

# SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN A TIME OF CORE STANDARDS

English Language Arts  
**Grades PreK–2**



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**NCTE**

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# I

## Observing the Common Core State Standards

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## © Introduction

Not long ago I was driving a van full of youngsters and heard a voice from the back say, “I hate, I hate, I hate the MEAP.” (The MEAP is Michigan’s state test of math and English language arts [ELA].) I recognized the voice as that of a good student, diligent in every way. Her class had just spent a month preparing for and then taking the MEAP, and she was feeling frustrated by the time spent and anxious about her performance.

That plaintive voice reminded me of concerns I’ve heard expressed about the latest chapter in the standards movement. The appearance of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has aroused a variety of responses, some of them filled with anxiety and resentment. It’s easy to get worried about issues of alignment, curricular shifts, and new forms of assessment. And it’s frustrating, after carefully developing state ELA standards, to have to put them aside in favor of the CCSS.

Yet, responses to the CCSS have also been positive. Some teachers have said that the grade-specific standards are helpful because they provide useful details about learning goals for students. Others have noted that the CCSS can help them address the needs of transient students because teachers in different schools will be addressing similar learning goals. Still others have commented that the CCSS can provide a lens through which they can examine their own teaching practices. As one teacher put it, “Looking at the standards made me realize that I wasn’t giving much attention to oral language.”

In the midst of all these responses stands the reality that the CCSS are now part of the educational landscape. It is also true that these standards do not replace the principles that guide good teaching. Regardless of new mandates, some things remain constant. One such principle focuses on the fact that teachers think first of their students, trying to understand their learning needs, developing effective ways to meet those needs, and continually affirming that they are being met. This book, like all four volumes in this series, is written with and by teachers who remain deeply committed to their students and their literacy learning. It is a book addressed to teachers like you.

No one knows as much about your students as you do. You understand the community that surrounds the school and helps to shape their life experiences. You have some information about their family and may even know their parents or guardians personally. You can tell when they are having difficulty and when they are feeling successful. You have watched their body language, scanned their faces, listened to their voices, and read enough of their writing to have some ideas about what matters to them. Your knowledge about your students guides the instructional choices you make, and it shapes your response to any mandate, including the CCSS.

Your knowledge about students is connected to your knowledge of assessment. You have a lot of experience with finding out what students have learned and what

they still need to learn. You probably already know about the importance of *authentic assessment*, measures of learning that are connected with work students can be expected to do outside of class as well as in it. No doubt you use formative assessment, measures of learning that give students feedback rather than grades, as a regular part of instruction. For example, you probably make sure that students respond to one another's written drafts as they develop a finished piece of writing. You may have individual conferences with student writers or offer marginal comments and suggestions on their drafts. Or perhaps you meet individually with students to hear them read aloud or tell you about what they have been reading. Whatever type of formative assessment you use, you probably use it to guide instructional choices.

You may have read about the principles for learning adopted by NCTE and other subject-matter associations, principles that position literacy at the heart of learning in all subjects, describe learning as social, affirm the value of learning about learning, urge the importance of assessing progress, emphasize new media, and see learning in a global context. These principles, like others articulated by NCTE, provide a North Star to guide instruction regardless of specific mandates, and you probably recognize, as most accomplished teachers do, that teaching based on such principles will foster student achievement.

Because you are concerned about the learning of *all* of your students, you probably try to find ways to affirm the wide variety of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds that students bring into the classroom. No doubt you are interested in taking multiple approaches to reading, writing, speaking, and listening so that you can engage as many students as possible. Taking this stance convinces you that continual growth and innovation are essential to student achievement, especially when new standards are being introduced.

This book is designed to support you in meeting the challenges posed by the CCSS. It celebrates new visions of innovation and the renewal of long-held visions that may have become buried in the midst of day-to-day obligations. It reinforces a focus on student learning by demonstrating ways of addressing these standards while also adhering to NCTE principles of effective teaching. It does this by, first, examining the CCSS to identify key features and address some of the most common questions they raise. The second section of this book moves into the classrooms of individual teachers, offering snapshots of instruction and showing how teachers developed their practices across time. These classroom snapshots demonstrate ways to address learning goals included in the CCSS while simultaneously adhering to the principles of good teaching articulated by NCTE. In addition to narratives of teaching, this section includes charts that show, quickly, how principles and standards can be aligned. Finally, this section offers suggestions for professional development, both for individuals and for teachers who participate in communities of practice. Thanks to NCTE's Connected Community, you can join in a community of practice that extends across

local and state boundaries, enabling you to share ideas and strategies with colleagues from many parts of the country. Embedded throughout this section are student work samples and many other artifacts, and the Connected Community includes many more materials on which you can draw and to which you can contribute. The final section of this book recognizes that effective change requires long-term planning as well as collaboration among colleagues, and it offers strategies and materials for planning units of study articulating grade-level expectations and mapping yearlong instruction.

Voices in the back of your mind, like the “I hate, I hate” voice in the back of my van, may continue to express frustrations and anxieties about the CCSS, but I am confident that the teachers you will meet in this book along with the ideas and strategies offered will reinforce your view of yourself as a professional educator charged with making decisions about strategies and curriculum to advance the learning of your students.

Anne Ruggles Gere  
Series Editor

# Demystifying the Common Core State Standards

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I strongly believe that interpreting standards based on the needs, knowledge, and communities of one's own students is essential. I worry about educators who feel that standards are "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." I worry that too many teachers are frightened away from teaching anything that isn't packaged, scripted, mandated, or tested. By telling our own teaching stories, we can empower each other to use standards as points of departure for integrating curriculum, supporting student inquiry, and teaching critically.

—MARY COWHEY, SECOND-GRADE TEACHER

The words of second-grade teacher Mary Cowhey set the tone for the book you are about to read. Like the other early childhood educators who are highlighted in this book, she teaches with deep knowledge of literacy theory and practice (*how* literacy is learned and taught, *what* literate human beings know, and how they *use* that knowledge), confidence in every child, and a commitment to engaging students in ways that motivate, challenge, and lead to achievement. This knowledge and dedication reflects the spirit of new and experienced teachers across the country who have high expectations for their students, but who do not equate those expectations with *standardization* or one-size-fits-all views of teaching and learning. They teach successfully within and beyond standards because they see them as resources to be used in concert with other resources, in particular, their own professional knowledge and commitment to building instruction from the expertise that children bring to their classrooms. They refuse to settle for policies and practices that would have them view students as test scores or that ignore the wealth of cultural resources within and beyond the school walls.

This book is written for new and experienced *teachers*, *administrators*, and *policy-makers* as they work to make this kind of innovative and inspirational teaching a reality in a time of Common Core State Standards (CCSS). We write to *administrators* because we believe that their positions are essential in ensuring the teacher's role as instructional decision maker and in creating school cultures where professional

learning and culturally responsive teaching are the norm. We write to *teachers* in support of their commitment to building knowledge and sustaining the innovative spirit that allows them to make a difference for every child. We write to *policymakers* with alternatives to mandating programs because we recognize how easily teachers' confidence and spirit can be taken away when mandates allow little room to use knowledge of theory, practice, and the children in their classrooms.

In a nutshell, we write to remind every educator that *inspirational and innovative teaching in a time of standards is not only possible, it is essential*. Standards need not paralyze us. We can work within and beyond existing systems without compromising great teaching. At the same time, we have a responsibility to take action to change systems (policies, practices, and standards) that oppress inspirational teaching, reduce teaching to skills-only fragments and scripted programs, or lead to labeling students and grading schools and teachers. Thus, while the ultimate goal of this book is to provide ideas and insights about supporting students in a time of core standards, it is also about supporting teachers, administrators, and policymakers in wisely interpreting standards—using them, not being used by them (Mills, 2005)—so they can continue to champion teaching that helps students develop as competent and critical problem solvers who will make a difference in their own lives and the lives of others.

## **Reading This Book**

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To accomplish the goals outlined above, this book is organized in three major sections, outlined below.

### **Section I: Observing the Common Core State Standards**

This section provides details about the history and organization of the standards, followed by questions and responses that reflect myths and concerns likely to be raised about the interpretation and implementation of these standards.

### **Section II: Teachers and Students in Classrooms**

Nine early-childhood teachers invite you into their classrooms as they share teaching and learning moments that build from students' strengths, interests, and needs in culturally responsive ways. Each vignette is followed by a description of the teacher's journey toward understanding how to address standards without compromising teaching that makes a difference.

Specific teaching moments are then charted to identify their connections to NCTE principles and beliefs and the Common Core State Standards.

### **Section III: Planning the Big Picture**

In this section, thoughts are shared about how teachers and their administrators might reflect and begin to plan as they consider how to actualize the ideas presented in Sections I and II.

