Be Core Ready

Powerful, Effective Steps to Implementing and Achieving the Common Core State Standards

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About the Author

Pam Allyn is an authority in the field of literacy education and a world-renowned expert in home and school literacy connections. As a motivational speaker, expert consultant, author, teacher, and humanitarian advocating for children, she is transforming the way we think about literacy as a tool for communication and knowledge building.

Pam currently serves as the executive director of LitLife, a national literacy development organization providing research-based professional development for K–12 educators. She founded and leads LitWorld, a groundbreaking global literacy initiative that reaches children across the United States and in more than 60 countries. Her methods for helping all students achieve success as readers and writers have brought her acclaim both in the United States and internationally. Pam is also recognized for founding the highly acclaimed initiative Books for Boys for the nation’s most struggling readers.

Pam is the author of 11 books for educators and parents, including the award-winning *What to Read When: The Books and Stories to Read with Your Child—And All the Best Times to Read Them* (Penguin Avery), *Pam Allyn’s Best Books for Boys* (Scholastic), and *Your Child’s Writing Life: How to Inspire Confidence, Creativity, and Skill at Every Age* (Penguin Avery). Her work has been featured on Good Morning America, The Today Show, Oprah Radio, The Huffington Post, The New York Times, and across the blogosphere.
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All students can meet and exceed the hopes, dreams, and goals we have for them as readers, writers, speakers, and listeners. I have written this book and created the Core Ready program to answer the call of the Common Core State Standards to create a new vision for what teaching and learning will look like in the 21st century. Core Ready students will master texts of all kinds; connect with fellow readers and writers from around the world; and see the value of reading, writing, speaking, and listening as powerful tools for communication, collaboration, creativity, and community. This book sets forth a brand-new framework in which literacy is no longer flat on the page, but is instead the multidimensional key to opening doors and entering new worlds. This framework is called the Four Doors to the Common Core.

Sign Language, School Reform, and the Dusty Roads from Home to School

I began my career as a teacher of the deaf. Many of my students not only did not learn English until middle school, but they first learned sign language then too. This was when I began to formulate ideas about the teaching of reading and writing specific to linguistically diverse students and special needs students—ideas that turned out to be applicable to all students. In my decade at the Teachers College Columbia University Reading and Writing Project, I led school reform work in New York City in hundreds of schools, building capacity among administrators for literacy leadership and training teachers. I built an understanding of the connections between reading and writing and studied children’s own reactions and responses to independent choice in reading and writing instruction. In 2002 I founded LitLife, a professional development organization designed to coach teachers to become effective literacy leaders. With the input of families and community leaders, I developed the idea of “wraparound” support for schools, best practice strategies for coming together as a true team to create a Core Ready community, ensuring all students can learn to read and write fluently, dynamically, and purposefully.

The Common Core State Standards have so much to offer: they put everyone on the same page in a common conversation for perhaps the first time ever, and in this way help us build a common vision for what we want for our children. In my travels, I have watched students walking many long miles along hot and dusty roads just to get to school. They are that hungry for an education that they will go hungry to get one. It is in this work that I have discovered there is nothing more fundamental than the right to read and write. It is the source of one’s own power and one’s own ability to protect one’s self and make oneself strong, healthy, economically empowered, and happy.

An Egg, a Soda Bottle, and a Plastic Bag

Question: What do an egg, a soda bottle, and a plastic bag all have in common?
Answer: They are all amazing innovations when used by children who are thinking like entrepreneurs. In rural Kenya, girls are raising their own chickens to create a “Chicken Initiative,” selling their eggs to the local markets. They have just learned to read and write, and with those skills they are building a business. A young man in the slums of the Philippines figures out that if he cuts a hole in the roof of his tin home covering and inserts a soda bottle full of water into it, he can bring sunlight in where there used to be darkness, thereby enabling him to do his homework and win a spot at a secondary school. In southern California, a group of schoolchildren collect all the plastic bags left on the ground and turn them into “bricks,” building furniture for playgrounds.
The world is changing, and everyone—young and old, near and far—can be innovators. You, my friends, can reach out and communicate with all of them. And they can communicate with you. And, surely, literacy and the language arts are all about communication.

Because of this changing world, we need a changed curriculum. We need to reframe the way we teach and how we as adults learn to learn in a brand-new world. We need a shared vision to take us into the new era. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have come along at just the right time.

Recently, I asked a group of kindergarteners to describe for me the “perfect school.” Earnestly, they told me many wonderful and magical ideas, most of which involved fantastic uses of the dress-up box, many hours of recess, as well as glorious and dreamy snacks in their lunchboxes. But then one little boy who was standing shyly by, listening intently, said to me, “Mrs. Allyn, I know what I’d have in the perfect school.” His eyes shining, he turned to his friends, opened his hands like the pages of a book and said, “Stories. I’d have stories all day and all night.”

Children are so wise. Invention, imagination, play, sustenance, and... stories. The reason I love the Common Core State Standards is that they give us a way to, at long last, tell a new story about ourselves in education. They also value stories in their reverence for literature and in their emphasis on argumentative writing, showing us that the value of literacy is having the power to tell your story the way you want it to be told. Yes, the stories might be those we find in journalism, those called “information,” or those stories might be the ones we find in folktales, those we tell on the streets to our neighbors, or those we tell in hushed whispers to the baby falling asleep. They are the stories that sustain us and lift us up. They get us walking down those dusty roads to school. They get us hungry to connect with each other.

You Belong to Core Ready

This book is for teachers, prospective teachers, administrative leaders, media specialists, ELL and special needs educators, and literacy coaches. But this book is also for families and community leaders so they become part of the Core Ready initiative too. Maria, the mother of third grader Stella, approached me recently at a school her daughter attends. “I never really know what to do to help my daughter at home to improve as a reader,” she shared with me. “I want to be on the team.” The CCSS provide the destination, what each child must achieve and by when in order to become “college and career ready.” This book and the ones to follow provide you with a way to create a team for Stella. By getting together and sharing a common vision, and effecting the changes that must come, we are all for Stella. Enrolling Stella’s teacher, Stella’s principal, Stella’s student teacher, Stella’s after-school program leader, Stella’s ELL coach, Stella’s media specialist, and Stella’s mother in the work of achieving standards, Stella has a transformational opportunity to achieve and to excel.

The Four Doors to the Core

The Core Ready program launched by Be Core Ready is a series of books that share reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language lessons created for use in a Core Ready classroom—where the CCSS can come to life.

