**Curriculum Review: New Castle County Vocational Technical District**

**Focus: English Language Arts**

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**Abstract**

In this curriculum review, I offer my summary, analysis, and reflection on the 2013-2014 ELA curriculum for the New Castle County Vo-Tech School District. This curriculum is designed for 10th grade students in four comprehensive, public high schools. The introduction of this review provides a more detailed look into the context of this curriculum. The annotations provide my analysis of the curriculum, including strengths and weaknesses, teacher and student implications, and wonderings I have about the curriculum. Lastly, in my reflection I provide a connection to the district’s curriculum and popular curriculum theory.

**Introduction**

In an effort to align what each student is learning throughout the New Castle County Vo-Tech district, all ELA teachers are required to teach the same four units this year. This is the first time curriculum alignment has occurred in several years.

In order to pursue curriculum alignment with fair consideration to all districts, represented from each school worked together to create these units. Teachers, department chairs, and the Director of Instruction made up our curriculum author team. This team relied on the Common Core standards and a supplemental curriculum called *Springboard.* There is no indication to what extent curriculum developers used this supplement in the creation of each unit, or to what extent teachers are expected to use the provided *Springboard* text. It is simply there as a resource to be used by teachers, to some extent in their classrooms.

The curriculum team provides ELA teachers with a page on Blackboard that guides teachers through the four units provided. For each unit, our team has created a unit overview. These consist of brief summaries of what teachers should cover, and suggested activities and lessons. In addition to the overview, teachers can find a curriculum planning document for each unit. Each planning document contains the following elements for the respective unit: Common Core Standards; a chart of what each student will know, understand, and do; a choice of two unit essential questions; several text selection choices; a list of learning outcomes; a list of skills that students should be directly taught; a list of mandatory common assessments

One issue the curriculum team faced was time. At Howard, students receive double the amount of ELA time. In this case, Howard teachers are responsible for apportioning the additional time. Teachers may extend the units and allow their students to grapple with the material at a deeper level or they may create additional units that come after. Since Howard teachers work in professional learning communities, the ELA teachers must come to an agreement about how to spend the extra time.

Below, please find the overview for each of the four provided units, with annotations. Below each overview, please find the introduction to each accompanying *Springboard* unit. Each introduction provides insight into the thematic aims of that unit. The units I’ve chosen to explore are assigned to tenth grade, in all four schools.

**ELA 2: Unit 1 Overview**

In Unit 1, students will understand the types of decisions that authors make when writing, such as tone, diction, figurative language, theme, etc. Students will be able to identify and analyze these choices and will understand the impact of those decisions on the final product. By the end of the unit, students will learn to apply these choices when writing his or her own personal narrative essay. During delivery of this unit, consider the following:

* Use mini-lessons to reinforce grammar based on students’ needs.
* There are several novel options listed for this unit that may also be taught in Unit 3. Please review Unit 3 before deciding which novel to use in this unit.
* Use of evidence is an essential part of Common Core. Students should be require to cite evidence in all activities that include text dependent questions, including classroom discussions, debates, Socratic seminars, and written responses.
* Building vocabulary capacity must be addressed through regularly having students use context clues and direct instruction of Tier 2 vocabulary words.
* Teacher directed close reading assignments should be routinely used with complex texts. At least two teacher-directed close reading activities are a part of the instructional plan.
* Formative assessments at the end of lessons need to have a written component.
* Students are expected to provide evidence and explanations for all text-based answers. Opportunities to provide these answers in writing must be a routine assignment.
* Except for students whose developmental level dictates use of highly structured scaffolding, students should be encouraged to go beyond the five- paragraph essay structure. Emphasis should be on organizing an essay based on the content and the purpose of the text.
* Homework should be a regular instructional practice. Homework is useful for practicing skills after guided practice in class, reading longer works such as novels, and completing writing assignments.

**Springboard Unit 1 Introduction**

The aim of this unit is to help students realize that they are multi-voiced and multicultural.

