequently seen in books and television shows, things like “Believe in yourself” or “It’s good to help others.” Then read books with these themes over a period of several days. “We might read James Howe’s *I Wish I Were a Butterfly*, then *Edward the Emu*, by Sheena Knowles, the next day,” says Williams. “We talk about how they have a similar message, then ask, ‘What’s the big idea the author is trying to get across?’”

**HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR TEACHING?** In the past, this type of unit wasn’t introduced until middle or high school. Your task is to help younger students grasp the “big ideas” —which they’re fully capable of doing.

Call out the time—6:30, for instance—or show the digital version. Have students mark the proper analog picture on their cards.

**HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR TEACHING?** You’re linking abstract concepts to concrete examples, with an emphasis on direct application.



# Grades 3–5

## A PICTURE'S WORTH...

**WRITING:** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

**ACTIVITY:** Riley, the arts integration specialist, uses a website called Storybird (storybird.com) to help kids to create rich characterizations and narratives. “Storybird allows kids to write their own piece based on illustrations,” she says. First, students find an illustration they connect with and figure out what happened beforehand. How did a situation emerge and why? Then they consider what might happen next. Soon, full-fledged stories take shape.

**HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR TEACHING?** Kids are great storytellers. A visual prompt helps them get past the blank page and unlocks their imaginations.



## TWO SIDES

**LITERATURE:** Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

**ACTIVITY:** Monica Sims, a fifth-grade teacher at John J. Pershing West Middle School in Chicago, has her students consider Scott O'Dell's novel *The Island of the Blue Dolphins* from two points of view: the Aleuts' and the islanders'. “I'll ask, ‘Who thinks the islanders are right—that it's not fair for the Aleuts to come to the island, search for otters, and not give anything in return?’” she says. “Then I'll ask, ‘Who thinks, Hey, it's Mother Nature—the Aleuts can do what they want?’” She ties the discussion to current news, such as gas prices and oil exploration.

**HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR TEACHING?** You'll encourage students to actively seek understanding of other perspectives through critical and constructive analysis, which will serve them well in a multicultural society.

## INTERACTIVE WRITING

**WRITING:** With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

**ACTIVITY:** Sims projects students' writing on the interactive whiteboard. “When the writing is on the big screen, they notice things they miss on paper,” she says. “As they read it aloud, and as they share with their peers, they're able to see mistakes without my having to mention it.” Guide your young writers to ask their peers questions about their work in progress, such as “Does this make sense?”

**HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR TEACHING?** Common Core emphasizes writing as communication. Push students to get feedback from their peers so they'll learn how to effectively communicate with an audience.



### MIX IT UP

**NUMBERS & OPERATIONS—FRACTIONS:** Develop understanding of fractions as numbers.

**ACTIVITY:** Riley uses music and color to help students understand fractions. Introducing kids to whole notes, half notes, and quarter notes helps get across the idea that a fraction is a part of a whole, she says. Mixing colors with colored water does, too. “I’ll ask students, ‘How much blue and yellow do I need to make this shade of green?’” she says. Help your students figure out that a green composed of two parts blue and one part yellow is two-thirds blue and one-third yellow.

**HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR TEACHING?** Work to build on students’ prior knowledge. In other words, don’t be afraid to use kindergarten concepts in fourth grade!

### DREAM HOME DESIGN

**MEASUREMENT & DATA:** Geometric measurement: understand concepts of area and relate area to multiplication and to addition.

**ACTIVITY:** Bring in real estate listings. Point out the square footage. Then show your students some home plans and blueprints. Have them design their own dream homes. “I have students who want a movie theater and a helicopter pad,” says Mechelle Hardaway, a fifth-grade teacher in Georgia. “That’s fine, as long as they include the area of each room.”