These lesson sets are organized around the Four Doors to Core Ready, my easy-to-use framework purposefully designed to make life simpler for you and with the language drawn right from the CCSS:

- The Journey to Meaning: Comprehension and Critique
- The Shape of Story: Yesterday and Today
- The Road to Knowledge: Information and Research
- The Power to Persuade: Opinion and Argument

This book’s coverage of close reading, text complexity, assessment, and the role of new media in literacy learning is guided by the concept that the Common Core State Standards are a new academic Bill of Rights for children. Teachers, leaders, and prospective educators will gain concrete knowledge and best practices for creating a Core Ready classroom—one that focuses on helping students achieve and exceed standards in literacy.

This book can be read on its own to get your community genuinely excited to make some changes in the spirit of the Common Core State Standards and it can also be read as the launch book for the detailed grade-level books that follow—12 of them for grade levels K–8. You will find these books chock-full of lesson plans and specific daily activities that you can use right away.

All students can become Core Ready. With this book and this series, we can make it happen for each and every one. Let your power come from your core and from the Core. And then let us build core strengths in every reader, every writer for this, the 21st century.
I thank the team at Pearson for inviting me to create the vision for this book and series to follow. Aurora Martínez is a passionate and radiant leader who makes all things possible. Thanks to Erin Grelak for getting it all started. Thanks to Bill Triant for making it all happen. Thanks to Karen Mason and all the Pearson team, and Karla Walsh and the team at Electronic Publishing Services Inc., for such wonderful support.

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PD TOOLKIT™

Accompanying Be Core Ready, there is an online resource site with media tools that, together with the text, provides you with the tools you need to implement the lesson sets.

The PDToolkit for Be Core Ready: Powerful, Effective Steps to Implementing and Achieving Common Core State Standards is available free for 12 months after you use the password that comes with this book. After that, you can purchase access for an additional 12 months. Be sure to explore and download the resources available at the website. Currently the following resources are available:

- Pearson Children’s and Young Adult Literature Database
- Videos
- PowerPoint Presentations
- Student Artifacts
- Photos and Visual Media
- Handouts, Forms, and Posters
- Lessons and Homework Assignments
- Assessments

To learn more, please visit http://pdtoolkit.pearson.com.
The Core Ready Student
New Commitments for a New Century

"Learning is not attained by chance, it must be sought for with ardor and diligence."
—Abigail Adams
The student of the 21st century participates in the most astonishing developments in human communication since the invention of language. Spoken words can be communicated effortlessly and inexpensively anywhere in the world. Translation software improves on a daily basis, rendering the chaos of different languages into a minor bump in the road of understanding between different peoples. Stories can be told visually, through videos seamlessly uploaded and transmitted to anyone with an Internet connection. The filters that have always existed between the storyteller and the mass audience fall like dominoes. The future holds amazing promise for our children to find one another across previously insurmountable barriers of access, geography, and language (Kist, 2009). The entire world is their audience.

And while the future beckons with vast potential, the child of the 21st century also enjoys unparalleled access to the richness of the past, to the creations of cultures that have come before. Emily Dickinson’s poems are available online. Plato’s philosophy can be found readily, with a quick browser search leading to more information about Greek life in his time, political infighting, or the history of philosophy from Socrates to Sartre. Charlotte weaves her web, the ducklings still need to find their way, and Charlie’s eyes widen with delight at the golden ticket in his hand.

Into this future have come the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which provide us with common language to describe what it is we are all striving to do as educators. And to help you make sense of the standards and to be empowered to use them to help all your students achieve and succeed beyond your greatest hopes, I have created Core Ready: steps to standards success.

Students as Co-Creators of Content

The myth about the 21st century is that students are “victims” of technology—that the information and images they absorb are overwhelming and will preclude them from learning. I disagree. We now have the opportunity to teach our children in a brand new way, to give them the agency to be co-creators of new content that will change all our lives. The child who uses an app to make art on a digital device can then upload his creation onto a collaborative sharing site and add text to explain his process. The child who loves music can post a link to her composition and invite others to create music in response. A teacher can share a short video on life in a village on the other side of the world, inviting students to respond and even send messages to the children in that video.

The world is on fire. And the students are fired up too. Their ideas matter, really and truly. Their ideas can actually intersect with ideas already in the world. Students can communicate in an instant with other students across the world. At the age of 8, they can change people’s minds—and ultimately change the world.

Students as Communicators and Collaborators

The Internet makes it possible for students to communicate with many people—whether friends in Kenya posting on a blog, two students in different classrooms emailing each other, or entire schools joining via Skype to celebrate World Read Aloud Day. Students can be heard by peer audiences everywhere and connect to new friends thousands of miles away. The Common Core State Standards
charge us to use technology “strategically and capably.” They are a clarion call for us not to miss this moment, but rather to embrace the potential these tools have to make more people literate than ever before. In this book, I frame the use of technology as a central feature of standards-based literacy instruction. In the books to follow in the series, the Core Ready Program, I offer both high-tech and low-tech options in the lessons, for I know all too well there are students who are still not receiving equal access to technology. Either way, communication is going to be the name of the game in literacy. Writing a five-paragraph essay that only the teacher will see is becoming a task of the past. The entire purpose for literacy through the lens of the Common Core State Standards will be to truly communicate with others.

**Students as Global Citizens**

Students can participate in the world as global citizens. In an instant, they can register opinions that can be seen worldwide and influence legislatures. Students can mobilize for change by starting a group that connects to thousands of other groups. Years ago, Maya Lin shocked the world when she won the competition to design the Vietnam War Memorial at the age of 21. Now this is not so strange. We understand that young people can create valuable new ideas. The Internet gives them a platform from which to spread these ideas quickly, but students need to be efficient, effective, intuitive, and collaborative readers, writers, speakers, and listeners to do this well.

**Students as Creators of Great Questions**

Consider the student who is given a problem and believes the teacher must have the answer. So he makes a good best guess, trying to formulate the response the teacher expects. There is far less need for this scenario today. The student in the 21st century must instead be prepared to seek problems and find solutions on his own. The child must be able to construct and craft an effective question independently, using tools like Google, the most brilliant website in the history of the Internet because it is a clean and elegant platform for our inquiries. Crafting questions and finding solutions are part of the student’s evolving roles as a learner, a thinker, and a citizen. Learning how to ask questions that lead to new knowledge is one of most important activities for the student in the 21st century classroom.

