Reframing Arguments for Teaching YA Literature in an Age of Common Core

by: Sean Connors and Iris Shepard

It remains to be seen what, if any, influence the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) will have on the way literature is taught in secondary English classes. Nevertheless, as someone who values young adult literature’s ability to inspire rich discussions that invite students to think critically about complex issues, I am concerned that the CCSS may inadvertently function to limit its presence in the high school literature curriculum. Arguing that the complexity of the literature students read matters, the publishers of the CCSS have disseminated lists of so-called “exemplar texts” that are said to reflect the level of textual complexity students ought to encounter in the different grades to ensure that they are college- and career-ready. The relative absence of young adult titles on these lists, especially for students in the upper grades, coupled with a heavy emphasis on canonical literature, seems to suggest that young adult literature lacks complexity. Readers of this journal know, however, that this isn’t the case. As school districts across the United States prepare to implement the CCSS, the onus for demonstrating young adult literature’s complexity falls on those of us who value it, raising the question of how we can best do so.

The arguments that teachers and librarians have traditionally given for making young adult literature available to adolescents—namely, that it represents their experiences and engages struggling and so-called “reluctant” readers—remain important today, but the implementation of the CCSS, which emphasize rigor and complexity, requires those of us who value the genre to acknowledge the latter criteria in our rationales for teaching it. Complexity is not synonymous with difficulty, nor is it attributable solely to a text’s objective properties. In this article, I take the position that whether readers regard a text as complex or not is influenced in part by the questions they ask in the process of interpreting it. As a result, I advocate reading young adult literature through the lenses of literary theory to make visible its complexity and to initiate class discussions that invite students to inhabit multiple perspectives and question the extent to which individual texts reinforce or subvert aspects of the dominant ideology. To make this argument, I begin by foregrounding a series of obstacles that I suggest teachers and students can ask of select works of young adult fiction, canonical as well as popular, as they work to meet the CCSS.

Challenges the CCSS Pose for YA Literature

Applebee’s (1993) comprehensive study of the literature curriculum in American secondary schools found that the 10 most frequently required book-length works in high school English classes were canonical. Nearly thirty years later, Stotsky’s (2010) national survey of the literature curriculum in public high schools identified a single young adult novel—Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson—among the 20 most frequently assigned book-length works in grades 9, 10, and 11. Citing statistics published by Renaissance Learning, the company responsible for the Accelerated Reader program, Stotsky reported that in 2008-2009, young adult fantasies accounted for 10 of the 16 books students in the top 10 percent of reading achievement in grades 9-12 read most frequently. A strong critic of young adult literature and an advocate of teaching canonical literature to promote close reading, Stotsky lamented that “almost all the books [adolescents] read are relatively easy to read” (p. 8).

If a divide exists between the literature students are required to read in high school English classes and the books they self-select, it is only likely to widen as school districts across the United States prepare to implement the CCSS. Driven by an almost evangelical belief that “the complexity of what students read matters,” the publishers of the CCSS have disseminated lists of so-called “exemplar texts,” which are said to reflect the level of complexity students ought to encounter in the different grades to ensure that they are college- and career-ready (National Governors Association, 2010b, p. 2). Though they caution against construing these lists, populated as they are by canonical titles, as an attempt on their part to influence the content of the secondary literature curriculum, it is difficult to construe their distribution as anything other than politically motivated.

Some critics will note, rightly so, that the literary titles the CCSS identify as exemplary texts are not mandated. In theory, this is true. In practice, however, there is no guarantee that school districts won’t treat them as such. To judge from the rigidity and mechanicalness with which schools in the area where I live and work are implementing the CCSS, the future of young adult literature in classrooms is anything but certain, especially underperforming districts where teachers and administrators are under pressure to prepare students to succeed on the high-stakes assessments that will eventually be tied to the CCSS.

This past spring I spoke with a high school English teacher who explained that she and other teachers in the school district where she works had, at the request of the superintendent of curriculum, met to select the literary texts they would require stu-
students in grades 9-12 to read the following year when the district planned to implement the CCSS. She explained that she and her colleagues were charged with the task of selecting texts from lists of exemplars, a result of central administration's desire to ensure that the literature students read in their English classes reflected the same level of complexity they assumed they would encounter when they sat to take standardized tests in the future. In the end, the texts the committee selected were, like the majority of titles on the published lists of exemplars, almost entirely canonical.

