TOPIC: What Makes Learning Compelling?
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September 21, 2020 ctovani@hotmail.com

"If you are trying to get information across to someone, your ability to create a compelling introduction may be the most important factor in the later success of your mission."   **Dr. John Medina** author of *Brain Rules*

Series Learning Targets

Learning Targets	Reflection
I can plan so that students are engaged in reading, writing, and discussing for more minutes of the class period or day than I am talking.	
I can demonstrate for students how I make sense of and repair meaning of text that I ask students to read and write.	

The Golden Gate Bridge on September 10, 2020 at 11:00 am PST (No filters were used to take this photo.)

What Do You Wonder?	What Connections Do You Have?

What's your bottom line?

 "The relationship between engagement and achievement is reciprocal, not unidirectional. **High engagement** leads to **high achievement**, just as high achievement makes high engagement possible. **Low engagement** leads to **low achievement**, and low achievers read relatively less than their peers and avoid reading. "Because engagement in reading and achievement in reading are mutually causal, they both must be cultivated in school. A neglect of one is a neglect of both."

John Guthrie, 2004 *Handbook of Reading Research*

Test Percentile, reading minutes and word count:

98%   67 minutes a day =   4,733,000 word exposure by 12th grade

60%   13 minutes a day =   72,200 word exposure by 12th grade

10%   1 minute a day   =   51,000 word exposure by 12th grade

Guthrie, J. T. (2002). Preparing students for high-stakes test taking in reading. In A. Farstrup & S. J. Samuels

What Causes Students to Disengage?	What Instructional Moves Can I Make to Re-engage Students?

Engagement Note-Catcher

From: *No More Telling as Teaching* (Heinemann, 2017, Tovani & Moje)
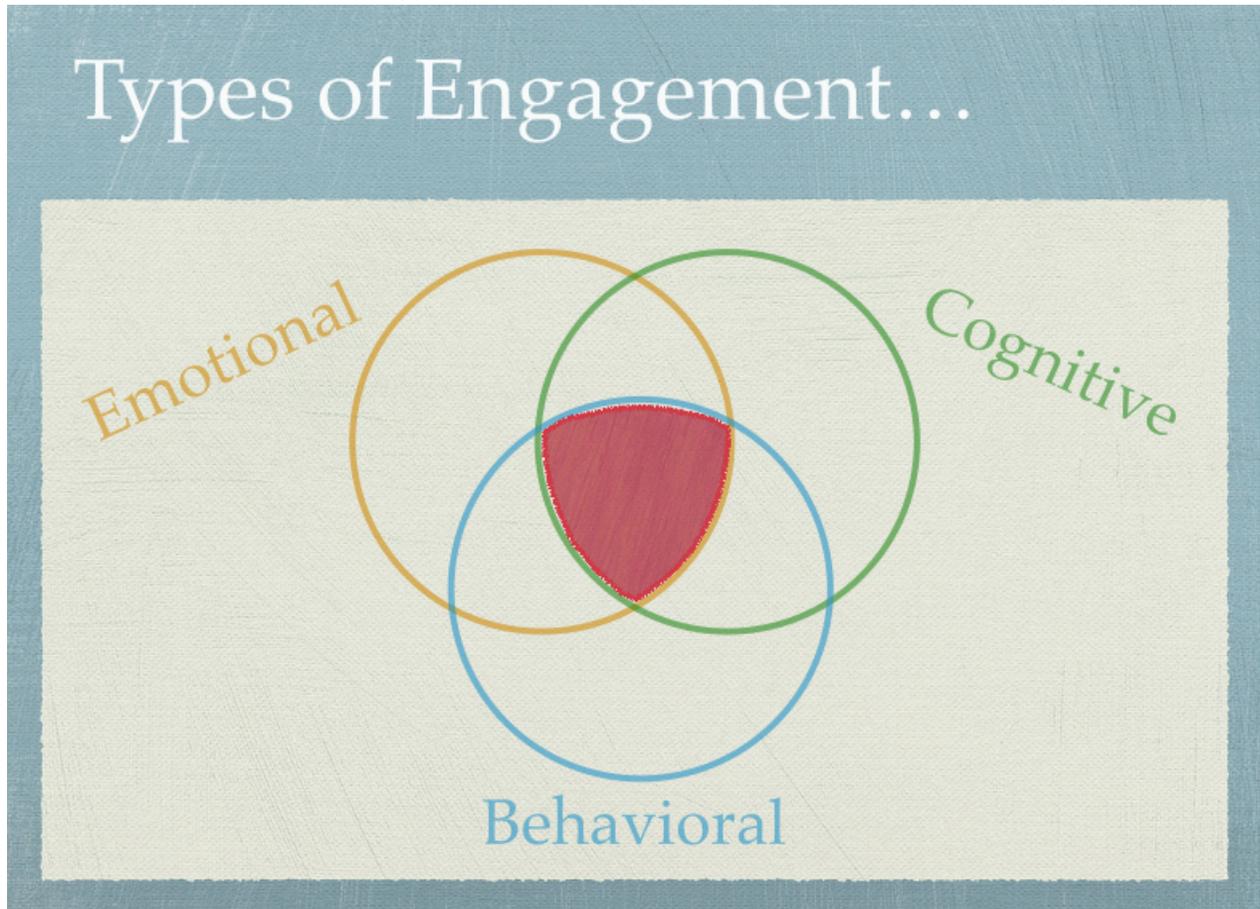
Fredricks, J.A. P.C. Blumenthfeld, and A.H. Paris. 2004. "School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of Evidence." *Review of Educational Research* 74 (1): 59-109.