Our students are growing up in a world where questions are valued; they drive the marketplace. Students may aspire to become engineers or electricians, attorneys or artists, computer programmers or doctors. In any of these cases, a learner growing toward passion and knowledge stokes the fires for active problem solving and clear, creative thinking, rather than learning to fill in the blanks on rote questions. Writing and reading change when their purpose is not just about regurgitating old ideas. Instead, we must formulate our own questions and know how to ask them so that the questions lead us toward what we really want and need to know. This kind of learning requires new curricula and new modes of teaching that are far more interactive and include deep and significant connections to and between content areas. The students themselves can help us envision a new era for education if we invite them to help us co-create these connections and to ask the big questions. One of the primary functions of literacy education is to teach our students how to ask questions, research answers, and innovate new ideas.

**The Standards as a Document for Change**

The Common Core State Standards were designed to ensure that all students, no matter where they live or what obstacles they face, receive a consistent, high-quality education from school to school and state to state, and upon graduation are prepared for success in their continuing education and their entry into the workforce. The standards were also designed to improve our ability to best serve the needs of our students. They help us figure out the knowledge and skills our students should have from year to year so we can build the best lessons and environments for them.

The Core Ready Student 3
The Common Core State Standards have come along at exactly the right time. As the world changes, we have in our hands a new document for change that we can use to find our way forward to teach, lead, and inspire. The Core Ready student will enter the workplace having had a classical yet modern education. She will know classic literature and be able to identify themes across texts, ideas, and cultures. She will see that there are common themes across the globe and across history, and that writers throughout time have been pondering and writing about those themes. She will become adept at identifying when an idea is fresh and new, when it is archetypal, and how it can be either abandoned or modified by her own innovative thinking.

The Standards as the Students’ Bill of Rights

Where, after all, do human rights begin? They begin right here in your classroom and in classrooms across the United States. That is where our children become global citizens, where they learn what it means to advocate for themselves and for others. That is where they get their first taste of equal justice, equal opportunity, and equal dignity without discrimination. That is where they get their first experiences with classical and modern texts. Words on the page—or on the screen—are what connect us to one another and allow us to find common ground, shared interests, shared joy. Expressing ourselves is what makes us human, and that is why literacy rights are human rights—and why the Common Core State Standards are so much more than standards for learning. They are a Students’ Bill of Rights, delineating specific educational benchmarks every student has the right to achieve.

The CCSS are also a Bill of Rights for teachers and educational leaders. We all have the right to clear and consistent expectations about what we teach and what our students need to know. We have the right to be supported by a solid body of knowledge and by a network of other teachers all working together to ensure that our students and our nation succeed and are working toward common goals. But we have to mean it. We have to put our muscle behind the task. We cannot just sit by the sidelines and say yes to standards. We have to stand up for them. The goal for every student should be mastery. Nothing can stop us in reaching that goal. But if we are going to say that, we have to be willing to change our stance too. We have to change the paradigm from teacher as leader to teacher as co-traveler. We have to learn how to be coaches and mentors, champions of individualized instruction, and diagnosticians who know every student’s literacy level and can quickly and efficiently take each one up the staircase of learning.

Let Your Power Come from the Core

The word core is a homonym: core and corps. I like that. Because it is at once about the core of why you teach and how you can enhance every aspect of your work to bring out your voice, your heart, and your soul. In realizing we are raising children, not making widgets, we must keep our children’s destinations at the core of our teaching.
This book is also about building a true corps of teachers, parents, and communities working together to ensure that every child has the certainty of gaining college- and career-ready outcomes. Poverty has devastated the chances of many children to succeed and achieve, and we need to keep the American dream alive and give these kids a real chance to thrive and become the leaders of tomorrow. Paul Krugman in the New York Times (2012) writes of how children from poorer families lack adequate nutrition and health care. And upon reaching school age, “they encounter a system in which the affluent send their kids to good, well-financed public schools or, if they choose, to private schools, while less-advantaged children get a far worse education.” Let us give all our children a great education.

Recent data show that despite everything we know about the critical importance of literacy and all the different models and techniques that have been developed to increase literacy outcomes, the reading competencies of American students in the past two decades are still lagging (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Research shows that focusing on college readiness is profoundly related to the number of students who ultimately complete college: “Unfortunately, of the 1.5 million 2010 high school graduates who took the ACT test, only 24 percent met all four College Readiness Benchmarks in English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science—indicating that fewer than 1 in 4 graduates were academically ready for college coursework in all four subject areas without needing remediation” (ACT, 2011a, p. 3). Today, we can use the Common Core State Standards as the way forward to build muscles (another meaning of the word core) to create a bright future for all students. By identifying common outcomes and delineating what those are at each grade level, no matter where that student moves or lives, we can guarantee that students will be given every chance to succeed. This is a big idea.

It Is Time for a New Story about Teaching and Learning

This book, along with the Core Ready Lesson Set series that follows it, will make the standards fully accessible to you and ensure that you are supported in helping every child reach and even exceed the goals the standards have set forth. The series is grouped by grade levels—kindergar-
ten through grade 2, grades 3 through 5, and grades 6 through 8—which closely follows the framework of the Common Core State Standards. It will provide you with targeted lessons and study units in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Each set of lessons moves upward on the staircase, so teams can see how the child ascends in his or her learning and be assured that students will not fall through the gaps.

When one initiative comes in and the previous goes out, teachers and administrators are often left on their own to figure it all out. But we have a new opportunity, here and now, to reframe what we want to achieve and what we want literacy to do for our students. Let us tell a new story about ourselves as educators and about students as learners—not as passive reactors to the forces that conspire against us, but as champions for the hope and promise every student deserves. Let us make this the moment in which we advocate for the rights of students by using the standards to improve the quality of our teaching and student learning and to transform classrooms into places of discovery, independence, achievement, and plain and simple fun. We have to tell a new story about what the purpose of education is, because if it is just the old story, the old way of providing information, our students will say, “I can get that off the Internet.” Instead, the classroom of the new century needs to be dynamic, stimulating, and encouraging of the kind of learning that emphasizes critical thinking, absorption of new knowledge, mastery of the power of stories, and deep understanding of meaning. The CCSS will help us collaborate with our students to get them to a new level of mastery that we could only have dreamed of before. After all, we are the co-creators and coaches alongside our students.

The classroom hums with the work of solving problems, uncovering meaning, supporting with evidence, and mastering arguments that will solve the puzzles and the challenges of the new world. Mastering the language arts will further students’ discoveries in science, math, and history; help those who wish to pursue vocational training; and enlighten students’ understanding of literature, past and present. This is the new story we can tell.

