Instruction Is Shifting

This is a comprehensive English Language Arts curriculum designed to fit the demands and instructional shifts of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). As such, the modules, units and lessons in this curriculum were designed with a close adherence to the Publisher's Criteria and The Tri-State/ EQuIP Rubric. This means that teachers may encounter some new or unfamiliar structures, approaches, and strategies. The authors of these modules have been careful to ensure that its strongest characteristic is that it will support teachers as they build students’ skills and knowledge in order to prepare them for College and Career as defined by the standards themselves. The major features of the modules and the ways in which these materials may differ from more traditional resources are outlined in the paragraphs below.

The following information is organized into three sections.

1. **Overall Curricular Changes Due to the Shifts Demanded by the Common Core State Standards**
   Some of the design features herein may necessitate shifts in practice for many high school ELA teachers, while many of them may be familiar as principles of strong and effective teaching. Where we see a possibility for significant changes in teacher practice, we are providing a bit of the logic behind the choices we've made.

2. **Our Approach to Homework**
   The modules include a research-informed, consistent, and scaffolded approach to nightly homework for students. It blends "Accountable Independent Reading" (AiR) with opportunities for extension of student thinking and preparation for new learning. We are providing a thorough explanation of the system suggested herein.

3. **Flexibility in This Curriculum**
   While some lessons provide detailed instructions or recommendations, it’s important to note that the lessons are not scripts and they do allow for teacher preference and flexibility to ensure that what is happening in the classroom both meets the needs of students and is in service of the shifts and the standards. We’ve been careful to point out the key places where teacher perspective and context-based decision making will be critical.
1. Overall Curricular Changes Due to the Shifts Demanded by the Common Core State Standards

a. Text Complexity
The texts read in this curriculum, with few exceptions, are considerably and consistently more complex than texts often studied at the high school level. This is in keeping with the increase in text complexity demanded by the Common Core State Standards. While there are familiar canonical texts such as Romeo and Juliet and “The Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” there are also contemporary works such as David Mitchell’s Black Swan Green and Karen Russell’s “St. Lucy's Home for Girls Raised by Wolves.” These lessons and units also include literary nonfiction such as Rainer Maria Rilke’s Letters to a Young Poet in order to expose students to a balance of text types and to build knowledge about the world. It will always be necessary and appropriate for teachers to ask and support all students to navigate grade-level text complexity. The real difference here is that teachers will no longer translate or explain texts that are complex; all students—regardless of current ability—will be unpacking, chunking, deconstructing, seeking meaning, conducting analysis, defining words in context, using and developing background knowledge, and working to understand what they can of the text at hand.

b. Depth, Not Breadth
This curriculum focuses on slowing the pace and carefully exploring complex text through reading and rereading sections to fully explore the ideas, structures, and layers of meaning. The emphasis is placed on depth of student understanding of the text they are reading rather than the breadth of texts “covered” by teachers. In order to keep this focus on deep student analysis of texts some works are read in their entirety, while many others are read in excerpted selections. As students progress through each year and up through the grades, their ability to read closely and raise and answer evidence based questions will develop and increase in efficiency. The traditional goals of "covering texts or "collecting miles on the page" are secondary to ensuring that students have the space, time, and support to truly navigate grade level text complexity. What’s more, the likelihood of those goals being met independently by all students is increased when classroom time devotes itself to thoughtful exploration and analysis of text. This curriculum expects students to engage in regular and accountable independent reading to ensure all students are reading a sufficient volume of texts; this is discussed in greater detail below.

