

# CommunicationPoints

## Welcome Back! A look at the road ahead

Hopefully, your new school year is off to a *rocking* start! As for the *rolling*, work and materials for the NCSC GSEG continue to metamorphose as we move closer to the 2015 implementation of the new alternate assessment aligned to the Common Core State Standards. This year will be exciting as states build on to the initiatives they have started and continue to break down barriers they've encountered along this Journey to the Core.

If you have not done so already, take some time to explore the NCSC Wiki which can be accessed at [wiki.ncscpartners.org](http://wiki.ncscpartners.org). The Wiki is like a warehouse. It stores all of the materials that have been developed through the NCSC GSEG: curriculum, instructional, and communication resources, as well as provides links to external resources that will also be of significance to you. The Wiki is the permanent home to these materials. You'll want to bookmark this site and refer to it often.

The Wiki works similar to Wikipedia which is why it was chosen as the method of housing the materials for you; it's familiar. It contains a search bar for you to search for specific topics. The search results will display everything within the Wiki pertaining to that topic.

The Wiki is publicly accessible and is still under construction. By its very nature, it will continue

to expand as more information becomes available and is refined. Become familiar with the Wiki and anticipate that the work planned for this year will move us closer to being ready for the new assessment. More importantly, it will help us provide an increasingly higher quality education for our students.

## Purposes and use of the NCSC Wiki and LMS

The NCSC Professional Development Team provides two electronic sites to assist in work with Common Core State Standards and the NCSC Alternate Assessment. The NCSC Wiki facilitates use of the curriculum and instructional resources developed in the NCSC grant, and the NCSC Learning Management System (LMS) delivers high quality, multimedia information and training.

The NCSC Wiki stores written grant resources in an easy to navigate and searchable format. Using MediaWiki software, the Wiki is formatted in a familiar fashion, follows the NCSC Schema in organization, and divides the materials into curriculum and instructional resources. Many of the pages (or articles) in the Wiki are linked to other resources, including additional articles within the Wiki, multimedia in the LMS, printable PDFs, and external sites that offer supporting information. The Wiki is a public site; no password is required to view the content.



The NCSC LMS will deliver multimedia information and training. This system will include Assessment Administration trainings and courses that support educators in their work with the CCSS (Common Core State Standards) and students with significant cognitive disabilities. Learners will see a personalized profile in the LMS that will help them track their progress through training as well as keep a calendar and monitor announcements that are sent about courses and other assessment related materials or timeframes. The LMS provides differentiated access to the content that is dependent upon the user's role and permissions associated with that role. Administrators, for instance, have the ability to track course completion for educators, generate reports, and view aggregated and disaggregated data for multiple users. Administrator coursework and configurations may be different from that of teachers. For this reason, the LMS requires a sign-in and password. The LMS is currently being developed, and your state staff will forward information on the timeline for implementation in your particular state.

## A closer “look” at tactile illustrations

“A picture is worth a thousand words” is more than a cliché. It's precisely the reason why children's books include illustrations. The pictures provide interest and help students make sense of text. From Eric Carle's simplistic yet colorful *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* to the works of Jan Brett, whose detailed illustrations

provide information not mentioned by the text. Pictures are an important part of the literacy building process.

Pictures pose an obvious challenge for students who have a visual disability. How can they access books with illustrations and still benefit from what the illustrations help convey? Tactile illustrations are the key, but using them is not as simple as telling your student to “pat the bunny.”

The American Printing House for the Blind, Inc. has a resource called, *Guide to Designing Tactile Illustrations for Children's Books* written by Suzette Wright.

Objects or parts of objects, forms of objects, flat shapes, and raised lines and shapes are among the types of tactile illustration tools mentioned in the *Guide*. However, the *Guide* is quick to point out that the purpose of a tactile illustration is not to reproduce a picture in tactile form, but rather to communicate an idea or information. Objects and textures cannot capture all of the information contained in a visual illustration, so tactile illustrations must extrapolate the most significant messages needed to compliment and support the text.

