

Correlation of Scholastic R.E.A.L. to the Common Core State Standard Initiatives for English Language Arts

GRADES K-7



R.E.A.L.

Your On-ramp to the Common Core State Standards

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) aim to help *all* students, kindergarten through grade 12 develop a *common core* of knowledge and skills so they graduate high school with a high quality education, well-prepared for college or careers. And, as engaged volunteers who care deeply about students' academic success, it's reassuring to know that as we follow the guidelines of **R.E.A.L. (Read, Excel, Achieve, Lead)**, we are implementing the key goals of the Common Core. **R.E.A.L.** turns ordinary mentoring programs into an invigorating, academic workout that meets the essential requirements of the Common Core.

A Note About the Interactive Read-Aloud

R.E.A.L. is framed around an *interactive read-aloud*, a read-aloud plus text talk, and is based on three understandings; it: 1) encourages students to become active learners during book reading; 2) provides feedback that models more sophisticated language; and 3) challenges children's knowledge and skills by raising the complexity of the conversation. The Common Core State Standards speak to the essential importance of the interactive read-aloud particularly for younger children:

Because...children's listening comprehension likely outpaces reading comprehension until the middle school years, it is particularly important that students in the earliest grades build knowledge through being read to as well as through reading, with the balance gradually shifting to reading independently. By reading a story or nonfiction selection aloud, teachers allow children to experience written language without the burden of decoding, granting them access to content that they may not be able to read and understand by themselves. Children are then free to focus their mental energy on the words and ideas presented in the text, and they will eventually be better prepared to tackle rich written content on their own (CCSS, 2010).

Ten Requirements of the Common Core Supported by R.E.A.L.

1. Engaging With the Highest Quality Fiction and Nonfiction

R.E.A.L. showcases award-winning fiction and nonfiction—in keeping with the Common Core’s call for a “deep and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and informational texts.” Reading in general and literature in particular have always offered the promise of transcendence, of an opportunity to experience other lives, universes, and emotional fields. A kaleidoscope of culture, language, human values, opinions, and perspectives flashes into focus through deep reading and conversation about literature, and helps to shape the perception, sensitivity, and knowledge of a literate person.

2. Accessing Critical Content and Building Knowledge

Like the Common Core, **R.E.A.L.** recognizes that nonfiction reading may well be the key to success in later schooling. As readers advance in grade, they more frequently face content-area textbooks as well as informational passages on tests. Including more informational text in early schooling prepares them for these reading and writing demands. Students who know something about topics they meet in different academic subjects bring a great advantage to their reading and writing. The more specialized academic knowledge they have, the easier it is to comprehend and convey new information when they read and write (*Hampton & Resnick, 2008*). What’s more, “students are expected to learn from increasingly technical expository texts during adolescence, and their knowledge base must continue to grow in order to meet the demands of this text...students who do not keep pace with the increasing demands content area texts place on prior knowledge will fall further and further behind in their ability to construct the meaning of the text” (*Torgesen et al., 2007*). The R.E.A.L. interactive read-alouds provide unique conceptual and linguistic support and enable even challenged readers to access critical content.

3. Using Challenging, Complex Texts

The Common Core recommends that our children read challenging books on their grade level and **R.E.A.L.** recommends books that are grade-appropriate for students. Ideally, every book we share with students will provide a thinking workout, especially as we engage in lively discussions about the books we read together. Kids who enjoy early experiences with books tend to become successful readers who can read grade level books with fluency and accuracy (*Duke & Carlisle, 2011*). And more good news: strong readers often become strong writers and spellers, too (*Krashen, 2004*).

4. Promoting Close Reading and Citing Text Evidence

R.E.A.L. recognizes that to grow and achieve the goals of the Common Core State Standards, our students must read extensively and intensively—especially informational texts that offer them new language, new knowledge, and new modes of thought (CCSS, 2010). Close reading—which the interactive read-aloud promotes— is a key strategy. Timothy Shanahan explains close reading:

Close reading requires a substantial emphasis on readers figuring out a high quality text. This “figuring out” is accomplished primarily by reading and discussing the text.... Close reading [means] intense emphasis on text, figuring out the text by thinking about the words and ideas in the text, minimization of external explanations, multiple and dynamic rereadings, multiple purposes that focus on what a text says, how it says it, and what it means or what its value is (2012).

A close reading is also a careful and purposeful rereading of a text. It’s an encounter with the text where students are able to focus on what the author had to say, what the author’s purpose was, what the words mean, and what the structure of the text tells them. **R.E.A.L.** provides text-dependent questions, which require our students to return to the text and search for answers. These aren’t the old-fashioned recall questions in which students simply search for the facts. These are questions that prompt students to consider the text and the author’s purpose, as well as the structure, graphics, and flow of the text (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2012).

5. Writing About Reading and Writing From Sources

R.E.A.L. offers opportunities for writing about reading—another CCSS requirement. Even young children can draw pictures about their books and then eventually try writing captions that explain their pictures. Reading and writing are mutually supportive language processes (Graham and Herbert, 2011). When children write about their reading, they reap the learning benefits. What’s more, the Common Core encourages students to back up their arguments and opinions with material drawn from the book—an excellent entry point into research.