At the center of this unit is the student and his or her relation to language and culture. Students consider their own positions as speakers within a culture and think about how their voices are shaped by aspects of culture, including personal heritage, family and local traditions, personal experience, and education. Students investigate the voices of writers

who discuss questions of self perception, cultural experiences, and voice in their works. The goal is for students to see themselves as users of language, with voices of their own that are similar to those of the writers whose works they are reading, thereby

allowing them to make connections with literature and its writers.

**ELA 2: Unit 2 Overview**

In Unit 2 students will study the thematic sense of identity through literature while learning to analyze an argument through the study of key elements such as irony, hyperbole, understatement, conflict and satire.  Students will synthesize knowledge of these elements, proper APA format, sentence structure and summarizing to form a valid and cohesive argumentative essay. During delivery of this unit, consider the following:

* Use mini-lessons to reinforce proper grammatical usage and sentence structure
* Spring Board follows MLA format. Activities using MLA format should be altered to follow APA format.
* CCSS makes a distinction between persuasion and argument. Argument does not permit the use of rhetorical fallacies or propaganda techniques. The argument must examine and address the opposing viewpoint.
* Students should be introduced to the use of technological aids such as Noodletools or other citation software.
* The use of a class wiki or discussion board on Blackboard can assist students with collaboration when researching.
* CCSS state that opinions expressed in arguments need to arise from analysis of the research. Therefore, students should form their thesis after examining all of their research. In the past, students formed an opinion and tried to support it. The process has reversed.
* Art, video, graphics are all considered texts in CCSS. Students must be taught how to interact with each type of text. Consider close reading works of art to model how one interacts with a painting.

**Springboard Unit 2 Introduction**

Unit 2 continues to guide students’ explorations of culture and its components—family, ethnicity, gender, race, and subgroups. The goal is to help students understand how those components shape their perceptions of the world as individuals and members of different groups. Students will examine a variety of texts that range from personal reflections to short stories and consider film and art as well. The texts explore cultural identity and conflict. Students will also write about cultural conflict and synthesize information from multiple texts in a thoughtful argument. By studying a variety of cultures and perspectives, students make connections to their own lives, to reflect on their own cultural identities, and to better understand the interrelationships of multiple cultures in American society.

**ELA 2: Unit 3 Overview**

In Unit 3, students will study impact that culture has on a work of literature. Students will develop speaking and listening skills by researching a culture and creating a presentation, and participating in a Socratic seminar. By the end of this unit, students will write an analysis of literature essay. During delivery of this unit, consider the following:

* Use research and presentations (Embedded Assessment 1) to build background knowledge for the selected novel.
* Having students peer review presentations assists with listening skills. Students should be required to provide evidence from the presentation to support their analysis. When developing your viewing guide, be sure to include a space for evidence.
* Informative text is an important element of CCSS. Portions of particularly effective analyses of the text selected model proper analysis technique and give students an opportunity to interact with complex, informative text. Use close reading to make dense analyses more accessible to all students.

**Springboard Unit 3 Introduction**

Unit 3 continues the exploration of culture by examining what happens to a community when outsiders try to influence it. As students read and analyze Chinua Achebe’s novel

Things Fall Apart, they will learn about the Ibo culture, make comparisons to their own culture, and consider the novel’s characters and their responses to the cultural change. Although the unit is primarily a novel study, students will also have the opportunity

to conduct research and present their findings in a group presentation. They will also have opportunities to refine their academic writing skills. Two poems and an interview with Chinua Achebe complement the novel. By the end of this unit, students should become more proficient in close reading, formal writing, literary analysis, research, and communication.

**ELA 2: Unit 4 Overview**

In Unit 4 students will study a variety of rhetorical strategies in texts and identify the affects that these author’s decisions have on the intended purpose. Specifically, students will analyze the drama genre and elements of Greek tragedy. At the culmination of the unit, students will compose a persuasive essay that demonstrates an understanding of the knowledge acquired. During delivery of this unit, consider the following:

* Review argumentative elements to help students make a connection between argument and persuasion.
* Expose students to a wide variety of informative texts in this unit.
* The concept of author’s purpose and bias is an important one. Students should constantly be referring to what the author was trying to achieve and how he/she tried to achieve it when reading informative text. Students need to understand how bias is manifested in text and how a reader should react when he/she discovers bias.