## **Guiding Principles: Foundations to the Wise Interpretation of Standards**

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Underlying each section of this book are guiding principles drawn from the expertise of teachers, administrators, and researchers as well as from NCTE principles and beliefs (see Appendix B). These are key concepts that we believe to be foundational to the wise interpretation of standards and to “equity and excellence in education” (Boutte & Hill, 2006). As you read, look for ways that these principles appear in ideas, examples, and resources. These principles define teaching that makes a difference as grounded in commitments to

1. Starting with *the child*
2. *Developing caring relationships* with students and families
3. *Implementing culturally responsive teaching* that
  - a. Values and utilizes resources from homes and communities (languages, literacies, worldviews, ways of being) and students’ cross-cultural expertise.
  - b. Maintains high expectations for every student without standardizing knowledge, children, or approaches to learning.
  - c. Develops a critical consciousness by creating opportunities to explore multiple perspectives (voices heard and unheard) as students examine and create texts in pursuit of making a difference for themselves and others.
4. *Assessing knowledge* in ways that are culturally relevant and that inform instruction day-to-day, moment-to-moment
5. *Building professional knowledge* and using that knowledge to generate curriculum, plan for instruction, and effect educational reform
6. *Advocating for educational equity and excellence*

## **First Steps in Demystifying: Reading the Fine Print**

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Reading the fine print is important when we encounter any document. This is especially true when interpreting standards. Understanding the fine print means we are more likely to be guided by actual information than by “they say you have to” rumors. A close read of standards and other educational guidelines provides firsthand knowledge so that issues can be addressed if policies and practices reflect partial reads or narrow interpretations. So, in the spirit of reading the fine print, we begin by providing an overview of the Common Core State Standards, their history and content.

### ***Common Core State Standards: Origins and Implementation***

The Common Core State Standards for the English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics were released in June 2010 after being developed as an initiative of the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Feedback was also provided by members of the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and the National Council of Teachers of English, among other organizations. The full texts of the ELA standards, along with other explanatory materials (including the current list of states that have adopted them), are available at <http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards/english-language-arts-standards>. While these standards are described as having been developed to put authority in the hands of states and school districts, it is important to know that incentives for states to adopt the standards were offered in the form of competitive federal grants. So, while the development of the standards was funded by the governors and state schools chiefs with additional support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and others, there are also connections to federal government initiatives.

In the states that have formally adopted them, the CCSS will replace state standards. States have the right to add 15 percent to them, which means that elements of the state standards could be preserved or new standards could be developed. The timing of implementation varies from one state to the next.

### ***Common Core State Standards: Assessment***

In September of 2010, two multi-state consortia, the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium, were funded—as a part of the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top federal grant program (from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009)—to develop

assessments to accompany the CCSS. By the time this book is in print, the assessment development phase will be close to completion. Field-testing is scheduled to take place during 2012 and full implementation (in states that have adopted the standards) in 2014. At this point, it is not known what the assessments will look like; preliminary documents indicate that formative as well as summative assessment will play a role, that computers may be involved in both administration and scoring, and that some parts of the assessment, such as writing, may occur over multiple days. For updates on the development of these assessments, check the following websites: <http://www.achieve.org/PARCC> and <http://www.k12.wa.us/SMARTER/default.aspx>.

We hope that readers will use the discussion of assessment in this book, as well as in other resources, to consider what needs to happen in their schools, districts, and states so that assessments will be locally determined, culturally and linguistically appropriate and supportive, and focused primarily on assessments that inform day-to-day instruction, without dictating, constraining, or leading to the labeling of students or the grading of teachers and/or schools.

### ***Common Core State Standards: Content and Organization***

In a nutshell, the ELA standards address four basic areas for K–2: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language. These areas are proposed as an *integrated model of literacy*. There is no advocacy for separating them instructionally. The intent is that they should be fluidly interwoven throughout the school day.

At first glance, the organization of the CCSS document seems complex, but if you cut to the chase, it can be pretty easy to understand and to put into perspective as one of many educational resources. Viewed in this way, you should be confident in continuing to teach in ways that are the most effective for *you and your students*.

A brief explanation: Each area (Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking, and Language) is organized into categories. For example, under *Writing*, the categories are (a) text type and purposes, (b) production and distribution of writing, (c) research to build and present knowledge, and (d) range of writing. This is where the standards are found. First there are Anchor Standards. These are merely overarching standards that cross grade levels, K–12. Each anchor standard is broken down into specifics for each grade level (see an example in Figure 1.1, which outlines two of the anchor standards for writing in K–2). The idea is that knowledge about a skill or idea builds from one year to the next. We know that knowledge is never acquired in such a linear fashion, so, as always, teachers will plan for instruction that takes into account the recursive nature of learning. In other words, skills, strategies, and content are revisited in new ways throughout the school day, the academic year, and from year to year.

<b>Writing: Production and Distribution of Writing</b>			
<b>K–5 Anchor Standards for This Category</b>	<b>How the Anchor Standard Looks in Kindergarten</b>	<b>How the Anchor Standard Looks in Grade 1</b>	<b>How the Anchor Standard Looks in Grade 2</b>
Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.	With guidance and support from adults, respond to questions and suggestions from peers and add details to strengthen writing as needed.	With guidance and support from adults, focus on a topic, respond to questions and suggestions from peers, and add details to strengthen writing as needed.	With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing.
Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.	With guidance and support from adults, explore a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.	With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.	With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.

**FIGURE 1.1:** Sample anchor standards for writing, K–2.

## **Interpreting the Fine Print: Myths, Questions, Concerns, and Advice**

It is easy to look at any standards document and develop narrow visions for what is possible in the classroom. However, much of that has to do with the way that standards are interpreted and the myths or rumors that tend to develop as a result. Every teacher and administrator knows how important it is to interrupt those myths. You know the kind of myths we’re talking about; they usually start with “They say you have to” or “You aren’t allowed to.” Again and again, we hear about new and experienced teachers losing their creative drive or leaving the profession altogether because they feel bombarded with “They say you have to” directives that contradict their hard-earned professional knowledge (Long et al., 2006; Meier, 2002). Often, those directives turn out to be myths perpetuated because of misinterpreted administrative suggestions, unquestioned traditions, or unfounded rumors. And sometimes directives are real and need to be evaluated and addressed. So the first step in interpreting the fine print of any set of standards means getting to the bottom of comments such as “They say you can only teach Language Arts from 9:00 to 10:30” or “We’re not allowed to read aloud more than ten minutes” or “You have to use these books.”

The following pages are organized around key questions that reflect these kinds of myths, as well as questions that reflect important issues raised in a time of standards. The purpose is to prevent narrow or inaccurate interpretations of the Common Core

State Standards by describing their open-ended nature and assurance of professional autonomy. The responses to myths and questions also include ideas, insights, and resources for further study.

### **Are standards intended to be a curriculum, *the* curriculum?**

No. This is a perfect example of the importance of reading the fine print. The CCSS are not *the* curriculum or even *a* curriculum. The language of the standards materials makes it clear that “teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.” This means that mandating packaged curricula and scripted programs is not an appropriate response to standards. As you will see in the classroom examples later in the book, teachers can easily meet standards while maintaining the autonomy to create curriculum by drawing on and deepening knowledge of their children, theory, and practice. To put standards in perspective with regard to teacher autonomy, it may be helpful to keep a few key phrases from the Common Core in mind:

“Standards are not a curriculum.”

“Standards do not tell teachers how to teach.”

“Standards are a first step.”

“Skills in these areas should not be handled in isolation.”

“Standards are not the only thing that is needed for our children’s success.”

### **Will my curriculum be narrowed?**

No. There is nothing in the Common Core State Standards that mandates narrowing curriculum from teachers’ visions for what will engage, intrigue, and fascinate students. *However*, it is important to be alert to interpretations of standards that may lead to narrower views. Too often, when interpreted through a narrow lens, curriculum focuses on discrete and isolated skills and restricted content. Requirements begin to appear that lead to curricular cloning from classroom to classroom. Student interests, prior knowledge, and cultural relevance are too easily pushed to the back burner or ignored altogether and “student-centered teaching . . . go[es] by the wayside” (Sleeter & Combleth, 2011, p. 58). This, in turn, has a profoundly negative effect on student learning and teacher morale (Nieto, 2003). It is important to remember

that, just as these standards are not a curriculum, they do not dictate breadth of curriculum or the means by which teachers support student learning. The standards materials make it clear that teachers determine what, when, and how to teach, making individual decisions about the materials they use, the students they target, and the duration of each lesson.

### **What’s the relationship between the Common Core State Standards and my state’s standards?**

There may well be some overlap between the Common Core State Standards and the standards developed by your state, particularly when you look at the more global goals of the Anchor Standards. Also, states adopt the CCSS with the agreement that it is possible to supplement them with up to 15 percent of state standards. So, some state standards may be preserved, but it is likely that these new standards will replace existing ones.

### **The Common Core State Standards include lists of *exemplar texts*. Do I have to use them?**

No. The word *exemplar* should not be interpreted to mean “required.” Exemplar texts are offered as *suggestions* for the kinds of topics and genres that teachers *might* include in their teaching. For example, one list of exemplar texts is organized under the heading “Staying on Topic within a Grade and Across Grades: How to Build Knowledge Systematically in English Language Arts.” These titles are used as examples to suggest how teachers can cluster reading around a specific topic so that students can build content knowledge while they are developing as readers. This *in no way implies* (a) that the suggested books are required reading or (b) that students at one grade level should not read texts suggested for students at another grade level.

How might teachers select texts that are appropriate for their students? First, it is important for administrators and policymakers to trust teachers’ judgment as they select texts based on their knowledge of each child and culturally responsive literacy theory and practice. At the same time, administrators and teachers will want to access high-quality resources to support their ever-growing knowledge about text selection.