**What to Teach?**

What exactly must we teach to achieve the goals the standards have set forth for us? This is always the burning question, but the standards do not answer this question for us. Rather, they establish a foundation and lay out the dream. Much like the Bill of Rights offers us the promise of rights that we then must strive for in order to uphold, so, too, the Common Core State Standards give us the promise of success that we then must strive for so all children will graduate to become what they dream of being. The task of determining what to teach is certainly formidable work. We are given a treasure trove of important information telling us what our students should be able to achieve by the end of each grade level, yet this information can push us in many confusing directions, with the real possibility of not reaching the goals the standards have outlined for us. The Core Ready program answers this crucial question of what to teach, and sets us forth on a course of action with attainable results.

Our students are growing up in a very different world outside the classroom. As educational leaders, we need not only to match what is happening out
there, but also to be the advance team for what our students will be encountering as readers, writers, speakers, and listeners when they enter the world of work and scholarly or vocational studies. I have organized the goals the standards set forth within what I have identified as the Four Doors to Core Ready: The Journey to Meaning, The Shape of Story, The Road to Knowledge, and The Power to Persuade. You will find specific Core Ready lesson sets grouped inside these four doors in the books that follow this one. Each book outlines a series of lesson sets organized around the standards and arranges key literacy skills sequentially so that the lessons are not static. They are carefully calibrated to match the goals for each grade level. The Core Ready program moves our students upward, helping them become more deeply literate year by year, until the literacies they use become transformational literacies they will be able to use every day of their lives, no matter what path they choose.

Here and now, in the pages of this book, let us travel together to meet the goals of standards-rich literacy for all students. To begin, let us look at the ultimate goal of the standards: college and career readiness, and what that really means.
Ensuring College and Career Readiness Right from the Start

“A capacity, and taste, for reading, gives access to whatever has already been discovered by others. It is the key, or one of the keys, to the already solved problems. And not only so. It gives a relish, and facility, for successfully pursuing the [yet] unsolved ones.”
— Abraham Lincoln

“. . . all serious daring starts from within.”
— Eudora Welty
I often think kindergarteners are more ready for college and careers than 12th graders. It is not because I do not trust a 12th grader; it is more because I worry that all that good stuff kindergarteners bring to the table gets a little lost over the course of many years of education! The Common Core State Standards do two wonderful things to counteract this: (1) they value many of those same qualities we treasure in younger students and remind us in no uncertain terms to encourage them as the child grows; and (2) they start at the end goal: college and careers, and work backward so that every grade level lines up in sync like never before. The reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language use goals are carefully outlined. But it is never forgotten what the young child brings to the table: a natural sense of independence, strong critical thinking skills, close reading capacities, and more. Right from the start, your work is to cultivate a child who is going to have a bright future.

When I ask college students about the skills and strengths they need to write powerfully in the classes they take, this is what they say their professors want from them:

- Creative, original ideas
- Support for these ideas from primary and secondary sources
- A structure that supports the claims and makes good sense for the reader
- A strong introduction
- An interesting concluding paragraph that expands on the thesis

Many students have told me they did not learn these skills until they arrived at college. Their professors say the same. Why are we waiting so long to teach these critical thinking and execution skills? If we started in kindergarten, our students would have a much better chance of achieving at far higher levels when they enter college—and a much better chance of entering college in the first place. The emphasis in the primary and middle school grades on rote responses, fill-in-the-blank answers, and regurgitating the answers the teacher expects is not moving our students forward (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Colleges are consistently reporting that incoming students have weaker reading and writing skills than the freshman classes before them (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), and findings also show that our children are not demonstrating writing skills that will allow them eventually to perform well in the workplace (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006). These findings demand immediate action. Improving literacy performance is the key to improving students’ overall success—literacy success has an impact on every subject area in school, as well as every aspect of our students’ lives. Future success both in higher education and in the workplace depends on giving every student a solid literacy foundation today (Olson, 2006).

Being college and career ready means becoming a creative problem solver. Research has shown that college professors believe key cognitive strategies such as analysis, interpretation, accuracy, problem solving, and reasoning are as important as specific content knowledge (Conley, 2007). Literacy is more relevant to more people in more ways than ever before in human history. From the farmer who wants to record crop prices to the traveler on the subway looking out for his next stop to the young woman who logs on to a search engine seeking answers to a question she has, it is a radiant new world where literacy can make so many different kinds of outcomes possible, tailor-made for the hopes and dreams of each local community. High-level literacy skills also lead to a more educated citizenry—people who know what and whom they are voting for and what constitute the rules of their society. Literacy skills are crucial in the formation of a civic society that creates common goals and makes commitments to shared dreams. And creative problem solving is something kindergarteners are really, really good at, but we often do not give them nearly enough time for it. The kinds of literacy I will discuss in the forthcoming chapters all involve problem solving, and all are natural habitats for even the youngest child (especially the youngest child)!

Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are the four components of what I call the literacy loop (see Figure 1.1). With the advent of the Internet, the four components are now intrinsically entwined. (Although viewing images in non-print form is not in most formal definitions of literacy yet, I believe it soon will be and should be.) A person may read something, record his ideas about it, send a message out to the world, and then respond to what someone else has said in return. Reading and writing well, and speaking and listening well, are essential in the 21st century.
Throughout this chapter, I weave in observations from college students and people in diverse fields about the importance of these skills. Take a moment with your colleagues (or parents at a back-to-school night) to use some of these reflections to discuss what kinds of skills are most necessary for college and the contemporary workplace. You may find the results of this discussion surprising. Ask your colleagues to compare the results to how they currently teach literacy in the classroom. Do they match? The Common Core State Standards set forth goals to ensure that students can do everything from speaking clearly and confidently about classic and contemporary literature to reading informational texts, to building an argument and then providing evidence for that claim in their writing. Now is the time to enact a curriculum and teaching practices that will truly meet these goals. The CCSS is subtitled “College and Career Ready.” Let’s take a moment to consider what that really means.

