



To Run the Course

On Memorial Day weekend, my family renews an annual tradition. In Indiana, it is an event that brings the spring (and the school year) to a close while ushering in the freedom, the possibilities, and the warmth of summer. For the last 20 years, we have attended the “Greatest Spectacle in Racing”—the Indianapolis 500.

As we make the hour-long drive to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, a two-and-a-half mile oval affectionately known as “The Brickyard,” other traditions are also reclaimed. We follow the same route to the speedway, park on the same block, sit just past the start-finish line better known as the “yard of bricks,” and enjoy the same packed lunch at this all-day affair.

The race itself is also filled with time-honored and cherished ceremonies. Taps is played and a moment of silence honors those servicemen and women who died in defense of this nation. There is the singing of the national anthem and “Back Home Again in Indiana” followed by the release of thousands of balloons. Next, the command to “Start Your Engines!” is given and, shortly thereafter,

the flying start with 33 cars plunging down the front straightaway approaching speeds of 200 mph, bringing a crowd of 250,000 people to its feet!

Two years ago, we witnessed an Indianapolis 500 like no other. While each race usually produces its own share of drama, close finishes are a rarity. The 100th anniversary of the first 500—held in 1911—was holding true to form. As the penultimate lap was completed, an unheralded rookie, J. R. Hildebrand, led the field by nearly four seconds—an insurmountable margin barring catastrophic engine failure or an accident. As Hildebrand approached the final turn, with the race seemingly well in hand, he came upon a backmarker—a racecar traveling some 80 mph slower than the lead cars. Rather than slowing down, Hildebrand attempted the pass, drifting high in the turn and off the racing line. His car got caught up in the marbles (those pieces of shredded tire rubber that are analogous to a passenger car driving on ice or, yes, marbles). In an instant, he lost control of his car, which slammed into the outside wall, spreading debris across the racetrack. The

forward momentum of his racecar carried him down the length of the front straightaway, but, alas, Hildebrand’s shattered chassis was passed by another car a mere 100 yards from the finish line.

The academic year often seems like just such an endurance race. There are long-standing classroom traditions in the form of treasured anecdotes, books, courses, lessons, and units. There is the excitement of the unknown. Will the implementation of new concepts, materials, and pedagogies bring about increases in student learning? There is the frenetic start with all the aspirations, energy, hope, and hoopla that is part of a new beginning for both students and teachers. However, by mid-year, the days, not unlike the laps of a race, unfold at a steady if not mesmerizing pace, occasionally interrupted by the unexpected student mishap or comment of surpassing insight.

Back to School: Continuing Tradition under Common Core

The 2013–2014 school year is far from typical; something unique is happening in schools across

the country as many states and thousands of districts implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS or Standards). Arguably, these Standards, once fully implemented, will provide students, regardless of location, with a “common” and, therefore, equally rigorous education that prepares them for the next phase of life. This is, undoubtedly, why the CCSS has thus far experienced widespread public support. Of course, the suppositions imbedded in this movement—the efficacy of the Standards, themselves, the implicit criticism of all schools that justifies such a sweeping reform, and the wisdom of applying a single set of standards to a diverse, complex, and continental nation—are just now being broadly debated.

Regardless of this debate’s outcome, the Standards offer teachers in the humanities with at least one positive turn. Hopefully, the Standards’ emphasis on informational texts in the “English Language Arts Standards” and “Literacy in History/Social Studies” will serve as a catalyst for a dialogue between English language arts (ELA) and social studies teachers. As a former middle and high school social studies teacher with 17 years of experience, I recall a lengthy struggle to get up to speed in the teaching of historical writing to secondary students. This is not uncommon among social studies teachers who often have little methodological training in the teaching of writing. Surely, some early career conversations with ELA teachers would have given me a jump start in accomplishing this important and complicated task, thus benefitting the students and teachers in both content areas.

Nevertheless, literacy is not the sole charge of any one content area or teacher, as the CCSS makes clear.

Correspondingly, I suspect my fellow educators in ELA feel a similar foreboding when steering their class from literature toward complementary informational texts, such as historical documents. This is further complicated by the burden ELA teachers often shoulder in schools—the full weight of teaching literacy skills. Nevertheless, literacy is not the sole charge of any one content area or teacher, as the CCSS makes clear:

The Standards set requirements not only for English language arts (ELA) but also for literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. Just as students must learn to read, write, speak, listen, and use language effectively in a variety of content areas, so too must the Standards specify the literacy skills and understandings required for college and career readiness in multiple disciplines.

In the spirit of dialogue and mutual responsibility for developing literate students, let me offer some suggestions for implementing historical informational texts that are appropriate for adolescents and fit into your curriculum, along with information about where they can be found.