Many teachers also find success creating texts for and with their students. In Section II of this book, you will read about first-grade teacher Janice Baines, who develops books for her classroom that are culturally

relevant and therefore immediately compelling and motivating. For example, she began last year by creating a book based on a pop-culture song familiar to her students. To the rhythms of “Pretty Boy Swag” (Soulja Boy, 2010), Janice wrote new words to create “I Can Read Swag.” The lyrics were printed and bound in individual books for use during Independent Reading and small-group instruction and projected on the SMART Board for large-group shared reading. She used the books to help children develop fluency while learning about word patterns and high-frequency words among a range of other literacy skills. “I Can Read Swag” was not an exemplar text on any list of suggested books, but it reached students because it was relevant for this particular group of children and it possessed characteristics of texts that meet the needs of emergent readers because it was

- Culturally authentic (Fox & Short, 2003) and relevant (Gay, 2011);
- Predictable and repetitive without dumbing down language, style, or content;
- Filled with high-frequency words and words with simple patterns, as well as more complex vocabulary within naturally flowing text; and
- Supported with illustrations that connected directly to the text and reflected the students’ communities and backgrounds.

Above all, “I Can Read Swag” captured students’ interest and excitement. They *connected with it* and were therefore motivated to *learn through it*. Janice created “Swag” for the same reasons that she chooses trade books and leveled texts—because she knows her students and she knows what speaks to them and reflects their worlds (Bishop, 2007; Short, 1997)—key pieces of advice in the selection of any texts for classroom use.

**The Common Core State Standards use the term *text complexity*.  
What does that mean and how does it affect my selection of books?**

*Text complexity* is defined by the CCSS as having to do with “level of meaning, structure, language conventionality and clarity, knowledge demands,

**Resources for Selecting Texts That Meet the Needs of Your Students**

*Beyond Leveled Books: Supporting Early and Transitional Readers in Grades K–5* (Szymusiak, Sibberson, & Koch, 2008)

“Books by Faith Ringgold”: a list of books by artist and author Faith Ringgold <http://www.faithringgold.com/ringgold/books.htm>

*Evaluating Children’s Books for Bias* <http://www.intime.uni.edu/multiculture/curriculum/children.htm>

*Free within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children’s Literature* (Bishop, 2007)

*Literary Pathways: Selecting Books to Support New Readers* (Peterson, 2001)

*Literature and the Child* (Galda, Cullinan, & Sipe, 2010)

*Literature as a Way of Knowing* (Short, 1997)

“Nine Ways to Evaluate Children’s Books that Address Disability as Part of Diversity” <http://www.circleofinclusion.org/english/books/section1/a.html>

*Postmodern Picture Books: Play, Parody, and Self-Referentiality* (Sipe & Pantaleo, 2008)

*Reading Globally, K–8: Connecting Students to the World through Literature* (Lehman, Freeman, & Scharer, 2010)

word frequency, sentence length [all in the context of] student knowledge, motivation, and interest.” While this sounds rather complicated, the intent is simply to ensure that students read increasingly more complex texts as they grow as readers. While text complexity formulas abound, the authors of these standards explain that actual complexity can only be determined when teachers use “their professional judgment, experience and knowledge of their students and the subject.” We suggest that you consider the following critical issues when using professional judgment regarding text complexity.

First, while early emergent readers certainly benefit from reading less complex texts (texts with controlled vocabulary, patterns, repetition, and predictability), when simplicity is the only criteria, books may fail to provide support for literacy learning because they do not engage, fascinate, or reflect the worlds of students who are asked to learn through them. In studies of books written specifically to have simple structures, researchers and teachers alike found that many books tend to lose those essential characteristics (Szymusiak, Sibberson, & Koch, 2008). In collections of leveled texts, for example, we still see few authentically portrayed children of color, families with two moms or two dads, or families who speak languages other than English. The activities represented in those texts tend to focus more on middle-class ways of being than on other elements of the rich mosaic that is our society. So, it is important to understand that structurally complex texts may actually be less difficult than books with simple text *if* the reader perceives the content, language, and structure to be familiar and compelling. In other words, complexity “has as much to do with the match between the content of the book and [students’] own experiences as it does with the linguistic difficulty of the book” (Short, 1997, p. 15).

Another point to consider is that readers do not progress through increasingly complex texts in a linear fashion. When children have opportunities to self-select books, they typically move back and forth on their own between easy and difficult texts (Fresch, 1995). Every teacher knows a child like the proud kindergartner who carries a dog-eared copy of *Harry Potter* or the first grader who is motivated to learn more about reading through a love of books that are personally compelling but may have dense text. The same children, in other moments, will engage with equally compelling simpler texts—those that are repetitive and predictable. Wise teachers provide opportunities for children to balance their reading lives by choosing books that reflect a range of complexities for a range of purposes.

## What about informational texts?

The Common Core State Standards pay particular attention to informational texts, not only with regard to social studies, science, and technological standards but also in standards for the English language arts. This is consistent with early childhood teachers' use of all kinds of nonfiction texts—picture books, maps, brochures, guidebooks, newspapers, and websites—to support science explorations, mathematical inquiries, and social studies investigations while teaching students how to read and write informational texts.

Several teachers whose classrooms are highlighted in Section II of this book describe how they use informational texts for content learning and as models for student writing. For example, Mariel Laureano uses the book *What Do You Do with a Tail Like This?* to help her kindergartners learn about writing descriptive texts. Freida Hammett uses the *National Audubon Society Field Guides* as her students learn and write about the insects and butterflies they care for in their classroom. Mary Cowhey supports her second graders as they examine and write about issues of social justice using books such as *Harvest Hope*, the biography of Cesar Chavez. In each case, teachers select nonfiction texts that meet the needs of their students and the curriculum they have created for and with them.

Just as with other text lists in the Common Core State Standards, the nonfiction exemplars are intended to be merely suggestions. Numerous resources can be accessed for information about where to find high-quality informational texts and ideas for using them to support content learning and teaching students about nonfiction writing.

### Resources for Selecting Nonfiction Books

"Boston Globe—Horn Book Awards for Excellence in Children's Literature" <http://www.hbook.com/bghb/current.asp>

*Is That a Fact? Teaching Nonfiction Writing K–3* (Stead, 2001)

"NCTE Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children" <http://www.ncte.org/awards/orbis pictus>

*Nonfiction Craft Lessons: Teaching Information Writing K–8* (Portalupi & Fletcher, 2001)

*Nonfiction Mentor Texts: Teaching Informational Writing through Children's Literature, K–8* (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2009)

*A Place for Wonder: Reading and Writing Nonfiction in the Primary Grades* (Heard & McDonough, 2009)

## What about English language learners?

The Common Core State Standards provide little information with regard to teaching English language learners. In fact, the statement is made that it is "beyond the scope of the Standards to define the full range of supports appropriate for English language learners." However, a significant guiding principle that *is* reflected in the Common Core materials is the importance of supporting students in maintaining home languages while adding

English to their language repertoires. The CCSS explain that “students must be able to use formal English in their writing and speaking, but they must also be able to make informed, skillful choices among the many ways to express themselves through language.” This provides clear support for schools as they help students draw from home languages *and* English as educational resources in the classroom.

A common misperception is that young children are confused by the introduction of more than one language when, in fact, the positive cognitive impact of exposure to multiple languages is tremendous and children quickly sort out when and how to use languages in appropriate contexts. When home languages, as well as English, are valued and utilized, all children benefit. English-only students learn about other languages and they learn that their language is one of many ways to communicate in the world. Emerging bilinguals see themselves, their families, their heritage, and their language as positive contributions to the classroom and to society; they have more opportunities to take on the role of expert in the classroom; and they are able to draw on home language resources to support the development of English language proficiency. At the same time, all students have opportunities to develop greater awareness of linguistic structures and cultural usage.

In terms of text selection, emerging bilinguals, like all students, are supported by texts that reflect their worlds, tell compelling stories, have supportive picture-text matches, utilize familiar and

natural language, and depict culturally relevant experiences (Freeman & Freeman, 2011). Primary resources for finding supportive texts are the students and their families who are likely to have access to magazines, newspapers, faith-based texts, letters from family members, and so on. Family members can also work with teachers to *create* bilingual texts using students’ home languages and English. Creating and/or purchasing bilingual picture books and nonfiction texts can contribute significantly to literacy learning for all children. Language groups and associations in every town and city are also excellent sources, and there are numerous websites that lead teachers to high-quality texts to support students’ growing knowledge.

