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# Common Core Canon vs Literary Canon: What Works, What Doesn't, and What Teachers Can Do About It

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# COMMON CORE CANON VS LITERARY CANON: WHAT WORKS, WHAT DOESN'T, AND WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO ABOUT IT

A Senior Honors Thesis

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The College at Brockport:  
State University of New York

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation  
in the Honors College

Thesis Director: Dr. Thomas Giblin, Professor, Education

May 17, 2017

# Introduction

The Common Core Canon is both a blessing and a curse to teachers across the nation, who are adapting to the new curriculum that the Common Core has brought to the forefront. These teachers are dealing with multiple moving pieces that are not easy to cope with, including novels that do not fit the classes to which they are assigned, skills that are challenging to teach without student engagement, and new standards to keep track of.

As such, teachers have formed strong opinions about these new challenges and successes, but there are not many venues for teachers to get to express their opinions. For this thesis, I took the opportunity to go to these teachers and ask for their opinions. These teachers chose to remain anonymous to avoid any issues that may arise from their opinions, but they gave unguarded answers which helps the reader to understand how teachers truly feel about the Common Core.

I chose to connect my opinions and experiences to their quotes, so that I could further understand the challenges that teachers faced. It allowed me to see how teachers look at these challenges, and how I will be able to rise to meet them in my future as a teacher. Creating the unit plan also allowed me to take these opinions and create an example that proves that teacher choice can work.

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# What Works

The Common Core Canon, like many other different curriculums, has its issues, but it also has its successes. Many teachers have found in the last few years that certain elements of the Common Core Canon are working for their students, and the students are finding success on a daily basis. Teachers have been able to teach some texts that they did not get to before, and students are developing skills that previously had been areas of weakness. Fortunately for the students, even the Common Core Exams have become more accessible. Teachers from across the state could give me some insight into the Common Core Canon and the ways it works.

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This English teacher, who teaches in a rural district, was able to share their opinions about the Common Core Canon with me, and was thrilled to tell me:

*"I like that the canon includes Shakespeare at every grade level in high school. I personally love teaching Shakespeare."*

Shakespeare: the favorite of many English teachers, and the bane of many students. Growing up, we covered Shakespeare's work a few times over the course of my academic career, but it was never a series of texts that I felt comfortable using. Sure, I could read Shakespeare and I could understand the language being used to an extent, but I did not have enough practice with Shakespeare's texts to be able to find my love for his work like I would later in my collegiate career. When we did read Shakespeare, we touched on it a little in ways that I felt did not help me to understand, such as spending middle school focusing on *Romeo and Juliet*. I am not ashamed to say that I did not have the necessary life

knowledge to understand what was going on and why this text appears next to the definition of “star-crossed lovers”.

As this young but experienced high school English teacher says, the Common Core Canon takes the opportunity to include Shakespeare each year of a student’s high school career. This allows students the chance to visit the language and texts on multiple occasions, which helps to build their understanding of the text. Half of the challenge that students face when it comes to reading Shakespeare is that the language of the times makes it so students spend more time trying to figure out what the text is saying rather than working to gain a deeper understanding of what the text means. Continuing on in this manner prevents students from being able to understand how Shakespeare’s plays began to define tragedy and drama, and how the comedies are quite entertaining and the epitome of quick-witted humor. Losing out on these aspects of Shakespeare prevents students from creating a connection with the text.

However, by exposing students to Shakespeare each year that they are in high school, teachers are able to build on the previous year’s knowledge of the language, which begins to remove that barrier from the students, allowing them to be able to focus on the story instead of the words. Once the language is accessible to students, teachers can then teach different skills, such as literary elements and prose, which Shakespeare uses so well. Including these elements in the curriculum helps to expand not only students’ ability to read, but also their ability to write. Understanding the language can also work to improve students’ self-confidence, especially once they make that breakthrough into full comprehension.

In addition, it is not just access to the language that students will gain, but also an understanding of the text itself. When students read *Romeo and Juliet* at the middle school age, it is hard for them to understand just how obnoxious the protagonists’ decisions were. Once this text is read at the high school level and students are as old or older than the protagonists, they can see just how

strange the entire situation is, which opens a whole new avenue of understanding in the text. Grasping this allows students to see that not only was Shakespeare writing the ultimate story of love, but he was also mocking the all-consuming power of young love, which can be funny to students who find themselves in similar situations.

This understanding of the text is not simply limited to Shakespeare, though. Students are also becoming more exposed to nonfiction texts, which is a good idea as this high school English teacher claims:

*“The strengths of the Common Core canon are that it introduces nonfiction in a prominent way and it is rigorous with regard to text selection. I believe, however that this can be accomplished with any number of texts, and since ELA is skill based and not content focused, ELA teachers can teach students how to isolate details, analyze them and make claims, using just about anything, even visual texts.”*

While nonfiction texts are taught in all the other content areas that students study during their academic career, the only place that they are taught how to read these texts is in English class. By adding more nonfiction texts to the English curriculum brought about by the Common Core Canon, students are gaining valuable skills that they will need in order to be able to fully comprehend and dissect texts for research and learning. By teaching students to recognize author bias, students will be able to read historical accounts and understand if the author was truly neutral or picking sides. Teaching students to understand word choice will allow students to understand exactly what their math prompts are asking them so that they can complete the correct equation. Also, by teaching students how to research nonfiction texts, students will be able to do research to prove their hypothesis's correct in science class.

The interdisciplinary idea of literacy mentioned above is one that was prominent in my training throughout college, but the Common Core Canon is designed to meet the realization that even though

interdisciplinary literacy is a great idea, the actual teaching of the skills comes from students' exposure in English class.

This teacher also makes an excellent point by saying that teachers could teach the same ELA skill using any texts. The Common Core Standards, the standards behind the Common Core Canon and the modules, are useful tools that are not far from what teachers have been teaching their students for decades. The standards are designed to be applied to any texts, so if the Common Core Canon were to undergo changes, the standards would remain the same from district to district across the country, which was the original goal of the Common Core.

Teaching these different types of text to students is not the only area that the Common Core Canon and the modules based off them have found success. With all the additional practice working with nonfiction texts, students are learning how to find evidence, which is a skill that is necessary across all the disciplines. This special education teacher makes note of that, saying:

*"I have noticed students effectively incorporating text based evidence in their writing. They now know how to look for evidence in the text and properly quote it in their writing."*

This skill is one that is often passed over, but is also one that is crucial to student development through their middle and high school years. Students need to understand which evidence is good evidence and which evidence is nonsensical, and this is a skill that the Common Core focuses heavily on. I have seen that the students I work with in my student teaching placement have spent a lot of time working with quotes, and they are pulling better evidence than I was able to at their age. Students spend a lot of time learning not only how to choose quotes, which can be the most difficult part of a writing assignment, but also how to utilize these quotes in their writing.

At the end of each of the modules that were created to fit the Common Core Canon, there is a writing assignment that students are expected to complete, and I was fortunate enough to be able to participate in teaching the students how to respond to this assignment, as well as the teacher that got to grade the finished product. I noticed that when it came to student writing samples, the strongest component of the essays were oftentimes the quotes that the students chose. They were cropped according to what the student needed them for and included in the proper places in their writing. While I had hoped that the students would be able to introduce the quotes a little more smoothly, I could see how that skill could be more easily developed now that the students were able to choose quotes and work with them correctly.

With these well-developed skills being utilized across the disciplines, one teacher took a moment to discuss testing for their district's students with me. This English teacher said that they had observed that:

*"Our passing percentage for students taking the Regents Exam each year has remained steady. In ELA, we have always focused on many of the skills outlined in the CCLS, so I believe that it was a much easier switch to Common Core for our discipline than it was for say, Math."*

In New York State, students are required to take Regents Exams at the end of the year for various high school classes, and the English one has always been one of the more difficult exams. There was some concern when the Common Core Canon and its accompanying standards and modules were rolled out that student scores on the Regents Exam would suffer. However, in this teacher's district, scores remained much the same. While they had not improved with the introduction of this new material, they also had not become worse, which was the fear of many parents.

Many parents also worried about the Common Core Exams that come along with the material for students in middle school, and pulled their students from the test. I saw my own sister get pulled



because my parents were concerned about the test material and how she would do on it, and I must say, when the tests were first given, I would have made the same decisions with my own hypothetical children. This year, though, I could help proctor the exam during my student teaching placement, and I noticed that the students were doing better than they had in past years. It turns out that the company who designs the exams had been replaced with a different company, and that single change made a world of difference for students. The texts became more accessible and students were no longer stressed out by time constraints.