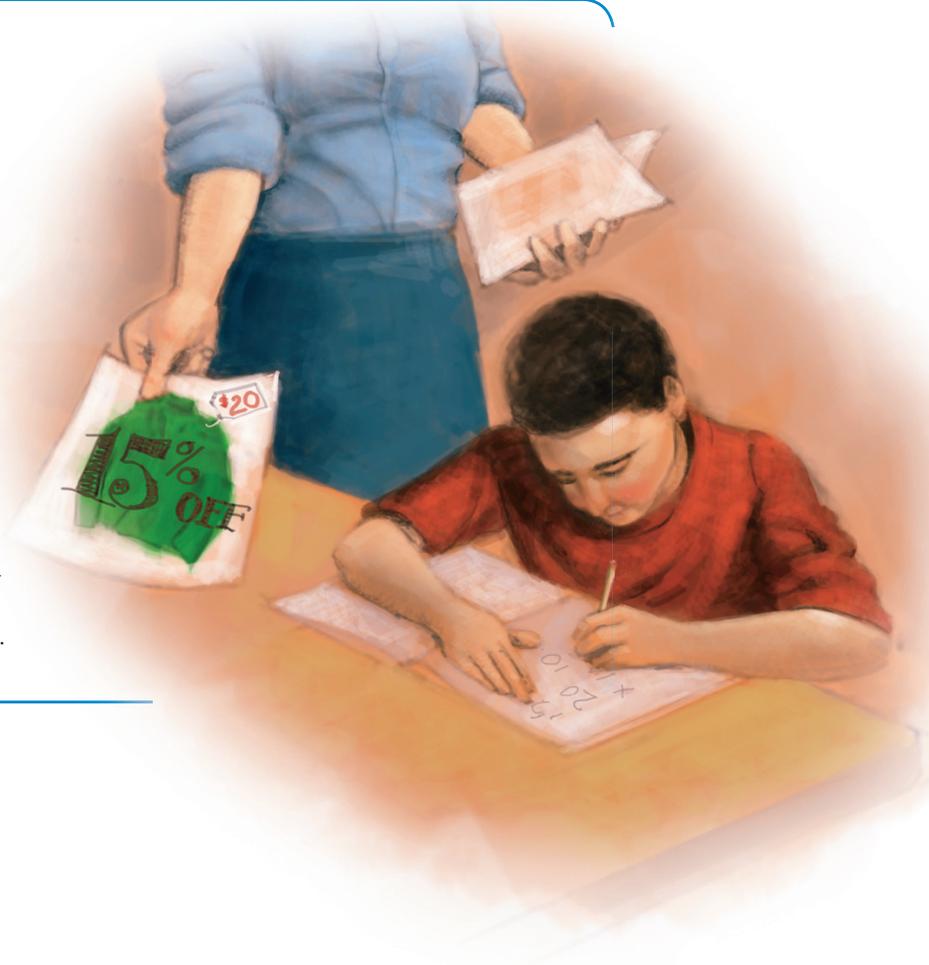
**HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR TEACHING?** You’ll be emphasizing understanding and application, rather than memorization.

### PRICE IT OUT

**NUMBERS & OPERATIONS:** Perform operations with multi-digit whole numbers and with decimals to hundredths.

**ACTIVITY:** “I get out some sales flyers and tell my students that they’re going to go shopping,” says Hardaway. Students tally up how much it would cost to buy a new outfit—or to completely furnish their dream home. Calculating sales tax provides them with extra practice in multiplying and adding decimals.

**HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR TEACHING?** Take every opportunity to engage students in real-world concepts while teaching the basics.



# Grades 6–8

## TIPS FROM CORE VETERANS

What advice do you have for your colleagues on teaching with the new Common Core standards?

Take some classes offered by your state teachers association. CTA [California Teachers Association] had a great workshop at our summer institute. —*Kathy K.*

We have been receiving professional development days to work as a team and to pick out textbooks and manipulatives and create tests and do research. —*Kathryn R.*

What I've done is link the standards to current curriculum or add something into the existing curriculum. It takes time to analyze them, but having a grasp ahead of time really helps. —*Kim A.*

I've found that I will actually be teaching fewer standards, just digging deeper on what truly matters. We have been working to implement them this year and my advice is to get started! It is not as bad as you might think!!! —*Karen K.*

Being flexible and able to adapt based on the needs of your students is key. Also, allow for discussion and collaborative time with your grade members to share ideas and allow for feedback. —*Lucy L.*

## PERFECT PAIRS

**READING—INFORMATIONAL TEXT:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.

**ACTIVITY:** “Get students interested in a topic first,” advises Tiffany Choice, a sixth-grade teacher at Hybla Valley Elementary School in Virginia. Discuss what students know—and don’t know—before reading an article. Then, after they read it, encourage them to use their previous knowledge to decipher any unfamiliar words or phrases. Discuss the article as a class, focusing on students’ interpretations of words and phrases. Which fits best? Why? “Once students have that kind of background knowledge, I introduce a fiction story on a similar topic,” Choice says. “The background knowledge helps them make connections and decipher meanings.”

**HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR TEACHING?** By pairing fiction and nonfiction texts on the same topic, students use their reading skills across the curriculum.