**Resources for Selecting  
Bilingual Children’s Books**

Bilingual Books for Kids

<http://www.cincopuntos.com>

Book by Yuyi Morales and links to websites of other authors <http://www.yuyimorales.com>

Bookjoy, bilingual books by Pat Mora

<http://www.patmora.com>

Monica Brown: Children’s Book Author

<http://www.monicabrown.net/>

National Association for Bilingual Education

<http://www.nabe.org>

National Association for Multicultural Education

<http://www.nameorg.org>

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

<http://www.tesol.org>

“Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children’s Book

Award Winners” [http://www.education.txstate](http://www.education.txstate.edu/c-p/Tomas-Rivera-Book-Award-Project-Link/Winner.html)

[.edu/c-p/Tomas-Rivera-Book-Award-Project-Link/](http://www.education.txstate.edu/c-p/Tomas-Rivera-Book-Award-Project-Link/Winner.html)

[Winners.html](http://www.education.txstate.edu/c-p/Tomas-Rivera-Book-Award-Project-Link/Winner.html)

Several of the classrooms highlighted in Section II of this book provide examples of teachers embracing and using multiple languages even when they may not speak those languages themselves. Tammy Frierson invites language lessons in Hebrew and in Spanish as she learns with her preschoolers about both languages. Julia López-Robertson writes about bilingual literature discussions in second grade. In Jessica Keith’s first-grade classroom, students learn about reading and writing in their home languages, adding English to their repertoire. The texts listed in the marginal textbox provide further resources to help teachers and administrators as they work together to understand more about teaching and learning in classrooms where multiple languages contribute to every student’s cognitive, linguistic, and cultural development.

### What about supporting speakers of African American Language?

Intentional teaching about the legitimacy of African American Language (AAL) and the act of translation (rather than correction) between Standard English (SE) and AAL have been shown time and again to effectively support students both in using their home language and in adding proficiency in SE to their language repertoire (Boutte, 2007; Smitherman, 2006). However, just as English language learning is not addressed in these standards, neither is the teaching of speakers of African American Language.

AAL has long been recognized as a rule-governed, history-rich language and was formally sanctioned as a language by a 1997 resolution of the Linguistic Society of America. Consequently, there are numerous resources to support teachers in helping students explore contrasts, comparisons,

#### Resources for Supporting Emerging Bilingual Students (English Language Learners)

- Affirming Students’ Right to Their Own Languages: Bridging Language Policies and Pedagogical Practices* (Scott, Straker, & Katz, 2008)
- Children, Language, and Literacy: Diverse Learners in Diverse Times* (Genishi & Dyson, 2009)
- Educating Emergent Bilinguals: Policies, Programs, and Practices for English Language Learners* (García & Kleifgen, 2010)
- Explorations in Language Acquisition and Use* (Krashen, 2003)
- Latino Children Learning English: Steps in the Journey* (Valdés, Capitelli, & Alvarez, 2011)
- The Light in Their Eyes: Creating Multicultural Learning Communities* (Nieto, 2010)
- “NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners (ELLs)” <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/teacherseducatingell>
- Negotiating Language Policies in Schools* (Menken & García, 2010)
- Room for Talk: Teaching and Learning in a Multilingual Kindergarten* (Fassler, 2003)
- Speaking in Tongues*, a documentary following four bilingual children <http://www.speakingintonguesfilm.info>
- Words Were All We Had: Becoming Biliterate against the Odds* (Reyes, 2011)
- Writing between Languages: How English Language Learners Make the Transition to Fluency, Grades 4–12* (Fu, 2009)

#### Resources for Learning about African American Language

- Code-Switching: Teaching Standard English in Urban Classrooms* (Wheeler & Swords, 2006)
- The Skin That We Speak: Thoughts on Language and Culture in the Classroom* (Delpit & Dowdy, 2008)
- Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English* (Rickford & Rickford, 2000)
- “Teaching Students Who Speak African American Language (AAL): Expanding Educators’ and Students’ Linguistic Repertoire” (Boutte, 2007) in *Brisk’s Language, Culture, and Community in Teacher Education*
- Word from the Mother: Language and African Americans* (Smitherman, 2006)

and historical and global connections between AAL and other languages. Again, teachers and administrators will need to access those resources as they study how to incorporate the art of translation and the study of African American Language structures and history into their classrooms.

### **How can I help students maintain home cultural identities *and* succeed in the dominant culture when standards do not encompass cultural and cross-cultural competencies?**

A concern voiced frequently is that standards will lead to a homogenization of students through one-size-fits-all pedagogies that reduce student identities to that of one cultural model. Standards, and the assessments that typically accompany them, seem to provide no space for valuing students' impressive abilities to succeed within and across cultural and linguistic contexts. Too often, we see students' positive home and community identities compromised or even erased because of narrow interpretations of what constitutes the norm. So the question of maintaining the rich cultural identities of each child's family and community is an important one: How do teachers maintain high expectations for students to achieve within existing power structures (public school education, higher education, business) without standardizing "to the point that one cultural or linguistic group internalizes that their ways of being in the world are better or worse than any other" (Campano, 2007, p. 54)?

#### **Resources for Understanding Culturally Relevant Pedagogies**

"African American Communities: Implications for Culturally Relevant Teaching" (Boutte & Hill, 2006)  
*Change Is Gonna Come: Transforming Literacy Education for African American Students* (Edwards, McMillon, & Turner, 2010)  
*Classroom Diversity: Connecting Curriculum to Students' Lives* (McIntyre, Roseberry, & González, 2001)  
*Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research and Practice* (Gay, 2011)  
*The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (Ladson-Billings, 2010)  
*Literacy in the Welcoming Classroom: Creating Family-School Partnerships That Support Student Learning* (Allen, 2010)  
*Reading Instruction for Diverse Classrooms: Research-Based, Culturally Responsive Practice* (McIntyre, Hulan, & Layne, 2011)

We believe that teachers and administrators can think about this by embracing basic tenets of *culturally relevant pedagogies*. Culturally responsive pedagogies are those that teach "to and through the strengths of the students" (Gay, 2011, p. 31). They are grounded in a commitment to promoting social consciousness and academic achievement by acknowledging "the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups . . . as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum" (p. 32). At the same time, culturally responsive teaching ensures that every student acquires expertise in the "conventions, norms, language codes, and practices within a mainstream" culture (Edwards et al., 2010, p. 46). In other words, while creating classrooms that broaden views of

what counts as the norm and making a place for teaching and assessing that values a range of cultural and cross-cultural competencies, culturally relevant teachers ensure that every student can succeed—not just minimally, but brilliantly—within and beyond the existing system. The goal is to create more equitable opportunities for achievement and to support all students in gaining appreciation for the expertise that they and every other student bring to the classroom. In Section II of this book, each classroom example has been carefully selected to highlight strategies for culturally responsive teaching. Further resources can be found in the marginal textbox.

### **Where is there room for children’s play in these standards?**

For years, early childhood educators have decried the disappearance of play in classrooms for young children (Ohanian, 2002). Often, standards movements put such a focus on the mechanics of content and skill learning that the playful nature of children’s work is neglected. As a consequence, interpretations of standards have often led to a reduction in opportunities for play or playful activities.

#### **Resources for Understanding the Importance of Play**

*A Child’s Work: The Importance of Fantasy Play* (Paley, 2004)

*The Classrooms All Young Children Need: Lessons in Teaching from Vivian Paley* (Cooper, 2009)

*Literacy through Play* (Owocki, 1999)

*What Happened to Recess and Why Are Our Children Struggling in Kindergarten?* (Ohanian, 2002)

At the same time, a large body of research demonstrates that intentionally structured environments that include opportunities to play with language and literacies can be highly supportive of literacy learning (Dyson, 2003; Lindfors, 2008; Owocki, 1999; Paley, 2004). As teachers and administrators address standards, it is essential to ensure that “opportunities for play are not diminished and are just as critical as any other standard in early childhood literacy education” (Genishi & Dyson, 2009, p. x). A wide variety of resources are available to support educators in understanding not only the importance of play but also what it looks like in environments where teacher intentionality is key to student success. Again, while the CCSS are not explicit in discussing play as a learning strategy, they do remind educators that decisions for how they will create and carry out curriculum are left up to the knowledgeable teacher.

### **What about assessment?**

We don’t yet know what the Common Core assessments will look like, but as you discuss assessments in your schools and districts, we hope you will keep some important issues in mind. First, every teacher knows that recent

**Resources for Assessment  
That Informs Instruction**

*Becoming Writers in the Elementary Classroom:  
Visions and Decisions* (Van Sluys, 2011)

"Broadening Visions of What Counts: Assessment  
as Knowing and Being Known" (Long &  
Sibberson, 2005)

*Cultural Validity in Assessment: Addressing Linguistic  
and Cultural Diversity* (Basterra et al., 2011)

*Kidwatching: Documenting Children's Literacy  
Development* (Owocki & Goodman, 2002)

*Knowing Literacy: Constructive Literacy Assessment*  
(Johnston, 1997)

*The Marriage of Reading Assessment and Instruction:  
Stories from Artful Teachers* (Stephens, in press)

NCTE's "Standards for the Assessment of Reading  
and Writing" [http://www.ncte.org/standards/  
assessmentstandards](http://www.ncte.org/standards/assessmentstandards)

NCTE's "21st Century Curriculum and Assessment  
Framework" [http://www.ncte.org/positions/  
statements/21stcentframework](http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/21stcentframework)

"Refocusing on Assessment" (Enciso et al., 2009)

standards movements led to a huge emphasis on high-stakes tests—large-scale standardized tests—that have little to do with the day-to-day needs of children in the classroom. Summative, rather than formative, they are not useful to teachers in terms of informing instruction. In fact, they often do more harm than good as students, teachers, and administrators are pressured to focus on test preparation rather than on teaching students to comprehend and generate complex ideas and solve problems by learning to think critically. Sadly, scores from these tests are often used in ways that punish and humiliate students, teachers, and schools, obviously counterproductive to teaching that makes a difference.

