# The Teachers' Newsletter
## from Illinois Classrooms in Action
Grade band lessons, ideas and information
Focus: English/ Language Arts

**Sixth through Eighth Grade**

If you have any suggestions, questions or concerns, click HERE to contact our editors.

## Student-Generated Assessment

In the previous issue, I explained some of the finer points for unobtrusive assessment, one of the 3 types of assessment. As a reminder the 3 types of assessments are obtrusive, unobtrusive and student-generated.

*Obtrusive assessment is where the assessment interrupts the normal flow of activity. Instruction stops while students that the assessment. Examples of this type are unit tests and formal standardized tests.*

*Unobtrusive assessment is where the flow of activity is not interrupted. In fact, students may not be aware they are being assessed. Observation and discussion are methods of unobtrusive assessment. This is often a formative assessment.*

**Student-generated assessment** is the third category of assessment. In student generated assessment students generate ideas about the way they will demonstrate their level of mastery on a given topic. Choice menus are an excellent way to guide students to worthwhile methods to demonstrate their learning. Time should be taken to discuss with the class your expectations and brain storm possible ideas. When this method of assessment is used, student motivation and engagement increase. It also allows teachers a chance to get to know their students' interests and strengths. And as a bonus, there is not big pile of repetitive papers to grade!

A Planning Guide is an excellent tool to guide students on this type of assessment.

Below is a sample.

*You can find more information on unobtrusive assessment in A School Leader's Guide to Standards-based Grading by Tammy Heflebower.*

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**Student-Generated Assessment Planning Guide**

Name:

Learning Goal or Topic

I want to demonstrate that I am at the _____ level of the proficiency scale for this topic.

I need to understand or be able to (describe the score -level content in their own words):


I will demonstrate my understanding or skill by (describe your student – generated assessment):

(Examples: write an essay, demonstrate a process, explain orally to the teacher, create a multimedia project)


My assessment proves my understanding or skill because:

# Using Mentor Texts to Teach Narrative Writing

Students need many examples of the type of writing we expect them to do. Finding texts as a mentor is one of the most powerful strategies for teaching writing. The following are steps a teacher could use when teaching narrative writing.

1. Choose mentor texts. Choose them based on the grade level and how that text could be used in future mini lessons. The text should be in the same genre that you are expecting your students to write. Of course the text should be engaging and full of skills that you want to pass on to your student.

2. Read aloud a part or the whole text. Read through without stopping. You will be able to reread portions of the text later as a part of a minilesson.

3. Choose a skill to teach during the minilesson such as how to develop a character. Read a portion of the mentor text that helps analyze the technique an author uses when developing a character.

4. Model for students by emulating this skill in your own writing. Keep in mind there should be similarities and differences in a portion you emulate from the mentor text.

5. Allow students to see you struggle or work through

Click here for a list of mentor texts from the NCTE.
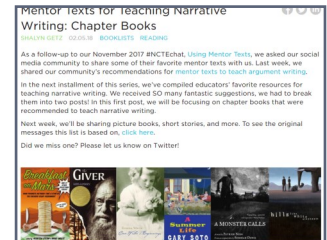
*"The most difficult thing about writing; is writing the first line."*

*Amit Kalantri*

# Model, Model, Model…and then Model Some More

One powerful technique for teaching writing skills is to write alongside students. Start a draft at the same time as the students and compose "live" on the classroom projector. Be careful to do a great deal of thinking out loud so students can see all the decisions a writer has to make. The most helpful parts for students to observe is the early drafting stage, where the teacher just scratches out whatever comes to them in messy, run-on sentences. During the revision stage, students should see where the teacher crosses things out, rearranges, and makes tons of notes on their writing.

When students witness this process over and over it can help to unlock a student's understanding of how writing is constructed.

Once students have a decent rough draft—something that has a basic beginning, middle, and end, with some discernible rising action, a climax of some kind, and a resolution, it may be time for further instruction.

A class period could start with a short mini-lesson on some aspect of narrative writing, and then time for students to write, conference with the teacher and collaborate with their peers.

During that time, they should focus some of their attention on applying the skill they learned in the mini-lesson to their drafts, so they will improve a little bit every day.

As mentioned in the top article, mentor texts can provide a different way of modeling specific components of writing.

Click here for another list of mentor texts recommended by Cult of Pedagogy.
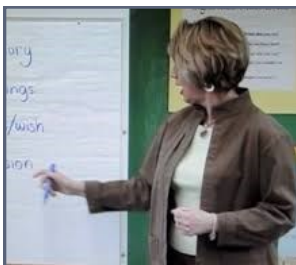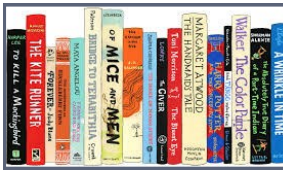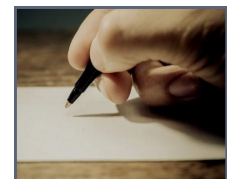
# Reading in the Math Classroom

How often do students (or even adults) say negative things about word problems? To help their students, teachers often reword or interpret word problems or come up with clever strategies to help them decode bits and pieces of word problems (such as "'*of*' means multiply" or "'*more than*' means addition"). Neither of these strategies help students become better problem solvers. Rather, they tend to make students more dependent on the teacher for help or inspire frustrations when the "tricks" they learned fail.