What Makes a Topic or Unit Compelling?

The notion of planning compelling contexts for reading – what Andrew was crying out for -- is affirmed by the research of Jeffery Wilhelm and Michael Smith, discussed in their book *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys: Literacy in the Lives of Young Men* (2002). The book delves into the issues that surround boys and literacy through interviews with 49 young men, examination of their reading logs, and the use of think aloud protocols by the boys when they did read. Smith and Williams' research showed that boys (and many girls) who call themselves "non-readers" and don't participate much in school-assigned reading actually read outside of school to solve problems and learn things they want to know. In fact, the students in the study often said they were willing to read difficult material when it helped them learn something they considered important. Ultimately, these authors conclude that asking boys (and many girls) to read for the sake of reading is at the heart of students' disengagement from school-assigned reading. Smith and William recommend that teachers make school literacy more compelling by creating contexts in which students feel the need to read.

Fortunately, there isn't just one right way to develop compelling contexts for reading. This is one really important place in the art of teaching where teachers can – with precise planning – use their creativity to bring their teaching alive. I sometimes use the metaphor of vanilla cake to explain the idea of creating contextualized curriculum. The standards and the materials that represent them are vanilla cake. They are pretty good, but they are generic and plain. Some kids eat the plan cake, but lots of kids don't. Context is delicious frosting. It's what you wrap the cake in to make it spectacular. Students who eventually "eat" the contextualized curriculum – the frosted cake – ingest all of the standards that are baked into the cake and the frosting that makes it worth eating. It's the frosting smeared all over the top, sides, and between the layers of cake that draws them into the act of eating. And teachers get to decide what flavor of frosting to use.

There are many ways to frost the standards cake and some of them might already be familiar to you. Students could read complex text, write from sources, listen and speak in order to:

- **Grapple with an intriguing question or test an interesting theory;**
- **Investigate a local injustice, problem, or concern;**
- **Teach others about compelling local history;**
- **Examine events or ideas from multiple perspectives;**
- **Analyze texts for what they have to teach about authorship and craft.**

No matter what flavor or flavors of frosting you choose, there's one guiding principle that I want you to remember as you read through the next several pages. All of these approaches are more rigorous if they are applied in ways that engage readers across *multiple texts*. Planning Common Core-aligned contexts for reading should consistently require readers to think critically both within challenging texts and across challenging texts. As you design and plan new Common Core-aligned units, you should be thinking about "sets" of texts, rather than a text. Ideally, these sets of texts are richly varied and represent a balance of fiction and non-fiction – novels, literary non-fiction, poems, essays, speeches, primary sources, short stories, newspaper and magazine articles, websites, plays, textbooks, scientific papers, brochures, pamphlets, government reports – all of these things are fair game for a text set. If, after you've planned, you could still name your unit "*Name of Book with a Short Story and an Article Added,*" you're not quite there yet.