It is also important to think about ways that high-stakes testing can "exacerbate differential access to curriculum—while creating more inequitable conditions in local schools" (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 167). Put simply, this means that most standardized tests lead to "enlarging class and race distinctions" (Campano, 2007, p. 146), rather than closing gaps in achievement. When students perform poorly on high-stakes tests, they are labeled in ways that are difficult to shake as they make their way from the kindergarten classroom through high school and beyond. While teachers know that many students' failure on such tests actually reflects the failure of tests to capture what students know, test results continue to take their toll in terms of students' future opportunities for learning. Instruction for students with lower scores often becomes confined to a focus on isolated skills rather than learning skills through the investigation of complex problems and reading and writing for a variety of audiences and purposes, while students who score well enjoy the range of intellectual challenges in their studies.

But it is not just summative assessments that have caused consternation. Assessments developed to inform moment-to-moment instruction have also been used in punitive ways, as class scores are paraded in faculty meetings, on school walls, and in local newspapers. This solves no problems and, in fact, creates new ones as teachers, parents, and children become fearful, stressed, and competitive to the point of missing the purpose of education altogether.

Finally, it is important to understand that the notion of using assessments to provide school-to-school or state-to-state continuity is seriously flawed. The assumption that there can be such continuity leaves out the fact that we are talking about uniquely capable human beings who are defined by more than a test score. This apples-to-apples approach leaves out the rich range of competencies, histories, languages, experiences, and styles that students bring to us and that a teacher can only understand by getting to know a student well. A test score or reading level cannot communicate the child's frame of mind or health on the day of the test, expertise in arenas outside the assessment, relationship with the teacher, or comfort with the testing genre.

These are important issues to consider as the yet-to-be finalized Common Core assessments begin to appear. Initial materials describe the projected assessments as focusing on "actionable data that teachers can use to plan and adjust instruction." This suggests that formative assessment (assessment *for* learning rather than assessment *of* learning) is a part of the plan. This is good news, but we have little idea about just what those assessments will look like and how they will be implemented. Thus, it will be important for teachers, administrators, and policymakers to access high-quality resources and ensure that assessments (a) support responsibly autonomous teaching; (b) do not lead to scripted programs or narrow curriculum; (c) promote appreciation for students' cultural, linguistic, and cross-cultural skills and knowledge; (d) acknowledge that there is much more to know about a child than any one assessment can reveal; and (e) *do not label children or grade teachers or schools*.

**Assessment and English Language Learners.** Children who are emerging bilingual or multilingual speakers of English *and* their home language(s) exhibit tremendous expertise. Yet this expertise is rarely valued in standards, and therefore it does not appear in the assessments that accompany them. As a result, "without a mechanism for recognizing such intellectual skills as mastering two languages or successfully negotiating differing home, school, and neighborhood environments, the standards-based movement denies the value of some skills that actually support academic achievement" (Hamann, 2008, p. 100).

To address this issue, educators need access to high-quality resources to help them understand strategies for most effectively and *fairly* assessing developing bilingual students. One such resource is the National

Association for the Education of Young Children's 2009 *Supplement on Screening and Assessment of Young English-Language Learners* (<http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/cape>). This document communicates the importance of assessing children by giving great emphasis "to the alignment of assessment tools and procedures with the specific cultural and linguistic characteristics of the children being assessed" (p. 1). Further resources include Bastera et al.'s (2011) *Cultural Validity in Assessment* and the assessment section in Samway and McKeon's (2007) *Myths and Realities: Best Practices for English Language Learners*.

**Resources for Thinking  
about Children with Special Needs**

"Addressing the Disproportionate Representation of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in Special Education through Culturally Responsive Educational Systems" (Klingner et al., 2005)

*From Disability to Possibility: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms* (Schwarz, 2006)

"Including Students with Special Needs in a Writing Workshop" (Fu & Shelton, 2007)

"A Pedagogy of Control: Worksheets and the Special Needs Child" (Lesley, 2003)

"Special Education: Promises and Problems" (Pardini, 2002)

*Yes They Can: Special Needs Students and 21st Century Literacies* (Garcia & Chiki, 2010)

**What do the standards say about students with special needs?**

The Common Core State Standards include little about children with special needs, although there is some emphasis on an inclusion model that does not isolate students from mainstream classrooms. The recommendation is to interpret the standards in ways that allow for the "widest possible range of students to participate fully from the outset [with] appropriate accommodations to ensure maximum participation of students with special education needs." With only limited guidance for implementing the standards with students with special needs, schools will need to access high-quality resources to ensure that appropriate

expectations lead to the most effective instructional practices.

**What about grade-level distinctions in standards?**

Although the Common Core State Standards are organized by grade level, it is important to remember that whether you are teaching kindergarten, first grade, or second grade, student expertise will encompass a similar range of abilities. There will be kindergartners who read the same texts enjoyed by second graders and there will be second graders who are early emergent readers. It is also important to recognize that learning to read and write does not follow a linear path. Learning occurs recursively within and across grade levels. Effective instruction provides students with multiple opportunities to revisit concepts and enact their learning over time with increasing difficulty. It is important for teachers to look at expectations horizontally (within grade levels) and vertically (from one grade level to the

next), recognizing that each classroom is filled with unique individuals who encompass a range of knowledge and abilities. So, once again, while the standards detail grade-specific expectations, the real decisions about how and when students should demonstrate standard-specific learning are left to teachers' judgment.

## **Conclusion: Demystified Yet?**

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*Demystifying* means making the strange familiar or at least less intimidating. In this case, we hope to have communicated that demystifying also means chasing down directives to determine whether they are myth or reality. When directives contradict what you know to be true about good teaching, they need to be addressed. So, demystifying the Common Core State Standards has much to do with reading the fine print, interpreting it by using sound knowledge of theory and practice, and then taking action to enable teaching in ways that will benefit your students the most.

Demystifying also has to do with recognizing the good work that you already do. Take a moment and list everything you hope for your students in an academic year: skills, dispositions, proficiencies, motivations, abilities. It is likely that your list encompasses the content of every standard in any set of educational guidelines required by your state or district, plus much more. So, as you consider standards, begin by trusting your best teaching. As Katie Wood Ray (2006) writes, "there is no challenge to try and somehow infuse [teaching] with high standards; if you're [teaching] good stuff, high standards are already there" (p. 185).

Hand-in-hand with valuing what you already do well, demystifying also occurs through teachers' engagement in ongoing professional study. The knowledge we acquire as professional educators allows us to address standards with wisdom. With knowledge, we need not be constrained by standards. We can plan and teach with confidence and tenacity. In the following section, we glimpse into preK and primary grades classrooms as nine tenacious teachers share ways that they use their knowledge to meet the needs of their students. They invite us into teaching/learning moments and share ways that they focus on children, create culturally and linguistically responsive curricula, and meet standards by teaching in "warm-demanding" ways (Gay, 2011, p. 57).



# II

Teachers and  
Students in  
Classrooms

## © Introduction

Every teacher loves to be the fly on the wall in the classrooms of other teachers. We stop by a neighbor's room and notice the vibrancy of students' latest pieces of writing. We scan the room and observe children and teachers encouraging, celebrating, teaching, and learning. We come away with renewed energy to transform our own learning communities. The teachers featured in this section invite readers into their classrooms in much the same way—to experience teaching in a time of standards that begins with the child and builds on the foundational principles introduced in Section I. In Section III of this book, questions are provided to prompt reflection and discussion about your own classrooms using these vignettes as jumping-off points.

At the core of their teaching, these educators are committed to creating “exciting places for exploration and growth” (<http://www.saveourschoolsmarch.org/2011/05/02/heres-to-the-teachers>). They believe strongly that equitable practices should draw on more than one cultural model of learning. For example, they are dedicated to helping students maintain home languages while adding proficiencies in Academic English. In Freida Hammett's classroom, for example, Korean, Hindi, and Mandarin are cherished along with the English that is foundational to instruction. Nancy Boggs, Mariel Laurenó, Julia López-Robertson, and Jessica Keith bring students' Spanish language expertise into the curriculum as important resources. Tammy Freirson joins her preschoolers in the regular study of Spanish and she learns alongside the children as a parent introduces Hebrew. Carmen Tisdale is at the beginning of her exploration of using contrastive analysis to help students gain insight into the legitimacies and differences between African American Language and Academic English.

You will also see how these teachers create spaces for students to develop as critical consumers and producers of literacies. Mary Cowhey describes her second graders' involvement in the study of labor issues in the clothing industry. Janice Baines and Carmen Tisdale write about their first graders' collection of oral histories to preserve the stories of the historic African American community in which they live. Julia López-Robertson's second graders and their families explore issues of immigration through bilingual literature discussions.

Each teacher's section is written in three parts: (a) Meet the Teacher, (b) Teaching and Learning Moments, and (c) The Teacher's Journey: Pathways to Enacting Practices. Vignettes are organized by grade level. Following each set of grade-level vignettes, practices are charted to highlight teaching/learning moments as they connect to NCTE principles and beliefs and to specific Common Core State Standards. This is done to demonstrate that meeting standards can look quite different from one classroom to another and that when curriculum and teaching strategies are tailored to children's interests, cultural knowledge, language, and academic needs, standards fall easily into place.

