Close Reading: Analyzing and Evaluating Complex Texts

Connections: English Language Arts
Grades 6–12
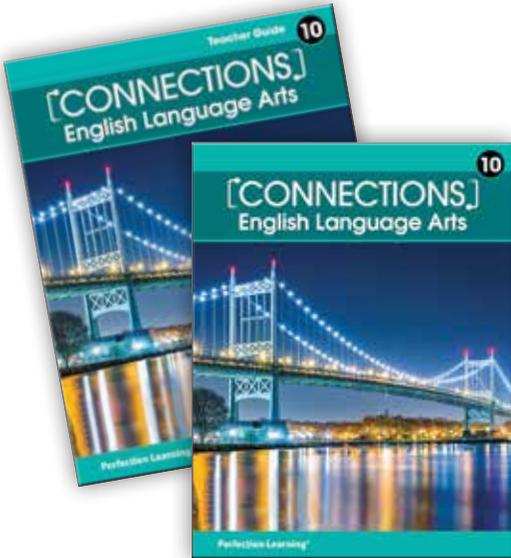
The success of today's students is grounded in their ability to make inferences, draw conclusions, and provide textual evidence to support a deep understanding of increasingly complex texts. *Connections: English Language Arts* teaches close reading skills based upon research-based best practices for English Language Arts instruction.

Text selections in each unit of *Connections: English Language Arts* are thematically related to develop the skills of analysis and synthesis across texts through a seamless integration of all facets of the ELA standards: Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking, and Language.

Additionally, students are asked to read text selections multiple times with a specific purpose in mind. While they may be given limited contextual information, students are encouraged to read through the text selection on their own at first, even if it means a struggle. "One of the mistakes in the past efforts to improve reading achievement has been the removal of struggle. As a profession, we may have made reading tasks too easy. We do not suggest that we should plan for student's failure but rather that the students should be provided with opportunities to struggle and to learn about themselves as a reader when they struggle, persevere, and eventually succeed." (Fisher, Frey, and Lapp 2012). Research-based supports are in place throughout the interactive readers as students seek to understand the complexity of the text selections before them.

> **"You will not only want to create the conditions that allow you to match readers to books and to provide students with opportunities to read extensively. You will want to accelerate their progress up the ladder of text complexity so that over time, they read increasingly complex books."**
> —*Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman, 2012*

Purposeful Reading Through Thematically-Connected Texts

Thematic instruction immerses students into topics viewed from multiple perspectives. Skills are introduced and **demonstrated** in a variety of ways to assist students by way of example of **what is** the desired outcome (Cambourne, Handy, and Scown 1988). Because text selections are related thematically and increase in complexity as the chapters in a unit unfold, students learn about the topics from a variety of sources and genres while improving reading, language, and writing skills. This learning progression through both content and skills provides the teacher and student writer the scaffolds necessary to move from the reflexive mode to the extensive mode where students demonstrate mastery of skill through project- and standards-based assessments (Carroll and Wilson, 1993). Overall, each unit builds on the theme of the next unit providing a unifying quality, yet allowing flexibility for focused units of study in isolation.

Connections: English Language Arts
Skill Development

	Grade 9		Grade 10
Unit 1		Unit 1	
Chapter 1	Building Suspense Through Descriptive Language	Chapter 1	Analyzing Narrative Details
	Suspenseful Details		*Understanding Narrative Details*
	Sensory Description		*Sensory Details and Comparisons*
	Structure		*Drawing Conclusions*
Chapter 2	Analyzing Narrative Word Choice	Chapter 2	Determining Central Ideas
	Identifying Key Details		*Details That Support Central Ideas*
	Figurative Language		*Analyzing Structure*
	Author's Craft		*Integrating Information*
Chapter 3	Analyzing Characters Through Inference		
	Analyzing Characters		
	Character Interactions		
	Characters' Thoughts and Dialogue		
Chapter 4	Identifying Main Ideas and Themes Through Sy		
	Determining Main Ideas		
	Author's Craft		
	Determining Theme		
Chapter 5	Understanding the Development of Ideas		
	New Words		
	Central Ideas		
	Development of Ideas		
Unit 1	Writing a Personal Narrative		
Unit 1	Practice Performance Task: Continuing the Nar		
Unit 2			
Chapter 6	Understanding Theme Through Infer		
	Making Inferences		
	Identifying Th		