From *Common Core, Unit by Unit* by Cheryl Dobbertin (2013, Heinemann)

Omran Daquneesh

08,21,2010

Dear President obama,
Remember the boy who was
picked up by the ambulance in
Syria? Can you please go get
him and bring him to
                    Park in the driveway or
on the street and we'll be wait
-ting for you guys with flags
flowers and balloons. We
~~Will~~ will ~~give~~ give him a
family and he will be our
brother. Catherine, my little
sister will be collect-
-ing butterflies and fireflies
for him. In my school I have
a friend from Syria, Omar, and
I will introduce him to Omar and

We cam all play together.
We can invite him to birthday
parties and he will teach us anoth
-er language. We can teach him Eng
-lish too, Just like we taught my
friend Aoto from Japan Please tell him
that his brother will be Alex
who is a very kind boy, Just like
him. Since he won't bring toys and
doesn't have toys Catherine will
share her big blue stripy white
bunny. And I will share my
bikke and I will teach him
how to ride it. I will teach
him additions and subtraction
in math. and he samell Catherin
's lil glass penguin which is
green. She doesn't let anyone
touch it.

Thank you very much! I can't
wait for you to come!

Alex
6 years old

6

My Homeland, Syria

Syria is an ancient land. People have lived in this area for thousands of years. Much of the country is covered in dry desert. The Euphrates River winds through Syria from north to south.

Euphrates River

Damascus

Damascus is the capital of Syria.

Syria's flag

The rich soil along the banks of the Euphrates River is good for farming. Many people have fought over the area to have access to this land. In 632 c.e., Syria was invaded by **Muslim** forces. Today, most Syrians are Muslims. They follow a religion called Islam. This faith was founded by the prophet Muhammad. The main language spoken in Syria is Arabic.

Between 1920 and 1946, Syria was under French control. The country gained **independence** from France in 1946. Syria then struggled for many years as different groups fought for power. In 1971, Hafez al-Assad became president. He helped make the country politically stable and developed strong relationships with **Western** nations, such as the United States.

But al-Assad also used his position to stay in power. He and his government made it so that Syrians were not able to vote to choose their own leader. After al-Assad's death in 2000, his son Bashar became the next president. At first, many Syrians hoped he would bring change to the country, such as allowing people to hold **protests**. But Bashar did not keep the many promises he made to the Syrian people.
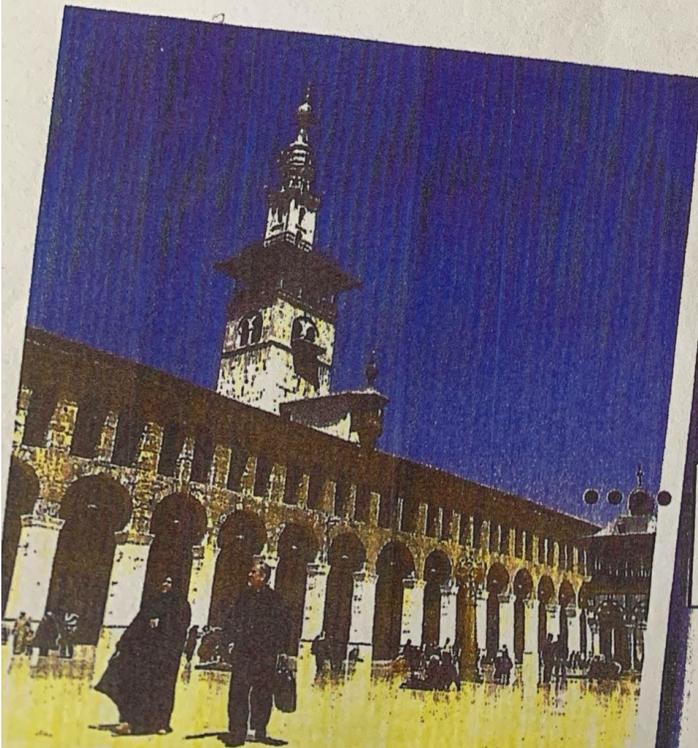
A mosque is a Muslim house of worship. The Great Mosque of Damascus was built between 705 and 715 C.E.

Refugees

Refugees are people who have been forced to flee their homes. They may have fled because of the dangers of conflict, **persecution**, generalized violence, or human rights **violations**. At the end of 2015, the number of people forced from their homes had reached 65.3 million. That's the highest number ever recorded. This number is made up of refugees, **asylum** seekers, or **internally displaced** people. Migrant workers are sometimes grouped in with displaced people. But migrant workers are choosing to move because they want to find work, not because of conflict or natural disaster.

DID YOU KNOW?

Twenty-four people each minute were forced to flee their homes in 2015.