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While many aspects of the Common Core Canon and its modules and standards do work, and have caused success for students and teachers alike, some teachers are not thrilled with the new curriculum. As with many new programs, there are several issues that arise and need to be dealt with. Teachers are learning to adapt their instruction to fit the Common Core Canon, but there are some issues that cannot be fixed, so it becomes a struggle for students to achieve the level of learning that teachers would like them to.

# What Doesn't Work

While there are valuable reasons why the Common Core Canon is an excellent tool for teachers to use with their students, there are also several reasons why it doesn't work. Teachers who were on board with the Common Core in the beginning are now biting their tongues, looking at the weaknesses that are developing with their students that were not present in previous years. While many teachers are outspoken about the issues with the Common Core, many members of the public are not filled on what the true issues are. Interviewing these teachers gave me a glimpse into how experienced teachers see the issues present.

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*"I feel that some of the novels are not appropriate for the kids...To Kill a Mockingbird is too much for 8th graders. They do not have the maturity or appreciation for the themes of that book. I don't like how the modules direct to only read parts of Unbroken. As soon as we start skipping parts (because of the inappropriate nature of some sections) those are the sections that the kids go right to! I just have a problem with skipping around and not reading a book in its entirety. Lyddie is very dull for 7th graders. We have never done Frederick Douglas...as teachers, we had a hard time just getting through the first few pages and knew it would not go well for 7th graders!"*

One of the largest issues that teachers have with the Common Core Canon, as presented in the modules, is that the modules prescribe novels that many do not believe are a good fit for the students who are intended to read them. This teacher, a special education teacher working in inclusive classrooms, was able to give me a clearer idea of the novels that the modules utilize, as she works with multiple grade levels and not just the seventh graders I found myself working with. This teacher picks apart many of the choices and only approves of a few.

An opinion shared by both myself and this teacher is that moving *To Kill a Mockingbird* from its previous placement in the later high school years to eighth grade is a mistake brought about by a lack of knowledge of teaching. Students in eighth grade, at only thirteen and fourteen years of age, are not able to grasp some of the darker ideas in the novel that while disturbing, are crucial to an understanding of the text. Students may be able to grasp the concept of racism at that age, but the subtler tones of just how severe that racism is, the sexism that plagues the protagonist, and the incest that causes the issues in the novel in the first place are all over the heads of these students. My sister is reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* now in her classroom, and when I asked her if she understood these themes from the novel, she was grossed out that they were even written about in the novel, but she had no idea that they were present.

Incidentally, this novel is not the only one that contains content that rises above the heads of the students reading the novels. *Unbroken* is a novel that is taught at the eighth-grade level, and this teacher informed me that the students are not asked to read the entire novel, as it contains material that is considered inappropriate for their age group. I also find issue with this. Not only does this go against all that we are taught as readers to skip around, but these changes were not made at the discretion of the teacher instructing the class. Indeed, these changes were made present by the modules themselves. Asking students to read a text that is not appropriate for their age level seems strange when there are countless numbers of novels in the world that would fill the task and complete the standards while maintaining the same message and the necessary appropriateness.

Having done my student teaching experience in a seventh-grade classroom, I was able to witness firsthand how seventh graders worked with the novel *Lyddie*, and I must say, I agree with this special education teacher. The students could not be kept focused whatsoever when we worked on this novel. Regardless of how hard the teachers worked to get students interested in the novel and how many ways the teachers presented the novel to the students, the students could not remain interested

in the novel. We tried movies, we tried reading the novel to them, we had them read in pairs, we had them read alone, we played games, and we even skimmed the text just to get to the information the students needed to gain from a chapter, and none of it was successful. It was frustrating to us as well, because the students were so dissatisfied with *Lyddie* that they did not grasp the skills we were using the novel to teach to the students.

The issues with the entertainment factors present in the novels listed as being part of the modules do not just stem to the students, but they stem to the teachers as well. The special education teacher also informed me that when the teachers were planning for the year, they were unable to get through the Fredrick Douglas text that the students were supposed to read. I found out that the teachers were so bored when it was their turn to read that they were unable to get past the first couple of pages. Having not been able to get past the first chapter of *Lyddie* myself, I could only imagine how boring the teachers must have found the Fredrick Douglas text if it were even worse than *Lyddie* was.

Having texts present in the curriculum that the teachers are not passionate about cause issues for the students as well. When teachers are passionate about what they are teaching, not only are they likely to do a better job, but they are also more likely to inspire that same passion for learning in their students. I spent every day of the *Lyddie* unit listening to my cooperating teacher complain about the *Lyddie* novel, and her grumbling about it soon spread to the students as well, discouraging the few who hadn't fully dismissed the novel yet. In addition, if the teachers are too bored with a text to be able to present it in a manner that the students will enjoy, they will also struggle to teach the students the skills that are meant to be taught alongside the novel. With these skills only being taught at certain points in the modules, the teachers who work in districts that do adhere to the modules will likely struggle with getting their students to absorb and fully comprehend these skills and how to utilize them in their everyday reading and writing.

It is not just this teacher though who found issues with the novels presented as part of the Common Core Canon. A high school English teacher was able to sit down with my and share opinions about the same ideas as the special education teacher, and I was surprised to find how similar the opinions were, despite having different reasoning behind them. For example, the high school English teacher said:

*“I was unhappy to see some moves, like *To Kill a Mockingbird* being moved to the Middle School, which in my opinion neglects students' unfamiliarity with American History at this grade level.”*

Just like the special education teacher, this teacher took time to focus on the movement of *To Kill a Mockingbird* from the high school level to the middle school level. However, this teacher focuses more on the unfamiliarity of the context of the story that students will be facing.

By the time students read *To Kill a Mockingbird* in high school, they have spent time in social studies learning about American history with a focus on the racism and tensions running high in America throughout the twentieth century. Having this background knowledge of the true issues and history that the novel is based off of is crucial to students being able to understand just how dangerous the situation is for Tom Robinson, and just how big the odds were that Atticus Finch went up against to being the stand against racism in the south. Without understanding that these types of events were normal and even accepted in some areas, it is quite possible that students would simply brush off the story as being fictional, without understanding the impact that these kinds of events had on children growing up during that time period.

That unfamiliarity with the real-life history behind historical fiction novels is an issue that faces teachers when they attempt to work with other novels as well. When I worked with my seventh graders during my student teaching placement, I found that most of my students did not have any background knowledge at all about child labor, so I ended up having to explain many of the vocabulary terms and

events in the story to them. For example, there is a chapter where the main character in *Lyddie* falls very ill from a disease that is running rampant amongst the Irish, but because my students have no knowledge of just how bad things were for immigrants and child laborers during the time period before the Civil War, they did not fully grasp the gravity of the situation, and the entire chapter was lost on them. Unfortunately, this was not the only chapter with which this problem occurred, which led to difficulties for the teachers trying to clear knowledge gaps.

With all of these issues with the novels that have been chosen to become a part of the Common Core Canon used in the modules, I often wonder what it was that caused the creators of the Common Core to pick these novels in the first place over so many other viable options. I believe this ninth-grade English teacher was able to put their finger on it immediately, telling me:

*“Generally speaking, I feel that the texts are not properly suited to students’ age level. Of Mice and Men and To Kill a Mockingbird are two novels that I feel the Lexile level may be appropriate for students, but the content does not suit the grade level. I believe the content of the novel Of Mice and Men works best in 10th grade. Students seem to understand and enjoy To Kill a Mockingbird at the high school level.”*

When teachers look at books to choose for their students, they focus on which level their students are reading at. These levels, known as Lexile scores, mark the difficulty of the texts in regard to their word use and word difficulty, not in regard to the content of the stories. While this method can actually be very useful to diagnose a student’s progress in reading, it is not an accurate depiction of where the student is maturity-wise. While this may seem like a subtle difference, it has a large effect on student understanding of the text. Students can easily read texts, but without the understanding of the text, there is a limited space for student growth and learning. It becomes an issue then when teachers cannot spend the time focusing on skills and instead have to spend their valuable class time focusing on teaching students the background knowledge that they need to understand the text.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is the prime example of a text that was moved because of the Common Core Canon where teachers are not thrilled with the change, it seems. This change, however, underwent an attempt at legitimization when those in charge of the move argued that the Lexile level of this novel was too low for the high schoolers it was taught to. In spite of this being true, teachers, such as the teacher above, have found that the content of the novel plays a role equivalent to that of the Lexile level when it comes to the use of a text in the classroom. Many would indeed argue that these changes for Lexile scores should be swapped out for novels that are content-appropriate, or that even if novels are assigned to units by Lexile scores, that they are novels that are also appropriate for the groups of students reading them.