**What Is College Ready?**

Being college ready today means reading widely, writing powerfully, and speaking and listening dynamically. A report from ACT called *The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2011* states that “sixty-six percent of all ACT-tested high school graduates met the English College Readiness Benchmark in 2011. Just 1 in 4 (25%) met all four College Readiness Benchmarks” (ACT, 2011b, p. 1). College ready literacy skills are complex and go across every subject area. These skills are not just about retelling or summarizing anymore. College ready is about navigating challenging texts and building one’s own hypotheses from the information found within them. Essentially, literacy is the ability to apply what one knows to new problems (Darling-Hammond, 2010). College ready is the stepping stone to having a career, a vocation, but it is also a unique use of the skills and capacities for reading and writing, speaking and listening: communicating with others in a way that shows our strengths and highlights our goals. As one college graduate said, “As writers in college, our audience was primarily our professors. We had to prove to them that we had done the reading and paid attention to their lectures. We had to show our ability to take their ideas and build off of them with our own research.”

**English Major**

I believe that the skills of imagination and creativity are often overlooked as essential reading and writing tools. My most inspiring professors have emphasized those skills to me and have pushed me, in their comments on my own writing and in our discussions as readers, to locate and build on those skills. I do think that a good grasp of grammar, organization, and clarity is a necessary tool to have as well. I feel, however, that many of those elements can be learned through the process of creating and imagining. Throughout my college career, I have learned to craft essays that move beyond thesis statements and supporting evidence. I now, instead, approach my writing as a space in which to explore my ideas, to assert my voice, and to represent the evolution of my thinking.

So the skill that has become most valuable to me is abstract, but I think that it is something that can, and should be, practiced at all points in the learning process: to know your voice, value your creativity, and treasure reading and writing as a means to representing your own individual wonderings.
Chapter 1

I help key executives make more confident decisions by connecting them with experts in various fields. We make as many as 1,000 connections per day, often between a client sitting in one country and an expert in another. As a people-based business, communication is our glue, the essential ingredient in every connection that helps us win client loyalty and provide an amazing experience for our experts.

Having overseen thousands of correspondences to make those connections possible, I can testify that reading skills are critical in helping us better understand our clients’ needs. We’re often relying on interpreting quick emails or complicated RFPs. Without that understanding, exceeding the clients’ expectations is difficult.

During a project, reading and listening are also essential for ensuring that the expert is really knowledgeable on a topic and appropriate for the consultation. We often identify red flag statements that give us cause for concern. And without sharp writing skills and the ability to cut to the chase and “so what” of an issue, we’d be lost communicating with the most senior executives and investors on one side of our marketplace and the experts they need to engage on the other.

For my particular career, I’m extremely thankful for the crystal clear comma rules I learned in eighth grade and the intense reading I was subjected to throughout my academic career, with exposure to business, academic, and pleasure reading—all important in a field where we have to tailor our communications to various personality types.

What Is Career Ready?

A career-ready student in the 21st century will need to be even better equipped to purposefully engage with the world. The career-ready scholar is curious, compassionate, and creative, ready for models of work that have begun to change (Oakes & Saunders, 2008). The virtual office, the conference call, Skype, and cloud computing already enable fully functional offices to exist without coworkers even being on the same continent. The corporation as a lifetime employer is a thing of the past. Students today may have many jobs over the course of their lifetimes (Ciletti, 2010). They will collaborate with peers around the world. They will bring their skills together with others to solve discrete problems and then disband, looking for other work groups. The pace of technological innovation will accelerate as each new discovery leads rapidly to others. In fact, due to advancements in information services, the amount of information that can be generated in a few years nearly equals the amount of information previously produced in the entire history of the world (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Our students’ challenge will be to forge new connections in this constantly expanding world.

Emily Nussbaum, the television critic for The New Yorker, has remarked how “we often have a cultural fantasy about individuals. But collaboration is just as frequently the source of great things, and it’s less rarely recognized. Change doesn’t always happen because of one person, but that’s what makes for great biographies” (Hepola, 2012). Collaboration is becoming highly valued. To work productively together, our children—from the first minute they are in school—must not merely sit at desks that resemble collaborative environments, but learn to work together to create and share new ideas, as well as listen to others’ ideas and synthesize them into something new.

Your students may never meet their future colleagues face to face when they enter the workplace. What once seemed magical and nearly unimaginable is now entirely possible. Their colleagues could be as far away as India or as close as a train stop away; the need to be together in person has diminished. Now more than ever the workplace synergizes ideas across time and space. What it requires is a workforce of people with strong literacy skills who can not only manage that kind of environment but also master it.
The Era of the New Reader

The era we live in now is charged with the energy and power of diverse genres, of constant information sizzling its way back and forth between people. These transactions are potentially life changing. We are reading across multiple genres in a matter of one hour. Everything from economic updates to personal information is flying across the airwaves in a microsecond. Even many very young children can operate portable technology.

Today’s reader might be reading several perspectives and genres at once: proverbs, poems, nonfiction articles, ecothrillers, political cartoons. Tracking a reader’s daily journey is fascinating. If you think about what you’ve read even today, you will be astonished to see how many genres you traverse and how many times your passions, your wonderings, and your concerns intersect.

Students today are reading more actual print than ever before. Mobile phones make it possible for them to write and receive short bursts of texts nearly continuously. If we harness this power in school alongside the vast and deep power of literature itself, we will create a winning combination. But we must move quickly, because school as we know it is becoming outdated even as you read this. We have to change our own paradigms and get set for this new era.

The Era of the New Writer

Students today are writing in myriad ways. They write long, formal essays, but also thousands of text messages, brief bursts of thought that flow immediately out into the world. They compose questions, seeking answers from teachers and community members as well as on social media and other online venues. Today’s writer needs to write short, sharp, and strong, but also be able to research many topics and take thorough notes, combining concepts to create new ideas. The writer must synthesize and create. He must craft a message to communicate with someone about an idea that is profound to him, and he must also be able to write for a particular audience: a professor, a friend, a team leader. He must have evidence to support his claim. And he must have a distinct voice—he must not look and sound like everyone else.

colleague conversation Be the Student!

Track your reading life briefly with your colleagues. Sketch out a timeline of your reading history from the last 24 hours. Now count how many genres you read, why you were reading, and how much time you spent on each genre.

What I Read

The Genre

The Purpose

Time Spent

Ask yourselves: How can we mirror the real-life reading we all do in the work we do with our students?

colleague conversation Be the Student!

Track your writing life briefly with your colleagues. Sketch out a timeline of your writing history from the last 24 hours. Now discuss what your purpose was, how long it took you, and who your audience was.