**Springboard Unit 4 Introduction**

This unit asks students to examine an important concept—justice. Unit 4 presents nonfiction, drama, music, and artwork from various cultures that explore the nature of justice. Students’ understanding of voice and of argumentation continues to expand as they take responsibility for presenting their cases in an issue of justice. By this time, students should be prepared to work independently to choose an issue, a message, a genre, and an audience. Students continue to develop teamwork skills as they collaborate on a written

text for a performance Embedded Assessment. Both Embedded Assessments in this unit offer rich learning opportunities while also preparing students for the level of collaboration and understanding of persuasion needed in Unit 5.

**Reflection**

After reviewing this curriculum, immediately I notice the expectation of teachers to toggle back and forth between two sub-curriculums; one devised from the Common Core, and the other created in response to social issues. I can foresee both strengths and weaknesses in relation to this balance. On one hand, teachers and students have the best of both worlds—a focus on cognitive skills necessary to comply with Common Core and to align with the state standardized test, and an authentic study of social injustice. Because of this balance, teachers can devote more time to one or the other sub-curriculum, depending on their students’ needs. This combination between a Humanist approach and a Social Meliorist approach appease multiple aspects of curriculum reform. However, this toggling back and forth may create confusion in teachers’ planning processes. The expectation for how *Springboard* should be integrated in the classroom is unclear; therefore, teachers who feel uncomfortable delving into social injustice, can simply breeze over these important topics with little student engagement. More simply, in some classrooms, students are expected to think critically and evaluate the world around them, and in other classrooms, students could be doing grammar drills and writing persuasive essays. These important discrepancies should be addressed in PLC conversations, so that students are being adequately challenged and feel valued equally in all classrooms.

The content of the *Springboard* curriculum, used to it’s highest potential—that is in balance with the lived curriculum of each teacher’s classroom—can have dramatic and lasting results. As Dr. Bieler notes in her article, “Changing the Subject: Building Critical and Compassionate Communities in English and English Education Classrooms”, schools should be places where students are empowered to make decisions, and “feel known and valued as individuals” (Bieler, 3). In my annotations, I found my thoughts continually directed to this important work of making every student feel valued as an individual. *Springboard* has great potential to achieve this goal and to create the critical and compassionate communities that Dr. Bieler establishes as crucial, first in her title and throughout her article.

Imbedded in curriculum reform theory lies the struggle between societally significant topics—those in line with Social Meliorist education theories—and traditionally sound subjects—those in line with college curricula and Humanist education theories. This curriculum attempts to balance both of these theories, and executed with support, guidance, and collaboration, has the power to reconcile the study of traditional language and literature, with a study of important social matters.

As you can see in the Appendix of this document, the curriculum planning document descends directly from the Common Core standards. This reflects the standards’ integral part in the development of this curriculum and must be recognized by teachers and students alike. The curriculum planning guide shows the order of elements of study in this curriculum and their direct connection to the standards. What students will be able to know, understand, and do, the learning outcomes, and the mandatory assessments all directly reflect the standards. This focus reveals outside pressure to teach to a state test, meet set standards, and operate in a “landscape that privileges the curriculum-as-plan” (Aoki, 3). As Aoki also suggests, however, there is a place for both the curriculum-as-plan and the lived curriculum in a multiplicity of curricular landscapes.

Overall, I think our curriculum team did a sound job of balancing the demand to meet state and federal criteria, while not ignoring holistic and socially relevant matters. If used as a guide, teachers can develop their own lessons, summarizing strategies, and formative assessments—this gives teachers enough freedom to personalize the curriculum for their students. Curriculum theorists like Ted Aoki would argue that the multiplicity of the Common Core, *Springboard,* and the freedom teachers are given, makes for an open landscape on which students and teachers can allow their learning to unfold.

**References**

Aoki, T. (1993). Legitimating lived curriculum: towards a curricular landscape of multiplicity. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, *8*(3), 255-268. Retrieved from <https://sakai.udel.edu/access/content/group/33cb03da-4aee-4897-81e0-1a3241d3f92f/Aoki.pdf>

Bieler, D. (2006). Changing the subject: Building critical and compassionate communities in English and English education classrooms. *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education*, *4*(1), Retrieved from <http://www.urbanedjournal.org/archive/volume-4-issue-1-spring-2006/changing-subject-building-critical-and-compassionate-communitie>

Kliebard, H. (2004). *The struggle for the American curriculum*. (3rd ed.). New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer.