Connections: English Language Arts
Skill Development

	Grade 11		Grade 12
Unit 1		Unit 1	
Chapter 1	Analyzing Descriptive Details and Sensory Language	Chapter 1	Analyzing the Effects of Plot and Imagery
	Suspenseful Details		*Determining Theme*
	Sensory Language		*Narrative Structure*
	Analyzing Different Interpretations		*Imagery*
Chapter 2	Evaluating Arguments	Chapter 2	Understanding Literary Devices in Nonfiction
	Main Ideas		*Setting Details*
	Evaluating Arguments		*Examining Dialogue*
	Evaluating Sources		*Integrating Texts*
Chapter 3	Analyzing Characters and Synthesizing Texts	Chapter 3	Comparing Texts from the Same Time Period
	Development of Character		*Determining Themes*
	Using Character to Develop Theme		*Interpreting Allusions*
	Synthesizing Texts		*Comparing Contrasting Poems*
Chapter 4	Analyzing Rhetoric	Chapter 4	Evaluating Arguments
	Analyzing Purpose		*Identifying Claims*
	Exploring Rhetoric		*---an Argument*
	Analyzing Logos		

Integrated Skill Development

Language development, both oral and written, is at the heart of the English Language Arts expectations. Reading a text closely, examining specifically what the author said (and in some cases **did not say**), how the author said it, and why it was said in the first place requires students to discuss, write, revise, and refine their thinking by engaging in authentic discussions with their peers. The groundbreaking research of Mortimer Adler in 1982 started a wave of educational reform known as *The Paideia Proposal* (Roberts and Billings, 1999). One of the cornerstones of Paideia was the teaching strategies our schools should employ: didactic teaching of subject matter, coaching that produces the skills of learning, and Socratic questioning in seminar discussion.

Connections: English Language Arts contains highly engaging topics and text selections with full teacher support for students as they acquire organized knowledge by means of didactic instruction. This purposeful presentation of information develops intellectual skills through exercises and supported practice in writing and language development. Additionally, students increase understanding of ideas and values by means of Socratic questioning and the active discussion of primary sources. Each unit features a chapter with a project-based assessment for a Roundtable Discussion (Roberts and Billings, 1999), complete with suggested norms and rubrics for active listening and participation (Marzano, 2007).

Connections: English Language Arts prepares students to think critically and deeply about texts of increasing complexity for a deep understanding of the text that will lead to success in college and career and beyond.

> **"The rigor that matters most for the twenty-first century is demonstrated mastery of the core competencies for work, citizenship, and life-long learning. Studying academic content is the means of developing competencies, instead of being the goal, as it has been traditionally. In today's world, it's no longer how much you know that matters; it's what you can do with what you know."**
>
> —*Wagner, 2007*

A Case for Annotation

"Rather than discouraging students from writing in books, teachers should require students to learn annotation techniques so that they can have a conversation with the text."
—*Fisher and Frey, 2013*

Research supports students' development of reading skills when texts are presented in a way that annotation can occur. Annotating texts includes the following research-based benefits

- promotes student interest in reading and gives learners a focused purpose for writing

- supports readers' ability to clarify and synthesize ideas, pose relevant questions, and capture analytical thinking about text

- gives students a clear purpose for actively engaging with text

- causes readers to process information at a deeper level and increases their ability to recall information from the text

- helps learners comprehend difficult material and engage in what Probst (1988) describes as "dialogue with the text"

The *Connections: English Language Arts* interactive reader is designed to promote student annotations including adding purposeful notes, key words and phrases, definitions, and connections tied to specific sections of text.

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