What makes things even more difficult for students is that many words used in everyday language have a different meaning in the math classrooms: prime, even, mean, mode, product, operation, domain, rational, and real just to name a few.

In order to truly help students become word problem experts, they must engage in reading for understanding in the math classroom. Teachers must be intentional about incorporating reading into their math classes and teaching their students sustainable strategies that

will help them read for understanding. The white paper by Carnegie Learning cited below suggests three strategies: Chunking the Text, A Multiple Read Process, and Annotation. This document is available for free download and includes an annotated lesson plan to illuminate how these skills could be incorporated into instruction.

Galasso, S. (2019). [online] Discover.carnegielearning.com. Available at: https://discover.carnegielearning.com/rs/041-RWV-195/images/2018-Developing-Literacy-Whitepaper.pdf [Accessed 25 Mar. 2019].
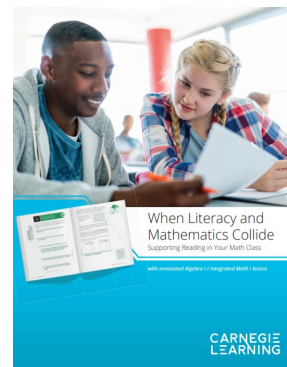
*"Making sense of problems, constructing viable arguments, and critiquing the reasoning of others, and attending to precision all require students to develop their ability to listen, read, speak, and write in mathematics at a depth that shows mathematical understanding."*

*(Galasso, 2019)*

## What's Going On in This Graph?

The Learning Network, a teaching resource by The New York Times, has a series called "What's Going On in This Graph?" In these activities, students are presented with a graph that had been published as part of an NYT article and are then prompted to answer these three questions: *What do you notice? What do you wonder? What might be going on in this graph?* These offer excellent opportunities to get students thinking, talking, and writing about their mathematical understanding!

## Upcoming #ILMathCom Events

Join us at one of our upcoming free, virtual #ILMathCom events!

Check out www.mathteachersinaction.org/ilmathcom.html to access the complete listing of upcoming events, register for #ILMathCom events, or to watch the recordings of past events.

The April #ILMathCom events will focus on the statistics and probability standards. Julia Brenson, retired teacher from Lyons Township, will be addressing your concerns and frustration with the statistics standards by showcasing the work shared on the IL Stats website. Join us! Tell your friends! Register here.

**Middle School Statistics:**

Tuesday, April 9, 3:30-4:30 PM CST

**High School Statistics:**

Thursday, April 25, 3:30-4:30 PM CST

## Science and ELA Integration

*"SCIENCE SIMPLY CANNOT ADVANCE IF SCIENTISTS ARE UNABLE TO COMMUNICATE THEIR FINDINGS CLEARLY AND PERSUASIVELY"*
*-A Framework for K-12 Education*

It is easy to see where science and literacy skills overlap in the Science and Engineering Practices of Obtaining Information, Constructing Explanations and Engaging in Arguments. Keep in mind that the intent of the inclusion of these practices in the NGSS is for students to leverage these literacy practices in the service of "figuring out" phenomenon and solving problems. Simply reading about scientific concepts does not accomplish this goal.

The NGSS Lesson Screener can be used to ensure that this goal is being met. You can find the lesson screener at https://www.nextgenscience.org/sites/default/files/NGSSScreeningTool-2.pdf.

## Argumentation Toolkit

Scientific argumentation is a social process in which students build, question and critique claims using evidence about the natural world. This is a key practice both in the Next Generation Science Standards and the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy. A resource that provides K-12 teachers with tools and professional development in using the ELA practice of argumentation in the science classroom is The Argumentation Toolkit. The Argumentation Toolkit website includes videos, tools and professional development modules to support teachers in integrating this practice. The resources are developed around 4 elements of scientific argumentation that students need extra support around: 1) Evidence, 2) Reasoning, 3) Student Interaction, and 4) Competing Claims.

These resources can be found at http://www.argumentationtoolkit.org/

## #ILSciCom

Join us as classroom teachers from across Illinois share some of the resources they are using to support Phenomena Driven Instruction. Learn how their students' learning has changed as they implemented this instructional shift. Come prepared to ask questions and share resources you have found. **Register Here: http://bit.ly/April4ILSciCom**

# The What and the How of Social Science

In social science we know that the content may be the *what* we teach, but there is also the *how*, and this is where literacy instruction can support social science educators. After all, the ultimate goal of literacy instruction is to build a student's comprehension, writing skills, and overall skills in communication. There are an endless number of engaging, effective strategies to get students to think about, write about, read about, and talk about the content you teach.

Students having conversations, deliberations, and discussions in small and large group settings does not happen overnight. It takes time -- and scaffolding -- to create this in your classroom. In order for our students to engage in academic conversation they need plenty of practice with informal conversation in pairs and triads. These conversations can enable students to write about the topic after hearing additional thoughts and having time to think about the topic.

