

JOSSEY-BASS TEACHER

GRADES **K-12**

SARAH  
TANTILLO

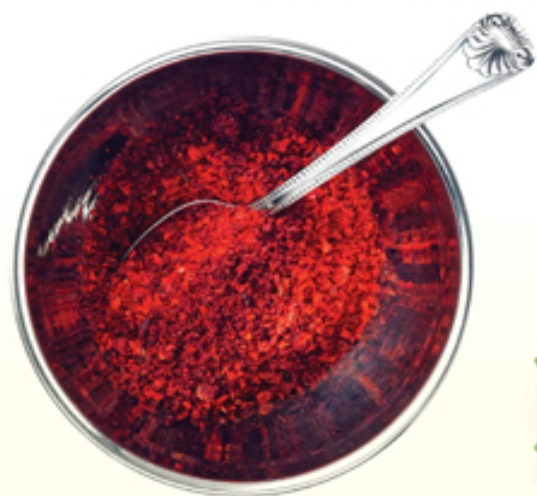


# LITERACY

and the

# COMMON CORE

RECIPES FOR ***ACTION***



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# Literacy and the Common Core

## RECIPES FOR ACTION

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To access the online materials, please visit  
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Last but definitely not least, huge hugs to my family and friends for their constant encouragement and support.

## About The Author

**Sarah Tantillo**, author of *The Literacy Cookbook: A Practical Guide to Effective Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening Instruction* (Jossey-Bass, 2012) and creator of The Literacy Cookbook Website (<http://www.literacycookbook.com>), consults with schools (especially urban schools) seeking to improve student achievement. She taught high school English and humanities in both suburban and urban New Jersey public schools for fourteen years, including seven years at the high-performing North Star Academy Charter School of Newark, New Jersey, where she chaired the Humanities Department and her students achieved a 100 percent passing rate on the High School Proficiency Assessment for Language Arts and Literacy. In addition to teaching, she founded the New Jersey Charter School Resource Center and the New Jersey Charter Public Schools Association. She led the Resource Center from 1996 to 1999 and the association from 1999 to 2003. Since 2007, she has coached K-12 schools on literacy instruction, curriculum development, data-driven instruction, school culture-building, and strategic planning. She currently writes two blogs, The Literacy Cookbook (<http://theliteracycookbook.wordpress.com/>) and Only Good Books (<http://onlygoodbooks.wordpress.com/>). Tantillo earned her B.A. from Princeton University, her M.Ed. from Harvard University, an M.A. from Johns Hopkins University, and her Ed.D. from Rutgers University.

## Preface

### Why I Felt Compelled to Write This Book

One day after I'd been consulting in schools for more than five years, I was sitting in the back of a classroom when I suddenly realized that although principals usually bring me in to support their schools' literacy instruction, almost invariably what I end up helping them with is *instruction* instruction. In too many schools to count, I've seen hard-working teachers struggling to design effective objectives, lesson plans, or unit plans. And I have tremendous empathy for them because I have been in their shoes. When I entered the field in 1987 through the Alternate Route, the "training" I received was like eating from an empty plate; in fact, I lost fifteen pounds in the first two months of school.

Teaching is challenging and complicated, but it should not be a complete mystery. We know many of the skills that are required, and stacks of great books have been written on this topic; among them are *The Skillful Teacher* by Jon Saphier and Bob Gower, *Teach Like a Champion* by Doug Lemov, and *Understanding by Design* by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe. So, one might ask why I am adding to the pile. Here's why: I believe that curriculum and instruction should go hand in hand, with teachers improving both their curricula and their teaching practices simultaneously. With the advent of national standards, we now have an opportunity to clarify how to help students meet these new standards and strengthen teaching and curriculum development skills at the same time.