## POWER OF POETRY

**WRITING:** Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others.

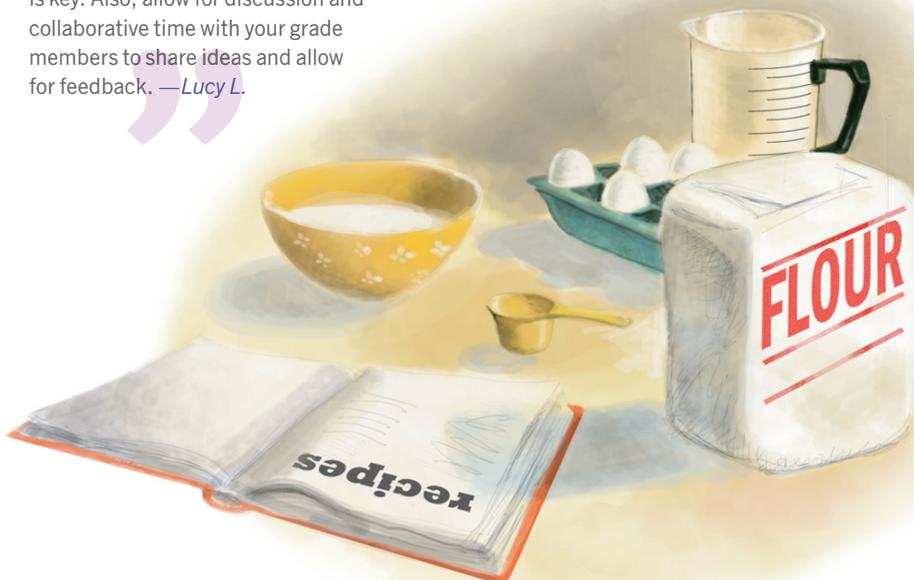
**ACTIVITY:** Generate excitement during poetry units by letting kids experiment with typography and design. “We use PowerPoint when we study figurative language in poetry,” Choice says, explaining that it has the advantage of being easy to use, even for computer novices. “Students can change the text and font and add pictures to illustrate the meanings of words and phrases.” Choice’s students also use online discussion boards to analyze and debate literature. Other teachers use tools such as Google Docs to enable student collaboration.

**HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR TEACHING?** You’ll ask students to write a variety of texts in different formats, then collaborate to enhance and improve their writing.

## COOK’S MATH

**THE NUMBER SYSTEM:** Apply and extend previous understandings of multiplication and division to divide fractions by fractions.

**ACTIVITY:** To help her students dive deeper into fractions, Choice has them





**WHAT'S YOUR ARGUMENT?**

**WRITING:** Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

**ACTIVITY:** Middle school students love to argue. Mary James, an eighth-grade English teacher in Alabama, uses that enthusiasm to teach them to support their opinions. "Students often say, 'We don't want to do this because it's stupid,'" James says. "I teach them that if they can come up with better-formed arguments, with research to back them up, they'll be more effective."

**HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR TEACHING?** Stress the importance of evidence to align with the Common Core.

**TASTY RATIOS**

**RATIOS & PROPORTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS:** Understand ratio concepts and use ratio reasoning to solve problems.

**ACTIVITY:** "I have students use ratios to make chocolate milk—say, two tablespoons chocolate mix to three cups milk," says Andrea Smith, the sixth-grade math teacher. "Then we'll talk about equivalent ratios: four tablespoons chocolate to six cups milk. I ask, 'Will it taste the same?' They end up discovering that both taste the same."

**HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR TEACHING?** Encourage experiential learning to help students understand mathematical concepts.

**EXPRESSIONS & EQUATIONS:** Apply and extend previous understandings of arithmetic to algebraic expressions.

**ACTIVITY:** "We begin our algebraic thinking unit with *The Five-Dog Night*, by Eileen Christelow," says Smith. "It's about a man who doesn't use blankets; when it gets really cold, he just increases the number of dogs who sleep with him. On a one-dog night, there's six feet in the bed—four dog feet plus two human feet. On a two-dog night, there are ten feet in all. Eventually, the students see two as the constant, and that each night, the number increases by four. So when I introduce the idea of an equation—the number of dogs for the night times four plus two equals the number of feet—and write it as  $4X + 2 = F$ , they know what I mean."

**HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR TEACHING?** Use developmentally appropriate, cross-curricular instruction to teach complex concepts. □

make recipe books. "I pull out tons of recipes and have students choose some favorites. Then I have them divide a recipe by half, or triple it or double it," Choice says. "We also talk about, 'Okay, this recipe feeds 12 people. But what if only four people are coming to

dinner? How will you adjust the recipe?'"

**HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR TEACHING?** Rather than just talk about dividing fractions, find a real-world way (like recipes or science experiments) to make the concept come alive.