



Content Area Literacy Task Force



CALTF Newsletter
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From the CALTF Team: Integrating Subjects

Tricia McKenny, English

It is said that no man is an island, but in teaching it can sometimes feel that way. We get so focused on our own content and our own requirements that we occasionally forget to step back and look at how everything we are asking of our students fits together.

How does what they are learning in Social Studies relate to what they read in English? How does the analysis they use in Art class relate to the analysis asked of them in a Math class?

If we can't make these connections it is impossible to expect our students to. It is important to remember that critical thinking skills require students to make connections and do higher level thinking regardless of the "class" they are in.

At CALTF, one of our basic beliefs is that literacy

skills transcend content areas. These are foundational skills that students need in order to communicate any content. For this month's issue, we wanted to focus on ways we have integrated other subjects with ours in order to expand our students' thinking and literacy skills.

For instance, one of the most powerful changes in language I use in my classes came from a presentation by Pete Edwards (Arts and Humanities teacher at Madison Central High School) at the ECU Writing Project 2012 Summer Institute. Pete was presenting about the analysis he asked his students to do with artwork and he was able to boil it down to three questions:

What do you see?

What does it mean?

How do you know?

While Pete used it to discuss artwork with his students, I realized it was the same kind of

thinking required of my students when we are discussing literature. Using those questions, and constantly referring to them whether we are discussing poems, plays, or novels, shows my students that analysis at all levels comes down to the same steps.

Since Pete's demo, I have made it a point to begin each unit with a visual piece of artwork to analyze, then progress to songs, and then transition to analyzing our literature. Breaking the process into these pieces as constant steps helps my students scaffold their thinking with the complex literature pieces, while reminding them that all analysis is the same. That is the end goal, showing them that they are capable of these literacy skills and building the confidence to achieve.

Coming In Future Editions:
December/January: Digital Literacy
February: Text Complexity
March: On-Demand March Madness
April/May: End of Year Reflective Writing

Join our Twitter Chat!
Follow #CALTF the first
Tuesday of each month from
6-7 pm to join our literacy
conversations!

Text Complexity – Creating Text Sets

“The whole is greater than the sum of its parts” – Aristotle
Jennifer Bernhard, Clark County Schools

***This is a monthly column provided to CALTF that will focus on the issue of
 TEXT COMPLEXITY as it relates to literacy.***

Undoubtedly our common understanding is that the *be all and end all* of specific content knowledge cannot be one single text, and that well-rounded information on a subject can best be delivered by an interrelated set of texts. It is also likely that we have all experienced disappointing responses from students who did not understand the method in our madness in challenging them with lots of black ink in numerous texts. Fortunately, since this is indeed a common experience, we now have the benefit of common core resources to guide us to be better prepared. A brief summary follows of one such valuable resource from the [Council of Chief State School Officers](#) to help us create more meaningful text sets:

Step One: Identify the Anchor Text and Formulate a Line of Inquiry for the Set

-The anchor text should be a grade-level complex text that supports inquiry and is worthy of the time and attention of students.

Step Two: Use Databases to Research Texts around the Topic

-Several databases facilitate organizing texts according to quantitative measures:

[The Lexile Framework for Reading](#), [Scholastic Book Wizard](#), [SIRS Discoverer](#), [EBSCOHost](#)

Step Three: Evaluate Texts for Inclusion in the Set to Determine “Worthiness”

-Does the text contribute to a range and balance of text types and formats in the overall set?

-Is the text worthy of student time and attention?

-Does the text contribute to a range and balance of text types and formats in the overall set?

-Does the quantitative measure of the text place it in the grade band of the anchor text? A range of texts spanning the band will support student-knowledge-building over the course of the unit.

Step Four: Refine, Finalize, and Produce Text Set

-Share your final product with your colleagues, including title, author, quantitative measure, source, text type, and brief summary/justification for each text.