Top 10 Origins of People Applying for Asylum in the EU

Pakistan 45,000
Eritrea 40,000
Nigeria 35,000
Iran 28,000
Ukraine 23,000

Syria 360,000

Albania 60,000

Kosovo 70,000

Iraq 120,000

Afghanistan 158,000
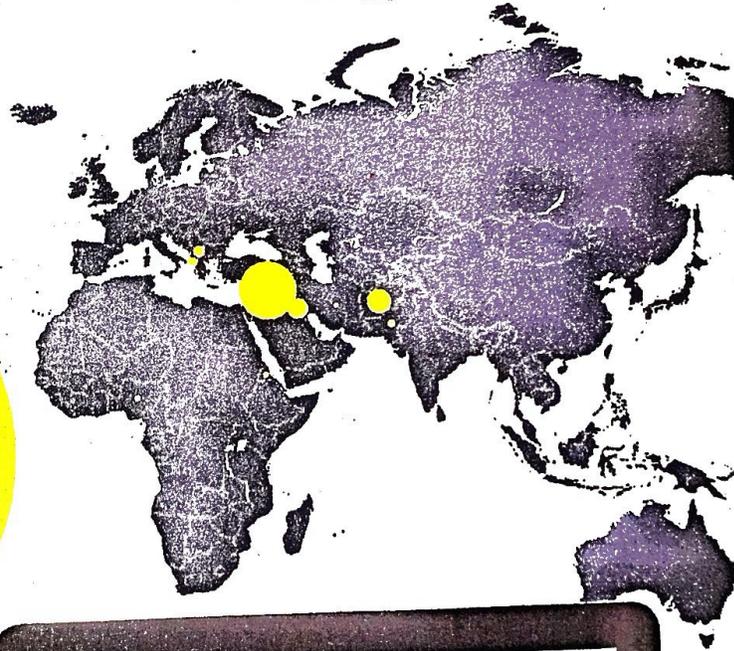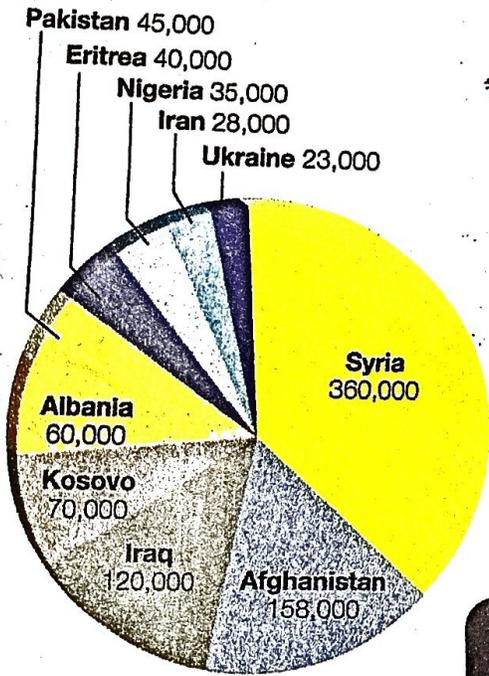
Nizar, 5 years old:

"The bombers came and destroyed our house. They shot fire, and destroyed my toys. They didn't leave a single piece of them."

Where to Go?

A refugee has the same human rights as everyone else. They also have the right to be in a safe place. This is sometimes difficult to ensure. The number of people forced to flee can cause a crisis. Refugees may have fled very quickly, bringing only the things they could carry. They need food and housing and to be able to rebuild their lives. Organizations such as charities and the UN set up camps for displaced people. These camps offer aid to people but are only short-term solutions. The UN would prefer people to settle in communities where they can use their skills to make a living. However, neighboring countries may be flooded with people. Other countries are put under pressure to help by welcoming more refugees. Racial tension and conflict can increase under this pressure. Safeguarding the human rights of refugees is a big challenge for all those involved.

