



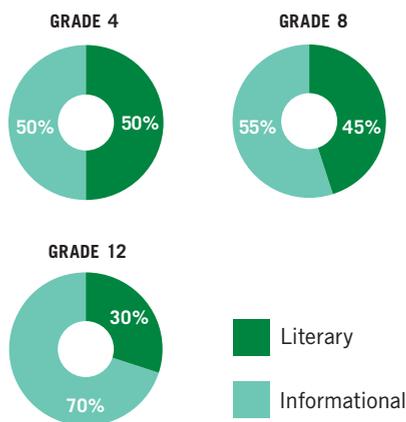
Why Now?

What has triggered the push for more informational text? For one, the goal of Common Core is to prepare students for college and career, both of which require a reservoir of knowledge about the natural, physical, and social world around them. And that's exactly what informational texts provide them.

"About 90 percent of what most adults read is informational text," says Laura Candler, a retired teacher of grades 4 through 6 from North Carolina. "Yet in school, it seems we've spent far more time reading fiction."

Another rationale can be summed up in one word: *assessment*. The developers of the standards sought to align the instructional balance of literary and informational text with that of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP—tests administered across the country at grades 4, 8, and 12. According to this model, fourth-grade students should receive a 50-50 balance between the two types of texts across the school day.

BALANCE OF TEXT TYPES ON NAEP



Informational Text 101

Ready to master the basics of informational text and Common Core? What follows are answers to some commonly asked questions.

What is informational text?

Common Core uses "informational text" as another term for "nonfiction text."

This category includes historical, scientific, and technical texts that provide students with factual information about the world. Typically, they employ structures such as cause and effect, compare and contrast, and problem and solution. They also contain text features like headlines and boldface vocabulary words.

Because of their narrative structures, biographies and autobiographies do not look like other nonfiction texts. In fact, they are often classified as literary nonfiction. But the Common Core considers them to be informational text as well.

Another category of informational texts includes directions, forms, and information contained in charts, graphs, maps, and digital resources. Simply put, if students are reading it for the information it contains, it's informational text.

Who is expected to teach it?

Just about everyone. In grades K to 5, teachers are expected to use informational texts throughout the school day. "I've always included a fair amount of informational text in my instruction," says Klein. "However, the way I teach it has evolved. I now integrate my content areas in a manner that allows for cross-curricular themes, rather than teaching concepts or themes in isolation. The connections between literacy and social studies and science engage students at a much higher level."

In grades 6 to 12, one strand of informational text standards falls to English teachers. A separate strand includes literacy in history and social studies, as well as literacy in science and technical subjects. That means

BUILD YOUR LIBRARY

The Common Core's Appendix B lists "text exemplars," but they aren't required. Look beyond the exemplars and try our choices.

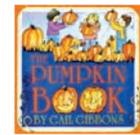
LIKE THIS?

TRY THIS

Grades K-1

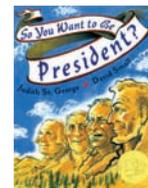


From Seed to Pumpkin
by Wendy Pfeffer

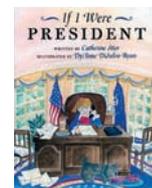


The Pumpkin Book
by Gail Gibbons

Grades 2-3



So You Want to Be President?
by Judith St. George



If I Were President
by Catherine Stier

Grades 4-5

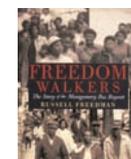


Discovering Mars
by Melvin Berger



Mars
by Seymour Simon

Grades 6-8



Freedom Walkers
by Russell Freedman



Claudette Colvin
by Phillip Hoose



“About 90% of what most adults read is informational text. Yet in school, it seems we’ve spent far more time reading fiction.”

—Laura Candler, retired teacher, grades 4–6

that social studies and science teachers will also be expected to teach vital literacy skills in their relevant content areas.

What do the standards call for?

Common Core calls for close readings of meaty, high-quality texts. The focus is placed squarely on the text—not on making connections to outside experiences or dwelling on prior knowledge. Students should get their hands dirty by digging into the text to uncover the evidence that supports their answers.

In each grade, the 10 reading informational text standards build upon the ones taught in previous grades, from kindergarten all the way through high school. “Most are the same as my current standards, but some are more in depth,” says Jenaya Shaw, a first-grade teacher in Georgia. “Common Core gives us more direction and specific areas to work on.”

Read for Yourself

For grade-specific standards, download the official document at corestandards.org. Rather have the standards in the palm of your hand? Download a Common Core app by [Mastery Connect \(masteryconnect.com\)](http://Mastery Connect (masteryconnect.com)).

What’s the difference between academic and domain-specific vocabulary?

Across all grades, informational text standard 4 calls for students to determine the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary. The phrase “academic and domain-specific vocabulary,” which appears several times, refers to words readers often encounter in textbooks across all subject areas. Among such words are *analyze*, which might be unfamiliar to a second-grade student, and *discourse*, which could be a new vocabulary word for a seventh grader.

Domain-specific vocabulary words, on the other hand, are likely to be encountered only in a particular content area. For example, a word such as *photosynthesis* falls within the realm of biology.

Putting It Into Practice

With an understanding of what the standards are calling for, it’s time to start thinking about what instruction in informational text could look like in your classroom. Here are a few ideas.

Grades K–2

LESSON: Text Features in the News

GRADES: 1–2

STANDARD: 5 (Know and use various text features.)

THE GIST: Laura Candler, the retired teacher from North Carolina, suggests using *Scholastic News Weekly Reader* to identify text features. Students can complete a three-column chart to extend their understanding.

ARTICLE	TEXT FEATURE	PURPOSE
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LESSON: Author Study Preview

GRADE: K

STANDARD: 5 (Name the author and illustrator and define the role of each.)

THE GIST: Kick off an author study unit by displaying several of the author’s books. Have students identify the author’s and illustrator’s names on the

cover of each book (sometimes they are one and the same). Discuss the contributions made by each. Then have students team up in author-illustrator duos to create their own books.

Grades 3–5

LESSON: Word Detectives

GRADES: 4–5

STANDARD: 4 (Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words.)

THE GIST: Prompt students to identify “suspect” words that may be hindering their understanding of a text. They can flag the suspects with sticky notes or write them on a separate sheet of paper. Have them find contextual clues to determine their meaning. Such clues usually come in the form of outright definitions, neighboring synonyms or antonyms, or other information that can yield useful inferences.

LESSON: Pinterest Pictures

GRADE: 3

STANDARD: 3 (Describe events, ideas, or concepts using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause and effect.)

THE GIST: “For many students, there is a learning curve to understand the vocabulary of informational text,” says third-grade teacher Suzy Brooks of Massachusetts. She uses images from a Pinterest board to introduce these concepts. To teach sequencing, for example, Brooks shows a photo of a dog chasing a ball and asks students what likely happened both before and after the photo was taken.

Grades 6–8

LESSON: Slice of the Pie

GRADES: 6–8

STANDARD: 6 (Determine an author’s point of view or purpose.)

THE GIST: Draw a pizza P.I.E. (“persuade, inform, entertain”) organizer on the board and discuss what is meant by “author’s purpose.” Talk about several informational texts and classify the purpose or purposes of each by writing the title in the appropriate slices of the pie. (Yes, an informational text can be intended to persuade *and* entertain!)

LESSON: State Your Case

GRADES: 6–8

STANDARD: 8 (Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text.)

THE GIST: After they’ve read an informational text with a central argument, have students pretend that they are lawyers in a courtroom. Ask them to state the author’s main claim, and provide ample evidence from the text to back it up. The goal is to convince the classroom jury to agree with the author’s argument. □

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