The following is sample set for *The Constitution*, Grades 6-8, from the same resource:

Anchor Text:

Excerpt from **Words We Live By: Your Annotated Guide to the Constitution** by Linda A. Monk (1110L)

Genre: Informational

Companion Texts:

“5 Things to Know About the Constitution” by Scholastic News (830L), *Thurgood Marshal and the Supreme Court* by Deborah Kent (900L), *The Great Little Madison* by Jean Fritz (1030L), “Hamilton and the Constitution” by PBS (1080L), “The Making of the Constitution” by David White (1140L), *Building a New Nation* by Christopher Collier (1150L), “Amending the Constitution” by Timothy K. Dyhouse (1220L)

The bottom line is our Standards emphasize the role of close engagement with texts to build students’ knowledge. Text sets are one tool for us to use in planning units of instruction to help students meet the demands of the Standards, as well as demonstrating that *the whole really is greater than the sum of its parts*.

Using Writing and Students' Lives to Learn about the Five Themes of Geography

Rhonda Orttenburger, Social Studies/LA

If we're to be in the business of education rather than that of schooling, one of our long-range goals must be to help students become life-long learners. Developing their ability to use writing-to-learn and their confidence and enjoyment in the process and its results should then be one of the highest educational priorities. Learning is the quintessential human activity. Language is the most powerful learning tool we have. All students have a right to discover--or, perhaps, rediscover--the joys of learning and we should all recognize that writing-to-learn is one of the best means of helping them to do so.

-John Mayher, et. al.

When teaching the five themes of geography in my Social Studies classes at the beginning of the year, I begin with a Five Themes Geography Notebook. This writing to learn notebook is divided into five sections – Location, Place, Human-Environment Interaction, Movement, and Region. Students begin by connecting these themes to their own lives. When we study the last theme – region – we use the other four themes to review our state regions, but extend our learning to the regions of the USA and the world so that we find our place on earth.

Location: When teaching location, I begin with absolute location and show our school's specific coordinates. Students also learn the address of our school. After asking students how often they would give someone directions using the coordinates of our school's absolute location, I introduce relative location and discuss

ways to explain directions using positional words. *We are surrounded by a golf course. We are one mile from our school board office. Turn left at the intersection of Lancaster Road and Barnes Mill Road.* In their notebooks, students use positional words to write directions from their house to our school; thus connecting learning and their real world.

Place: In the same manner, when teaching place I first teach descriptive language. Then I ask them to describe their bedroom, the school cafeteria during lunch, the playground during recess, and their neighborhood.

Human-Environment Interaction: This theme is always the most difficult one for me to teach so I focus on our school and community. I provide pictures of our school and city from the past and today; then ask students to think about how our city has changed or been modified by people by noting both positive

and negative effects.

Movement: When writing about movement, we begin with ways we go to and from school. Next, we list ways that people, goods, or ideas travel to and from our community. We also focus on why people, goods, or ideas travel to and from our community.

Regions: At that point, we are ready for a short review of the regions of Kentucky because our third grade ends the year with a Kentucky unit that focuses on the physical and human similarities and differences of regions in our state. Then we expand our learning to include the **regions** of the USA (fourth grade content). During our study of regions of the USA, students "visit" a tourist attraction in a region. One part of the assignment requires them to use maps to write directions to their attraction's **location**.

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Integrating Music with Other Content Areas

Sandy Allen, Elementary Music

A few years ago, Apple coined the phrase, “There’s an app for that.” In the realm of education, most music teachers would tell you, “There’s a song for that.” I often have classroom teachers approach me and ask if I have a song to go along with a particular lesson or theme they are teaching. Teaching second grade students the water cycle? There’s a song for that. Studying the Civil War in fifth grade? Boy, do I have songs for that! Third graders trying to learn their multiplication facts? How about a multiplication rap? And how many of us learned the alphabet by singing the ABC song?

I have a bulletin board that I usually put up at the beginning of each school year that has the word MUSIC running vertically through the other content areas. I explain to my students that music is a part of every subject they will study in school. And learning about music can help them learn what they need to know in every content area. Song lyrics? That’s reading. How is sound made? That’s science. Rhythm is fractions. Yes, we’re studying math. Music is the perfect vehicle to reinforce content area learning. I have middle school and high school students that can still sing the names of all 50 states because in fifth grade they sang the song, “Fifty Nifty United States.”