What I Wrote

Why I Wrote It

Whom I Wrote It For

Time Spent on It

Ask yourselves: How can we mirror the real-life writing we all do in the work we do with our students?
Speaking and Listening
Skills Really Count

Speaking and listening skills are integral parts of becoming college and career ready in the 21st century. Practice is key. The more we allow our students to practice making their arguments orally, articulating their thoughts on a particular topic, and voicing their opinions, the more adept and comfortable they will become with doing this on a daily basis. Likewise, the more we allow our students to use their deep listening skills, especially with their fellow classmates, the easier it will become for them to use that skill as they move through college and the workplace. Just as our students will be required to sift through large amounts of written information, they will also have to interact with many different types of people, in many different environments, with many different kinds of distractions, and still be able to extract the heart of what is being communicated to them. Being able to speak and listen well is crucial for our students to succeed. Does this mean all students have to be chatterboxes in class all day? Not at all! In fact, one of the essential texts for my work is a book by Susan Cain called *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking*. In Chapter 11 I talk about differentiating instruction for every learner, and this is one type of learner often underestimated and undervalued. So-called introverts may actually be great listeners, a skill that will benefit them enormously in the workplace later on.

The social, intellectual, and business world of the 21st century is one in which exchange is highly valued. We are trading ideas, selling ideas, promoting ideas, and giving ideas away. We are also idea consumers. We do this by being attentive listeners to radio, television, social media, and one another. There is certainly a cacophony of information, but it is not unmanageable if we teach our students how to identify ideas that have strong value for them and are supported by strong evidence to prove their worth. Knowing how to sift through information is a prized quality for today’s speaker and listener.

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career ready  Researcher

Even though I’m a researcher, sometimes it seems like I’m really a writer. Writing is how I develop my ideas for a study as I design the outlines of a project. Writing is how I figure out what questions to ask. Writing grant proposals is how I get funding to do my work! But most important, writing is how the quality of my work is judged, and how my findings get used. I write up the results of a study in a variety of ways—short reports for policymakers and educators, and longer reports for other researchers. I often write op-eds. If I can’t present my findings effectively through writing, my work won’t be seen as useful. It probably won’t be seen at all.

Since my job requires all sorts of different writing-based tasks, I rely on a range of writing skills. Obviously, I need to write a coherent sentence. But I also need to understand different audiences and what type of language to use to communicate effectively with each. I need to be able to craft arguments in my writing and to use evidence to back up my points. I need to be persuasive. I need to write good questions.
Knowing how to modulate what we share is also prized, and will become more so in the future. Effective communication and healthy discourse on varieties of topics will be highly optimized in our society, and the time is now to teach our students how to read, write, speak, and listen in ways that promote the dynamic sharing of new ideas.

**colleague conversation** | Be the Student!
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Track your speaking and listening life briefly with your colleagues. Sketch out a timeline of what has been meaningful to you first as a speaker and then as a listener from the last 24 hours. Now discuss what your purpose was, how you felt, and who your audience was.

What I Said

How I Listened

What Were the Outcomes

Ask yourselves: How can we mirror the real-life speaking and listening we all do in the work we do with our students?

**career ready** | Lawyer
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My career has required extensive reading and writing skills. The main types of writing are persuasive texts and analytical texts:

- Briefs and motions (which are also highly analytical) for courts
- Letters and submissions to administrative agencies
- Letters to adversaries and people with whom clients had an issue

Legal writing is different from most types of writing because it is somewhat formulaic and formal, and also because you are strictly forbidden from knowingly writing anything that you do not believe to be true. It contains elements of logic and a lot of research, but the key to victory is always tapping into the emotions of the judge or jury, or at least making palatable to their emotions what is logically incontestable.

Legal reading can be very mind numbing at times. Cases have their own style. But there is also a lot of reading about various businesses and industries. You learn an amazing amount of information about different areas of life as a lawyer. It is almost exclusively nonfiction—though it is often true that fact is stranger than fiction.

Close reading is absolutely essential. But the more prior knowledge you bring to the text, the more you can maximize the ways you can synthesize it with other texts and experiences to make your argument as strong as possible. Speaking and listening are also incredibly important skills for a lawyer, both in presenting and defending the case, as well as trying to figure out what is preoccupying the judge or your adversary. Trying to gain an understanding of the issues in the case from your own client often involves a lot of high level speaking and listening.

Speaking and listening are also about storytelling and empathy. Life is about transaction and interaction. Teaching children to speak and listen well is to teach them to communicate. Learning how people interact, sometimes virtually and sometimes face to face, sometimes in front of large groups and sometimes one to one or in small groups, is a vitally important skill. With the advent of video as a powerful communication tool, our students will need these skills in order to live the most purposeful, connected lives possible. Learning how to tell one’s story includes the same skills one needs as a writer, but in speaking and listening the audience is an even more powerful force, and the response becomes extremely important. The reader, writer, speaker, and listener must not only create new ideas but also be able to adapt ideas to the needs of the audience or to what he or she is trying to accomplish, as seen here from the viewpoint of an experienced doctor.
Core Learners, Core Texts, and Core Capacities

To succeed in college and the workplace, the learner in the 21st century must be a curious and collaborative critical thinker, reader, writer, speaker, and listener. Students must strengthen their capacities to read and write both independently and collaboratively, building content knowledge, thinking critically, and identifying key ideas to support their thinking. Students need to make connections that reach across genres, texts, and sources of information to build and defend their ideas and arguments. Their reading skills will flourish because they read regularly and widely across genres. Their skills are challenged by reading a variety of texts in a variety of modalities and reading both for stamina and to push their higher-order thinking skills. They will be active participants in an interconnected world, seeking information and opportunities to engage in discourse with other learners.

Students will read core texts that reflect various periods, cultures, and worldviews to enable them to talk deeply and intelligently about history, science, ethics, and human nature. The student who reads folktales and myths is the student who understands the nuances of favorite texts in which allegories appear (e.g., The Chronicles of Narnia) and even recognizes when the automobile industry has tapped into such references (The Odyssey). The Core Ready learner manages the popular culture and the library of classic texts, able to talk across the modern and the classical, the ancient and the contemporary. The child who makes the connection between The Lightning Thief and The Odyssey is a child who sees paradigms and metaphors and is able to think at much higher levels than simply filling in a few random questions on a test.

For the practice of medicine, the real art is learning how to translate complex medical concepts to the level that the patient can understand, recognizing that there are tremendous differences in literacy among patients. The obvious mistake that occurs over and over is when the doctor walks into a patient’s room speaking in medical jargon and the patient doesn’t understand a word being said. This also includes written informed consent, where patients read a poorly written legal form that makes no sense to them and must sign that they understand the risks of the procedure. There is a lot of interest now in specific “health care literacy,” which reflects the ability to read and understand drug labels, medical instructions, and the like. It turns out that fewer than half of patients take the medications their doctor thinks they are taking (the way they are supposed to be taking them) and, among many factors, poor health literacy clearly contributes.