So we welcome you into the classrooms of teachers who, like you, care deeply about children and their families, face challenges as well as successes every day, and continuously study the art and science of the profession in the pursuit of effective teaching for all children. While effort has been made to include a geographically, culturally, and linguistically diverse range of classrooms, this collection of classrooms is obviously not comprehensive. For that reason, we urge you to read with an eye to possibilities for your own classroom no matter the grade level or demographic. Use these stories as jumping-off points for reflection about developing “alternative visions for what is worth cherishing in public schools” (Nieto, 2003, p. 8) in a time of Common Core State Standards or anytime.

# Reading and Writing in Preschool and Kindergarten

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## © “The word on the street is that Olivia read a book today!” Preschoolers Learning Languages and Literacies

by Susi Long with Tammy Frierson

### Meet the Teacher

Tammy Frierson teaches in a bright and busy classroom of twenty-three four- and five-year-olds. Tammy is the lead teacher, but she will be the first to tell you that her teaching assistant, Mrs. Robinson, and the school’s Spanish teacher, Sra. Herron, are critical to the classroom’s success. Mrs. Robinson has been at the school for thirty-two years, has taught the parents of some of the students, and is greatly admired for her wisdom in all things early childhood. Sra. Herron comes several days a week to share her enthusiasm for and knowledge of Spanish language and heritage with the children. Tammy’s admiration of her teaching partners is the first thing readers should know about her. This is who Tammy is—a teacher with tremendous expertise who values those who bring further wisdom and perspective to her classroom.



Tammy has been teaching for fourteen years, eleven of those in this child development program serving a suburban public school system in the southeastern United States. The program was provided by the district as a service to the community and, although tuition-based, many of the children attend with the support of state-funded vouchers and grants for low-income families.

In Tammy’s classroom, eight of the children are African American, eight are European American, one is Latino, and one is biracial (Black/Latino). Seventeen of the students identify as Christians, one is Jewish, one is Muslim, and one is Hindu.

Tammy views this diversity as a blessing and, with the help of family members, she ensures that the class celebrates Ramadan, Chanukah, Christmas, Diwali, and Kwanzaa. Honoring each child and his or her family is basic to Tammy's ability to build a community that, as she says, is truly a family.

### ***Teaching and Learning Moments in Tammy's Classroom***

*Wisdom, calm, and joy* are words that come to mind after sitting for only a few minutes in Tammy's classroom. As we slip into one of the tiny chairs at a table full of puzzle pieces and books, we see all of the children seated in a large oval on the gathering carpet. Four-year-old Nate's mother has already joined the class this morning and is sharing their family's Chanukah traditions. She teaches songs and shares language, adding the lyrics and some Hebrew characters to the English and Spanish words already on the whiteboard. Tammy joins the lesson by asking carefully posed questions and making strategic comments to help the children get as much as possible out of the experience. Tammy's sensitivity to the needs of the children and to celebrating Nate is apparent as, at various points in the conversation, she naturally interjects with comments and questions such as:

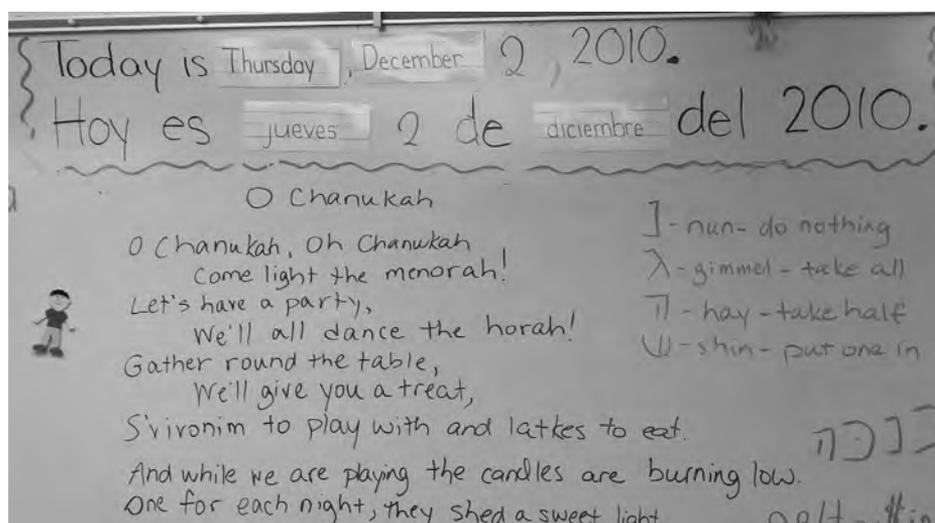
"So tonight at Nate's house, what are they going to do?"

"Did you know that Menorah means 'light'? It has nine lights. One needs to be higher than the others."

"Is there a light in the Temple that burns constantly?"

"I have another question: What in the world is a *latke*?"

[Speaking to Nate's mother] "I'm so happy you came. Oh my goodness, I'm overwhelmed with all that I learned."



As Nate's mother leaves, Tammy announces to the children, "Olivia came in with a book today. I feel that it is important for her to do what?"

"Read it!" the children call out.

"Olivia, you've been working on this book?"

Olivia nods.

"Well, bless your heart. Let's give Olivia our undivided attention." Olivia settles onto the bench at the front of the room. She opens her book and begins to read aloud, showing the pages to the class as she has seen Tammy do many times before. The class listens with rapt attention. Tammy sits close by so that, now and then, in an ever-so-gentle voice, she can support Olivia's reading of the text. This is clearly a landmark day for Olivia. As she finishes the book, Tammy announces, "The word on the street is that Olivia read a book today! Mrs. Robinson, will you tell anyone you see that Olivia read a book today?" Mrs. Robinson responds, "You know I will."

The children have been sitting for quite a while so Tammy stands up and tells them, "Now we're going to exercise. You stand up too. Okay, the inside of me is going to breathe in and out. Now I'm going to wake up my toes. Inside my shoes, my toes are moving. My knees are rocking. My bottom's swinging. My shoulders are moving. My neck is swinging. My head is bopping. Let's do it and count to twenty. One, two, three, four." The children move with her, captured by her voice, the language of her direction, and her easy guidance of their movements.

As they exercise, Sra. Herron, the Center's Spanish teacher, quietly enters the room and joins in their movements. After the children sit down, she begins her Spanish lesson. Tammy sits in a chair just behind the children so that she can participate as a learner, but also to help focus students' attention and responses through her participation. The interplay between Tammy and Sra. Herron is elegant and seamless. They finish each other's sentences in





ways that clarify information and extend learning. As Sra. Herron begins to call roll, Tammy calls out, “¡Presente!”, modeling the correct response for the children. When Sra. asks the children, “¿Cómo estás?”, Tammy answers with great enthusiasm, “¡Bueno!”, and the children repeat, “¡Bueno!”

Then Sra. Herron leads the children in singing a “Buenos Días” song. Tammy and Mrs. Robinson join in, again supporting the chil-

dren in participating and learning. They do the same thing when Sra. reads a book to the children in Spanish. At one point, Sra. comes to a passage about a flashlight. She explains that she keeps one on her bedside table. She asks Tammy if she has a flashlight on her bedside table. Tammy answers, “Sí,” and then models how learning language sometimes means taking the initiative to ask for help: “And so how do I say “bedside table” in Spanish?”

“Mesita.”

“Oh, *mesita*. I can say *mesita*,” Tammy announces proudly.

This creates a space for Sra. to provide another language lesson: “Remember boys and girls, we say *ita* when we mean that something is very little. Table is *mesa* so little table is *mesita*.” Then she asks about a favorite cartoon character. “Does Dora have a flashlight?”

One of the children answers, “Yes. Do you want to know what color it is? *Roja*.”

“¡Bueno!” says Sra. and Tammy applauds. Then Sra. asks, “Is it *grande* or *pequeña*?”

“It is *pequeña*,” answers one of the children.

“Yo *linterna roja*,” chimes in another child intending to say, “I have a red flashlight.”

Sra. congratulates him for his approximation: “See, he is trying to put all of his words in Spanish together. Good job!” Then Mrs. Robinson extends the learning further by asking, “I want to know—do we have a *linterna* at school?”

“¡Sí!” the children shout.

When Sra. asks, “¿*Donde*?”, Mrs. Robinson goes to a cabinet and comes back with the class flashlight. “Is it *grande* or *pequeña*?” The children reply, “¡*Pequeña*!” Sra. asks why they have a flashlight in the school and the children offer two answers: “To look in our throats if we’re sick” and “Because one time, I had to get a bead out of my ear.”

“We’re not going to have *that* anymore!” says Tammy.

“¡*No más*!” agrees Sra.

“¡*No más*!” agree the children.

In unplanned yet natural ways born of shared goals for and commitment to the children's learning, language is developed and used as the children experience Hebrew, Spanish, and English, all in the course of one early morning gathering time. The Spanish lesson finishes with a song and Tammy congratulates the children: "You know what? Today I was so proud of you all. You all have been so patient! So today I'm extremely . . ."