Teachers in another district, driven by a belief that out-of-school reading, like assigned reading, ought to prepare students to read more complex texts, instituted a policy prohibiting them from reading series books and works of speculative fiction—that is, fantasy, dystopian, and science fiction—for extra-curricular reading. In a private conversation, the school's librarian lamented that these were among the most frequently checked out books in the library, though she also sympathized with the teachers, who she suggested were under pressure to improve reading scores, and who she felt—rightly so—had the best interest of students at heart. The teachers, she explained, were simply responding to the value the CCSS, and subsequently the district, attached to the concepts of rigor and complexity.

I share these vignettes not to be critical of teachers, whose autonomy to determine what is in the best interest of their students is increasingly being stripped from them, but to demonstrate that the place of young adult literature in the secondary literature curriculum is anything but secure as school districts implement the CCSS. Moreover, I wish to illustrate the challenge we face as a field to reframe our arguments for teaching young adult literature in order to account for its ability to prepare students to meet the expectations prescribed by the CCSS.

Defending the emphasis the CCSS place on rigor and complexity, the groups responsible for producing the standards argue that, in the past fifty years, “K-12 texts have actually declined in sophistication, and relatively little attention has been paid to students’ ability to read complex texts independently” (National Governors Association, 2010b, p. 2). This claim warrants closer examination, as its veracity depends in part on how one defines “complexity.” If, for example, complexity is defined solely according to readability scores, which is all too often the case, then the statement is misleading, because it conflates difficulty with sophistication. Untangling this mixing of terms, Phelan (1999) states, “Difficulty is a measure of a text’s accessibility, while sophistication is a measure of its skill in bending means to ends” (p. xi). If, on the other hand, one's definition of textual complexity takes into consideration a work of literature's qualitative aspects, as the publishers of the CCSS claim to do, and which they define as “those aspects of text complexity best measured or only measurable by an attentive human reader” (National Governors Association, 2010b, p. 4), then there is no reason why more works of young adult fiction shouldn't occupy a place on lists of exemplar texts and in the high school literature curriculum.

If readability scores alone don't account for textual complexity, what does? There is reason to believe that the expectations readers bring to a text play a role in shaping their sense of its complexity. This assertion is supported by the work of various reader response theorists, including Rosenblatt (1978), who attributes the stance readers take toward a text—that is, whether they read it aesthetically or efferently—to cues they encounter in both the text and the environment in which they read the text. For Rosenblatt, the stance that readers take, rather than objective properties in the text itself, brings its literariness into view. Bleich (1978) makes a similar point, stating, "An observer is a subject, and his means of perception define the essence of the object and even its existence to begin with. An object is circumscribed and delimited by a subject's motives, his curiosities, and, above all, his language" (p. 18).

Fish (1980) extends this argument further, noting that the concept of literature is itself socially constructed, and that the way different interpreters read a text is subject to change over time. As a result he concludes that what a community of readers acknowledges as literature is also likely to vary. Specifically, he states, "Literature...is the product of a way of reading, of a community agreement about what will count as literature, which leads the members of the community to create literature" (p. 97, emphasis added). Extending his argument, one could argue that the interpretive strategies readers bring to bear on a text, young adult or otherwise, play a role in shaping not only their sense of its literary merit, but also its complexity. Asked to respond only to recall questions that concern elements of plot, for example, readers may fail to appreciate the complexity and multilayeredness of Albert Camus’ (1942/1988) The Stranger, a text that shares a readability score similar to the books in the Harry Potter series. Challenged to consider how the novel reflects tenets of existential philosophy, however, reader may find it more complex than it first appeared.

The preceding arguments suggest that textual complexity is not attributable only to a work of literature's objective properties, but that it is also contingent on the expectations readers bring to a text, and the way they take it up in the process of interpreting it. This assertion is supported by Nystrand (1991), whose research on classroom discourse led him to observe that "curriculum and instruction—what teachers ask students to do—are themselves significant factors in the difficulty of any work of literature studied in school" (p. 143, my emphasis). In making this argument, Nystrand reminds us that the questions teachers invite students to ask of a text and the opportunities they create for them to talk about the text in the context of discussions with others are integral in determining the extent of the challenge reading it poses for them.