Moving around novels is not the only change that the Common Core Canon makes to the traditional classroom that I grew up in. In addition to these moves and changes, the focus of the texts read in a school following the Common Core have changed from focusing on novels as a source of communication and expression to the reading of informational texts such as a student might find in a newspaper or a textbook. This teacher found a way to put this to words in what I believe to truly be a profound manner, saying:

*“I would ensure that we don't overload students with nonfiction texts because students read nonfiction in every single one of their other classes in high school. We are slowly losing the novel as a form of study for not only analyzing details, but also for reflecting on what it means to be human, which I think students need to occasionally ponder, as well.”*

This teacher really does have a valid point that I believe is very important. As someone who had novels for their only friends as a child, I know firsthand just how difficult it can be for a student to focus only on nonfiction texts throughout the school day. Those students might not have any physical friends,

but they can connect to the characters. In addition, having spent some time working in an inclusive classroom in a science lab, I was able to see the nonfiction reading that the class participates in on a daily basis, and it surprised me how much of it was going on. Students spend a lot of time reading nonfiction material, so it appears English class would be the place where students would have the opportunity to focus on fictional texts. Counter to this, though, students spend much of their English class under the Common Core focusing on the different skills needed to read nonfiction texts.

While these skills are necessary for students to learn in order to understand how to read and comprehend nonfiction texts, it is important that the students also get a chance to read novels. The teacher takes a moment in their quote to say that we, as a country, are not paying the novel the attention that it is due with its place in literature. With the novels that the students are reading in class in many cases being the only novels that students are reading in my experience, it is important for teachers to ensure that these novels are good experiences for the students. However, if the students are not able to understand the novel because the content is over their head and they are too bored by the story, then they will not pay attention, which will lead to the lack of novels in their lives whatsoever.

The lack of novels does have an impact on the growth and development of students. When I was in school and we read novels, I know that my classmates and I were able to learn many life lessons from the novels that we covered in class. We learned how to treat each other correctly, we learned tolerance, we learned acceptance, and we learned what it means to be a good person. As the teacher above states, we learned how to be human beings. With reading on a decline across the country, it is especially important that students are receiving these messages in school, as they may not be receiving them at home. It becomes, in part, one of the many tasks that a teacher must fulfill: teaching the students how to become good quality human beings. It is a message that was passed down from generation to generation with the reading of novels in school, and it is a message that is not as present in the classroom today. I have noticed a marked difference between my sister and myself when it



comes to these life lessons, and while she is a good person, it is clear that she did not learn these lessons the same way that I did.

The Common Core canon does not only affect the novels that the students read in class, but they also affect the rest of the skills in an English classroom as well. The modules that were written to accompany the designated novels have driven teachers to look for alternative methodologies to use for teaching, as they take away from necessary skills that a student must learn in school. One of these skills, which this special education teacher notes, is writing. They told me:

*“The modules include very little writing - I would definitely suggest changes to include more and not just a final writing piece in each module. More age appropriate/ more interesting novels should be incorporated.”*

Just as reading is important to all the different content areas that a student experiences during their time in school, writing is as well. Students need to be able to communicate their ideas clearly and affectively to their classmates and teachers to share their knowledge and help to build up that of others. However, teachers are finding that when they follow the modules, or even the tasks that are presented to them in the modules, that they do not have enough writing tasks in a unit to build up students' abilities in writing. I know that in my student teaching placement, we took the time to craft new writing assignments for the students so that they would be forced to practice their writing, but in my opinion, it was not enough.

This new generation of students, those who have grown up with the Common Core, are far weaker writers than even my generation are. I am only ten years older than my students in my student teaching placement were, but they struggled with writing tasks that even the weakest students in my class in seventh-grade would have been able to complete without issue. Students do not know basic

grammar or writing mechanics, and it is not uncommon to see a student that forgets to capitalize the first letter in a sentence.

With the class that I had control of, I spent the time to create even more additional writing assignments for them, and their ability to write improved markedly over the course of the fifteen weeks I spent there. Because these assignments were done in conjunction with a novel that I chose to work with, *The Outsiders*, the students were actually engaged in their reading and their writing improved. They actually cared about the novel that they read, and they found that same level of interest also held true with their writing. Even now, several weeks later, these students are maintaining the writing skills that they developed under me, and they continue to improve their skills. Even though I only had this experience working with those changes in a single class period, I do believe that the trend that began with that class would have continued with all of my other classes if they had access to the material that I worked through with the other students.

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There are several issues with the Common Core Canon, especially as presented with the modules, but it is crucial to remember that these pieces operate separately from the standards, which is the section of the Common Core that is the most important. In addition, teachers should remember that there is a little autonomy left in some districts, and that those who have access to it should make sure that they take advantage of it. With that autonomy, teachers can make changes, and the teachers that granted this interview have found many ways to cope with the Common Core Canon and modules.

## What Teachers Can Do About It

With the option to choose whether to use or not use the Common Core not being permissible in many districts, teachers need to look at alternative ways that the Common Core Canon can be adapted

to best suit their needs. While it would be impossible to change the standards, teachers can push to be allowed to adapt the Common Core, by changing the modules or neglecting to use them entirely and asking to choose different texts to teach their students.

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When asked about the ways that teachers would like to adapt the Common Core Canon to suit their needs, all the interviewed teachers were excited to express their opinions. They chose to express opinions that could be possible in the near future, such as this teacher saying:

*"I don't know that I have any one classic that I would add. Many of my favorites are already listed. I would definitely encourage some selection from some more contemporary texts and authors and add some of Shakespeare's comedies, which can be more fun for students than one tragedy per year."*

Some teachers enjoy Shakespeare so much that they want to include even more of a variety of his work in the school curriculum. Teachers in the high school are asked to teach a tragedy a year under the Common Core Canon, but this teacher wants to teach the comedies as well. I agree with the teacher, because I believe that the students would be more likely to connect with the material in the comedies than the material of the tragedies.

Continuing with building the Common Core Canon to fit today's students, this young teacher suggests that more contemporary novels be included as well. Students are even more likely to connect with a text if it is one that they want to read. In a class where one of the *Harry Potter* novels is taught, students are more likely to pay attention to and read the texts than they would if they were trying to read *Lord of the Flies*. Choices like these help to connect students to the material they are learning from to maximize learning potential.

The other teachers interviewed seemed to share similar beliefs about the texts that should be chosen, but they tended to veer away from a pre-selected canon of novels and instead rely on the teacher's choice for his or her own classroom. This teacher says:

*"The standards can apply to any text so I think that teachers should be free to choose texts based on the students' needs and interests."*

Even though some districts are rather strict about the texts that a teacher can use in the classroom, many teachers used to have complete control (pending district approval) of the texts that were taught in their classrooms. Teachers would choose to teach texts that they felt passionate about, which would help them to create lessons for the students that were fun and helped the students to connect to the text. This also helped the students to understand what was happening because they had access to someone who became an unofficial master of the text.

With the introduction of the Common Core Canon, teachers lost the autonomy of choice, which took away some of their passion for the material that they were teaching. This weakens the level of instruction in some cases that the students are receiving, which can lead to poorer grades on the part of the students. Furthermore, students are trying to learn from texts that do not interest them. When the students in my student teaching placement were working with *Lyddie*, they were not interested at all, and that caused a severe lack of attention and lack of skill develop. To further compound the problem, the teachers did not have any interest in the subject matter, which caused the lessons to become less and less inspiring.

No one knows what students need in an English classroom better than their English teacher does, so there is no one more qualified to determine which texts are the best fit for their students. If teachers had the opportunity to choose the texts that they use with their students, they would be more likely to connect with their students and keep them learning. For example, in the district that I worked

in for my student teaching, there were a lot of students that came from migrant worker families that spoke mainly Spanish. If the teacher had been able to pick the novels for the class, we would have picked one that is full of Mexican culture so that those students could feel connected to the class and the text as well.

This teacher's opinion was not a new one to me. It coincides strongly with my own personal beliefs about education and teaching texts, which was made even stronger for me after my observations for college. Other teachers voiced their opinions about the same matter, with one saying:

*"I believe that educators should be given some professional autonomy to choose the texts that are appropriate for the population of students they teach. A canned list of texts is a fine start, but ultimately, the teacher should decide what is best for the students in their classroom."*

As a recent student myself, I can sympathize with both the students, who want to read novels that they enjoy, and the teachers, who want novels that will allow them to teach their students the skills needed to develop their writing and reading abilities. Moving forward in my teaching career, I would like for the Common Core Canon to be changed and further developed to include a bit of choice, which would help me to select novels that my students will connect with. The more the students can connect with the characters, the more they will pay attention to the story. This level of focus leads to more developed students that will go farther in life.

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Understanding what the teacher can do to try to adapt the Common Core Canon to best suit his or her classroom is the most useful and most successful way to ensure that the students are receiving instruction that promotes their learning. As the Common Core is not looking to go away any time soon, it is important for teachers to think outside of the box when putting together their lesson plans, so that their students can succeed.