The artful parts of good medicine—some of which are innate, but many of which can be learned, modeled, and taught explicitly—include the ability to assess the knowledge and literacy of the patient, tailor the verbal and written communication accordingly, and actively listen to make sure that the communication was successful. The other part of course is the ability to convey empathy and caring, which is another skill that is partly innate but can also be improved upon with practice and feedback.

career ready  Cardiologist

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Journalists read everything, all of the time. Moving, for me, is always extremely time-consuming: wrapping the wine glasses in newspaper takes so long because I have to stop to read the many fascinating articles I previously missed. Of course, these days, it’s much harder to read everything because there is so much written and it’s available on so many different devices. (I refuse to read books on my iPhone, but I see people doing it on the subway all the time.)

The proliferation of words makes it ever more important to be a discerning reader and carefully evaluate your sources. So much of the verbiage on the Internet is just people commenting on the original work done by others. As often as possible, go to the original sources.

I find reading articles on the Internet or on a mobile device is very effective for scanning but, overall, I think the Internet is bad for reading comprehension. It teaches you to absorb large volumes of information quickly and superficially.

career ready  Journalist

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The proliferation of words makes it ever more important to be a discerning reader and carefully evaluate your sources. So much of the verbiage on the Internet is just people commenting on the original work done by others. As often as possible, go to the original sources.
I still find it extremely valuable and important to sit down with actual books or newspapers to absorb information in a meaningful and lasting fashion.

For aspiring writers, the most important thing is to be a voracious reader. Reading teaches you how to write. Emulate the writers and publications that you admire. One of my girlfriends had a job delivering The Wall Street Journal, and she got me started reading it. I instantly fell in love with the paper’s crisp, understated style. I got my job at The Wall Street Journal by reading the paper very closely and copying its style.

We demand so much of young writers! They must be in command of their material. Having good facts is very important for journalists. There is also a big intangible element involved: You can’t teach someone to gravitate to the most surprising, enticing tidbits. Writing with clarity is essential. Reporters need to be good interviewers, good researchers, and good writers, and they have to equally enjoy each aspect of the process (although there is nothing quite so exhilarating as sitting down at the keyboard with a notebook filled with good material).

Core Ready learners are critical thinkers. They effectively identify evidence in texts to support their big ideas. They competently make connections that inspire their thinking, connecting ideas across multiple disciplines and multiple genres, from science to history, from poetry to blog posts, from the contemporary text to the classic, and they build hunches and hypotheses that are supported by facts to bolster their theories.

The Core Ready series that follows this book stresses the use of a diverse range of texts, imparting to your students important ideas about their history and their cultural connectedness to one another, to their communities, and to the global society. Core texts are chosen based on their complexity, quality range, and purpose (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). They are examples but by no means a final list. The Common Core State Standards are really emphasizing independence. In this way, our role is to model lifelong reading and give our students tools to do so, not restrict their reading lives with a small set of “approved” books. The widely diverse range of recommended genres includes everything from folktales, which express our human longings to make moral sense of a fractured world, to graphic novels, whose visual elements can help readers of all levels gain a deeper understanding of the material, to poetry, with its use of highly personal and intimate language, to informational texts, which use much more methodical and cerebral terminology. These, and many more, are the core texts that compose the “new” classical education every student deserves, right from the start.

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As a teacher I need to be able to read quickly and skim text when necessary to pull out key information, determine if it is appropriate, and summarize/synthesize large amounts of information. I also need to be able to apply what I’ve learned from reading to demonstrate understanding.

In the context of writing, I need to be able to effectively communicate through email (formal and informal). I also need to be able to write clearly scripted lesson plans that have step-by-step actions and detailed criteria for success. Someone else should be able to use my lessons in the event that I’m unable to teach my students. My writing therefore must be clear and provide explicit directions.

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By reading widely, writing regularly, and engaging in meaningful dialogue with peers and authentic audiences, our students will gain and strengthen what I refer to as the core capacities. These are key points identified by the Common Core State Standards. I believe they should be displayed in every classroom and known by every educator, forming the basis for a solid contract of commitment to the outcomes of our students. Students who master the core capacities will be able to

- Demonstrate independence
- Build strong content knowledge
- Respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline
- Comprehend as well as critique
- Value evidence
- Use technology and digital media strategically and capably
- Come to understand other perspectives and cultures

Ensuring College and Career Readiness Right from the Start 17
Every lesson in the Core Ready series is designed to achieve these seven core capacities. Keep these capacities as a checklist on your portable device and somewhere visible to you, your students, and your colleagues. Use them as “check-in prompts” for yourself and for your team. Does your teaching or leadership angle students toward these capacities? They can and should be the heartbeat of our teaching and leadership.

The Core Ready learner is not merely a writer who can master the five-paragraph essay or the research paper; he or she must be able to write in a wide variety of circumstances and, perhaps most important, use economy of language to build a case, explain an idea, or ask a question. Consider this:

- The Ten Commandments are 297 words.
- The Bill of Rights is 463 words.
- The Gettysburg Address is 266 words.

To captivate their audience and to get their point across quickly, students must learn to be concise but pack a punch. Length is not how we evaluate quality of writing in this 21st century. A superb Facebook status message or tweet can stop us in our tracks, make us cry, change our minds, or even change lives.

Clarity of writing, supportive details, and crystal clear point of view are all extraordinarily important because they hone our message for the reader. These skills must be taught and practiced, however. Your students must have the opportunity to write for real audiences (across time and space, virtually and in person) and to write in ways that match what they will actually do in the real world.

career ready  Executive Vice President, Investment Banking

In my workplace, we generally are required to produce persuasive written documents. In this setting, the most important writing skill is to be able to express what is often a very complex issue in a concise manner (one or two sentences at most) and then, equally concisely, set forth your recommendation for how to address that issue. All of this should be done within one short paragraph.

The balance of the written document should be devoted to supporting your recommendation. All substantive information should be conveyed in no more than a single page.