As the above discussion suggests, the problem of gauging textual complexity is, well, complex. Still, there remain critics who, according to Daniels (2006), insist that young adult literature does not warrant serious “attention because it doesn’t offer enough substance to be included within the traditional literary canon” (p. 78). As the pressure on literacy educators to expose students to more complex texts builds, it is imperative that those of us who value young adult literature, and who see a place for it in the high school literature curriculum, reframe our arguments for teaching it. In an age of CCSS, justifying one's decision to teach a young adult novel because it is relevant to adolescents, or because it engages struggling and reluctant readers, important as these things are, is unlikely to persuade administrators concerned with preparing students to pass high-stakes standardized tests. If we hope to help young adult literature cross the boundary between popular culture and "Literature," we need to engage those who would marginalize it on their own terms, arguing for its sophistication, craftsmanship, and, yes, even its complexity. In doing so, we should be able to demonstrate that the young adult fiction we ask students to read is multilayered, is able to be read closely in much the same way as the classics, and is capable of...
helping students meet the CCSS. One way to accomplish this, I suggest, is to invite students to read young adult literature from the perspective of literary theory.

**Is Literary Theory Appropriate for High School Students?**

According to Culler (1997), the end goal of theory is "to show that what we take for granted as 'common sense' is in fact a historical construction, a particular theory that has come to seem so natural to us that we don't even see it as a theory" (p. 5). This includes "commonsense" views that construct young adult literature as a product of popular culture, and hence as a superficial form of entertainment void of literary merit or complexity. When one approaches individual works of young adult fiction from the standpoint of literary theory, it is possible to debunk that view. One might ask, however, whether it is appropriate to teach literary theory in high school English classes. I am not the first author to answer that question in the affirmative.

Having observed that class discussions about young adult novels, like those about canonical literature, often require students to do little more than recall information about plot, Soter (1999) characterizes teaching literary theory as an engaging and intellectually stimulating alternative to the way that literature has traditionally been taught in secondary English classes. Though she is not concerned with the application of theory to young adult literature per se, Appleman (2009) expresses a similar view, noting that when students read literature from the standpoint of theory they are accountable for constructing their own interpretations as opposed to blindly accepting those teachers impose on them. She consequently encourages teachers to expect "adolescents to inhabit theories comfortably enough to construct their own readings and to learn to appreciate the power of multiple perspectives" (pp. 7-8). It is worth noting that Appleman's argument, which shifts interpretive authority from teachers to students, echoes the emphasis the CCSS place on preparing students who are college- and career-ready.

Beach, Appleman, Hynds and Wilhelm (2006) ascribe a political function to the teaching of literary theory. Specifically, they argue that reading literature from the standpoint of theory enables students to recognize that "the literary texts [teachers] assign them to read are inscribed with issues of power and shaped by ideological influences as they are created and as they are read" (p. 182). As a result, they advocate creating opportunities for adolescents to ask how certain texts function to reinscribe or subvert aspects of the dominant ideology. Gillespie (2010), a high school English teacher who embraces literary theory in his own teaching, also celebrates its ability to make visible taken-for-granted assumptions about the world students inhabit. Beyond this, he regards asking students to read literature from the standpoint of theory as preparing them for the rigors of college reading, a learning outcome that calls to mind the emphasis the CCSS place on preparing students who are college- and career-ready.

When teachers ask students to read young adult literature through the lenses of literary theory, then, they simultaneously invite them to practice the kind of close reading the CCSS value and promote. In doing so, they shift interpretive authority from teacher to students, encouraging them to read independently, and to acknowledge that literary texts lend themselves to being read in multiple ways. Moreover, asking students to read young adult literature from the standpoint of theory prepares them to think critically about how texts function to reinscribe or subvert aspects of the dominant ideology. This is especially important in the case of young adult fiction, which Trites (2001) suggests is "designed to teach adolescents their place in the power structure," and which she characterizes as tending to convey some form of "ideological message that reinforces the need for the adolescent to conform to the status quo" (p. 480). Applying critical perspectives to young adult literature, on the other hand, can support students as they work to "unravel" the constructs that surround them and re-examine the relationships between appearance and reality (Appleman, 2009, p. 97). In the section to follow, I identify ways that teachers and students can approach young adult fiction—canonical as well as contemporary, and popular as well as literary—in a manner that enables them to meet the CCSS.

