

Guide to Creating Text Sets for Grades 2-12

Rationale

The *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* focus on building student ability to read and understand grade-level complex text and express that understanding clearly through writing and speaking. The Standards emphasize the role of close engagement with text in students building knowledge about the world. Well-crafted text sets around a topic can be one tool for educators in planning units of instruction that help students meet the demands of the Standards.

What is a text set?

A text set is a collection of related texts organized around a topic or line of inquiry. The line of inquiry of a given set is determined by an anchor text—a rich, complex grade-level text. The anchor text is the focus of a close reading with instructional supports in the classroom. The number of texts in a set can vary depending on purpose and resource availability around a given topic. What is important is that the texts in the set are connected meaningfully to each other to deepen student understanding of the anchor text and the overall line of inquiry. In a sense, the texts “talk to one another” so that in reading the set, students build a coherent body of knowledge around a topic.

Features of Strong Text Sets:

Strong text sets	Weak text sets
<i>Build student knowledge about a topic; meaningful connection to the anchor text</i>	<i>Texts are not related or connected across sets or they are only superficially connected</i>
<i>Texts are authentic, rich, and worthy of study</i>	<i>Only commissioned texts or textbook passages</i>
<i>Range of text types (genres) and formats</i>	<i>Focused exclusively on one genre or format</i>
<i>Text complexity levels support student achievement of the grade-level complexity demands of the CCSS*</i>	<i>Text complexity levels are erratic and do not support the staircase of text complexity in the CCSS</i>

*One strategy for supporting weak readers is to use a gradated text set, a text set in which the complexity demands steadily increase to build towards instruction around a grade-level text. In this case, some texts in a set may start below the quantitative demands of the grade band in an effort to build towards the anchor text. Similarly, some texts may place above the band to provide an opportunity for advanced engagement with the content after students have built background knowledge through the anchor text.

Steps to Creating a Text Set:

Selecting texts for teaching is a complex and nuanced process. There is no single process for creating a text set; educators may take a variety of different approaches given their aims and available resources. The following steps can be used as a basic guide to creating your own text sets:

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

The first step is to identify an anchor text and formulate an overall line of inquiry for students to follow as they read the texts in the set. This can happen in either order. An educator may first identify an anchor text, from which they formulate the overall line of inquiry for the set OR an educator may choose

to first identify a topic for a unit of study and then seek out an anchor text around which to build the set.

In the case of *Wonders of Nature*, for example, the text set author started with the anchor text. The topic of the anchor text is animals with special abilities that affect how they live in the world. From this, the author of the text set determined that the overall line of inquiry of the set would be *animals with special abilities*. Determining the overall line of inquiry in a set with an informational anchor text is often straight-forward; you can use the topic the anchor text addresses as the central organizer of the set. With a literary anchor text, it may be more challenging to settle on an overarching line of inquiry prior to exploring available resources. In some cases, you may need to adapt your line of inquiry as you select the richest available resources that connect with the anchor text.

The most important part of this step is that the anchor text be a grade-level complex text that meets the complexity demands of the Standards and is worthy of the time and attention of students. Without a rich anchor text, it is impossible to create a worthwhile text set.

Step Two: Use Databases to Research Texts around the Topic

Once you have identified the anchor text and line of inquiry for your set, you can use a variety of databases to search for accompanying texts. Sometimes you will need to adjust your search terms in the databases to find a range of texts around the topic. For example, in building the *Wonders of Nature* text set around animals with special abilities, the text set author searched *animals with special abilities*, *animals*, *animal adaptation*, *moles*, *beavers*, *praying mantis*, *chameleon*, *trap-door spider*, *spiders*, *archerfish*, etc. You want to make sure to protect the coherence of the set, but also be creative with search terms that might bring you a range of resources.

Several databases allow you to organize your results according to the quantitative measures of each text's complexity. These databases are exceptionally helpful in building a text set, as otherwise you will need to run the quantitative analysis for each text you consider. Running a quantitative analysis for a text is a simple task, but given the number of texts you might search to find a high quality selection for the set, using a database that provides a quantitative measure will be a time saver. One exceptional free tool is the Lexile "Find a Book" (<http://www.lexile.com/fab/>), which allows you to search for books by Lexile, grade level, and topic. Scholastic Book Wizard (<http://www.scholastic.com/bookwizard/>) and SIRS Discoverer (<http://discoverer.prod.sirs.com>) are two other user-friendly databases that allow you to search by topic and filter by quantitative measure. Scholastic Book Wizard is free and open to the public; SIRS Discoverer requires a subscription, but can often be accessed through your local library.

School librarians have a wealth of experience in using these kinds of tools to locate texts at given levels of complexity, so contact your school librarian (or a local librarian) for additional assistance in using these tools to create high-quality text sets.

Step Three: Evaluate Texts for Inclusion in the Set

In choosing your texts for the set, you will want to consider the *features of strong text sets* (in the above table). Ask yourself the following questions to determine whether a text is worthy of inclusion in the set:

- 1) *Does the text contribute to the students building a body of knowledge around the topic of the anchor text?*
- 2) *Is the text worthy of student time and attention?*

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

As much as makes sense given the purpose of your text set, aim for multiple formats (e.g., prose, poetry, drama, media), a variety of lengths, and balance in text types (informational and literary). Students should experience a 50/50 balance of literary and informational texts in elementary and a 30/70 balance of literary and informational texts in secondary across the school day (including reading in ELA, science, social studies, the arts, and technical subjects).

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

The majority of texts in the set should sit in the grade band of the anchor text. This is important in supporting students to meet the complexity demands of the CCSS. However, this does depend on the purpose of the set you are creating. In some cases, you may want to create a text set to support struggling readers in building knowledge around a topic prior to engagement with the anchor text. In this case, you may consider including a few texts below the band that build students' knowledge and familiarity with the topic before they are asked to grapple with the more complex anchor text. In other cases, you may want to provide an opportunity for students to build on the knowledge they have gained from engagement with the anchor text. Consider including a few titles above the grade band in complexity.

Step Three: Refine, Finalize, and Produce Text Set

Continue to refine your selections until you are satisfied that you have a range and balance of texts that support student engagement with the line of inquiry. Then, finalize your selections and document the text set for use in your instructional unit and to share with other educators. In documenting your set, we recommend including the title, author, quantitative measure, source, text type, brief summary/justification for including the text in the set, and citation.