GOOD NEWS

The billionaire George Soros, who survived Nazi occupation during World War II, has given $500 million to charities who help migrants and refugees.
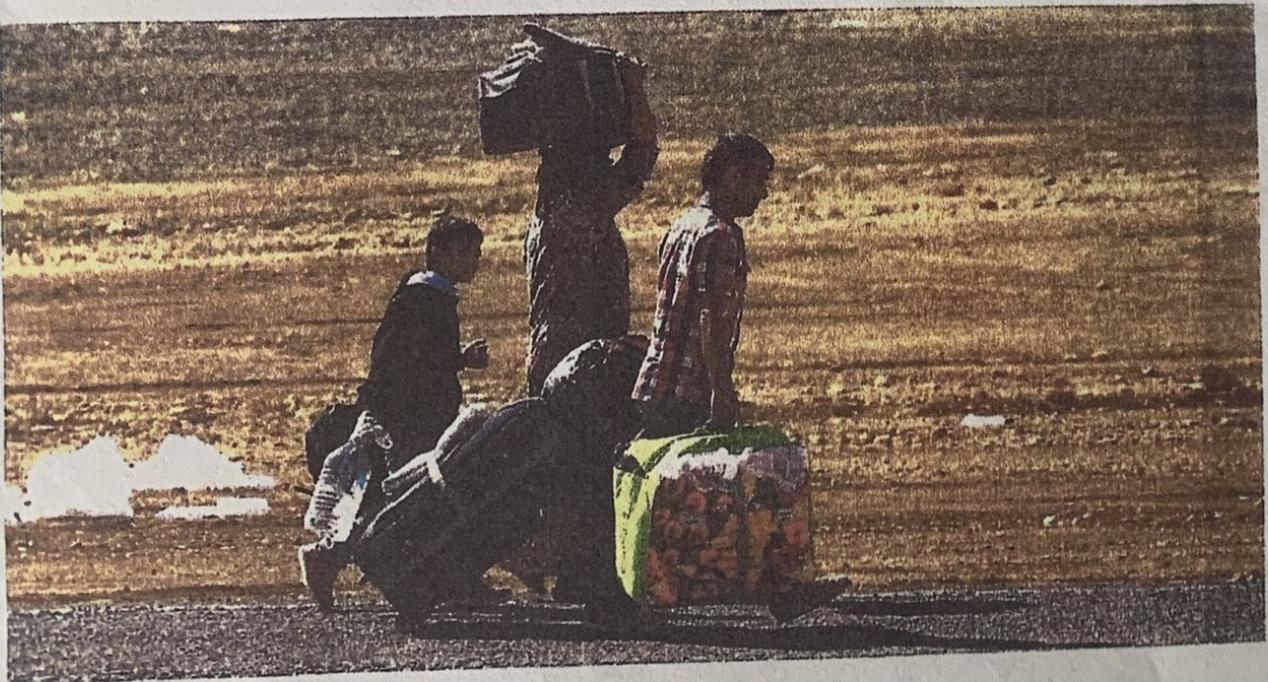

Many Syrians have become refugees in their attempt to escape the violence of the Syrian civil war.

Choice 4: Barrel Bombs

What is a barrel bomb?

The Syrian regime is increasingly relying on "barrel bombs" to cause damage and loss of life in rebel-held areas, according to activists. So how do they work?
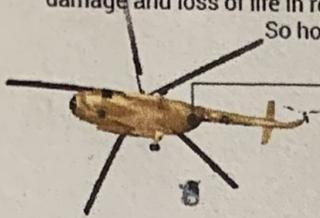
HELICOPTER DROP
Soldiers in Russian Mil Mi-8 helicopters drop the bombs.

THE BOMB
Oil barrels or similar cylindrical containers filled with explosives, fuel and irregular shaped steel fragments (like cut rebar or large machine pieces).

FINS welded to aft section of cylinder to increase stability and probability of bomb landing on impact fuse.

IMPACT FUSE, using detonation cord to ignite the bulk of TNTcharge. The bomb needs to land on the impact fuse to detonate.

Source: Brown Moses Blog
Info.Bild

Barrel bombs are **Syrian** improvised explosive devices - oil drums or oth large containers packed with explosives, fuel, shrapnel, glass, and other let material. Their sole purpose is to maim, kill, and terrorize as many people possible when they are dropped from **Syrian** government aircraft.
globalsecurity.org/military/world/syria/barrel-bomb.htm

Syria: New Deadly Chemical Attacks on Aleppo

A local resident told Human Rights Watch that he was at home when he heard a helicopter and then the sound of a bomb falling and hitting the ground. He went outside to help anyone who was injured:

People started getting dizzy, had tears in their eyes, and were unable to breathe. Those who had asthma and breathing problems were affected the most. Some even started getting symptoms while at home. I wore a mask. My 6-month-old son, however, inhaled toxic gas. He kept coughing endlessly for several days afterward.

The local resident said that there was a strong odor of chlorine and that there was yellowish dust where the barrel bomb had struck. The local resident told Human Rights Watch that the attack took place in a residential area, away from the front lines, where thousands of civilians still lived.