Over the last quarter century or so, social studies teachers in particular have been encouraged to use primary sources in their classroom instruction (Barton & Levstik, 2003). Primary sources, defined as

“firsthand testimony about a[n] . . . event,” are the building blocks of history (Handlin et al., 1954). They include documentary sources such as autobiographies, diaries, government documents, interviews, journals, letters, memorandums, official records, speeches, and telegrams. However, they may also include non-documentary sources, such as photographs, moving pictures, paintings, poems, and songs.

Regardless of the format, primary sources offer the possibility of seeing events and developments from multiple perspectives. They empower individual students to interpret and construct historical meaning. These sources also have another appeal; they are seen as antidotes to the sanitized, staid, and stilted narratives often found in history books. Gradually, primary sources have become standard fare in social studies classrooms.

In spite of their attraction, primary sources require competent and thoughtful handling. Several strategies, often simply known by their acronym, have been developed to provide students a framework for analyzing documents. Among these are RAFTS (Role, Audience, Format, Topic, and Strong Verb; www.vrml.k12.la.us/graphorgan/18strat/strat/raft/raft.htm) and APPARTS (Author, Place and Time, Prior Knowledge, Audience, Reason, The Main Idea, and Significance; <http://teachinghistory.org/teaching-materials/ask-a-master-teacher/24711>). At the apex of the corner connecting English language arts with social studies is a College Board analysis strategy known as SOAPS. In this age of the CCSS, the strategy has a parallel application to both ELA and social studies. In ELA, it is referred to

Table 1. Questions for students as they approach English language arts or social studies texts

	Speaker	Occasion	Audience	Purpose	Subject	Tone
English Language Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whose voice will be heard in this composition? • Is this voice a fictional character or that of the writer? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the time and place of the writing? • What context prompted the composition? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the intended audience for this writing? • Why are you addressing them? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you hope to accomplish with this composition? • Is the composition going to be a narrative, persuasive, or analytical? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the subject of this writing? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the attitude of the author? • What is the author's tone of voice?
Social Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the author of this document? • What is the author's point of view? • Is this person writing in an official capacity or privately? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When was this document created? • What is the historical context that led to the creation of this document? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the intended audience? • What does the author think about his/her audience? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why was the document written? • What purpose(s) does it serve? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the message? • What does this document tell us about the era, the people, and/or institutions? 	

as SOAPStone, and it involves a series of questions that students should answer before writing a composition. By contrast, the social studies version is simply known as SOAPS and is used for document analysis as explicated in Table 1. In short, the idea is that the very questions used in the construction of a composition are later fruitful for document analysis.

So, if you are teaching or your students are reading a YA novel with a specific historical setting (e.g., Westward Expansion, World War I, the Great Depression, the Holocaust), it is easy to find primary information texts to supplement your teaching or their reading. The National Archives (www.archives.gov/nae/education/lesson-plans.html) is a wonderful source for additional document analysis worksheets, lesson plan ideas, and primary sources. George Mason University (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu>) sponsors "History Matters," a website that provides links and materials for the teaching of American history. In addition, the National Endow-

ment of the Humanities (<http://edsitement.neh.gov/subject/history-social-studies>) offers nearly 400 lesson plans related to social studies, often incorporating primary sources. This site also allows you to search for lessons by grade level, subtopic (including themes, such as "common core"), people (including African American, Native American, and Women, etc.), place (including Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas, among others), and duration. These are but a few of the many sites offering informational texts that might enrich the study of young adult literature.

I find the origin of the term *curriculum* intriguing. The term is derived from Latin and came into existence in the 1820s. Curriculum literally means "to run the course." It suggests activity, involvement, and a completeness that defies artificial content boundaries. While the yearlong race to "cover" learning targets, objectives, standards, and the like are understandable given the implications of high-stakes testing, all too often a backmarker is overlooked. As teachers in the hu-

manities, we need to take our foot off the throttle, just long enough to complete the final circuit, in order to help our students see the deeper understanding of what young adult literature and history can offer each other.

Paul E. Binford is an assistant professor of social studies teacher education at Louisiana State University and social studies consultant. His research interests include the history of the social studies and English language arts and social studies cross-curriculum connections. His most recent publication is a state history textbook, *A Place Called Mississippi: Teacher Wraparound Edition* (2013). Paul can be reached at pebinford@lsu.edu.

References

- Barton, K. S. & Levstik, L. S. (2003). Why don't more history teachers engage students in interpretation? *Social Education*, 67, 358–361.
- Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2013). *Discover the common standards*. Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org/>.
- Handlin, O., Schlesinger, A. M., Morison, S. E., Merk, F., Schlesinger, A. M., Jr., & Buck, P. H. (1954). *Harvard guide to American history*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.