## My Example

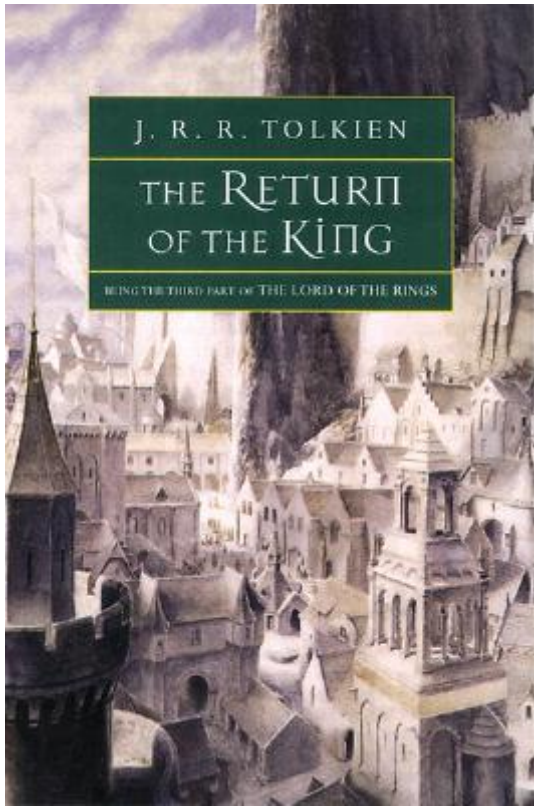
I took to heart the idea of choosing texts that students would enjoy, and chose to try my hand at changing it up to ensure the success of my future students. As an avid fan of *The Lord of the Rings*, I have always wished to teach those novels to high school students. When talked to students over my time working in the schools during my student teaching placement and my observations, I found that

many of the students had a great interest in that world, and thought that it could be a great novel to use to teach different aspects of the English Curriculum.

I created a unit plan that utilizes my favorite novel in the series, *The Return of the King*, as my vehicle for instructing different reading, writing, speaking, and academic skills. To keep in with the Common Core, I made sure that each of the lessons in the unit plan follow the Common Core Standards and model the same skills as are focused on for high school seniors. However, I attempted to create activities that are more fun and entertaining for the students that still teach the necessary skills.

It was not quite as challenging as I would expect, and I was pleasantly surprised with how well it came out. The most difficult task was creating lesson plans that worked together to form a unit, instead of simply functioning as individual pieces. If I can do this, as a student who is in her senior year of college, then it is evident that teachers will be able to do the same, especially with experience under their belts.

~<@>~



*Unit Plan*

*Emily Siddall*

*Mrs. Farrand*

*EDI 465.01*



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## Unit Plan Cover Sheet for EDI 4/565 Farrand – Spring 2016

Creator: \_\_Emily Siddall\_\_\_\_\_

Unit Title: \_\_Undying Friendship\_\_\_\_\_

Grade Level: \_\_12\_\_\_\_

Timeline: \_\_4 Weeks\_\_\_\_\_

### Unit summary/overview:

This unit explores the idea of friendship and how friendship affects decisions made by characters in a novel. Through various writing and speaking exercises, students explore the mindsets of different characters and through this, how these characters interact with their friends throughout the course of the novel. Students will also spend time working on vocabulary and grammar lessons that will both reinforce these aspects of writing and reading, but also enable students to pick up on contextual clues that allude to the friendships between characters. Students will also have the opportunity to look at various different mediums of text, including the novel, the film adaptation, movie posters, other students' work and speeches, and class discussions to understand how Tolkien uses friendship to bind the characters together in the face of adversity.

\_/10 pts.

**Central texts** – minimum of 4 (rich/diverse choices may include: novel, short story, non-fiction articles, photographs, poems – include copies with unit when possible):

*The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King. Dir. Peter Jackson. New Line Home Entertainment, 2004. DVD.*

*Tolkien, J. R. R. The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King. London: HarperCollins, 2001. Print.*

*All Movie Posters and Prints for The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King | JoBlo Posters." JoBlo Posters. Web. 10 May 2016.*

*Student Speeches and Writing: Students can learn just as much from each other as they can from any formal academic source*

\_/20 pts.

**Priority/focus CCLS** (4-5 maximum – suggestion – one from each category of Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking):

- RL.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)
- W.12.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences
- SL 4.1. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks
- L.3.a. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. Vary syntax for effect, consulting references (e.g., Tufte's *Artful Sentences*) for guidance as needed; apply an understanding of syntax to the study of complex texts when reading.

\_ /10 pts.

**Essential Questions** (1-3 maximum):

- *What is friendship?*
- *How do friendships affect our decisions?*

\_ /10 pts.

**Vocabulary:**

Tier 2 (5-10 words minimum)	Tier 3 (5-10 words minimum)
Standard	Quays
Fealty	Kine
Disdain	Oast
Wont	Monolith
Primeval	Tilth

/10 pts.

**Differentiation Strategies (2 minimum - describe):**

There are many different ways to incorporate differentiation into this unit. First of all, when it comes to the group work for the Quick Writing lesson, I would like to place my stronger writers as pairs with my weaker writers when it comes time to come up with prompts and proofread papers. In this case, my weaker writers would be proofreading stronger papers, which would give them achievable examples of what I am looking for in a writing piece. In addition, their papers would be graded by stronger writers, so the weaker writers would get to see all of the comments their peers made on their papers, and they would have the opportunity to ask questions from people who can answer them.

When it comes to the speaking lesson, where the student will need to make their argument, I anticipate students who do not speak English as their first language to possibly have difficulty with their speeches. If there is a teacher in the school who fluently speaks these students' first language, I would still like for each of these students to give their speech in English, but I would also like them to give it in their native languages to someone who would understand the language. In this way, these students would still be practicing speaking in English, but they would also be able to show their knowledge of the information clearly. I would also make myself available so that these students can have additional time to work with me specifically in order to practice even further, so that their classmates can understand what it is they are arguing.

\_20 pts.

## edTPA Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 12

Subject / Content area: English

Unit of Study: Tolkien's *The Return of the King*

Lesson Title: Vocabulary Practice

<p><b>Central Focus for the learning segment:</b> Vocabulary</p> <p><b>Content Standard(s):</b> NYS CCLS or Content Standards (List the number and text of the standard. If only a portion of a standard is being addressed, then only list the relevant part[s].)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RL.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)</li> <li>• L.4.a. Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase</li> <li>• L.4. c. Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, its etymology, or its standard usage</li> </ul>
<p><b>Learning Objectives</b> associated with the content standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will be able to read a sentence with an unknown vocabulary word and determine its meaning using contextual clues</li> <li>• We will be able to use and understand vocabulary words using a variety of methods</li> <li>• We will be able to work in a group in order to share ideas to solve issues with comprehension</li> </ul>
<p><b>Instructional Resources and Materials</b> to engage students in learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A copy of <i>The Return of the King</i></li> <li>• Pre-made vocabulary chart sheet</li> <li>• Pre-made homework sheet</li> <li>• A dictionary</li> <li>• Colored pencils</li> <li>• Pen</li> </ul>
<p><b>Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks</b> that support diverse student needs. (Include what you and students will be doing.):</p> <p>Students will be receiving a list of the new vocabulary that will be used with the first section of the novel (Chapters 1-5), totaling 20 words. In class, we will begin by discussing how to determine the meaning of vocabulary words using contextual evidence. As a class, we will go over examples</p>

using sections of text from other novels, teaching all students how to use sentence structure and evidence to determine the meaning of unknown words. Secondly, the class will work in pairs to answer three practice questions, which we will go over together afterwards. The students will then be given a chart each, and will be required to get into groups of three. On the sheet, they will be given the page numbers on which the vocabulary words are used in the novel, and will be required to write down the definition of the word as they determine it to be using contextual clues. Once this is completed, each group will be given a dictionary and colored pencils. They will be required to write down the dictionary definition of the vocabulary word, write their own sentence using that word, and draw a picture that reminds them of that vocabulary word to use as a mental trigger. This will take the better part of two days, and it will be turned into me to grade. I will return this chart to the students so that they can use it to study for their vocabulary quiz, which will take place at the end of Part One of the novel.

**Differentiation and planned universal supports:**

For students in the class who require additional help for this assignment, I will make sure to spend additional time working with these students during the class time allotted to this assignment, and I will give a full explanation to their special education teachers as well so that they can work on this assignment in their Resource class. For the ELL students in the classroom, I will change the assignment so that they are given a Spanish-English dictionary, so that they can read the definition of the vocabulary words in both languages to ensure comprehension. For students that require additional time, I will reduce the number of vocabulary words that they will need to complete the chart for from 20 down to 12, and I will give them a definition sheet along with their graded assignment so that they can understand the necessary vocabulary.