Dozens of people went to hospitals for medical treatment following the attack. One doctor said:

Many families arrived to the hospital, all with respiratory problems: suffocation, coughing, wheezing, some had a rash, excessive tearing. We knew it was a chemical gas because they all had a strong smell about them. The smell was very similar to the chlorine. We treated around 60 to 65 people.

Another doctor said that two children and their mother died in the attack:

At first, two children and their mother arrived to the hospital. The children were unconscious and unresponsive. Their mother was shivering, coughing, and wheezing. She barely could breathe and was drooling heavily from her mouth. Their clothes were covered in a wet substance with a sharp smell, like chlorine. The two kids went into cardiac arrest after around fifteen minutes. We tried to resuscitate them to no avail. Five minutes later, the mother also died.

DEPICTION OF AN IMPROVISED CHEMICAL MUNITION, ALLEGED TO HAVE BEEN USED IN THE IDLIB GOVERNORATE BETWEEN MARCH AND MAY 2015

Outer shell

Bottle with chemicals

Lifting lugs

Back Wheel

Payload support bracket

Gas cylinder

Stabilising fins

Detonation cord

Impact plate

Front Wheels

Blasting caps

http://al-bab.com/sites/default/files/chlorine-bomb.jpg
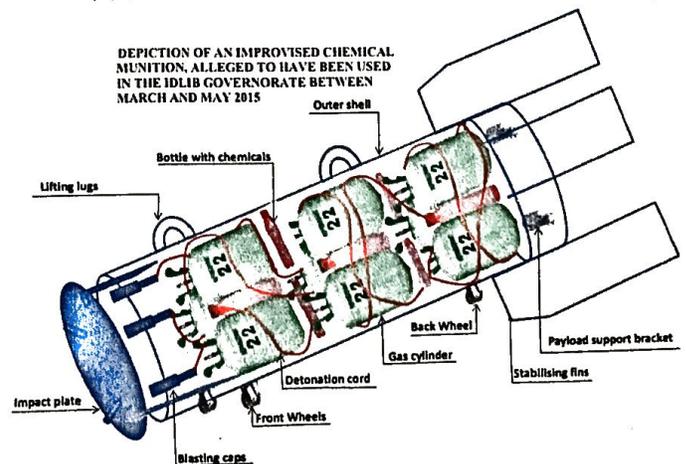
Virtual Background Knowledge Placemats

To make this activity work virtually, you'll need some sort of virtual configuration, like chat rooms to break students into small discussion groups.

Each student will need a thinksheet, similar to the one below to hold their connections, questions, and surprises. Section off the thinksheet to accommodate room for a title or description of the background knowledge placemat that you want students to read and respond to. In a virtual setting, I would provide no more than four choices.

As a whole group, show the first background knowledge placemat to the class. Give students time to study the images and then time to record connections, questions, and surprises. Once students have viewed the different background knowledge placemats, put them into virtual small groups so they can share their thinking. Visit each small group to listen for connections, questions, and surprising thinking that you want to highlight for the large group.

Pull students back together as a class. Being mindful of time, share the powerful thinking that you heard in each virtual small group. Offer students an opportunity to go back to their thinksheet to add new thoughts they had as a result of hearing your synthesis. Ask students to submit their thinksheets so you can create a whole class document capturing examples of students' thinking. Share the class document with students at the next whole class meeting.

(In lieu of sticky notes, use this thinksheet below to capture student thinking.

Virtual Background Knowledge Placemat Thinksheet
Student Example

Barrel Bombs-Weapons of War	Picture of Omran Daqneesh and Letter from Alex
Connections:	**Connections:** This reminds me of the Holocaust. The Germans were killing their own people like the president of Syria.
Questions: Why is the Syrian president bombing his own people? **Surprises:** I'm surprised that barrel bombs are so cheap to make.	**Questions:** How did President Obama get Alex's letter? Did he ever respond to Alex? **Surprises:**

Thoughts from Monday's Gallery Walk

"Where do people go if their country doesn't want them anymore?" **Luis, Katelyn**

"Children have more humanity than adults." **Eliza**

"Where is Omaran Daqneesh's family?" **Caleb, Luis**

"Little kids dying—how do we fix it? How do we combat the bombings?" **Trenton**

"Did Obama see the letter that Alex wrote?"