c. Text Pacing and Creating Space for Close Reading
As a result of the complexity of the texts used in the curriculum and the depth with which we want teachers and students to engage in analyzing and making meaning from texts, the lessons within the curriculum require a much slower pace than is common in many high school ELA classrooms. Pacing has been slowed to provide time for the teacher to facilitate class in such a way that it is the students who are thinking, talking, and writing about the text through reading, rereading, and collaborating. This will often feel different from more traditional approaches where teachers establish background knowledge, conduct sometimes lengthy pre-reading activities, restate or upgrade nascent student ideas and share meaning more readily. It will not be efficient at first, and it may even feel uncomfortable for awhile as teachers and students all work to find their “sea legs” in this new venture. In other words, in these lessons, students are more frequently asked to address difficult questions with complex text.
independently and in groups and to understand and articulate their own confusions and understandings before teachers provide answers or modeling.

d. Revisiting Text and Annotating Text
While common practice in poetry lessons, rereading and reviewing prose in small chunks for specific purposes is more common in these modules than in traditional curricula. A class may spend an entire period on ten lines of text to achieve a common and solid understanding. Part of the process of achieving this depth of understanding involves annotating text. This curriculum frequently asks students to note specific parts of a text that contain important ideas or themes that spark connections to other parts of the text or a different text, or require additional attention or discussion to support comprehension and analysis. In situations where students do not have their own copies of text to annotate, direct guidance should be provided to them on how to take notes and make annotations not directly on the text. For example, T-Charts with page numbers and comments or the liberal use of small self-stick notes would be fine solutions among others.

e. Academic Vocabulary
One of the foci of this curriculum, as with the Common Core Standards in general, is building students' academic vocabulary through exposure to Tier Two words (what the standards refer to as “academic vocabulary”) more likely to appear in complex literary and informational texts as well as regular practice and review with the words in varied contexts (shift 6). By encountering a volume of challenging text through independent and classroom reading, students will be exposed to a large number of these transferable, high-octane terms; gain familiarity with them through context; and occasionally—when the absence of definition would prohibit understanding—learn their meaning from their teacher. See our research page for more information on the approach to academic vocabulary and academic language demanded by the Common Core State Standards.

f. Writing from Sources and Research
This curriculum emphasizes writing from sources and research, again matching the emphasis placed on these activities in the Common Core State Standards. Using the text as the basis for forming claims and making inferences, the students write in a variety of contexts for a variety of purposes (shifts 4, 5). Students also engage in peer-supported and independent research projects of varying lengths and regarding various topics. See our research page for more information about the writing standards and the approach to research demanded by the Common Core.

g. Standards Assessed versus Standards Addressed
For each lesson in the curriculum, we have identified one or two "Assessed Standards" and another small group (most often 1–3) of "Addressed Standards." Assessed Standards identify the core work of the lesson around which student learning has been designed. For the Assessed Standard(s) we have paid special attention to ensure that the work of the lesson provides students opportunities to engage with the demands of the full standard. Students will be assessed on this core work during the daily assessment at the end of each lesson.

This Assessed/ Addressed difference may require a shift in teacher thinking in that the Common Core demands careful attention to the language of the entire standard. Typically, for example, ELA curriculum has concerned itself with the independent study of theme. Because of the structure and coherence of
individual standards within the Common Core, we must now examine the way an author manifests theme over time through the arc of a character's development.

Due the interrelated nature of the standards, each lesson addresses (or requires some work in) other standards to varying degrees. We have identified those standards, which have been "addressed" in sufficient detail to scaffold student learning in order to more deeply engage with the standards in future lessons.

The daily assessments are specifically designed to provide students the opportunity to demonstrate their development (growth in their learning) against the standard(s) assessed in that lesson. In some assessments, the language of the standard will be evident in the question. Other assessment questions do not clearly reflect the language of the standards but require students to conduct all of the thinking embedded in a specific standard in order to appropriately address the standards.

2. Our Approach to Homework

a. Independent and Regular Reading

The CCSS places great emphasis on academic vocabulary. These modules focus robustly on in-class close reading of complex text, and this is a key way to support students’ vocabulary growth. But it is not enough.