**Language Function students will develop. Additional language demands and language supports:**

Students will learn how to use contextual clues to determine the definition of unknown vocabulary. They will learn how to then use different methods of memorization to learn the meaning of the new vocabulary words, as well as how to apply them in new ways. Also, the students will learn advanced vocabulary to further enhance their knowledge of the English language, which will help on state and national testing.

**Type of Student Assessments and what is being assessed:**

- **Informal Assessment:** The initial definitions that the students come up with for the vocabulary words using contextual clues will be useful as a pre-exam for me to determine the knowledge that they have of these words before we study them in the class. These definitions will also be useful for me to determine if students understand the concept of using contextual clues, and if it will require additional instruction to clarify the techniques.
- **Formal Assessment:** There will be two formal assessments: 1) the graded vocabulary chart, and 2) the vocabulary quiz at the end of this section of the novel. Both will count as quiz grades in the grade book, and will help me to determine if the students are able to both use contextual clues to determine vocabulary, and if they understand the vocabulary words and are able to use them in other contexts.
- **Modifications to the Assessments:** Each exam will be able to be modified to meet additional needs of students based on what is listed on their IPAs.

**Evaluation Criteria:** The vocabulary chart will be graded out of 60 points, and I will be looking to see how students did using contextual clues, if they completed looking up the given definitions, if they correctly used the vocabulary word in a sentence, and if they drew a picture. The vocabulary quiz will be graded out of 100 points, and I will be looking to see if the students were able to match the vocabulary word to the correct definition.

**Relevant theories and/or research best practices:** These exercises will assist in the idea that literacy techniques are able to be used across different content areas. By learning how to use contextual evidence in order to determine the meaning of unknown vocabulary words, students will be able to use these techniques no matter what subject they are working in, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the text.

**Lesson Timeline:**

**Day 1:**

(5min): Attendance, turn in last night's homework, hand out materials

(10min): Instruct on how to use contextual clues in order to determine vocabulary words' definitions, working as a class with on the board examples

(7min): Work in pairs with practice examples to see if students understand the skills needed

(15min): Begin work on the vocabulary chart sheet in groups of three

(3min): Clean up materials, explain what will happen for the next day

**Day 2:**

(5min): Attendance, hand out materials, get back into groups

(30min): Finish vocabulary charts

(5min): Turn in materials, assign first reading chapter for homework, turn in vocabulary chart

**End of Reading Section 1:**

(15min): Take vocabulary quiz

Vocabulary Word	Contextual Clue Definition	Dictionary Definition	Sentence	Picture

**Name:**



**Name:** Answer Key"Return" Vocab Quiz #1

quays	landing places built parallel to the banks of a waterway
bastion	a fortification or stronghold
belie	give a false impression of
disdain	a lack of respect, often suggesting an undeserved sense of superiority
prowess	skill in battle
hamlet	very small town
kine	cows (archaic form)
fealty	the pledged faithfulness of a vassal or thane to a lord
oast	a kiln or oven, usually conical in shape, used to dry tobacco, hops, or malt
wont	habit; custom

fiefs	feudal estates that are under the control of a lord or a king
monolith	a single stone carved either by art or nature into columns or pointed obelisks
flagon	a metal vessel for wine
primeval	relating to the earliest ages of the world, ancient
standard	a banner carried on a pole
thronged	excessively crowded
gallant	showy in dress and appearance
butteries	storerooms for food and drink
keel	the "spine" of a boat that extends on the bottom along the center of the vessel
tilth	land cultivated to grow crops

Vocabulary List to be Written on the Board for the Quiz

Quays

Bastion

Belie

Disdain

Prowess

Hamlet

Kine

Fealty

Oast

Wont

Fiefs

Monolith

Flagon

Standard

Thronged

Gallant

Butteries

Keel

Tilth

Primeval

**Don't forget to mix up these words when you put them on the board!!!**

## edTPA Lesson Plan (Emily Siddall)

Grade Level: 12

Subject / Content area: English

Unit of Study: *The Return of the King*

Lesson Title: Step into Their Shoes!

<p><b>Central Focus for the learning segment:</b> Speaking and Listening</p> <p><b>Content Standard(s):</b> NYS CCLS or Content Standards (List the number and text of the standard. If only a portion of a standard is being addressed, then only list the relevant part[s].)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SL 4.1. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks</li> <li>• W 5.1. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience</li> </ul>
<p><b>Learning Objectives</b> associated with the content standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will be able to look up ideas in a text and connect them to an overarching argument</li> <li>• Students will be able to defend their opinion against claims by their classmates</li> <li>• Students will be able to speak publicly in front of the class, while speaking as their assigned character</li> <li>• Students will be able to listen to other's speeches, and take notes of the important arguments for each</li> <li>• Students will be able to compile the data they spoke about and listened to, in order to create an argumentative essay that showcases their opinions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Instructional Resources and Materials</b> to engage students in learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A copy of <i>The Return of the King</i></li> <li>• A pen and paper</li> <li>• Access to a computer</li> <li>• Index cards</li> </ul> <p>I will additionally need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To create a document that has all the character names on it with space for notes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks</b> that support diverse student needs. (Include what you and students will be doing.):</p> <p>For this task, I would like to take a look at speaking and listening, so that students can have some practice working on their public speaking and listening to other speakers. I would like to do this assignment roughly halfway through the novel, so that students have sufficient knowledge about each of the characters, but they will not yet know how the story ends. First, I will have a list of characters, so that there are enough different ones so that students get to each have a different character. I plan on letting them choose characters through a lottery system, where students draw folded pieces of paper out of a hat, and then we go in the order of the numbers written on those slips</p>

of paper. Then, once each student has a character, I would like to present the assignment to them. Each student will be required to argue, in 3-5 minutes, why they, the character they chose, are the most important character in the novel. Students will be required to speak in front of the classroom, using evidence from the text to support their position. While the students are listening to their classmates, they will be required to take notes about each of the arguments. As a class, we will take some time to talk about these arguments, as well as what speaking techniques and ideas worked, and which didn't. After all the students have gone, students will be required to argue which character they believe is most important, and which is least important, based on the arguments that their classmates made. This will take place in a small, 2-3 page argumentative essay, which I will then collect and grade.

**Differentiation and planned universal supports:** For the students with special needs and ELL learners, I will need to modify this assignment slightly. Students with special needs will be able to spend time with me one-on-one working on finding material for their arguments, and I will expect them to speak to the class just like everyone else. However, I will make sure to have them present closer to the end, so they can have more time to practice and work on their speeches. The essays should not cause too many issues, but like always, I will make sure that I am available to meet with them should they need help, and I will give the Resource teachers detailed instructions about what I expect, plus a copy of my notes from the speeches that they can use to help the students with the essays. I will end up using similar modifications for those students who speak English as their second language. If they are truly struggling, however, I will ask them to speak as well as they can in front of the class, but so I can check content I will offer them the option of giving the speech a second time with an interpreter so that I can assess their knowledge better. However, this is only to be used if those students are truly struggling and their grade will be greatly affected otherwise.

**Language Function students will develop. Additional language demands and language supports:** Students will develop speaking and listening skills with this assignment, which are crucial to their growth in the real world as well as the classroom. They will learn how to present a persuasive argument to a large group of people, and they will develop their speaking techniques further to help them when it comes to speaking more formally and for a longer amount of time. This will also allow students to learn how to listen for the important points in a speech, so that they remember the most pertinent and crucial information. Also, they will have the chance to further develop their writing skills with the short essay that they will be asked to write at the end of the assignment.

**Type of Student Assessments and what is being assessed:**

- **Informal Assessment:** Informally, I will assess the students on the note sheets that they take. The notes sheet will help me to see if individual students are able to pick out the important arguments in the speeches, and to see if they were paying attention. The speaking portion will actually also be graded more informally. As I plan on using this as one of the first more formal speaking opportunities, I want to be able to give students a chance to learn how to speak without killing their grades if they mess up, so this will allow me to be easier on their grades while still providing them feedback and readying them for the more formal presentations later on in the course.
- **Formal Assessment:** The same does not stand for the essay. As this is not the first essay that they will be assigned in this class, and because the essays are so short, I will collect them and grade them each in a closer manner, to help improve students' writing abilities. It will be graded both on their argument, and the grammar/mechanics present in the essay. They will be held to an appropriate level

with their grammar, and while there is no wrong answer to their argument, it will need to be supported with facts from the in-class speeches.