The Common Core Standards offer the potential to transform the field if we take full advantage of them. Although the standards are not perfect and they present some thorny implementation challenges, they also offer numerous benefits. Philosophically, they compel us to examine our existing curricula and determine what must be improved—and improvement is always a good thing. On a practical level, they clarify what must be accomplished in every grade in literacy and math. No longer can teachers honestly claim not to know what they are expected to teach. For many years, in my home state of New Jersey and in others, the standards were framed as, “By the end of fourth grade...” or “By the end of eighth grade...” and so on. That sketchy framework put undue pressure on some teachers and left others to wonder what their responsibilities were. The gaps made it difficult to design meaningful vertical articulation plans with colleagues. Now, thanks to the Common Core Standards, teachers can say to their students with confidence, “By the end of this year, you will be able to...”

Moreover, because these standards are national, educators can share ideas and best practices across state lines and—over the Internet—in the blink of an eye. New resources emerge daily to support these efforts. This national push, in my view, strengthens the professionalism of our profession: teachers and school leaders can make contributions to what is now truly a national dialogue. Instead of focusing exclusively on our own individual states, now everyone is on the big stage together. I can't speak for anyone else, but I find it quite inspiring that we can work together to help colleagues and students all around the country.

As grand as that notion may seem, this book represents my modest attempt to make life a little easier for everyone—teachers, school leaders, parents, and students—as we all

strive to prepare students for college and the careers they most desire.

# Introduction

# What Problems This Book Attempts to Solve, and How

*How can we teach lessons that meet the Common Core Standards when our curriculum isn't "there" yet?*

I hear this question practically every day, and indeed, this problem is one that we all need to solve. Even the highest-performing schools regard their curriculum as a work in progress (actually this is one reason that they are high-performing). Although some panicked folks view the situation as “trying to fly a plane and build it at the same time,” I prefer to think of it as trying to cook a decent meal for hordes of hungry citizens. It's important work, it's urgently needed, and we don't want to produce garbage. To properly serve the masses, we must design a careful plan for the whole meal, but we also need to send out some appetizers ASAP.

This book is for teachers and school leaders who understand that in order for schools to move forward and implement the English Language Arts (ELA) Common Core Standards effectively, we must all collaborate—from subject to subject, grade to grade, and school to school. The old “us versus them” (whether it's administrators versus teachers or schools versus other schools) approach has never really worked, and in this situation, it would be disastrous. Transforming curriculum and instruction to meet these standards is a heavy lift. It won't happen unless we all bend our knees, count in unison, and lift.

In sum, this book explains how school leaders and teachers can approach the ELA Common Core Standards strategically and systematically. It provides guidance on how to design units, lessons, and objectives to meet the standards; it offers practical strategies that teachers can use immediately to target key standards; and it explains

how to analyze the standards to support curriculum development and instructional planning.

## **How to Use This Book**

The book is divided into four parts, titled “Basic Ingredients,” “Appetizers,” “Entrées,” and “Desserts.” At the end of every chapter, you will find a “Doggie Bag” of questions to take away and reflect on. These questions will help you review the material and ensure that you're on track to apply what you've learned. You might want to preview these questions before you read each chapter because they can also provide a useful guide to key points.

Where should you start? Although you can certainly dive in anywhere, it will help to have a grasp of the Basic Ingredients in Part One: strategic action planning and identification of key resources, both curricular and human (Chapter 1); suggestions about schoolwide reading initiatives (Chapter 2); ideas about how to bridge the gap when students are not on grade level (Chapter 3); fundamental approaches to unit planning (Chapter 4); and key aspects of effective lesson planning (Chapter 5). These chapters answer the following questions:

- How should we plan to tackle the Common Core?
- What do effective schoolwide reading initiatives look like?
- How can we bridge the gap when students aren't on grade level?
- What elements should a solid unit plan include? How do we move from unit plans to lesson plans?
- What are RPM (rigorous, purposeful, and measurable) objectives? How can we write them, and how do they

relate to other parts of the lesson? What does an effective lesson look like?

The Appetizers in Part Two offer quick first steps toward our collective goal of meeting and exceeding the ELA Common Core Standards, starting with immediate professional development suggestions and an array of close reading strategies that teachers can use in any grade or subject.

The Entrées in Chapters 8 to 12 in Part Three describe how to create more substantial dishes that require more time, energy, and attention. They address these questions:

- How and why should we teach students about argument and evidence?
- How can we train students to become effective writers?
- What does everyone need to know about quote sandwiches (i.e., well-explained evidence), open-ended response writing, and document-based questions?
- How can we analyze, unpack, and move forward with the ELA Common Core Standards?