The *Guide* acknowledges that not much research is available on which types of tactile clues are more/less difficult for students, but research is cited that indicates children with a visual disability typically follow a sequential, gradual emergence of tactual discrimination skills. The research also points out that children

Click [here](#) to access the American Printing House for the Blind's *Guide to Designing Tactile Illustrations for Children's Books*.

gain meaning from 3-dimensional objects first, later from flat shapes, then from raised shapes and lines, and finally from braille shapes. Consequently, the *Guide* recommends providing object illustrations first and raised line illustrations later as the student's tactual discrimination skills develop.

Just as a visual illustration helps a child make a personal connection with the text by conjuring up personal experiences, an effective tactile illustration provides the child with "a tactile experience that, along with the book's words, triggers a connection with the child's own experience of the object in everyday life" (Wright & Stratton, 2007). The *Guide* also discusses basic guidelines of good tactile design, including using textures, lines, shapes, symbols, or items that feel

distinctly different; keeping it simple by providing tactile illustrations that represent only the most salient features; and avoiding clutter by spacing objects so that they are felt as separate. From there, the *Guide* suggests 5 steps to designing tactile illustrations (*inset*).

This information is useful not only when working with literary texts, but also when using informational texts which often include embedded charts, graphs, timelines, and tables that would necessitate tactile supports.

The *Guide* provides a thoughtful consideration of tactile illustrations and shows that while objects can't express a thousand words like pictures can, they can help students with visual disabilities gain insight to the world of literacy.

### **Steps to Designing Meaningful Tactile Illustrations**

(Paraphrased from the *Guide to Designing Tactile Illustrations for Children's Books* by Suzette Wright, APH, 2007)

1. Consider what the student already knows and can do and involve the student in choosing how to illustrate a thing or concept.
2. Consider the story/text so the student has enough context to make a meaningful interpretation and connection between the text and the tactile illustration.
3. Design the tactile illustration by deciding which type of tactile illustrations to use (e.g., objects, forms, textures, cutouts, lines, etc.) based on which illustrations best addresses the student's tactual discrimination skills.
4. Present the tactile illustration by providing the student with hands-on experiences with the real thing before presenting a tactile illustration of it.
5. Evaluate the tactile illustration by testing it out with your eyes closed or with a subject who has never seen or touched the illustration. Redesign as necessary.

## Taking a look at *Real Life*

The term *real life* is perhaps an innocently misunderstood buzz phrase in modern education.

Students have long asked the question, “Why do I have to learn this stuff?” By incorporating *real life* situations into the content curriculum, teachers have sought to help students understand the connection between what they are learning at school and how that information might be useful in their daily lives now or later.

*Real life* connections are prioritized in the Common Core State Standards since the premise of the standards is to prepare students for career and college options. Yet, the words *real life* pose a couple of conundrums.

First, to whose *real life situations* are the lessons built to relate? Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century varies from one person to another. A nurse’s *real life* is different than an engineer’s or a mechanic’s or a lawyer’s or a journalist’s or any number of other people’s daily experiences. Secondly, if content’s connection to *real life* is inapplicable or unforeseen, does that mean the content should not be taught?



The danger is that teachers may use their crystal balls to determine their students’ futures, and therefore make instructional decisions about what content to teach based on what teachers feel will be pertinent or what seems to be applicable to

their students’ present situation without considering of the broad array of options the future may hold.

It is important to remember that schooling is about providing students with opportunities to learn. The CCSS clearly emphasize providing opportunities for all students to learn so they can then use that information and set of skills for further educational pursuits.

At the same time, there is something to be said for learning for learning’s sake. Success in life depends upon constantly adding to one’s skills set, learning new things, and seeking out opportunities to achieve more. Many instances arise where one uses a skill that he/she never thought would be useful. Sometimes those connections are not consciously recognized. Yet, the experiences are there, ready to be recalled, and put into practice as they come up in *real life*.

Students should be presented with learning opportunities that connect to practical, *real life* experiences. But that does not mean that learning should be limited only to those concepts that have an immediate, obvious, and foreseeable usefulness. Education is too broad to be confined to those boundaries.

### Some questions to consider:

What 21<sup>st</sup> century skills are needed for all students to be successful?

What skills do students need in order to keep up with ever-changing technology?