**Making Young Adult Fiction’s Complexity Visible**

A central expectation of the CCSS “is that all students must be able to comprehend texts of steadily increasing complexity as they progress through school” (National Governors Association, 2010b, p. 2). Such thinking has resulted in the production and dissemination of lists of exemplar texts that are said to embody the level of complexity students ought to encounter in the different grades. Unfortunately, relatively few works of young adult fiction are featured on lists for students in the upper grades, suggesting, through a process of omission, that the genre lacks complexity. Textual complexity is not synonymous with difficulty, however, nor is it attributable solely to a text’s objective features. Rather, as I have argued, our sense of a text’s complexity is influenced by a number of qualitative factors, including the expectations that we bring to it as readers, and the questions that we ask in the process of interpreting it.

Acknowledging this necessitates changing the way we approach preparing students for the CCSS. One need not ask, for example, which works of young adult fiction are best suited to meeting the CCSS, as such a question assumes that rigor and complexity reside in a text, as opposed to the activities teachers and students take part in around it. A more profitable question would ask which critical perspectives teachers can profitably pair with young adult novels to make visible their complexity and support students as they work to master the literate behaviors the CCSS prescribe. Given that defining different literary theories is beyond the scope of this article, I instead highlight a series of questions that teachers and students can ask of young adult novels as they work to meet the CCSS. To do so, I draw on my experiences teaching young adult fiction in both high school and college English classes to identify questions that I have explored with students as we’ve read both canonical young adult fiction and genres that are popular with contemporary adolescents, including speculative fiction, paranormal fiction, and graphic novels.

According to Appleyard (1990), “The adolescent reader looks to stories to discover insights into the meaning of life, values and beliefs worthy of commitment, ideal images, and authentic role models for imitation” (p. 14). This may explain why so many high school students I’ve worked with have been drawn to philosophical criticism. Throughout my teaching career, I have found that students seldom struggle to comprehend the plot of Robert Cormier’s (1974) The Chocolate War. Asked to read the same novel through the lens of philosophical criticism, however, and in doing so consider how Jerry Renault’s decision to “disturb the universe” embodies elements of existential philosophy, stu-
students, whether in high school or college, often find the same text considerably more challenging. Recognizing this, high school English teachers might profitably pair Cormier’s (1974) novel with Camus’ (1942/1988) The Stranger, a work of canonical fiction that explores similar themes and issues. Both texts focus on existential heroes condemned by their respective communities as a result of their decision not to comply with social conventions, and in both instances the characters’ decision to do so is motivated by the death of a loved one, the result of which leads them to contemplate their own mortality. To familiarize students with tenets of existential philosophy prior to reading these novels, I first ask them to read aloud and discuss excerpts that I select from Sartre’s (1985) Existentialism and Human Emotion, a text whose complexity few education pundits would question. Comparing and contrasting the treatment of existential philosophy in these texts requires students to integrate information in order to “analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics,” an expectation established by the CCSS (National Governors Association, 2010a, p. 35).

In a similar vein, students could read works of canonical young adult fiction with the intention of deconstructing otherwise taken-for-granted interpretations of them. S. E. Hinton’s (1967/2006) The Outsiders, for example, has historically occupied a place in the middle school literature curriculum, and is often celebrated for its allegedly provocative treatment of issues related to social class. By encouraging students to read the novel through what Appleman (2009) call a social class lens, however, teachers can problematize this interpretation and ask them to consider whether the novel is as subversive as it first appears. Confronted with the latter question, undergraduates in a young adult literature course I teach recently observed that the main solution Hinton seems to offer readers for dealing with poverty is that at-titude, not class, determines the quality of a person’s life. Moreover, they pointed out that Ponyboy’s unwavering credence in the power of education to help him rise above his material conditions reinforces the status quo, and hence the dominant ideology, by holding individuals, rather than institutions, accountable for poverty. To arrive at this conclusion, students first had to determine how the novel constructs a theme of rugged individualism, after which they revisited the text in search of evidence and details that allowed them to problematize that interpretation, thus meeting another expectation of the CCSS.

