

## Overview of ELA Units (6-8) Summer 2014

We are excited to release three new thematic units for English Language Arts in grades 6-8. The released units are driven by the following essential questions:

- **Mystery:** What drives people to find an answer?
- **Sports:** Is mental strength as important as physical strength in sports?
- **Charity:** How can we help our school, community, and people around the world?

Those who have used our units in the past will notice a few changes this year. It was our intent that these units would allow more freedom for educators to make professional decisions based on their personal preferences and individual needs of their students. The ELA Specialist will provide more explicit explanations and professional development on utilizing these resources as well as designing additional units, but do note several **key differences**:

- **Grade Span:** Rather than grade specific units, these have been written to align to a grade span (6-8). Instructional strategies are, therefore, aligned with Anchor Standards opposed to grade specific standards. Depending on the grade level taught, teachers will need to **look at grade specific standards** to determine how these specific standards will be addressed. Additionally, teachers will not be able to utilize all of the texts included in the set within a nine-week period. It is our recommendation that teachers **omit texts from the textbooks of other grade levels**. The attached texts, texts from a specific grade's textbook, and an extended text will leave students with ample materials to explore the essential question throughout the nine weeks.
- **Color-Coding:** In alignment to PARCC's Model Content Framework, students will be asked to compose an argument or informational piece and a narrative piece near the end of the unit. These writings are clearly outlined in the beginning (Writing Assignments) and end (End of Unit Summative Assessments) of the unit. Throughout the unit, writing assignments are designed to build students up to the final writing piece. It is important for students to see their reading work pay off and view their writing as a process. Therefore, **the color-coding allows teachers to follow a writing strand throughout the unit to work students towards the final composition**.
  - Argument (Yellow) – 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> nine weeks focus
  - Informational (Green) – 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> nine weeks focus
  - Narrative (Blue) – Each nine week focus

Teachers should follow the suggestions outlined in PARCC’s MCF for the writing focus, but the final presentation format is left in the hands of the teacher (e.g., essay, letter, speech, brochure, front page news, blogpost, etc.)

- **Text-Dependent Questions:** Rather than providing teachers with a list of questions for each text, we have only provided three questions for each text. These questions show teachers the types of questions that may be asked and how these questions build upon one another as part of close reading. ***The questions move from the literal level to the structural level before ultimately taking students to the inferential level.*** Such questions may apply to an entire text or just small portions of a text. It is essential for teachers to spend time in a text prior to teaching, making note of where and how to question students.
- **Research:** Each unit embeds opportunities for ***short as well as extended*** research. Again, it is our intention that students’ reading and writing throughout the course of the unit allows ample opportunity for them to ***capture thinking along the way.*** We also welcome ***student-driven inquiry,*** allowing opportunities for students to question texts, authors, and the world around them. In the end, students should be able to integrate knowledge and ideas from their discoveries throughout the unit for a final presentation.
- **Extended Text:** Rather than selecting an extended text for each unit, we have provided ***several suggestions*** for literary as well as nonfiction texts. We ask that teachers consider PARCC’s MCF when selecting texts for the nine weeks:
  - **Literature** – 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> nine weeks
  - **Nonfiction** – 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> nine weeks

Teachers may choose books from the suggestions to use as part of ***whole class study or literature circles.*** They may also consider promoting some of these titles for ***independent / choice reading*** or simply pulling ***excerpts*** for closer analysis. Regardless of the text and presentation chosen, teachers should ensure that each are ***centered around the focus standards*** of the unit. When planning instructional strategies for the novel, teachers may choose some strategies used with the shorter texts within the unit. The choice is in the hands of the educator! ***One word of caution: teachers must read a text and use professional judgment about its complexity and appropriateness prior to selecting it as an extended text.***

We hope these units will serve as a valuable resource for teachers this school year. We look forward to seeing this work in action in classrooms and receiving feedback from our colleagues.

## Layering Questions for Close Reading of Texts

### Literal

*What does the text say?*

#### Close Readers Might Begin by Noticing Key Ideas and Details

- What is “the gist” of the reading?
- What did the author/text want me to know?
- What other ideas or concepts does this text suggest?
- What information is important and cannot be determined separately from the text?
- What in the text makes you say that? (cite evidence)

### Structural

*How does the text work?*

#### Close and Critical Readers Might Then Notice Craft and Structure

- How did the text say what it said?
- How did the text accomplish the tasks from the first reading?
- How did the author organize the information?
- What techniques or craft did the author employ, and what effect did these techniques have?
- What literary devices, persuasive techniques, or data presentation devices were used to convey meaning, and what was their effect?
- Why did the author choose this word or that word?
- Were the meaning of key terms consistent or did they change with use across the text?

### Inferential

*What does the text mean?*

#### As Well As Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- What does this text mean?
- Whose perspective was represented in the text?
- What was the author’s point?
- Whose point of view was most fully explored?
- What does it say about our lives or our world?
- Who is honored or privileged in the text? Who is marginalized?
- How valid is it?
- How does it connect with other texts (or to other experiences, videos, or experiments)?
- How does the perspective in this text compare with others on this issue?

### Critical Literacy

*What does this text inspire you to do?*