- **Modifications to the Assessments:** Because my goal is to help students to better their writing abilities, I will make sure that if students want to meet with me to go over why they lost points on their essays, then I will permit them afterwards to do corrections for half of their lost points back. In addition, I will make sure that while the students are working on their essays in class, I will meet briefly with each student to go over their speech to help to identify great methods they used and what parts of speaking that they need to work on.

**Evaluation Criteria:** Students will be evaluated on their ability to speak in public, both through the argument that they make, as well as how they speak in front of a crowd. They will also be evaluated on their essays, whose grades will depend on how well the students' arguments are supported in the paper. I do not want to ruin their grades with the speaking, seeing as this will be the first time they have done any formal speaking for me, so I will make sure to take detailed notes for each student so that we can go over their speech and presentation together.

**Relevant theories and/or research best practices:** Jim Burke's *The English Teacher's Companion*, the chapter on Speaking and Listening

**Lesson Timeline:**

Day One:

- Have students draw numbers
- Go through the process of choosing characters
- Explain the assignment
- Students will have the rest of the period to start their arguments

Days Two-Three

- Students will find the necessary information for their arguments
- Students will start drafting out their speeches

Days Four-Eight (Seven, if it doesn't take that much time)

- Students will give their speeches in class
- On the last day, I will present the essay assignment

Day Nine

- Students will work on their essays in class
- If Day Eight is not used above, it will be given as an addition in-class essay day

Day Eleven

- The essay will be due, graded, and handed back to the students

## edTPA Lesson Plan (Emily Siddall)

Grade Level: 12

Subject / Content area: English

Unit of Study: *The Return of the King*

Lesson Title: Take Some Time to Get in Their Mind!

<p><b>Central Focus for the learning segment:</b> Writing</p> <p><b>Content Standard(s):</b> NYS CCLS or Content Standards (List the number and text of the standard. If only a portion of a standard is being addressed, then only list the relevant part[s].)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• W.12.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences</li> <li>• W.12.5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience</li> </ul>
<p><b>Learning Objectives</b> associated with the content standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will be able to write their own creative story based on a text</li> <li>• Students will learn different proofreading methods and skills</li> <li>• Students will be able to make changes to their stories after the proofreading process</li> <li>• Students will be able to come up with a turn-in ready story</li> </ul>
<p><b>Instructional Resources and Materials</b> to engage students in learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A copy of <i>The Return of the King</i></li> <li>• A pen and paper</li> <li>• A red pen</li> <li>• Access to a computer, either at home or in the computer lab</li> </ul>
<p><b>Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks</b> that support diverse student needs. (Include what you and students will be doing.): For this lesson, I would like to work both on my students' creative writing abilities, as well as some proofreading techniques. First, I would have the students finish Book 5, and then I would give them some time to think about their characters. I would like them to work, both in class and for homework, on choosing a character in Book 5, and re-write an important scene from that character's point of view. I think this would allow students to have some creative freedom, because they could both look at the text from a different angle, but they could also create some thoughts and actions for these characters that are not explicitly explained in the novel. I would like this assignment to be at least two pages long, but if students wish to go a little longer with it because they are enjoying writing, I do not want to stop them. For the proofreading, I would like to spend some time teaching students different methods of proofreading in a large group setting. Afterwards, I would have the students each bring in a printed, double-spaced copy of their rough draft, and I will collect them, mix them up, and redistribute them to students. I would have each student proofread a section after reading the story, and then give feedback on the story in general. This would be done anonymously, and then we would continue to pass the papers around in a circle, so that each story is proofread and commented on by several other students. After this, I would collect the papers and give my own proofreading marks and comments. I would then redistribute the</p>

stories back to the proper author, complete with comments, so they can be edited or re-written as needed, and then turned in for a final grade.

**Differentiation and planned universal supports:** I am a firm believer that students with special needs and students for whom English is not their first language should be kept in the same classroom doing the same activities as the average student as often as possible. In order to make this happen, I would permit these students to have additional time to work on their stories if they require it. I would also make sure that they are able to meet with either me or a resource teacher for one-on-one tutoring if needed. I believe that if they have the additional time and help, that they will be able to participate in the group work and turn in final products that are comparable to those of their peers.

**Language Function students will develop. Additional language demands and language supports:** Through this assignment, students will learn how to work with language to craft their own creative stories using already written characters. This will give them free rein to write about whatever they would like (within reason), and hopefully will spark some creative thinking and genuine interest in their final products. Also, with the group work in proofreading, students will learn techniques that they can use later on, on their own works in the future, to edit their assignments to improve their final drafts. This practice writing should work to help their grasp of grammar and structure, and give them more practice with writing both for school and for fun.

**Type of Student Assessments and what is being assessed:**

- **Informal Assessment:** For an informal assessment, I would like to meet with each of my students while they are working on their first draft of their story, so that I can hear their ideas and where they are planning on going with their stories. At this early stage, I would be able to help them if they are struggling with coming up with ideas, and then I would also be able to steer them closer to the right direction if necessary.
- **Formal Assessment:** For the formal assessment of their work, I would like to grade the final version of their stories. This would enable me to look at the different proofreading marks that were made to the original draft, as well as the changes that the student chooses to make to edit it and turn it into a final product. However, knowing how difficult writing can be for some students, I will grade the papers, then permit students who are unhappy with their grades to meet with me to go over the story, and make corrects to gain half of their missed points back.
- **Modifications to the Assessments:** With the different kinds of students in my classroom, such as the students who have disabilities or are ELL learners, I would like them to complete the full assignment and participate in the group activities in class. However, if they need additional time to complete the assignment, I would definitely grant it, and I would make sure that their additional help, either resource or language help, has availability to give them one-on-one tutoring if necessary. I would also make sure I would be available to help as well.

**Evaluation Criteria:** In order to turn in a good paper, each student will have to come up with their own creative story that brings in their own personalities. They will need to use proper grammar and



writing techniques appropriate to or surpassing that of their grade level. Their final draft will have to follow proper English mechanics, and there will need to be evidence of effort present.

**Relevant theories and/or research best practices:**

- Jim Burke's *The English Teacher's Companion*, Writing Chapter

**Lesson Timeline:**

- Day One: Assignment is explained to the students, students are given a chance to brainstorm and bounce ideas off of a partner, they begin writing their story
- Day Two: Students will be given the entire period to continue working silently on their stories, and any stories not completed by the end of class will need to be completed for homework
- Day Three: We will spend the first half of the period teaching how to proofread and what to look for, and the other half of the period will be spend in the circle passing the papers around for the proofreading activity
- Day Five: Students will need to turn in a completed, edited paper at the beginning of the class period

## edTPA Lesson Plan (Emily Siddall)

Grade Level: 12

Subject / Content area: English

Unit of Study: *The Return of the King*

Lesson Title: Quick Writing

<p><b>Central Focus for the learning segment:</b> Timed Writing and Understanding Grading</p> <p><b>Content Standard(s):</b> NYS CCLS or Content Standards (List the number and text of the standard. If only a portion of a standard is being addressed, then only list the relevant part[s].)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• W.2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.</li> <li>• W.10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Learning Objectives</b> associated with the content standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will be able to read and understand rubrics about quick writing</li> <li>• Students will be able to write question prompts that could be used for timed writing</li> <li>• Students will be able to complete timed writing assignments</li> <li>• Students will be able to identify their own strengths and weaknesses with timed writing</li> <li>• Students will be able to use a rubric to grade others' work</li> </ul>
<p><b>Instructional Resources and Materials</b> to engage students in learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A pen and loose-leaf paper</li> <li>• A copy of <i>The Return of the King</i></li> </ul> <p>I will provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The rubric used on the AP English exams for timed writing</li> <li>• Example question prompts for timed writing taken from the AP exam</li> <li>• Their prompt written on a sheet that looks like the AP exam</li> <li>• An additional copy of the rubric to be used for grading their partner's essay</li> </ul>
<p><b>Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks</b> that support diverse student needs. (Include what you and students will be doing.): For this lesson, I want to take a look at the kinds of quick writing that students will be doing both on their AP exams in the spring, as well as practicing the skills that they will need throughout their entire lives to complete timed writing effectively and with great content. I first will start the lesson by having a class discussion to talk about timed writing, students' fears and struggles with it, where the class feels their strengths and weaknesses are with timed writing, and situations where they will encounter it. I will then explain that we will be taking time to write quickly from their own knowledge in timed scenarios, with emphasis on the skills needed to do so well. We will then look at the same rubric that is used to grade AP timed writing samples, so that the students can become comfortable with how they will be graded on these, and they will get the chance to ask questions and identify criteria that they are not completely comfortable with. After this discussion, we will take a look at sample AP English timed writing questions, and talk about the language that is used, and how to read the questions so that the student understands exactly what it</p>

is they are writing about. I will split the class into small groups, and they will be asked to write their own sample questions about *The Return of the King* using the formats and kinds of questions that the AP exam makes to write their own question about the text. We will put each of these questions on the board, and go over them as a class, seeing if they fit the frames that questions for timed writing prompts take, and see if they are answerable in a timed setting. I would then choose the best of these prompt questions without telling the students what it is, and give it to them in class, where they will be expected to write a timed essay answering the prompt that they created. Once the time is up, students will trade papers with a partner, and grade the essay based on the rubric that we previously looked at. The pairs would then meet, so that each student can ask questions about the grade that they were given, and why the other student gave that grade based on the rubric. Each student will then write an exit ticket listing their strengths and weaknesses that they discovered based on the rubric, and I will look at these along with the quick write essays. Once I also go through and grade the essays based on the rubric, I will hand all this back to the students, and make sure that they understand the comments that I make on their papers. These kinds of quick writing scenarios will be presented to students throughout the year, and I will build those lessons around the skills that the students identified that they need to work on.