Most of the words students need to know to be college and career ready are learned through wide and extensive reading. Students, therefore, need to read independently—the more the better. This is especially true for students who are currently reading below grade level because they will gain the stamina and vocabulary required to attain grade level.

Students will read independently and regularly for homework; Accountable Independent Reading will happen most nights, and students will quickly develop habits of mind around this practice. Independently, therefore, students will be consuming a volume of text that they can navigate on their own. These texts can and should often connect to the topics and ideas explored in the modules. A companion independent reading text list is currently in development by New York State. Ultimately, each of the modules in NYS 9–12 ELA will include a list of books and articles related to the topics and themes of each module. These books and articles will be at a variety of complexity levels so teachers will be able to recommend these differentially for independent reading for all students. Independent reading is too important to wait until this can be fully developed, however, so we are recommending an interim independent reading program oriented to the CCSS Reading Standards.

Now and always, the school librarian or media specialist should play a key role in this aspect of the student’s literacy education by helping students and teachers locate quality high-interest books for this purpose. They are trained and poised to be key players and student advocates in a Common Core-aligned curriculum.

b. Accountability for Accountable Independent Reading

To make the program accountable, easy to implement, and Common Core oriented, we will focus student attention on an applicable reading standard. To make it easier for teachers to implement,
and more pleasant for students, students will be encouraged to work in pairs. This can work as described in section c (Establishing a System for Accountable Independent Reading).

c. Establishing a System for Accountable Independent Reading

Students will need to be given time to choose books, articles, websites, or journals. They can pick any text they feel they can read independently, and they will be encouraged to do this in pairs. In the first few days, the homework assignment would be to find a partner and a text both agree they want to read. Beginning on day five, teachers will briefly (if they have not done so already) introduce and explain one informational text standard and one literary standard, beginning with standard one. For grades 9 and 10 informational, standard one is “cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.” To make sure that students are able to connect a focus standard to their text, we recommend introducing informational text and literature standards 1–6 only, as these standards are the most broadly applicable to a wide variety of texts.

Regularly during the second week, students will be given 3–5 minutes with their partner to prepare to explain how they employed this standard in what they read the night before. For example, if a pair of students had read an article on performance enhancing drugs in sports, they might say, “The article talked about how substances are bad for baseball.” One strong and thorough piece of evidence the student might cite to support this would be decreases in attendance in parks throughout the country.

Teachers will "cold call" students and record only whether or not the response indicates that the reporting pair understood the text and interpreted the standard accurately. If done in pairs, one student could provide the answer, but the other student will respond to questions from the teacher or students. Students would be graded in their pairs, with both accountable to and dependent on the other for their performance. We suggest that teachers include these results in ELA grading and that the focus standard change regularly until all the applicable reading standards have been introduced. Then students can use the standard that makes most sense for what they read the night before.

Surely some students, especially at the high school level, will game this system. Nothing is completely airtight when it comes to holding students accountable for activity beyond the class period. Many students will, however, do this, especially since they can gain credit for being diligent. Even those who do shirk the work will get brief daily exposure to the reading standards and will get modeling and exposure to how they inform a variety of reading strategies and approaches to comprehending text. Teachers may want to assign an accountability measure, such as reading logs, posting to a wiki, journaling, etc. for homework so that they can spot check the writing/collaboration/thinking that happens at night for students who aren't cold called.

Once the suggested related titles for each module are posted, teachers can choose to use this same system to hold students accountable for the related text titles. This would make the beginning dialogue more closely connected to the unit and would help to build students’ background knowledge.
d. Other Homework/Additional Homework Outside of Independent Reading

In addition to AIR, students will be asked to do two homework activities each week. It is critical that this additional homework extend the learning of the day’s lesson or prepare them for the lessons of the following day. Homework cannot and should never be an opportunity for low performing students to fall farther behind because of an inability to navigate grade level complex text independently.

