

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO
Using the **Common Core**
State Standards With
Gifted and Advanced
Learners in the
English
Language Arts

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Introduction

The purpose of this second book on using the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (CCSS-ELA) with advanced and gifted learners is to provide classroom teachers and administrators examples and strategies to implement the new standards for advanced learners at all stages of development across the years in K–12 schools. One aspect of fulfilling that purpose is to clarify what advanced opportunities look like for such learners from primary through secondary grade levels. How can schools provide the level of rigor and relevance within the new standards as they translate them into experiences for gifted learners? How can they provide creative and innovative opportunities to learn what will nurture the thinking and problem solving of our best students in the subject area?

This second book also serves as a primer for basic policies and practices related to advanced learners in school. At all levels, schools must be flexible in the implementation of policies related to acceleration, waivers, and course credit, all of which may impact gifted learners. The developers of the CCSS-ELA acknowledge that advanced learners may move through the standards more readily than other learners (National Governor's

Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers [NGA & CCSSO], 2010), attesting to the importance of using differentiated approaches for these learners to attain mastery and/or progress in academic achievement at their level. It is critical that schools allow for flexibility in these areas and others in order to accommodate our advanced learners.

In this book, we also want to demonstrate vertical planning in the language arts that lends vision to the work of teachers as they deliver classroom instruction at one level but prepare students for the succeeding levels in the journey toward the real world of language-based careers. What is the progressive development of skills, habits of mind, and attitudes toward learning needed to reach high levels of competency and creative production in language-related fields? We have included a model scope and sequence of these talent activities in the language arts that school districts may use to plan appropriate differentiated experiences for advanced learners at all stages of development.

This book, like the first one (VanTassel-Baska, 2013), is based on a set of underlying assumptions about the constructs of giftedness and talent development that underpin the thinking that spawned the CCSS-ELA work. These assumptions are:

- Giftedness is developed over time through the interaction of innate abilities with nurturing environmental conditions. Thus, the process is developmental, dynamic, and malleable.
- Many learners show preferences for particular subject matter early and continue to select learning opportunities that match their predispositions if they are provided with opportunities to do so. For many children, especially those in poverty, schools are the primary source for relevant opportunities to develop domain-specific potential, although markers of talent development also emerge from work done outside of school in cocurricular or extracurricular contexts.
- Aptitudes may emerge as a result of exposure to high-level, challenging activities in an area of interest. Thus, teachers should consider using advanced learning activities and techniques as a stimulus for all learners.

- In the talent development process, there is an interaction effect between affect and cognition, leading to heightened intrinsic motivation of the individual and focus on the enjoyable tasks associated with the talent area. This dynamic tension catalyzes movement to the next level of advanced work in the area.
- Intellectual, cultural, and learning diversity among learners may account for different rates of learning, different areas of aptitude, different cognitive styles, and different experiential backgrounds. Working with such diversity in the classroom requires teachers to differentiate and customize curriculum and instruction, always working to provide an optimal match between the learner and her readiness to encounter the next level of challenge.

Thus, users of this book need to be sensitive to the ideas contained herein as not being intended to apply exclusively to identified gifted students but also to those students who show an interest and readiness to learn within the domain of English language arts. Therefore, students with high potential and advanced readers would be candidates for a differentiated ELA curriculum, as would students from poverty and twice-exceptional learners.

The decision to provide examples for advanced learners and to employ that terminology was made with an eye to the mixed group of students who may benefit from advanced instruction in language arts. This group would include high-level readers, high achievers in the language arts area, as well as identified gifted learners. We have not made distinctions about curriculum options within those groups and as a result, the examples may not be sufficiently differentiated for some gifted learners, while they may be too demanding for some high achievers within a given period of time.

Finally, it is our hope that the book provides a roadmap for meaningful state and local educational reform that elevates learning in English language arts to higher levels of rigor for gifted and, indeed, all learners who can benefit from the elevation of learning experiences suggested.

As in the first book, the authors believe there are certain foundational understandings that readers need to have in order to understand the adaptations suggested in this book. These common understandings relate to what the Common Core State Standards are, the rationale for differentiating them for gifted learners, how they relate to 21st century skills, how they align with gifted education standards, and the key strategies we may use to differentiate these standards effectively for our target population. Thus, these sections have been reproduced here from the first NAGC CCSS-ELA book (VanTassel-Baska, 2013) to aid new readers in this understanding.

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The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: What Are They?

The Common Core State Standards for English language arts (CCSS-ELA) are K–12 content standards that illustrate the curriculum emphases needed for students to develop the skills and concepts required for the 21st century. Adopted by 46 states to date, the CCSS are organized into key content strands and articulated across all years of schooling and, in most cases, replace the existing state content standards. The initiative has been state-based and coordinated by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). Designed by teachers, administrators, and content experts, the CCSS are intended to prepare K–12 students for college and the workplace.

The new CCSS are evidence-based, aligned with expectations for success in college and the workplace, and informed by the successes and failures of the current standards and international competition demands. The new standards stress rigor, depth, clarity, and coherence, drawing from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Frameworks in Reading and Writing (National Assessment Governing Board [NAGB], 2008, 2010). They provide a framework for curriculum development work, which remains to be done although many states

are already engaged in the process. States such as Indiana, Minnesota, Illinois, Georgia, and Maine are working within and across local districts to design relevant curriculum and to align current practice to the new standards.

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