Textual complexity is not, of course, limited to works of canonical young adult fiction. To the contrary, teachers can use the questions that literary theory makes available to facilitate close readings of genres that are associated, often times pejoratively, with mainstream culture. This includes dystopian and paranormal fiction, two genres that currently enjoy widespread appeal with adolescents, boys and girls alike, and which often, though not always, take the form of series books. The novels that comprise Suzanne Collins’ Hunger Games series, for example, lend themselves to being read through the lens of gender criticism, meaning that students could ask whether characters such as Kat-niss, Peeta, and Gale reinforce or subvert traditional gender roles. The same question could be asked of Bella, Edward, and Jacob, the protagonists in Stephanie Meyer’s Twilight series. Indeed, a valuable assignment might ask students to compare and contrast the female protagonists in both series with the intention of determining whether they reinforce traditional female gender roles or construct new ones. Again, such an activity would hold students accountable for analyzing the way authors develop a similar topic in two or more texts, thus meeting a Common Core standard for reading.

Genre criticism presents another avenue teachers and students can travel to meet the CCSS. In fact, Rabinowitz and Smith (1998) offer what might well be a rationale for teaching young adult fiction in an age of CCSS when they propose that the study of genre ought to begin “with those works where the workings of genre are most evident...in many cases, this means looking care-fully and seriously at noncanonical, even formulaic, texts” (pp. 70-71). Prior to reading Mary Shelley’s (1818/1985) Frankenstein or Bram Stoker’s (1897/1981) Dracula, students could first read one of the novels in Rick Yancey’s brilliant Monstrumologist series, which recounts the horrors that befall an adolescent serving a renowned monster hunter in the nineteenth century. In doing so they could ask how the author simultaneously draws on and circumvents tropes and conventions associated with gothic fiction to construct the narrative. Likewise, prior to reading George Orwell’s (1949/1983) 1984 or Aldus Huxley’s (1946/1992) Brave New World, students could read one of the novels in Veronica Roth’s Divergent trilogy, James Dashner’s Maze Runner series, or Scott Westerfield’s Uglies to develop a list of conventions that are characteristic of dystopian fiction. In doing so, they could ask how each of the aforementioned authors replicates and subverts certain genre traditions. This would not only require them to evaluate the author’s purpose, but also to identify influences that shape the content and style of each story, thus allowing them to meet another Common Core standard.

A distinct benefit of the new standards is that they create opportunities for students to study non-traditional texts as they learn to “integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually” (National Governors Association, 2010a, p. 35). Graphic novels, which construct and convey a narrative using a combination of word and image and which are popular with many adolescents, lend themselves well to addressing this end. Recognizing that, teachers and students could read Kelly and Niimura’s (2010) I Kill Giants, a moving story about a young girl whose mother is dying of cancer, through the lens of psychological criticism and ask how the protagonist’s fantasy of slaying giants can be read as a metaphor for her internal struggle with death. More mature readers could read Pride of Baghdad, a visually sumptuous graphic novel by Brian K. Vaughan and Niko Henrichon (2006) which is set during the early days of the Second Persian Gulf War and which examines the adventures that befall four lions after they are released from a city zoo. Few students find the graphic novel difficult to read so long as they approach it as an animal story, but they find it considerably more complex when they are asked to read it as an allegory that aims to problematize the concept of freedom. Students in the middle grades could read Gene Luen Yang’s (2006) American Born Chinese with the intention of analyzing how the author “draws on themes...character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works” to construct a narrative (National Governors Association, 2010a, p. 37). High school students, on the other hand, could read one of the many graphic novels that retell the classics with the intention of “evaluating how each version interprets the source text” (p. 38).

Participating in discussions of the sort described above would help students appreciate that young adult fiction and graphic novels, like other literature they read in school, are capable of great complexity. As one AP student exclaimed after participating in
an after-school graphic novel reading group I facilitated, “I think we’ve had better discussions based on graphic novels than I have in class with The Crucible and other books. I think all of us have taken away just as much from our experiences reading graphic novels as we have from our classroom reading experience. Maybe more.” What better evidence that the “difficulty of any particular literary text ultimately depends on the standards that the literary community estabishes in treating and interpreting it” (Nystrand, 1991, p. 141)?