"Happy!" calls out one of the girls, and Tammy replies, "Girl, I'm always happy. But today I'm a little more than happy. I'm feeling generous. Do you know what *generous* means? It means that you give more than usual." Tammy shares her generosity by directing the children to centers around the room. She suggests that Nate show Sam how to play the dreidel game he brought to school so that Sam can teach other children.

Mary, Corrine, and Logan head to a writing table to work on books they are making. Mrs. Robinson moves to the table where she will read and write with a group of the youngest children. A calm hum of activity permeates the classroom as children build with blocks, make alphabet books, write in journals, cut, draw, count, organize, and create.

Tammy sits down to hear Nate and Samuel read and then guides them to illustrate and write about the story. Another child brings her writing to share. "Look at that!" Tammy exclaims in genuine pleasure at the girl's accomplishment. Tammy crosses the room to work with a group of children learning to tell time. On the way, she notices one little boy pulling his rug over to work quietly by a classroom visitor. "He enjoys being right there beside you while he's working," she says, her



sensitive knowledge of the children revealed once again. Then Tammy sits down on the floor with her group, holds up a large cardboard clock, and begins her lesson. And the room continues to hum.

### ***Tammy's Journey: Pathways to Enacting These Practices***

Tammy's teaching convictions and classroom practices have grown over the years from her feelings about children and their families. As she says, "Parents leave their children with me every day. You have to be real and sincere about your relationships with them. I don't think about making an effort to embrace families from diverse backgrounds in my classroom. It's what we do."

Tammy loves teaching in a family-grouped setting. She first meets the children when they are three years old and continues to teach them for three years. Tammy says, "In the first year, I'm just getting to know a part of their personalities. In the second year, they are really finding their place in the classroom, and by the third year, they know me very well—my humor, my style, my expectations—and then they can help the younger children by modeling their responses to me." Tammy doesn't see teaching a multiage class as more stressful than teaching any other class. She recognizes that even a class of all four-year-olds or a class of five-year-olds would encompass a span of abilities, experiences, and understandings similar to those of her group of three- to five-year-olds.

In terms of standards and other guidelines, Tammy appreciates that her administrator listens—genuinely listens—when she and other teachers question suggested modes of teaching. She feels fortunate that her administrator respects and "chooses to trust" the decisions she makes and engages with teachers in collaborative professional study. Tammy does not take for granted that her administrator honors teachers' autonomy as well as their commitment to continued professional growth. As Tammy says, "It's nice to know that you can say 'no' and it's not a power struggle."

Tammy is deeply committed to career-long professional learning. Currently, she is studying culturally relevant practices with a faculty study group, taking classes to gain Montessori certification, and studying new languages alongside her students. These are commitments that keep her going as a professional and that have supported her through the years. She perseveres in professional study because she worries about "all of the programs that are often imposed on teachers by people who have no idea about classrooms" and believes that teachers need to continue to build their professional knowledge so they can get involved and make decisions for their own schools and classrooms.

## 🌀 Listening as Key to Supporting Kindergarten Writers

by Katie Van Sluys with Mariel Laureano

### Meet the Teacher

In her ninth year of teaching, Mariel Laureano became a kindergarten teacher at the same Chicago public school where she began her teaching career. The school is situated within a small community that has historically been home to predominately Latino/a families. Mariel has worked with students and families in the community through many of the challenges that accompany the gentrification of neighborhoods, including the displacement of families and threats of school closings. Before teaching kindergarten, Mariel worked for seven years as a middle grades teacher and for one year as a school-based literacy coach. One of Mariel's great qualities as a literacy coach and a classroom teacher is that she is, first and foremost, a listener. From the youngest child to her learning colleagues, Mariel listens. Through careful listening, she is able to provide necessary support for learners as they inquire into issues, concepts, and ideas that matter.



In the following vignette, we enter Mariel's classroom as her kindergartners begin their day. Through the events of one morning, we see ways that Mariel lives her belief that careful listening is foundational to good teaching, as well as ways that she builds on the resources children bring to school, including home languages. She views such resources as assets to be celebrated and developed throughout students' lives.

### *Teaching and Learning Moments in Mariel's Classroom*

Walking into Mariel's kindergarten classroom, children, family members, colleagues, and visitors are immediately aware that this environment is not only physically inviting but is also a space filled with energy. Visitors are compelled to linger, watch, listen, and attend to the many ways that class members learn *and* teach as they read, write, draw, move, talk, sing, and so on. One of the first things visitors see is a small table set up with a simple notebook housing children's daily sign-in lists. Turning the pages, we see children's writing progress from copying their first names to the independent use of conventions as they write their first and last names using spacing and upper-case as well as lowercase letters.

Looking up from the notebook, we notice that the walls of the classroom are lined with student work and tools for student learning. For example, we see an interactive

An alternative option to the interactive word wall is to have students keep word journals; set aside specific times each day to add to them. Students could be encouraged to trade words with classmates to expand their knowledge.

Children can help select books for baskets, making decisions about genre, topics, and stories that would be purposeful and appealing. Twenty minutes could be set aside on Fridays for students to fill book baskets for the next week.

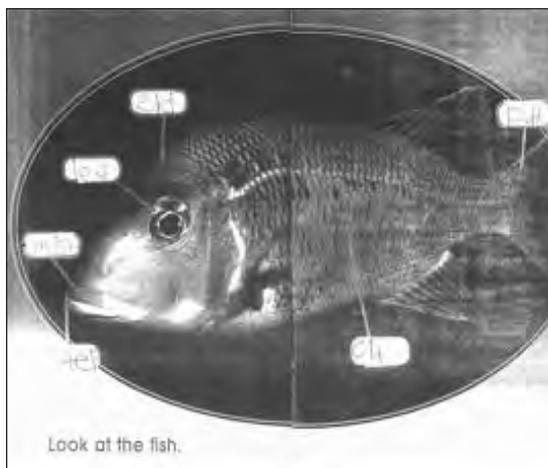
word wall placed at a level where five- and six-year-olds can remove the words to use them in support of their reading and writing and return them when finished. Adjacent to the word wall, a colorful rug designates a class meeting space partitioned off by a bookcase on one side and kindergarten-size benches on the other side.

Books are arranged in baskets in the classroom library so that book covers always face outward with clear labels separating books by topic, genre, and language, for example, "Animal Books" and "Libros en Español." Additional book baskets are placed in the center of each round table in the classroom. The baskets are filled with a wide range of books to represent different student interests, reading abilities, and classroom themes of inquiry. Today, for example, a basket at Javier's table speaks to his current curiosity about nocturnal animals. It contains books about bats as well as a variety of other nonfiction books with diverse text features and organization. A basket at Itzel's table contains nonfiction books as well as storybooks such as *Green Eggs and Ham* in both Spanish and English.

The cozy, purposeful feeling in this room is deepened by features such as the fish tank, the daily letter written by the teacher to the children (posted for everyone to read), and student work hung from the clotheslines strung across the room. Each day in this classroom is unique and characterized by a lively hum of people engaged in serious, important work, but each day is also grounded in predictable structures that give children support and confidence.

To understand more about a few of these predictable structures, we spend time in Room 106 on a particular morning to follow the children as writers and readers. As usual, the children enter the room to find their morning work waiting for them. Today, they are asked to make connections to a fish diagram that fascinated them during whole-class shared reading the previous day. Building

from their interest, Mariel has photocopied the diagram, deleting the words labeling the head, tail, scales, fin, and so on. The children check the front board and see that as their first task of the day, they are invited to label their fish diagrams and then make a diagram of their own. After hanging up backpacks and signing in, the children settle into their labeling tasks, excited to pick up where they left off the day before. While the children work, Mariel attends to the typical morning needs of individual children and then begins conferring with students about their writing.



As she kneels by Tomás, he points to the fish’s scales on the diagram and asks, “What is this?”

“What do *you* think?” Mariel replies, turning the responsibility back to the child. “Skin,” Tomás responds, and he begins to subvocalize sounds as he works to construct the word *skin* to label the scales on his diagram: “/s/ /k/ /i/.” Knowing the child’s needs at this moment in time, Mariel makes the decision not to correct his word choice (*skin* instead of *scales*), but to focus on supporting completing his construction of the word *skin* by helping him think about the ending sound. “What else do you hear in *skin*?” she asks. “Say the word out loud and think about the very last sound you hear.”

Mariel leaves Tomás and makes her way around the class as children draw support from her but also from each other and from the resources around the room. Some children walk over to a class-made diagram posted on the wall to gain further insights about which parts of a diagram are considered labels. Others talk quietly with each other as they make decisions about what should be written on the labels and how to construct words.

Productive talk of this kind does not emerge in a vacuum. Mariel consistently provides whole-group, small-group, and one-to-one demonstrations of how to think about constructing texts. She is explicit in asking the children to think in the same way when they work alone or with classmates. She frequently validates this kind of thinking by celebrating specific instances of its occurrence: “Did you see the way Tomás was thinking about how to write *skin* today? Tomás, would you please tell us what you did?”