Learning is a very social act.  One idea is for every 5-8 minutes students read or take in information, give students 1-2 minutes to talk to each other.  You can walk around and listen, informally assessing and checking for understanding. Make sure you provide purposeful questions and statements that enable good discussion and of course model, model, model how to talk to teach other. Looking for sentence stems for students to use during these conversations?  Click here to check out a variety of sentence stems.

# 21st Century Literacies in the Social Sciences

The National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) recognize that "As society and technology change, so does literacy. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the 21st century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies." They state that active, successful participants in this 21st century global society must be able to:

1. Develop proficiency and fluency with the tools of technology;
2. Build intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others so to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought;
3. Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes;
4. Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information;
5. Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts;
6. Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments.

Though the social sciences provide an excellent opportunity to engage students in all of these 21st century literacies, it is of particular importance that students are provided the opportunity to strengthen literacy practices 4 and 5 as digesting and interpreting information has become a key component to social science instruction in this modern age.

Two great resources exist to allow students the opportunity to practice these literacies.

♦ The News Literacy Project, a nonpartisan national education nonprofit, empowers educators to teach students the skills they need to become smart, active consumers of news and information and engaged, informed participants in our democracy. Educators and students can access lessons with a free account or upgrade to a premium account for additional features.

♦ The Stanford History Education Group's (SHEG) Civic Online Reasoning portal provides assessments of civic online reasoning—the ability to judge the credibility of digital information about social and political issues. They hope teachers use the tasks to design classroom activities, as the basis for discussions about digital content, and as formative assessments to learn more about students' progress as they learn to evaluate online information. Also, as part of MediaWise, SHEG is developing and evaluating new civic online reasoning lesson plans for middle and high school students. The lessons will be available fall 2019.

*Media literacy is not just important, it's absolutely critical. It's going to be the difference between whether kids are a tool of the mass media or whether the mass media is a tool for kids to use.*

**Linda Ellerbee**

Check us out on the web:
Illinois Classrooms in Action

Writing for me is definitely a form of ventilation - a way for me to cope and deal with emotions. I think it is for any writer.

-Crystal Bowersox
Musician

# Connecting SEL Standards to English Language Arts

The Illinois English Language Arts Standards have a set of standards that are the same for all grade levels called the College And Career Readiness Anchor Standards (CCR). These detail an overall understanding for the development of reading, language, writing, and speaking and listening. Connecting the SEL standards to these CCR standards can allow all educators to support ELA with social emotional learning opportunities.

Incorporating social emotional standards within all classroom activities can be accomplished. Discussions and questioning is a simple way to encourage students to reflect and identify social cues and situations. Talking through what a character is going through in a story or the struggle/successes people are experiencing in current events creates a wonderful way to connect these actions to students' lives.

Take time to discuss or ask students to write about the characters' decisions. Possible questions:

- Would the students make the same choices? Why/Why not?
- What would happen if the decision was different?
- How did the characters choices affect others in the story?
- How did the others react in the story?
- Could they have done something different?

When developing vocabulary for study include grade level emotional vocabulary. K-1 might include sad, happy, anger and progress to vulnerable, ecstatic, infuriate by high school. Full example of an emotional word wheel is here:
https://goo.gl/9GRF8u

| CCR Standards | SEL Standards | SEL Bench- |
|---|---|---|
| CCR.R.3: Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. | | |
| | 2B: Recognize Individual And Group Similarities And Differences. | |
| | | 2B.3a: Explain how individual, social, and cultural differences may increase vulnerability to bullying and identify ways to address it. |
| CCR.R.6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text. | | |
| | 2A: Recognize The Feelings And Perspectives Of Others. | |
| | | 2A.3a: Predict others' feelings and perspectives in a variety of situations. 2A.3b: Analyze how one's behavior may affect others. |
| CCR.W.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences. | | |
| | 1A: Identify And Manage One's Emotions And Behavior. | |
| | | 1A.3a: Analyze factors that create stress or motivate successful performance. |
| CCR.W.8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism. | | |
| | 3B: Apply Decision-Making Skills To Deal Responsibly With Daily Academic And Social Situations. | |
| | | 3B.3a: Evaluate strategies for resisting pressures to engage in unsafe or unethical activities. |
| CCR.SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. | | |
| | 2D: Demonstrate An Ability To Prevent, Manage, And Resolve Interpersonal Conflicts In Constructive Ways. | |
| | | 2D.3b: Evaluate strategies for preventing and resolving interpersonal problems. |

# Resource Connection

My Pop Studio is a website that allows students to go behind the scenes within four media platforms and find out how media influences teenagers view of themselves and social relationships. Students can be in a magazine studio designing a layout where they are the celebrity, a TV studio examining viewing choices and ads, music studio looking a lyrics and media or a digital studio discovering the impact of social media. Incorporating English Language Arts CCR standards are built into this platform and the lesson plans available to educators. The website includes learning outcomes and secondary outcomes on the "about us" page. http://mypopstudio.com/index2.php