**Appendix**

**Unit 1 Curriculum Planning Document**

**Standards:**

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/9-10/1/) Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/9-10/2/) Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/9-10/3/) Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/9-10/4/) Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.5](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/9-10/5/) Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.6](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/9-10/6/) Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/9-10/3/) Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/9-10/4/) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.5](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/9-10/5/) 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. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1–3 up to and including grades 9–10 [here](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/9-10).)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.6](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/9-10/6/) Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology’s capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/SL/9-10/1/) Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.1](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/9-10/1/) Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.2](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/9-10/2/) Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.4a](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/9-10/4/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.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.5](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/9-10/5/) Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

**Know**

Figurative

Language/Imagery

Symbolism

Author’s purpose

Voice

Diction

Syntax

Theme

Tone

Stereotype

Sentence Structure:

Parallel Structure

Subordinate Clauses

Connotation/Denotation

Summary

Narrative Elements

Collaboration

Constructing Support

Context clues

Character Development

Point of View

Culture

**Understand**

An author makes decisions when writing narratives that impact the final product.

**Do**

Write a narrative that directly reflects knowledge of author’s decisions.

Use proper command of Standard English and conventions

Work collaboratively in peer groups to hold effective discussions and complete tasks

Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work from outside the United States

Analyze how an author’s choices affect a text

Support decisions with appropriate textual evidence

Use context clues to determine the meaning of a word or phrase

Analyze how a character develops over the course of a narrative

Write an objective summary of a narrative

Use parallel structure and subordinate clauses correctly

**Unit Essential Question(s): Select one question based on team preference.**

How can cultural experience shape, impact, or influence our perception of the world?

How does voice function in and beyond the context of writing?

**Text Selections: Starred selections are Common Core Exemplars.**

Novels:

*Persepolis*—Satrapi (not appropriate as only novel for unit)

\**The Joy Luck Club*—Tan

*Kite Runner*—Hosseini

\**Killer Angels*—Shaara

\**The Book Thief*—Zusak

*A Lesson Before Dying*—Gaines

Poetry:

Theme for English B—Hughes

Where I’m From—Lyon

My Mother Pieced Quilts—Acosta

Legal Alien—Mora

Sure You Can Ask Me a Personal Question—Burns

Song:

Imagine—Lennon

Memoir:

from Funny in Farsi—Dumas

Media:

Clips from Grease—Keisler

**What students should be able to do/learning outcomes:**

Write a narrative that directly reflects knowledge of author’s decisions.

Use proper command of Standard English and conventions

Work collaboratively in peer groups to hold effective discussions and complete tasks

Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work from outside the United States

Analyze how an author’s choices affect a text

Support decisions with appropriate textual evidence

Use context clues to determine the meaning of a word or phrase

Analyze how a character develops over the course of a narrative

Write an objective summary of a narrative

Use parallel structure and subordinate clauses correctly

**Skills/concepts that need to be directly taught:**

Figurative Point of View

Language/Imagery Culture

Symbolism

Author’s purpose

Voice

Diction

Syntax

Theme

Tone

Stereotype

Sentence Structure:

Parallel Structure

Subordinate Clauses

Connotation/Denotation

Summary

Narrative Elements

Collaboration

Constructing Support

Context clues

Character Development

**Common Assessments: Mandatory assessments are district-wide assessments that every student must complete. Examples of possible mandatory assessments are portfolio pieces, performance tasks, reading assessments, essays, USAP. Grade level team summative assessments are how the planning team in a particular school is going to assess student learning: i.e. tests, quizzes, constructed responses, projects, debates, Socratic seminars, writing assignments.**

**Mandatory Assessment(s):**

**1. Narrative Essay**: Evaluate a significant risk, experience, achievement, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you; use a narrative to support your claims**.**

**2. Choose one of the following Spring Board Embedded Assessments:**

Creating an Artistic Representation of My Culture

Presenting Two of My Voices

**Team Assessments:**