Conclusion

According to Martin (2012), “The number of young adult novels published each year has quadrupled in 12 years—from 3,000 in 1997 to 12,000 in 2009, when total sales exceeded $3 billion” (para. 5). Yet if the results of Stotsky’s (2010) national survey are to be believed, high school students are seldom required to read young adult literature in school. Instead, their literary diet is more often characterized by a heavy dose of the classics, a situation that, to judge from the abundance of canonical titles that appear on lists of exemplar texts, is unlikely to change in the age of CCSS.

Citing a time-honored argument for teaching young adult literature, namely, its ability to address issues that are relevant to adolescents, Soter and Connors (2009) argue that “relevance is but one reason for embracing young adult literature. It’s potential literary sophistication, coupled with its treatment of complex social issues, are equally important” (p. 66). As the emphasis the CCSS place on textual complexity threatens to undermine young adult literature’s already tenuous foothold in the high school literature curriculum, a decision to read it from the standpoint of literary theory can allow teachers to advocate for it on the same terms laid out by those who would marginalize it—namely, as a complex form of reading material that lends itself to close reading and challenges students to think critically about complex themes and issues.

Throughout this article I have argued that when one adopts a critical stance in relation to young adult novels it is possible to appreciate them as sophisticated, multilayered works of literature that are open to myriad interpretations and that are capable of challenging students in much the same way as the exemplar texts identified by the CCSS. At the same time, and as many teachers and librarians know, young adult literature is capable of engaging adolescent readers in ways that tend to elude canonical literature. I would add that if, as educators, we accept the argument that literature stands to teach us something about what it means to be human, then we are obliged to invite students to approach young adult literature with the same degree of thought and care that both we, and the creators of the CCSS, expect them to exhibit in reading the classics.

References


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help children and young adults learn about the world and consider ethical decisions people make within human circumstances. . . . that require sensitivity and empathy from anyone who reads them, talks about them, or uses them to understand more about who they might become in the world. Brittany Rose Collins offers great advice about teaching dark and difficult literature in her article in English Journal, Embracing discomfort seizes suffering, allowing it to become as noted above, in the perpetual molding that is the learning process. . . . Reframing arguments for teaching ya literature in an age of Common Core State Standards. Signal Journal, 35(3), 6-10. Connors, S. P. (2013). Weaving multimodal meaning in an after-school reading group. Visual Communication, 12(1), 27-53. Connors, S. P., & Sullivan, R. (2012). That easy: Creating assignments that blend old and new literacies. Uncommon Composing in the Age of Common Core: Multimodal Learning. ARTful Teaching Conference, Morrilton, AR, April. Connors, S. P. (2012). Guest lecturer, “It’s that easy: Creating assignments that blend old and new literacies.” Uncommon Composing in the Age of Common Core: Multimodal Learning. ARTful Teaching Conference, Morrilton, AR, April. Connors, S. P. (2011). Guest lecturer, “Critiquing Research Articles” for Cindy William’s CIED 5062, Literacies Across the Curriculum, March. Our Middle School & YA Lesson Plan bundle includes thirty first-rate lesson plans focused on teaching argument, grounded in the following texts: Animal Farm by George Orwell. Romeo & Juliet by William Shakespeare. This lesson bundle includes the pieces of the puzzle necessary to engage students in a compelling campaign-building project — through which they are asked to select a meaningful problem, to craft a sound argument, and to bring it to life as an actionable campaign! Grab it now for only $5.99! Published April 27, 2016. Beowulf Unit. Our Beowulf unit is available for purchase at a discounted rate as part of our British Literature Bundle. This unit condenses dozens of hours of work into a simple, premium-quality lesson plan bundle. When presenting an argument, the possible counter-arguments should be taken into account. Thus, an academic argument can be called as an evidence-based defense of a complex issue. Features of an Effective Argument. Consider the following quotation by Kenneth Burke (1941), Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. The Common Core ELA Standards The first Common Core ELA anchor standard is the basis of Common Core close reading. One of the tools of the scholarly trade is citing evidence. Schools should teach children this skill. But the Common Core states place strict stipulations on what evidence counts to earn full credit on assignments or assessments: It must be verbatim (text specific) and from the provided text (text dependent). In the next section, I offer illustrations of what this means for the kinds of work that students do in the Common Core era. In other words, the official Common Core literature provide data in an evaluation of the standards, but one should also study the consequences of the Common Core. democracy & education, vol 26, n-o 1. feature article.