"The world needs more people like Alex." **Sabina**

"I agree with Sabina. We must also help parents. The government needs to help kids and teens out too. People need love and a heart." **Marlene**

"When people have to leave, why do they have to come to American?"

"American needs to do something for these kids in Syria."

"What is asylum?" **Sabina**

"People voted for Bashar to see a change but he did not keep any promises."

"Bashar is using his power for bad and will hurt and kill his own people with his power."

"How long has the Syrian crisis gone on?"

"How hot is it in Syria?" **Luis**

"With 6 million refugees how come only 10% live in the camps?" **Mikaela**

"What are people fleeing from?" **Ender**

"They used to live in a beautiful place now it's bombed, burned down, and broken to pieces."
Grace

"Why isn't their space for everyone who needs help?"

"What is the point to destroying all your buildings? Is this bombing stuff still going on today?"

"Why is it so hard for countries to help and bring in refugees?" **Carolina**

"65.3 million people have been forced to move out of their homes at the end of 2015." **Johnny**

"I wonder how many people have been forced out now?" Ms. Tovani

"I don't understand why people don't feel safe."

"I know how it feels to leave and lose everything."

"Who pays for refugee camps?" **Elizabeth**

Reasons to Study the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Compelling Literacy Big Ideas:

- The behaviors and mind-sets that we choose affect our actions.

- Stories help us see different perspectives which can give us empathy, understanding, and a roadmap on how we might act in a particular situation.

- Supporting a position with evidence makes me more credible. But doing this is hard if I don't know about the topic. Writers need to read and build their background knowledge before they can write well about an issue.

- Knowing how to read and write complex text about current events will empower readers to be successful not only in school but in life.

- Sharing stories of human resettlement creates counter narratives necessary to fight social injustice on a large scale. It also helps us push back against day-to-day discrimination people experience at school and in the community. Stories help us learn about different situations and cultures so we don't rely on assumptions (Stewart, 2015).

Compelling Social Studies Big Ideas:

- One in every 113 people on the planet is now a refugee. Around the world, someone is displaced every three seconds, forced from their homes by violence, war and persecution. By the end of 2016, the number of displaced people had risen to 65.6 million - more than the population of the United Kingdom. The number is an increase of 300,000 on the year before, and the largest number ever recorded, according to the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR (2016).

- When violence erupts or war breaks out, life can change in a matter of minutes— shattering families and communities and driving millions to flee. Everyone is vulnerable.

- Crises, whether human-made or natural, cause immense suffering and uncertainty, not only because victims lose loved ones, homes, and livelihoods, but because their safety net also disappears.

- Governments normally guarantee the security and human rights of their citizens, but when they are unable to do so, they sometimes they become violators. The tragic result is that displaced civilians are extremely vulnerable to targeted violence, sexual assault, exploitation, persecution and other human rights' abuses. The rise of destructive nationalism fuels hatred for immigrants and refugees.

- Being able to describe the social, economic and political impact of world crises helps people make decisions. It impacts how we respond, vote, treat others, spend money, …. Being able to weigh the risk of ignoring crisis helps us to think about: How does ignorance plays into fear? Who should we stand up for? Who would help me if I were struggling? How do I distinguish what is propaganda, accurate or a bold face lie?

The 4 Ts From **Transformational Literacy** by Ron Berger, Libby Woodfin, Suzanne Plaut and Cheryl Dobbertin (Jossey-Bass, 2014)_p. 92

Topic	Task
Compelling topic brings the need to know and purpose so that students care to learn	**The culminating assignment – a product or performance task**
The topic gives cohesiveness to the unit of study. It is the "what" students are learning about, often connected to specific content knowledge. Although students may be able to meet the standards without an engaging topic, a compelling, relevant topic helps students to develop their skills more deeply as readers and writers as they engage with increasingly complex text. The best topics teach the standards through real-world issues, original research, primary source documents, and the opportunity to engage with the community. They lend themselves to the creation of authentic tasks and products.	The culminating task gives students the opportunity to read for and write with specific textual evidence and to meaningfully apply the standards (targets). This is different from just writing "about" what one has read. The best tasks give students to opportunity to address authentic need and an authentic audience related to the topic.
Targets	Text
Learning targets derived from the literacy and content standards that students are expected to meet	**Complex texts with a variety of text structures that students will read closely, to ensure that students experience a volume of reading at their independent and instructional reading level**
The learning targets name what students need to know and be able to do. They are derived from the standards and informed by analysis of the assessment of the standard. (Some say, "The standard is not the standard, the assessment of the standard is the standard.") Learning targets are contextualized to the topic, prepare students for and guide the task, and ensure proper, deep analysis of the text. Pay particular attention to what type of texts students will need to read in order to master specific standards and targets.	Text is the primary vehicle through which the topic is taught. Carefully selected texts at the text complexity band for a given grade level give students access to the topic and content targets through close and careful reading. Attention to text selection ensures that students can practice specific literacy standards so that they have deep access to the topic and learning going forward. Choose text judiciously to ensure it is worthy in terms of the knowledge it will help students build about the world and the opportunities it presents for students to master specific literacy standards.