Evidence-based writing requires students to use evidence from the text to support their points. Summarizing the Graham-Perin (2007) report *Writing Next*, Timothy Shanahan (2012) lists key findings that demonstrate the ways in which writing about text provides students with a way into the text that enables them to crack it open and construct meaning and knowledge in more effective and precise ways than would be possible if they were only reading and rereading the text or reading and discussing it. The benefits of writing about text are abundant and profound; writing about text:

- Encourages deeper thinking about ideas
- Requires students to draw on their own knowledge and experience
- Helps them to consolidate and review information
- Inspires the reformulation of thinking

- Requires the organization and integration of ideas
- Fosters explicitness
- Facilitates reflection
- Encourages personal involvement
- Requires translation into one’s own words

In the era of Common Core, students don’t just write about the ideas they learn from text. Their writing—which consolidates their views and understandings—also helps drive their reading comprehension. Additionally, students are expected to synthesize information in their own words, and use the text to make an argument or opinion. (*Neuman & Roskos, 2012*).

6. Discovering Research: A Way to Build and Present Knowledge

Common Core promotes student research across the curriculum. As part of a **R.E.A.L.** experience, we can be on the look-out for topics that spark students’ interest. Every **R.E.A.L.** book has the potential to launch additional research. We might make a chart with students: what they know about [topic], what they want to find out, and how they’ll learn. Students can search for additional information on the Internet, in their classroom library, or at the public library. They can read the books independently, take notes, and report what they learned. We can mark off the questions they find answers to in the books, and jot down new questions that may arise. In this way, students will learn the value of investigating multiple sources, considering alternative points of view, and capturing their own thinking in writing that they can then share with others.

7. Controlling Academic Vocabulary

The research demonstrates that the majority of vocabulary growth occurs not as the result of direct instruction, but through reading and text talk. As students hear the exquisite **R.E.A.L.** titles read aloud—and have the opportunity to discuss them—they encounter new vocabulary again and again. It’s these repeated exposures to new words that enable students to make the words their own. “*Domain-specific academic vocabulary* consists of relatively low-frequency, content-specific words that appear in textbooks and other instructional materials; for example, *apex* in math, *escarpment* in geography, and *isobar* in science” (*Blachowicz & Fisher, 2011*). Knowing that a robust vocabulary predicts reading comprehension, it is essential that we do all that we can to help our students grow their understanding of vocabulary related to specific domains of content; indeed, as children’s vocabulary grows, it bolsters their reading comprehension (*Duke & Carlisle, 2011*).

8. Using Listening, Speaking, and Presenting to Learn

The Common Core, like R.E.A.L., recognizes that conversation, in general, is an indispensable learning tool. When we serve as thoughtful facilitators of classroom talk, demonstrating the quality comments that reflect critical analysis, and provide the space and structure that invite our students to share their own thoughts and questions, we move away from an IRE discourse pattern (teacher *initiates*, students *respond*, teacher *evaluates*) to an invigorating interactive pattern best characterized as I-R-R-R-R, where our opening remark is then followed by a series, or chaining, of student responses (*Serafini, 2009*). This is the power of *collaborative conversation*. Students learn to delve deep into intellectual inquiry: to explore issues, share interpretations, and build on each other’s evolving meanings. Additionally, the Common Core understands that the best way to learn is to present to others what you know. To that end, the standards promote student presentations. As we read aloud the R.E.A.L. recommended books, we can encourage students to present what they are learning to us, to their classmates, and to extended family members.

9. Learning Foundational Reading and Writing Skills

Part of learning to read, of course, is learning what the CCSS calls *foundational skills* that enable reading—such as learning the alphabet, knowing sound and letter relationships, developing strong control over a growing vocabulary, understanding the role of punctuation, and reading with accuracy and fluency. Every time we share a **R.E.A.L.** book with students, depending on their grade level, we can talk about the ways in which letters, sounds, and words work together to create a meaningful message. Or, if we’re working with older students, we can discuss more sophisticated aspects of language related to the writer’s craft such as word choice and grammatical structure. And in a similar way, as we work to help our students respond to their reading through writing, we can talk about and encourage them to use proper language conventions—the rules about grammar, spelling, and punctuation that we apply when we write so that others can follow our thoughts and understand our message.

10. Developing Intellectual Curiosity and Multiple Perspectives

R.E.A.L. helps students engage with high-quality fiction and nonfiction in ways that “build knowledge, enlarge experience, and broaden worldviews,” a pivotal goal of the Common Core (2010). Helping children develop cultural and linguistic sensitivity and an expansive understanding of our richly diverse world is built into **R.E.A.L.** —which offers numerous opportunities to explore and celebrate diversity and spark students’ intellectual curiosity. Students who read widely about different cultures, customs, and ways of living around the world, develop open minds and understanding hearts.

In Sum

Again and again, the research demonstrates that students who learn to read, write, and talk about books, in the ways in which **R.E.A.L.** recommends —become engaged learners, successful students, and deep thinkers—for life!

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