## Communication Corner/Voices from the Field

This month's student story was submitted by Gayle Lobdell a middle school special education teacher and a member of the Wyoming CoP.

The contents of "Voices from the Field" represent the view of the author and are not endorsed by the staff at the National Center and State Collaborative, the Office of Special Education Programs, or the state supporting the CoP member.

### Using technology to teach reading

I have two students who struggle with reading aloud. They read at about the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level. In addition to making many adapted books for my students, I started using *Start-to-Finish* books 4 years ago. This program is now online with a subscription. With these two students in particular, and many others, I have used such titles as: *Sacagawea*, *Treasure Island*, *Frederick Douglass*, *Silver Blaze*, *Mark Twain Collection*, *Tom Sawyer*, and many other classics from the *Start-to-Finish* collection. These books are adapted for lower reading levels and come in two levels. The program keeps track of where the student is in the book. Students complete a chapter and answer comprehension questions with a provided worksheet for each book that can be completed online or printed.

I have shown parents these books who are proud to say to family and friends, "My student is reading ...." Recently, one mom told me that she realized that her son could read better than she thought, so she bought him an e-reader to help motivate him to read more.

The student purchased many expensive books before the parents realized he knew how to purchase online. They continue to use the Kindle, and he and his mom are reading books

together. The parents solved the purchase problem by using gift cards with a set amount of money each month. The current book they are reading together is *Hunger Games*. His mom told me that at first she was hesitant about the choice of books, but she decided to go with it. Mom also states that she has her son use the dictionary that comes with the Kindle. He is reading at about the third grade level and is in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

The other student is using *Start-to-Finish* books to participate with her general education classmates in history class. She is reading and comprehending *Rosa Parks* with this program. To complete written assignments, she is using the SOLO program to type the information she gathered from online sites as well as responses to the book she read for the project. She was able to share her report with her general education class along with the pictures that she put on her poster.



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## Accessing the info in informational text

By now, you know that one of the key features of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts is the distinction between reading literary texts and reading informational texts. Although many basal readers have long provided a mix of each type of text, the CCSS place increased emphasis on informational texts, especially as students move across grade bands. Since we're living in the "Age of Information," and since the goal of the CCSS is to prepare students for career and college opportunities, emphasis on information text is important.

While informational texts can be drier, less interesting and engaging for students than literary texts, they're not necessarily more difficult or less accessible to students with a cognitive disability.

For example, it is usually easier to glean the "who, what, when, where, and why" information from informational texts while literary texts tend to express more abstract ideas and concepts. Any number of graphic organizers can be used to help students take notes on and analyze informational texts as well.

Informational texts also often contain headings, subheadings, and bolded words that act as cues to students regarding specific information. These text features help students understand how writers organize and present information and how students themselves should do the same when writing for similar purposes.

A third and probably the most significant feature of informational texts is that they often have embedded graphic sources like charts, diagrams, timelines, and photos that simplify, summarize, or provide additional information that can be helpful to reader comprehension, especially for students who are visual learners. And since many of these graphic sources are also found in mathematics and science (e.g., a chart showing the average rainfall for a particular region), students have more experience with these sources when interacting with informational texts.

Of course, as with any kind of text, students may need supports, especially students who have a

visual disability. When adapting informational texts, remember

There is helpful information about many topics in the introduction and appendices of the CCSS. This information may be found at [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org).

to retain and convey the most salient information of both the text and any graphic sources.

A plethora of real world, daily, informational texts exist that can and should be used to help students sharpen their informational reading skills. Newspapers, online media, brochures, schedules, etc. are all examples of everyday texts that students need to be familiar with and to process to be college and career ready.

Appendix B of the CCSS provides text exemplars of literary, informational, and cross-curricular texts.



## Movies vs. Books: *Considerations for using one to teach the other*

For avid readers, movie adaptations of beloved books can be disappointing. Then again, they can also be a reason to dress in costume and attend a fun, midnight premier! So, perhaps it's a matter of perspective. Still, not all movie adaptations are created equal.

Movie adaptations provide a number of opportunities for students who are emerging readers. However, because a movie is not the same as a book, and because watching and listening are not the same as reading, there are a few important considerations when using a movie as a way of helping students access a book.