Plus Two More from Cris Tovani: Time and Tend

Time	Tend
Time for students to read, write, and think	**Tending to students emotional and instructional needs**
This is not a luxury but a necessity. Not all students run by the same time clock and expecting all students to master skills and complete tasks at the same time is not reasonable. There is more content than time to cover it. Teachers have to decide what matter most to students learning and plan with realistic goals.	Paying attention to students' needs and strengths helps teachers to make an emotional connection with students which helps them care about the content and skills when the learning gets difficult.

Upcoming Workshops in the Series
Participants are welcome to attend any and all workshops.

September 28, 2020 4:00-4:45 EST **Conversations with Cris**

- This session is designed to give participants who attended the September 21st workshop, **Topic:** "What Makes Learning Compelling" a chance to chat with Cris and share successes, ask questions, and get feedback on instructional moves. **Space is limited.**

October 5, 2020 4:00-5:30 EST **Time:** Planning for Students to do the Work

- This second workshop in the series, will focus on helping teachers think about how to use Workshop Model as a planning structure so that students are engaged for more minutes of the class period reading, writing, and discussing important ideas.

October 12, 2020 4:00-4:45 EST **Conversations with Cris**

- This session is designed to give participants who attended the October 5th workshop, "**Time:** Planning for Students to do the Work," a chance to chat with Cris and share successes, ask questions, and get feedback on instructional moves. **Space is limited.**

October 19, 2020 Targets: 4:00-5:30 EST **Targets:** What Do We Want Students to Know and Be Able to Do?

- This third workshop in the series, will focus on what learning targets are and how they help teachers GIVE feedback and design mini-lessons that meet more students' needs.

October 26, 2020 4:00-4:45 EST **Conversations with Cris**

- This session is designed to give participants who attended the October 19th workshop, **Targets:** What Do We Want Students to Know and Be Able to Do? a chance to chat with Cris and share successes, ask questions, and get feedback on instructional moves. **Space is limited.**

November 2, 2020 4:00-5:30 EST **Tasks:** How Do We Know What Students Know and Need?

This fourth workshop in the series, will focus on GETTING feedback by asking students to complete tasks worthy of their time. Cris will show how Targets and Tasks fit together so that students can reflect on their learning.

November 9, 2020 4:00-4:45 EST **Conversations with Cris**

- This session is designed to give participants who attended the November 2nd workshop, **Tasks:** How Do We Know What Students Know and Need?a chance to chat with Cris and share successes, ask questions, and get feedback on instructional moves. **Space is limited.**

- November 16, 2020 4:00-5:30 **Texts:** Finding the Right Text So Students Can Access Content and Curriculum

In order for students to grow their comprehension, vocabulary, and background knowledge they need a variety of text structures that match their reading level. When students can "uncover" curriculum and content they grow as readers, writers, and thinkers. This session will focus on how to build text sets and find a variety of reading material to meet a variety of students' needs.

- November 17, 2020 4:00-4:45 EST **Conversations with Cris**

This session is designed to give participants who attended the November 16th workshop, **Texts:** Finding the Right Text So Students Can Access Content and Curriculum a chance to chat with Cris and share successes, ask questions, and get feedback on instructional moves.   **Space is limited.**

- November 30, 2020 4:00-5:30 EST **Tying it All Together:** Long-Term Planning Drives the Day-to-Day

The last workshop in this series will focus on how long-term planning can make day-to-day instruction less gruling. Cris will show how anticipating a few student needs will help teachers plan ahead for those tough to engage students.

- December 7, 2020 4:00-4:45 EST **Conversations with Cris**

This last conversation with Cris is open to anyone who attended any of the series workshops. Participants will have a chance to chat with Cris and share successes, ask questions, and get feedback on instructional moves.   **Space is limited.**