As morning work time comes to a close, Mariel uses the beginning and ending sounds of children’s names as a signal for them to gather their work and transition to morning meeting: “If your name starts with /z/, bring your work. If your name ends in /n/, bring your work.” During group meeting, Mariel takes the opportunity to build on the students’ enthusiasm for yesterday’s nonfiction book about fish to deepen their ability to use and create informational texts. Today she introduces a new book, Steve Jenkins’s *What Do You Do with a Tail Like This?* Briefly, she guides the children to make predictions about the text as they explore the cover and title. The children share their curiosities about the book, and Mariel reads a few selected pages aloud, pages that attend to what various animals do with their ears. She stops now and then to discuss new insights about content, but also about ways the author presents information using both text and illustration. Then she suggests that the class also create a book about ears—about what animals do with their ears—and each child will create a page.

Javier heads to his seat, eager to share facts and findings from his active, science-oriented reading life, which includes many books about

A labeling exercise could work with almost any topic of inquiry and presents a great way to build from prior knowledge and vocabulary.

Student-made pages for class books can be about any topic of study and are easy to put together. Hint: Take digital photos of children’s illustrations and writing and download into PowerPoint to make pages of books that can be projected and/or printed and bound.

bats. As a writer who has spent much of his first five years of life thinking and learning in Spanish, Javier's oral language skills in English reveal his experience as an emerging bilingual speaker. Sensitive to this, Mariel is deliberate in supporting his use of Spanish while providing well-planned opportunities for him to continue adding English to his language repertoire. Javier begins by drawing a bat on the top of his paper. Mariel approaches him for a brief conference:

MARIEL: OK, you've got your bat, what do you want to say about the bat?

JAVIER: He's creepy because he can use his ears. When some things talk, he flies and follows the noise where it's coming from.

MARIEL: So the bat uses his ears to follow the noise.

JAVIER: [Javier begins to write: *A bat is cool because he uses his*—Then he makes the sounds out loud as he attempts to write *ears*] h . . . e . . . e . . . r . . . s

MARIEL: Let's stop and review to see what you can add to it. [She reads] A bat is cool because he uses his ears [pause]. What did you say he uses his ears for?

JAVIER: Following the noise.

One-on-one conferences provide unparalleled opportunities to gauge an individual child's learning. Fit in conferences at every opportunity—as children are coming in, when they are at centers, on the playground, anywhere!

Mariel's teaching strategy is clear: She asks a strategic question and then she listens. While listening, she focuses on understanding what Javier wants the reader to know. Javier regularly uses talk to frame and refine his thinking—he talks as he writes. Mariel knows it is important for him to use spoken English and, at times, Spanish to try out his thinking, to express what he knows. Then she uses her talk to reframe his thinking in conventional English by repeating his ideas back to him in somewhat different form. She echoes his thinking so he can hear new possibilities for expressing his ideas. She helps Javier understand that his message is what matters most, but that it is also important to use certain conventions to be able to communicate his message clearly to others.

Through this moment of teaching and learning, Mariel learns a little bit more about what Javier knows and needs to know as he continues to develop as a code breaker, meaning maker, and text user. She sees that he is beginning to differentiate between fiction and nonfiction, can identify and use text features to tell more about the subject at hand, and hear sounds in words as he segments sounds for writing. Through this moment, she learns that Javier knows that writers write for readers and that one's reading life can directly influence one's writing life.

### ***Mariel's Journey: Pathways to Enacting These Practices***

It is clear from this glimpse into Mariel's classroom that conferencing is a cornerstone of her teaching as she aims to meet individual student needs. She entered the profession with a commitment to making a place for talk as foundational to writing, but she deepened that commitment through her involvement in ongoing professional study. Over the years, she has continued to perfect her ability to engage the children in one-to-one conferences as well as whole-class discussions and then to listen, learn from their talk, and tailor her teaching to match their needs and potentials. She is able to do this by thinking about each child in conjunction with her strong professional knowledge about literacy learning and teaching and with her knowledge of each child's family and community resources.

Mariel came to this commitment to listening because of her professional reading, but also because of her convictions about knowing the children well. Her teaching is guided by a strong sense of responsibility to child, family, and community. She sees school as a community space that requires full inclusion and participation of families and community members, but she recognizes that she must take responsibility for engaging them by making herself a part of local community issues and getting to know families and their out-of-school lives. She believes that fulfilling her commitment to the community also means taking responsibility for moving each child forward in specific ways by listening to build on what the child already knows and then presenting new information to ensure growth.

## Charting the Practice in Prekindergarten and Kindergarten

Have a look at a few of the teaching/learning moments in Tammy’s and Mariel’s classrooms as they address principles that NCTE has identified as foundational to great teaching and as they meet specific Common Core State Standards.

NCTE Principles and Beliefs Enacted in These Moments	Teaching/Learning Moments in Tammy’s Class	Teaching/Learning Moments in Mariel’s Class
<p><i>Home cultures and languages are celebrated and used as foundational to instruction.</i></p> <p><i>Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.</i></p>	<p>Nate’s mother teaches a Chanukah song, Hebrew language, and religious traditions. Tammy reinforces by asking questions and reminding the children of Nate’s lighting of the Menorah.</p> <p>Sra. Herron reads aloud from a Spanish picture book and teaches a Spanish song. Tammy and Mrs. Robinson join in as learners.</p> <p>Tammy asks Nate to teach the dreidel game to Samuel who will, in turn, teach it to other children.</p>	<p>In a 1–1 conference, Mariel helps Javier make connections between his home language and his acquisition of English.</p> <p>The classroom library includes children’s books in both English and Spanish. Book baskets are organized by topic, genre, and language. The basket for books in Spanish is labeled <i>Libros en Español</i>.</p>
<p><i>Key to high-quality formative assessment is teachers making time and space to listen to and interact with individual students as they work.</i></p> <p><i>Teachers who know how to listen and what to listen for can inform instruction immediately as well as for the long-term.</i></p>	<p>Tammy invites Olivia to read to the class and celebrates. Because she knows Olivia well as a reader, she recognizes that this is a critical point in her learning.</p> <p>Tammy listens to Nate and Samuel read and then guides them to write a story based on their reading.</p>	<p>As Mariel conferences 1–1, she listens to determine which instructional moves to take next. She can respond, question, and teach because she knows each child well.</p> <p>Mariel teaches Tomás through their conference, then uses his example to teach a spelling strategy to the class: “Did you see the way Tomás was thinking about how to write <i>skin</i> today? Tomás, would you please tell us what you did?”</p>
<p><i>Using anchor texts—the work of other authors—as the foundation for teaching writing, for learning through the demonstrations of others, is essential whether learning to write fiction or nonfiction texts.</i></p> <p><i>Children learn vocabulary, word patterns, letter-sound correspondences, and other skills best when they are supported in doing so explicitly, yet in the context of meaningful oral and print experiences.</i></p>	<p>Children experiment with writing and reading at centers including collaborating on creating a book.</p> <p>Sra. Herron uses a Spanish language read-aloud as a jumping-off point for teaching the diminutive of the word, <i>mesa—mesita</i>.</p> <p>Tammy highlights new vocabulary in the context of giving directions to the class, for example, using and defining the word <i>generous</i>.</p>	<p>Mariel builds from students’ enthusiasm about a nonfiction book she has read aloud to support them in learning to label their own diagrams.</p> <p>Mariel uses the book <i>What Do You Do with a Tail Like This?</i> to provide a model for nonfiction writing. As she reads aloud, she points out writing decisions made by the author.</p> <p>Mariel offers regular demonstrations of writing through her daily letters to the class.</p> <p>Mariel uses sounds in students’ names as a way of transitioning the class and reinforcing phonemic awareness.</p>

## **Where do you see these Common Core State Standards for kindergarten supported in Tammy's and Mariel's practices?**

### **Language**

- Standard L.K.1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
  - Print many upper- and lowercase letters.
  - Use frequently occurring nouns and verbs.
  - Form regular plural nouns orally by adding /s/ or /es/ (e.g., dog, dogs; wish, wishes).
  - Understand and use question words (interrogatives) (e.g., who, what, where, when, why, how).
  - Use the most frequently occurring prepositions (e.g., to, from, in, out, on, off, for, of, by, with).
  - Produce and expand complete sentences in shared language activities.
- Standard L.K.4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on kindergarten reading and content.
  - Identify new meanings for familiar words and apply them accurately (e.g., knowing *duck* is a bird and learning the verb *to duck*).
  - Use the most frequently occurring inflections and affixes (e.g., -ed, -s, re-, un-, pre-, -ful, -less) as a clue to the meaning of an unknown word

### **Reading: Literature**

- Standard RL.K.2. With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details.
- Standard RL.K.4. Recognize common types of texts (e.g., storybooks, poems).

### **Reading: Foundational Skills**

- Standard RF.K.1. Demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of print.
  - Follow words from left to right, top to bottom, and page-by-page.
  - Recognize that spoken words are represented in written language by specific sequences of letters.
  - Understand that words are separated by spaces in print.
  - Recognize and name all upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet.

### **Writing**

- Standard W.K.2. Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative/explanatory texts in which they name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic.

### **Speaking and Listening**

- Standard SL.K.1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
  - Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others and taking turns speaking about the topics and texts under discussion).
  - Continue a conversation through multiple exchanges.
- Standard SL.K.2. Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.