

Implementing Common Core Standards

My district—and state, for that matter—has just transitioned to the Common Core State Standards, which represents a nationwide effort to provide high quality and engaging classroom practices for all students. The English Language Arts Common Core is delineated in five key standards, or strands: reading, writing, speaking and listening, language, and media and technology. The Common Core represents a shift in expectations, because all students are to meet the rigorous standards as outlined.

This unit meets the criteria for a strong Common Core unit in several ways. For example, according to expectations from the Reading strand, students should “read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.” This is an essential part of this curriculum unit because students must be able to not only comprehend the plot of the text, but to engage in class discussions with both small and large groups, which will be based on providing textual support for their opinions and explaining their interpretations and conclusions. Students will also “assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text,” which is another foundational element of this unit, especially due to the significance of the shift in perspective from one text to the other, which shapes interpretation and analysis.

This unit was also designed for an Advanced Placement class, which must also adhere to rigorous nationwide standards. AP classes are designed to provide a college-level course experience in a high school setting; students are introduced to demanding critical thinking and interpretation skills and are expected to apply them to their literature study. An AP English Literature and Composition course includes expectations like “students reflect on the social and historical values it reflects and embodies. Careful attention to both textual detail and historical context provides a foundation for interpretation.” As stated, this unit will include biographical, social, and cultural background so that students will understand and appreciate the context that plays an important role in the novel. The College Board also notes that “the approach to analyzing and interpreting the material involves students in learning how to make careful observations of textual detail, establish connections among their observations, and draw from those connections a series of inferences leading to an interpretive conclusion about the meaning and value of a piece of writing.” This is a necessary component of the unit because students are expected to note details that occur throughout the text, creating a cumulative interpretation that must be open to change as the novel progresses.