**Differentiation and planned universal supports:** Seeing as there will be situations where all students, regardless of language ability and special needs will need to complete timed writing, I do not want to make their assignments any different than those of their classmates. By asking them to complete the same amount of writing in a shorter time slot as their peers, when they reach exams at the end of the year and need to write, they will be able to do just as well if not better with their additional time. I will just make sure that I am available for questions while they write, seeing as this is the first time that they will be doing quick writing for me this year.

**Language Function students will develop. Additional language demands and language supports:** Students will strengthen the skills that are necessary for them to use for writing in a timed setting. Seeing as they will be required to complete quick or timed writing in their careers and later schooling, students will be working on practicing the language that they should use for these assignments. They will also learn how to find their strengths or weaknesses, so that they can work to strengthen them on their own as well as in class.

**Type of Student Assessments and what is being assessed:**

- **Informal Assessment:** The exit ticket where students will be given a participation grade for completing will not just be a check for understanding, but it will also give me insight to see where the students believe their strengths and weaknesses are so that I can tailor future lessons to their needs.
- **Formal Assessment:** The formal assessments for this lesson will be the question that students come up with in class, which will be graded for their ability to be answered, and the essays themselves. These essays will not be worth as many points as their untimed papers are because of the context in which they are written, but I want to provide a grade for them so that they can track their growth from each timed writing assignment to the next.
- **Modifications to the Assessments:** I don't really want to modify these assessments because the need for growth will be great, but if necessary, I will look into grading the essays on a curve so that the students' grades aren't destroyed if as a class, they struggle.

**Evaluation Criteria:** Students will be graded on their ability to come up with a written question prompt in groups that fits the frame that AP exam ones are written in. They will be also graded on how well they can answer the prompt in the time provided, using the rubric that they will have

previously seen. They will also be evaluated on their ability to identify their own personal strengths and weaknesses.

**Relevant theories and/or research best practices:** Jim Burke's *The English Teacher's Companion*, Ch.8

**Lesson Timeline:**

Day One:

- Class discussion about timed writing
- Look at the rubric in class and discuss it

Day Two:

- Answer any remaining questions about the rubric
- Look at sample questions and discuss the language and format used
- Divide into groups and work on writing their own prompts

Day Three:

- Finish writing prompt questions
- Begin going over the prompts one by one

Extra Day (if needed):

- Finish going over the prompts

Day Four:

- Give the quick writing assignment

Day Five:

- Split students into pairs
- Have a class discussion about how to grade using the rubric
- Grade partner's paper using the rubric
- Discuss the given grades in pairs

Extra Day (if needed):

- Finish discussing in pairs
- Give exit ticket identifying each's strengths and weaknesses

Day Eight:

- Hand back the graded essays with my comments, their exit ticket, and their partner's completed rubric about their essay

## edTPA Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 12

Subject / Content area: English

Unit of Study: *The Return of the King*

Lesson Title: Grammar and its Effects

<p><b>Central Focus for the learning segment:</b> Grammar</p> <p><b>Content Standard(s):</b> NYS CCLS or Content Standards (List the number and text of the standard. If only a portion of a standard is being addressed, then only list the relevant part[s].)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• R.5.1. Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact</li> <li>• R.5.2. Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging</li> <li>• R.6.2. Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.</li> <li>• L.3.a. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. Vary syntax for effect, consulting references (e.g., Tufte's <i>Artful Sentences</i>) for guidance as needed; apply an understanding of syntax to the study of complex texts when reading.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Learning Objectives</b> associated with the content standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will practice close reading sections of text from RotK</li> <li>• We will find and label complex sentences in the text</li> <li>• We will learn what kind of complex sentence each is and discuss why the author chose that kind of sentence in that instant</li> <li>• We will practice crafting different kinds of complex sentences</li> </ul>
<p><b>Instructional Resources and Materials</b> to engage students in learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A pen and notebook</li> <li>• A copy of <i>The Return of the King</i></li> <li>• Loose-leaf paper</li> <li>• Scanned copies of Burke's sentence type chart</li> </ul>
<p><b>Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks</b> that support diverse student needs. (Include what you and students will be doing.): Students need to have a detailed knowledge of the different kinds of sentences that there are in writing, both so that they are prepared for close reading in college, and so they can have correctly-used variations in their own writing. I would like to test the students by having them match different kinds of sentences (the names of these) to examples that I will have</p>

written for them up on the board. I will take a quick look at their strengths and weaknesses to see where I need to focus my time. Then, we will look at the scanned copy of Burke's chart of different kinds of sentences, and using RotK, we will look up different kinds of sentences as they are used in the text and talk about them. I will briefly review the ones they are already comfortable with (such as simple and complex), and we will talk in detail about the more complex ones. Afterwards, we will work as a group to craft examples of the more difficult kinds of sentences on the board so that the students can have a chance to look at how these kinds of sentences are built. Finally, the students will be given a chance to practice with their evaluation, which is the homework assignment described below. If students are still found to be struggling and did not do well on the assignment, then I will plan an additional lesson and fit it into the grammar unit.

**Differentiation and planned universal supports:** I do not believe that this is a concept that all students will be able to grasp right away, so I will make sure that I am available both after school and before school so that students who are struggling with the assignment will get extra help. I will also make sure to give a detailed description and explanation of the assignment to the resource room teachers, and make sure that they have the knowledge to assist the students who require their aid. In addition, for the students who require additional help in English, such as extra time or those that have challenges that affect their reading and writing abilities, I will decrease the number of sentences that they do for homework from ten to seven, so that they will be better able to complete the assignment.

**Language Function students will develop. Additional language demands and language supports:** Students will learn more about the different kinds of sentences that are used in texts, so that they can identify them when used. They will also be able to craft their own examples of these different kinds of sentences as well, to maximize comprehension. This will give them more tools to use when writing, and it will help them with their close reading, because sentence structure is important when determining what the author is trying to say. This is not a concept that I was exposed to at a young age, and I would like to make sure that my students have the necessary knowledge that will assist them on the ACT and SATs, as well as in college.

**Type of Student Assessments and what is being assessed:**

- **Informal Assessment:** At the start of the lesson, I will put different kinds of sentences on the board, and put a list of those different kinds next to them. I will ask students to take out a half of a piece of paper and to try to match the kinds of sentences to the sentences themselves. I will make sure to let them know that they won't be graded officially on these, and have them exchange papers so that they can be peer graded. This will give me an idea of the previous knowledge that the students have of the different kinds of sentences.
- **Formal Assessment:** I will have the students complete a homework assignment that I will grade and add to the gradebook. They will be given ten different kinds of sentences, and will be asked to craft their own examples for each kind of sentence. I will grade their papers once completed and return them to the students, so that they will have them to study from for the unit test on grammar at the end of the grammar unit.

- **Modifications to the Assessments:** If a lot of the class still struggles on crafting the different kinds of sentences, I will allow students to correct their papers for half of the lost points back, and I will give another lesson on the subject a little later in the unit.

**Evaluation Criteria:** Students will not only be need to be able to recognize the basic different kinds of sentences, but they will need to be able to craft their own examples of these sentences on their own. I will expect them to utilize 5 of the different kinds of sentences in their next paper, and there will be a percentage of points on that paper that will be given for that requirement being met.