The Desserts in Part Four provide sweet resources, including a ready-to-use manual for a schoolwide independent reading program, plus trajectory analysis charts for all of the ELA Common Core Standards.



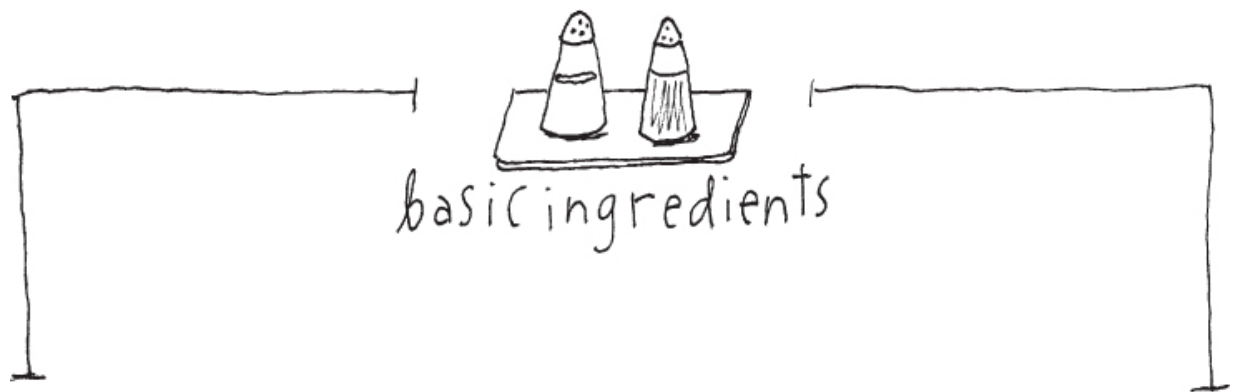
In short, there is something here for everyone. Every document mentioned is in the online materials as well. And as a bonus, this book comes with a free thirty-day trial to The Literacy Cookbook (TLC) Website, [www.literacycookbook.com](http://www.literacycookbook.com), which includes all of the files online plus hundreds more. Explanations of how to access the online materials and The Literacy Cookbook Website are at the end of this book.

# **One Last Thing: The Literacy Cookbook Blog**

If you would like to keep tabs on my latest thinking on topics related to literacy instruction and the Common Core, in addition to reading this book and using the resources online and TLC Website, please consider following The Literacy Cookbook Blog, which is free and can be found at: <http://theliteracycookbook.wordpress.com/>. Many of the ideas in this book appeared in earlier form in the TLC Blog.

Now let's dig in!





If you've already read *The Literacy Cookbook* (and I hope you have), you are probably wondering, *How are these Basic Ingredients different from those in the original Literacy Cookbook?* Good question. *The Literacy Cookbook* deals with strategies for teaching comprehension, reading, writing, speaking, and listening. This book explores instruction more broadly, so the Basic Ingredients here address how to develop and deliver curriculum units and lessons that will help students meet and exceed the Common Core Standards. We begin with strategic planning and resources; examine schoolwide approaches to reading; consider what it takes to bridge the gap when students are not on grade level; then tackle unit planning, objective writing, and lesson planning.

# Chapter One

## Strategic Planning to Strengthen Curriculum

### Strategic Action Planning: How to Make Things Happen

I'm not sure who said it first, but one of my favorite quotes is: "You can make things happen, you can watch things happen, or you can ask, 'What just happened?!'" In order to make things happen, you need a plan. More specifically, when it comes to the English Language Arts (ELA) Common Core Standards and work related to the Common Core, your school needs a strategic action plan.

Here is a simple template to facilitate the action-planning process:

Topic/Issue/Task	What Do We See?	What Do We Want to See?	What Will We Need to Do in Order to See What We Want to See?	What Resources Will We Need? (including human and fiscal)	When Will We Tackle This Task?