Don’t be shy about collaborating with your building’s music teacher to include music in your content area instruction. More than likely, he or she has a song for that.

Music Resources:

Schoolhouse Rock – songs and videos for every content area

Music K-8 Magazine – Original songs for holidays, content area learning, etc.

Donald Duck in MathMagicLand – animated film showing how mathematics is used in music and science

American History Through Folksong – A six volume set of CDs with songs and historical narration by Keith & Rusty McNeil

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We describe the similarities and differences of regions based on the human and physical characteristics of the **places**. We expand our study using **human-environment interaction** to understand the history of our country and the changes/modifications made by people. When we study change over time as a part of our region unit, we use **movement** as a basis for studying the migration of people from the Old World to the New World, as well as changes in transportation. We then write about how the **movements** of people, goods, and ideas have changed over time and the reasons for these changes.

In conclusion, this writing to learn geography notebook is a valuable tool for thinking through key concepts or ideas, using content vocabulary in writing, and for gathering research. As they write, students gain a deeper understanding of the content. Later in the year, this tool is an important informational resource when writing to publish informational texts.

Integrating Subjects—History and English Maggie Brewer, Social Studies

I find collaboration in history to come quite naturally. Every subject has a history and history teachers can often provide some insights into what is being taught in another content area.

One subject that I find has a great amount of overlap with history is English. While sophomore English classes are learning World Literature, we are learning World Civilizations. While English classes are learning American Literature as juniors, we are studying U.S. history. This parallel can provide for great collaborative opportunities.

At Boyle County, some of our teachers are using Literacy Design Collaborative modules to implement writing in our classrooms. English teacher, Leigh Koch and I had several students who overlapped in our Honors classes so we decided to create writing prompts that would correspond to lessons taught in both of our classes. We found that prejudice was a common theme so we bought copies of *The Nature of Prejudice* by Gordon Allport to use in each class. Leigh then created a graphic organizer highlighting Allport's "Scale of Prejudice" that we would use in both classes when examining text.

In Leigh's class students read novels including *Chinese*

Cinderella by Adeline Yen Mah, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini and *Night* by Elie Wiesel. In my class we examined primary sources dealing with various types of prejudice including issues of religion in the Renaissance and World War II, sexism during the Enlightenment, racism during the French Revolution, and ageism during the Industrial Revolution. Each class culminated with the examination of prejudice from a different perspective. In Social Studies, students were asked to define prejudice and explain why it exists in our world whereas in English they were to ask a question about prejudice and then provide an answer using research.

It was wonderful to see the way that students carried information back and forth from each of our classes; how they were able to use articles, texts, and discussions from each of our subject areas to support their findings and arguments in the other. In reflection, we learned that it was important to stagger our final papers, that assigning both around that same time was a bit much; however, as a whole the assignment was a success. I always look forward to collaboration with my colleagues, either in one of our classes or in creating a lesson to use together. Two brains are definitely better than one.

Using Fiction to Teach Historical Concepts

Collected by
**Katie McClain, Library
Media Specialist**

Chains by Laurie Halse Anderson (Slavery, American Revolution)

The Boy Who Dared by Susan Campbell Bartoletti (World War II)

Train to Somewhere by Eve Bunting (Orphan Trains)

Click, Clack Moo by Doreen Cronin (Unions)

The Mighty Miss Malone by Christopher Paul Curtis (Great Depression)

Ox-Cart Man by Donald Hall (19th Century England)

The Lions of Little Rock by Kristin Levine (Civil Rights)

Molly Bannaky by Alice McGill (Indentured Servants, Slavery)

Uncle Jed's Barbershop by Margaree King Mitchell (Great Depression)

Woods Runner by Gary Paulsen (American Revolution)

Pink and Say by Patricia Polacco (Civil War)

Casey Over There by Staton Rabin (World War I)

America's White Table by Margot Theis Raven (Vietnam War)

Countdown by Deborah Wiles (Cold War)

Coolies by Yin (Immigration)

Integrating Subjects: Collaborative Teaching and Rubric Construction

Lee Alan H. Roher, Ed.D., Mathematics

As I started to assign papers in my math classes, I have found students who can show me their mathematical knowledge in a well-written paper. Other students showed mathematical knowledge in a paper that was not written quite so well. I think it is important that a student be able to communicate mathematics in an appropriate way. I decided to change my rubric to guide students in good writing practices.