**Relevant theories and/or research best practices:**

- Burke's *The English Teacher's Companion*, pages 271-291

**Lesson Timeline:**

- 2min—students will take their seats, I will take attendance, and they will get out their materials
- 5min—the students will be given instructions to match the sentences to the proper label (of the kind of sentence it is)
- 3min—we will grade the papers, and I will ask how many the students each got right by calling out numbers correct and having the students raise their hand when I call out their score
- 15min—close reading of already-read sections of RotK with detailed explanations of different kinds of sentences, using sentences from the text as examples, students will be given the scanned section of Burke's sentence chart
- 10min—practice crafting some of these different kinds of sentences on the board as a group
- 5min—explanation of homework with an example they can use for a free ten points on the assignment

**edTPA Lesson Plan (Emily Siddall)****Grade Level: 12****Subject / Content area: English****Unit of Study: *The Return of the King*****Lesson Title: Analyzing Media about *The Return of the King*****Central Focus for the learning segment: Media Literacy****Content Standard(s): NYS CCLS or Content Standards (List the number and text of the standard. If only a portion of a standard is being addressed, then only list the relevant part[s].)**

- **W. 5. Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest**

**Learning Objectives associated with the content standards:**

- **Students will be able to close-read different forms of media**
- **Students will be able to ask leading questions about media to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning**
- **Students will be able to come up with their own informed opinion about media portrayals**
- **Students will be able to discuss media portrayals of a completed novel**

**Instructional Resources and Materials to engage students in learning:****Students will need:**

- **A pen and paper**
- **A copy of *The Return of the King***

**I will provide:**

- **A film clip from the 2003 version of the film *The Return of the King***
- **A movie poster from the 2003 version of the film *The Return of the King***
- **Previously composed leading questions to direct the discussions for myself**
- **A paragraph assignment worksheet about the discussion materials**



- **Markers**

**Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks that support diverse student needs. (Include what you and students will be doing.):** To begin the lesson, I would like to start with a class discussion about media, and its function in society, to see what student's believe its role is in their lives. We will discuss media portrayals of people, literary works, and the news, to bring to light the fact that media presentations are often skewed to serve an additional purpose. I will then ask the students to work in groups of three to brainstorm what we might be looking for as educated investigators when we close-read media formats. I will ask them to focus these group discussions on film and movie posters, as these are the forms we will be looking at in this lesson. We will then come together as a class, and make a list of the different ideas for each of the two media formats. The next day, we will look at the movie poster for the 2003 film, and have a class discussion about the image. I would like to discuss why the designer and director chose to portray the image the way they did, how their lighting, camera angles, etc. influence the viewer's perception of the image, and the deeper meanings that are present in the image. I would then have students work in pairs to sketch out how they would have made the movie poster for the film. This will be a way for me to allow them to be creative, but also allow me to see what they deem to be the most important aspects of the novel and film. The final day of the lesson will be spent on the film clip that I choose from the movie. I will only make the clip about 30 seconds long, so that we can spend the entire class period going over choices that were made about the film, how the novel was adapted to make the film, and the director's choices. For homework, I will give students the paragraph assignment, which will ask them to discuss which media format impacted them the most greatly, and what choices that were made about that particular format do they deem the most important and why. I will collect these for a grade, but also to see if the students have gained an understanding about media, and if not, I will rework this lesson later on in the year and readdress it.

**Differentiation and planned universal supports:** For this assignment, I would like for students with disabilities to work on the project with the rest of us. If they need additional time to complete and turn in the paragraph, they will of course be granted it, but I feel as though they may be able to benefit from the discussions and the ideas of their classmates. I will make an additional example available to the resource and special education teachers, so that they can have more practice working with this new way of thinking if necessary. With these media forms being mostly visual and audio in presentation, I do not see there being issues for ELL students, but if they need to write their paragraph in their native language or have extended time, they will be granted it for the paragraph.

**Language Function students will develop. Additional language demands and language supports:** Students will be able to take a look at different forms of media, which will help them to gain an understanding about media literacy. It will give them skills to look at the different

**forms of close-reading that will be necessary for them in today's technological world, and will enable them to practice those skills as well. There will also be a chance for the students to practice their discussion skills, in both large and small group formats, which will help with their communication as well.**

**Type of Student Assessments and what is being assessed:**

- **Informal Assessment:** I will walk around during small group discussions to listen to students' ideas, and collect their drawings that they make changing the movie poster. This will give me an idea of if the students are understanding the materials, and let me know if I need to make adjustments to my lesson plans for this topic.
- **Formal Assessment:** I will give the students an actual grade beyond a participation grade for their paragraphs, which they will be graded on for content and grammar.
- **Modifications to the Assessments:** There will be additional time given for students with special needs and ELL learners, but I would like them to complete the same assignments as their peers.

**Evaluation Criteria:** Students will be evaluated on their grammar in the writing assignment, but they will mainly be graded on the content that they include in their writing. I will check their ideas to see if they are supported properly with examples, and look at how students are understanding the material. Students will also receive participation grades for their participation in both the small group and full class discussions.

**Relevant theories and/or research best practices:**

**Thoman, E., & Jolls, T. (n.d.). Media Literacy: A National Priority for a Changing World. Retrieved March 29, 2016, from <http://www.medialit.org/reading-room/media-literacy-national-priority-changing-world#bio>**

**Lesson Timeline:**

**Day One:**

- **Class discussion about media and media literacy**
- **Small group discussions about close-reading media**

- **Come back together to make lists on the board about what to analyze with different forms of media**

**Day Two:**

- **As a class, have a group discussion about the movie poster**
- **Have students work in pairs to design a new movie poster based on what they believe is most important with portraying the novel as a film**

**Day Three:**

- **Class discussion about the film**
- **Hand out and explain homework assignment**



Vocabulary Word	Contextual Clue Definition	Dictionary Definition	Sentence	Picture

**Name:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

<i>Frodo</i>	
<i>Sam</i>	
<i>Aragorn</i>	
<i>Gandalf</i>	
<i>Eowyn</i>	
<i>Pippin</i>	
<i>Theoden</i>	
<i>Legolas</i>	

## EXIT TICKET

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*I AM STRONG BECAUSE:*

- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*I CAN BETTER MY WRITING BY:*

- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*I WOULD LIKE MORE HELP WITH \_\_\_\_\_  
BECAUSE:*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Name:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Mind Reader Paper*

*Due Monday, April 19<sup>th</sup>*

*For your final paper in this unit, you will be writing a creative piece in which you choose a character that was present in Book 5 of *The Return of the King*, and re-write an important scene from that character's point of view. You will need to present realistic thoughts and ideas from the character's mind, while still telling what happens in the scene. Be creative: you can imagine the character's point of view any realistic way that you choose. If you are having trouble brainstorming ideas or if you have questions, you are welcome to ask me during study halls, as well as before and after class. This paper should be in MLA format, and should be 2-4 pages in length.*



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*Mind Reader Paper Rubric*

	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b><i>Creativity</i></b>	<i>The paper is full of evidence of creativity, with new thoughts and ideas introduced.</i>	<i>The paper contains some new ideas, with a strong focus on what was actually written.</i>	<i>The paper contains only a couple new ideas, and mainly tells the story as was written.</i>	<i>The paper does not introduce any new ideas, and instead simply restates the story.</i>
<b><i>Style</i></b>	<i>The student's writing style is evident and well-developed.</i>	<i>The student's writing style is present and developed.</i>	<i>There is evidence of the student's writing style, but needs work.</i>	<i>There is no evidence of the student's writing style, and it needs work.</i>
<b><i>Mechanics</i></b>	<i>The paper uses proper grammar and the MLA format, with minimal errors.</i>	<i>The paper uses mostly correct grammar, with MLA format and some errors.</i>	<i>The paper uses some correct grammar, with flawed MLA format and several errors.</i>	<i>The paper uses incorrect grammar frequently, with no MLA format and many errors.</i>
<b><i>Organization</i></b>	<i>The paper flows smoothly from one thought to another, and ideas occur in a logical order.</i>	<i>The paper flows from one thought to another, and ideas occur in a reasonable order.</i>	<i>The paper moves somewhat choppily from one idea to the next, and ideas occur out of order.</i>	<i>The paper moves awkwardly from one idea to the next, and ideas do not occur in any order at all.</i>

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>
	<i>Vocab Day One</i>	<i>Vocab Day Two</i>	<i>Grammar</i>	<i>Quick Write Day One</i> <i>Vocab Quiz</i>	<i>Quick Write Day Two</i> <i>Vocab Quiz Back</i>	
	<i>Quick Write Day Three</i>	<i>Quick Write Day Four</i>	<i>Quick Write Day Five</i> <i>Quick Writes Due</i>	<i>Swing Day</i>	<i>Shoes Day One</i>	
	<i>Shoes Day Two</i> <i>Quick Writes Back</i>	<i>Shoes Day Three</i>	<i>Shoes Day Four</i>	<i>Shoes Day Five</i>	<i>Shoes Day Six</i> <i>Presentations</i>	
	<i>Shoes Day Seven</i> <i>Presentations</i>	<i>Mind Day One</i>	<i>Mind Day Two</i>	<i>Mind Day Three</i>	<i>Mind Day Four</i> <i>Mind Paper Due</i>	

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