First, it's important to view the movie not as a replacement for the book but as a companion to it. Because many students are visual learners, movies can help students get a better feel for the setting, better connect to characters' mannerisms and subtler traits that the text does not explicitly address, and better understand critical plot events, especially those that are complex or action-packed. However, because authors take great pains to craft their stories in a way that allows readers to picture and figure out things for themselves, it's important to be thoughtful in using the movie version to help students understand the book.

Rather than using the movie only, and rather than reading the entire book then watching the entire movie (or vice versa), consider having the student *read* the book (using an adapted

text, if needed) and show only certain scenes or parts of scenes of the movie that provide insight or clarification to improve the students' comprehension of the story.

The movie can also be used as an aide for students to verify their understanding of the text. There is also merit in reading the story and having the students predict how a particular scene will be portrayed by the movie, provided that the students have not already seen the movie.

Secondly, it's important to know the differences between the movie and the book. Sometimes important details from the book are left out of the movie—details that are particularly important to the character and/or plot development and that can help students build reading, analyzing, and critical thinking skills.

For example, in Louis Sachar's 1999 Newbery Medal winner *Holes*, the protagonist, Stanley Yelnats, is overweight. It's an important character trait because Stanley is uncomfortable in his own skin and is ridiculed at school. Stanley's physique is a key issue in his struggles when he is sent to Camp Green Lake to dig holes. As the story progresses, Stanley loses weight which is a physical sign of an internal change in him. In fact, by the book's climax, Stanley's improved physical fitness is why he is able to break the so-called curse he feels has been afflicting him.

Even so, the issue of Stanley's weight was ignored in Disney's 2003 movie adaptation of the book since the movie was shot out of sequence and actor Shia LaBeouf, who played Stanley, was not overweight.

Even a good movie adaptation like Disney's *Holes* can miss important details which can be teaching tools. Comparing and contrasting a book to its movie counterpart is an activity for students that can lead to a greater appreciation of the book and an understanding of the author's craft.

Finally, be mindful of the way in which the story is told in the book. Authors use clever ways to tell their stories and use writing techniques that don't always translate to a movie adaptation. *Holes* is an excellent example of how flashback can be used to create multiple plots, parallels, foreshadowing, and other devices that are typical of great literature.

The narrative of Kate DiCamillo's 2004 Newbery Medal winner, *The Tale of Despereaux*, draws attention to the fact that a story is being told that addresses the reader directly. It tells the same story or parts of the same story from three different perspectives, leaving the reader to tie the information together in order to understand the story. The author/reader relationship is important to that text, and yet the 2008 Universal, animated movie adaptation doesn't create that same bond. The movie also changes the tone of the story, making it funnier than mysterious and suspenseful.

Of course, the degree to which a movie adaptation remains true to the book is often a matter of how involved the book's author was in the development of the screenplay. Even then, there are differences. It's not a matter of deciding which is better (although that would be a great prompt for a student writing

assignment); it's more about using the movie to help teach the book.

Appendix B of the CCSS for ELA provides a list of text exemplars across grades. Several of them have been made into movies that you may want to consider as you plan and implement instruction on reading literary texts.

#### K-1

- *Green Eggs and Ham*
- *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*
- *Little House in the Big*
- *Mr. Popper's Penguins*

#### 2-3

- *Sarah, Plain and Tall*
- *Charlotte's Web*

#### 4-5

- *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*
- *The Secret Garden*
- *The Black Stallion*
- *Tuck Everlasting*

#### 6-8

- *Little Women*
- *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*
- *A Wrinkle in Time*
- *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

#### 9-10

- *The Grapes of Wrath*
- *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- *The Joy Luck Club*
- *The Book Thief*
- *A Doll's House*
- *The Glass Menagerie*

#### 11-CCR

- *Pride and Prejudice*
- *Jane Eyre*
- *The Scarlet Letter*
- *The Great Gatsby*
- *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
- *Shakespeare's Hamlet*
- *The Importance of Being Earnest*
- *Death of a Salesman*
- *A Raisin in the Sun*