I examined my own writing process first. When I was writing my dissertation, I would have three different people read and edit my chapters before I would submit them to my chairperson. My readers all looked at my paper from a different perspective so they each had something

different to offer in editing my paper. I decided my students needed to have a peer edit their papers. The peer editor document follows the assignment rubric. This document is not just a check sheet but there is space available for the editor to give feedback regarding their peer's paper. In addition to peer editing, each student needed to score their own paper using the scoring rubric. The self grading document can be a check list type paper. Next I worked on the rubric. Part of my rubric specifically addresses the math content and knowledge that I am assessing. The other part of the rubric addresses the Language Arts and page set up of the paper. I was confident in the math content part of the rubric. The Language Arts section is what I felt I needed help with. I conferred with English teachers and Social

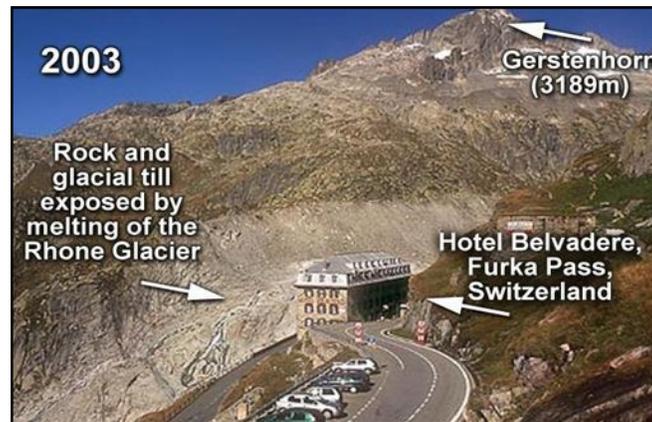
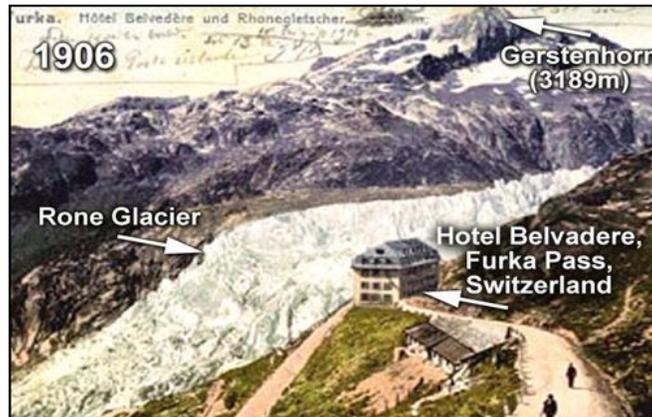
Studies teachers to see what they thought was important to include in a rubric for paper, and I added criteria regarding grammar, typos, punctuation, appropriate citations, and clear and concise introductory and concluding paragraphs.

When I shared this process with other writers and educators they were really excited to see a rubric that had not only content area criteria but also Language Arts criteria. We all discussed it would be great if teachers could collaborate, not only on constructing rubrics, but collaborate on designing assignments that are authentic in language arts in addition to the content area. The rubric and peer editing document can be found [on my webpage](#).

Integrating Science and Geography

Lisa Antoniou, Science

In the teaching of global warming in my classroom, my students were charged with writing an argumentative piece about their claim on global warming. In order to offer alternative pieces of evidence, I combined before and after geographical pictures of Rhone Valley for them to consider.



Postcard Activity: Imagine that you took both of these photographs. You took the first picture when you were 10 years old and vacationing with your parents. You took the second picture when you retired and took a trip on your own. Write a postcard describing each visit to the area. Some questions you should answer:

1. What might you have done?
2. What clothing and supplies did you bring?
3. What was the weather like?
4. What did the landscape look like?

This newsletter is a publication of the Eastern Kentucky University Writing Project,

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Content Area Literacy Task

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