Keep in mind that this is a *template* for organizing ideas and information. Don't let the size of the boxes fool you. To answer these questions, you will probably write lots and lots of notes. And although you can complete the template by working in isolation, this tool is actually more useful as a vehicle for collaborative reflection and problem solving. When I've presented it in workshops, participants working

in teams are often surprised by how much agreement they find among colleagues whom they previously thought they disagreed with. Working together to identify and solve problems enables people to understand the perspectives of others, and these efforts will almost invariably fortify the sense of mission and purpose that you and your colleagues share. As with any other work, the more deeply that people are involved in the planning and development, the more personally they become invested in the results. The reverse is also true. For example, when only a few people sit in isolation and write the curriculum, it's not uncommon to see colleagues who were not involved in the process simply ignoring what was produced. Bottom line: Collaboration is essential, and every teacher needs to have a firm grasp of what the Common Core Standards entail and how to design units and lessons that will help students meet them.

To decide what to put in the “Topic/Issue/Task” column, you and your team might start by brainstorming a list of “things we need to work on,” then narrow it down to two or three items. Your longer list might include curriculum writing, lesson planning, standards, assessments, test prep, schedule, or even skills such as reading, writing, or speaking and listening. But try not to spend too much time haggling over which topics to address. As one workshop participant noted wryly after I'd given her group thirty seconds to pick a topic and go with it, countless meetings throughout history have begun and ended with nothing accomplished because people couldn't decide what to focus on. So when it comes to choosing topics, keep it simple. Start with one.<sup>1</sup>

Of course I can't tell you what you see (column 2) in your school, but in the case of what you want to see (column 3) as you implement the Common Core Standards, that checklist should probably include the following items (and more):

- Teachers use a common lesson-planning template.
- Teachers are trained in how to write effective RPM (rigorous, purposeful, measurable) objectives and use them in their lesson plans.
- Teachers align objectives with other parts of the lesson plan.
- Teachers receive frequent feedback and support on their lesson plans and instruction.
- Teachers receive coaching on how to unpack the ELA Common Core Standards and design lessons and units based on the Standards.
- Teachers meet regularly for grade-level and vertical articulation in support of curriculum development and other professional development needs.

This list is just a start. And of course it's not enough to make a list. You and your colleagues must identify steps that will enable you to accomplish these aims (column 4), along with key resources (both human and fiscal—column 5) that you will need. For example, if your school does not already use a common lesson-planning template, you will need to create or select one (see the “Annotated Lesson Plan Template” in Chapter 5 for one option), then train staff how to use it effectively. As surprising as it might sound, it's not safe to assume that every teacher will know how to write an effective lesson plan. You will need to clarify your expectations for each section of the plan and provide models and training (see Chapter 5 for more information).

Finally, for every item on your list, it's vital to schedule sufficient time for the work to get done (column 6). If you're a school leader, how you allocate time for instruction and professional work reveals what you value. If you give

teachers time to write curriculum together, that sends a message. If you don't, that also sends a message.

## **How to Keep Track of the Standards**

In order to design units and lessons aligned with the Common Core, one must be “fluent” in the standards. The Common Core Standards Website<sup>2</sup> offers the standards in downloadable PDF documents,<sup>3</sup> which are fine, but—let's face it—not totally user-friendly. For this reason, I have developed a more manageable format, putting the literacy-related standards into Excel spreadsheets. When you're developing a year-long set of unit plans, these grade-by-grade spreadsheets make it easy to track which standards you'll hit in each unit. I've created two separate documents: “K-12 ELA Common Core Standards Tracking Spreadsheet,” to support and monitor literacy instruction in every grade, and “6-12 CCS for Literacy in History, Science, Technical Subjects Tracking Spreadsheet,” for those who teach history, social studies, or technical subjects in grades 6 to 12. Both files can be found online as well as on the TLC “Standards” page.<sup>4</sup> The following snippet from the fourth-grade ELA spreadsheet, showing the fourth-grade Reading Standards for Literature, offers a brief taste of how the standards are laid out.

## Grade 4 Excerpt from ELA Common Core State Standards

	Reading Standards for Literature	CPI Code <sup>a</sup>	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6
	<b>KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS</b>							
1	Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.	RL.4.1						
2	Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.	RL.4.2						
3	Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts,	RL.4.3						