As is well known, à la Mark Twain, it is much more difficult to write a concise document than a long rambling one. This requires clarity of thought, strong sentence structure, and a broad vocabulary.

career ready  Graphic Designer and Graphic Production Editor

Having excellent writing skills is a definite requirement for a graphic designer. I often find myself rewriting ad copy when the language is awkward or incomprehensible. One also has to have a sharp reading eye, since it is necessary to catch mistakes as well as tighten up the writing so it is more concise and succinct.
The same new approach is essential for the teaching of reading. We used to teach reading in a lockstep approach, with everyone reading the same book at the same time. That proved ineffective because students were not able to deepen comprehension skills at their independent reading levels, and we saw no significant improvement in reading outcomes. We introduced the idea of leveling text, or matching individual readers to books at their own levels. Children need to read material that they can understand (Allington & Gabriel, 2012). Research has shown that interventions that focus on reading comprehension significantly improve overall reading ability (Keller & Just, 2009). Matching students to leveled text at their independent reading levels has been groundbreaking because students gain comprehension and stamina when they read texts that are comfortable for them. But this, too, has some limitations. In the real world, readers must be able to navigate information and literature at many different levels—including those well beyond any ideally matched levels. They also need strategies for going far outside their comfort zones as they read across genres, media, and disciplines. In the world, all students have to synthesize and organize large amounts of information in order to innovate new ideas and communicate those ideas to others. So how to resolve this apparent conundrum? In order to learn to read at higher levels, students need to read at their independent levels. But all students also need to grapple comfortably with challenging text. Here’s what I recommend.

Support readers with a solid range of resources at different levels up and down so they can reach up and dip down when necessary, depending on the purpose of their reading. In general, students should spend approximately half their time engaged with text at their level (determined using formative assessments) in order to build comprehension and stamina. One-third of their reading time should be spent engaging—both with support and independently—with more challenging text above their level to develop better reading skills. The balance of reading time (about 15%) can be spent engaging at text below level to further promote stamina and fluency. This mixture of text levels promotes comprehension while developing the skills and techniques to successfully engage with more difficult texts. Consider having an individualized book box, bag, or e-reader containing a collection that reflects not only what students can read at their levels, but also a selection of more difficult books in subject matter that is of interest to them as well as a few light reads that help them build both stamina and interest. The students can in this way curate their own reading lives, with teacher support and guidance.

**career ready** Scientist

The most common form of science reading is scientific abstracts and manuscripts. Scientific papers have strict word limits imposed by the publishers and, therefore, are often packed full of detailed information. A well-written abstract should provide all the important points from the paper in a short digestible form. To be efficient and effective in gleaning the important information from manuscripts, scientists must be familiar with the format of a scientific paper, know where in the paper to look for the information they are seeking, and then be able to scan the material for important points. Once the scientist has identified the important material in a paper, an in-depth reading of those sections will help provide the detailed information they seek. A few key papers closely related to the reader’s project might merit an in-depth reading; however, most papers will provide just one or two elements, such as a particular result or a specific method employed, that will benefit the current project. In this case, a targeted reading approach is a crucial time saver.

The forms of writing in which the scientist most often engages are manuscript and grant writing. In writing manuscripts, scientists must be able to summarize their results succinctly and word their conclusions so as not to overstate their findings while emphasizing the importance of their work. In grant writing, the most important aspect is to persuade the reader to be interested in and excited about the proposed project. The scientist must also write in a way that clearly lays out the foundations for proposed experiments and supports the expectations of success. Without these writing skills, papers cannot get published and grants will not get funded. The welfare of the scientist depends on effective communication of his or her data and ideas.
The Core Ready reader needs to understand not only what an archetype stands for in literature, but also the position a reporter is taking in a news article or op-ed or a blog post, the directions in an online course, or even a how-to article on fixing a website’s HTML. The reader needs resources to read multiple texts all at once. The old way was that every child turned the pages at the same time. Then the idea arose for different children to turn different pages at the same time. What I propose is that we teach our children to do both: read from a canonical text that defines a big idea about literary elements and read in a varied and purpose-driven manner to retrieve vital information and to sift through perspectives. In this book, I explain ways we can prepare our students to meet this century’s demands for new reading skills. The rigor we inspire in our students must come from the work they do with texts, not just the difficulty level of texts.

A Rich Definition of Literacy

What literacy is all about, really, is the classic E. M. Forster plea to “Only connect.” The authors of *Literacy as Social Practice* write of literacy as sets of social practices “rooted in life experiences. Since different people have different life experiences it follows that social practices are differentially available to various individuals and groups of people. This differential availability means that not everyone has equitable or equal access to literacy” (Vasquez, Egawa, Harste, & Thompson, 2004, p. xi).

It is therefore critically important that we make sure literacy instruction is rich and full, with access to resources that include both print and visual images. Reading texts, reading images, and reading the nonverbal ways people communicate every day add up to a rich definition of what literacy means in the 21st century and how much it means to everyone.

I work with a team of teachers from a school for the deaf. As we flash our signs to one another, I am reminded once again of what it means to “read” as my eyes catch their hands making meaning in the air. With the power of 21st century communication tools, the act of reading can feel like we are seeking meaning in the air. From the youngest ages, all our students must be equipped with the skills necessary to read, write, speak and listen, and master language skills in every possible modality.

A Cup of Coffee and a Bottle of Water

The business world has many effective strategies for selling ideas. Businesses have convinced people to pay five dollars for a simple cup of coffee. They have convinced people to buy something we can get almost for free at home (water). But somehow we educators have not been able to convince the public that we can educate children. And all the assessments in the world are not going to solve that problem. The way we convince them is to actually teach children effectively and meaningfully, and tell the story of U.S. education in a fresh, innovative way. The Common Core State Standards give us the opportunity to do just that.

Let’s not now sigh, “Oh, yet another initiative.” Let’s instead say to parents, “We will make it possible for your child to be ready for college and a career.” The CCSS are a game changer. This is the time to change the game. With the standards wrapping around us as educators and families, we now have a common language to create a shared vision. All children deserve the right to be functionally and transformationally literate.

At every workplace, in every college classroom, in every vocational setting, many forms of literacy are required—and beyond required, they will open the gateway to opportunity, personal and professional growth, and happiness. We cannot underestimate literacy as a tool that gives all people the right to the maximum levels of human happiness. Literacy alleviates loneliness, inspires independence, and cultivates understanding. In order to reach what I call transformational literacy, every student must learn the building blocks of literacy: the functional literacy skills for a lifetime. The next chapter will introduce you to the key to the Core Ready solution—the Four Doors to the Core, a way of organizing and managing the content in the CCSS and making it really easy to implement the CCSS tomorrow morning in all classrooms, everywhere.