3. Flexibility in this Curriculum

While some lessons provide detailed instructions or recommendations, it’s important to note that the lessons are not scripts and they do allow for teacher preference and flexibility to ensure that what is happening in the classroom both meets the needs of students and is in service of the shifts and the standards.

This curriculum has been carefully designed to give an example of how the standards and shifts can be enacted in a high school ELA classroom. However, the curriculum designers recognize in any given classroom there is a range of student needs. To accommodate that reality, this curriculum is designed to be flexible in terms of day-to-day implementation, but with specific planning parameters as detailed below.

a. Timing

The lessons will give a suggested portion of classroom time to spend on specific activities; however, given the complexity of the texts and analytic nature of the tasks in these lessons/units, it may be necessary to move even more slowly than recommended. Teachers implementing this curriculum should always move at the pace they think is right in order to give their students the essential literacy skills demanded by the CCSS. It is better to extend the lesson than to omit sections of it for the sake of time.

Importantly, if students are engaged in substantive evidence-based discourse and are making meaning of the text under study, it is not necessary to push forward into the next activity, question, or task. The priority in this work is that students are constantly developing their ability to engage in rigorous conversation and writing informed by their analysis of texts and are gaining insights and proficiency for themselves. In order for them to become successful and independent learners, they need to learn these skills for keeps.

Because we are sensitive to the fact that high schools and their students are in a variety of places with their understanding and implementation of many of the core elements of this curriculum, including the Common Core State Standards, Accountable Independent Reading, evidenced-based conversations about text, teaching vocabulary in context, and teaching close reading, we have included detailed instruction on each of these elements early on in each year of instruction. If direct instruction on each of these elements is necessary, lessons may run longer than a typical class period. Teachers will have to make decisions, as they always have, around what is most appropriate for their students, while ensuring students are moving towards mastery of the standards.
b. **Building Fluency**

The curriculum will include instances where the teacher is instructed to read a text aloud, in part or in whole, in order to model fluent reading for students and to give students who are not fluent with complex text a chance to hear the text read well. Students reading below grade level will benefit enormously from hearing the text read while they follow along, “reading in their heads,” before they begin to deconstruct it and conduct their own analysis. Some students may need two of these read-throughs in order to access the text with confidence. If teachers serve students mostly reading on or near grade level, they might choose to limit these activities in favor of having students read independently or in group settings. This element of the curriculum is designed essential to support weaker readers. Not only does it bring them into the text with more confidence and comfort, but it does that while developing their ability to read more fluently.

c. **Paired and Group Reading/Collaborative Work**

Collaboration plays a major role in being ready for college and careers (see speaking and listening Anchor Standard 1 and Writing Anchor standard 6) and as such, these lessons/units allow for multiple opportunities for students to collaborate while reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Social learning and sharing of insights will likewise support students who didn’t arrive at the same conclusion. Students who develop the habit of presenting the textual evidence that led them to their conclusion will become better at it. Listening to peers presenting their position and supporting it well will lift everyone’s capacity for doing the same. The Common Core Standards were designed to weave together the four strands of reading, listening, speaking, and writing for just these reasons.

d. **Grading/Scoring of Assessments**

These lessons/units include frequent and varied opportunities to assess student learning and track progress towards mastery of the CCSS. These assessments can and should be used for formative purposes, but educators may also choose to select specific assessments for the purpose of assessing student progress and holding them accountable for their learning. To this end, we have included rubrics and others information to give the educator data that can drive instruction or be used for summative purposes towards determining a final course or unit grade for students.

e. **Text Versions**

This curriculum deals with a variety of texts, both those in the public domain and those with privately held publishing rights. Given the nature of these texts, you may notice some variance (language, page numbers, etc.) between versions referenced in this curriculum and other available versions. There is also a text list available, which denotes information about the text versions. The specific version of a text is identified at the module level. Generally, the most readily available version of a text was used; however, it is important to ensure the versions of texts used in implementation are cross-referenced with the curriculum to ensure alignment and to make any necessary adjustments.