

**TEXT:** Finding the Right Text So Students Can Access Curriculum and Content

**6Ts Series Sponsor:** Georgia's ELA Department of Education  
with Cris Tovani [ctovani@hotmail.com](mailto:ctovani@hotmail.com)  
November 16, 2020

**Prior knowledge effects are powerful.** The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him/her accordingly.  
From *Visible Learning and the Science of How We Learn*

### 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 Right Text Increases All Three Types of Engagement.

### Test Percentile, reading minutes and word count:

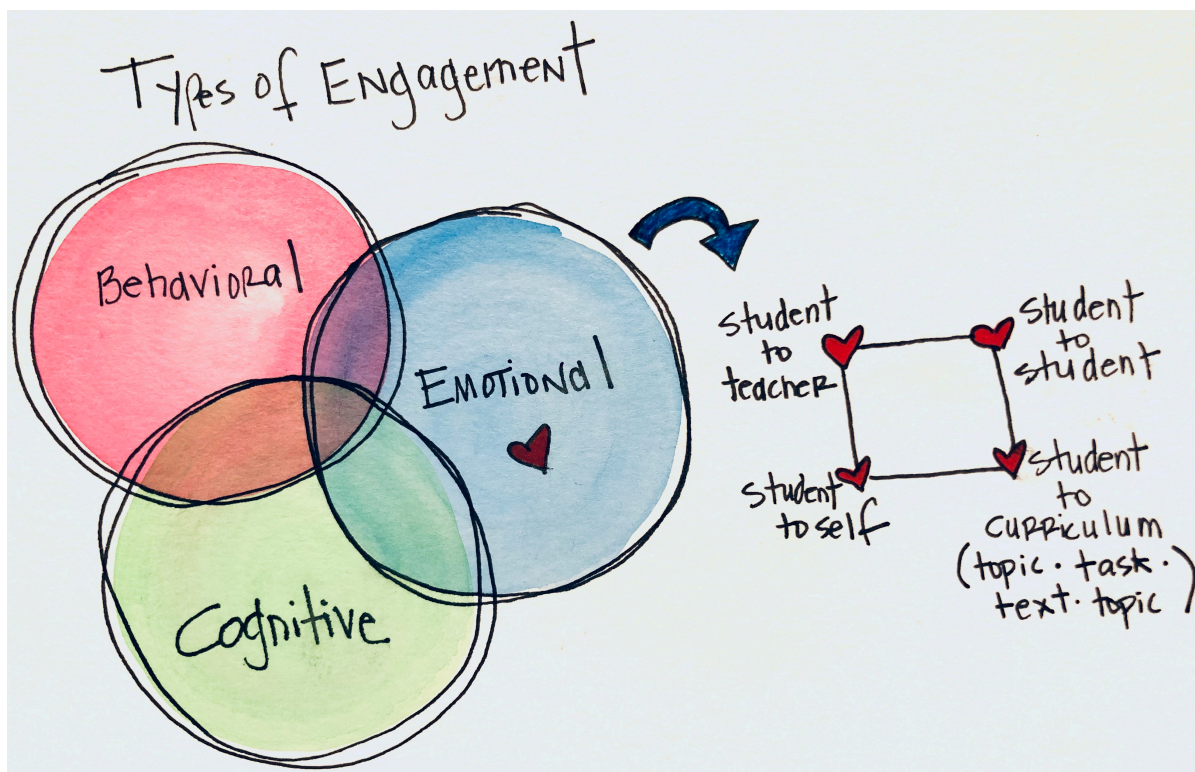
98% 67 minutes a day = 4,733, 000 word exposure by 12<sup>th</sup> grade

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

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

Guthrie, J. T. (2002). Preparing students for high-stakes test taking in reading. In A. Farstrup & S. J. Samuels (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading instruction* (pp. 370–391). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

From: *Why Do I Have to Read This?* (Stenhouse, 2021) Tovani



Fredricks, J.A. P.C. Blumentfeld, and A.H. Paris. 2004. "School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of Evidence." *Review of Educational Research* 74 (1): 59-109.

## **Text to Build, Activate, and Assess Background Knowledge**

“My students don’t have a clue about the (novel, topic, skill, rule, strategy...) and furthermore, they couldn’t care less!” **Penny a high school teacher**

### **The Procedure**

The procedure is a common one. First, you arrange the items in piles that represent different categories. The piles are then processed individually using necessary machinery for the task. Usually two pieces of equipment are used. It’s important not to process too many items at a time. This could cause damage to the machinery and ultimately be quite expensive. Once the items are processed, they are arranged into different piles and returned to their original locations. In a short time, the procedure is repeated.

### **Rocky**

Rocky slowly got up from the mat, planning his escape. He hesitated a moment and thought. Things were not going well. What bothered him most was being held, especially since the charges against him had been weak. He considered his present situation. The lock that held him was strong but he thought he could break it. He knew, however, that his timing would have to be perfect. Rocky was aware that it was because of his earlier roughness that he had been penalized so severely—much too severely from his point of view. This situation was becoming frustrating; the pressure had been grinding on him for too long. He was being ridden unmercifully. Rocky was getting angry now. He felt he was ready to make his move. He knew that his success or failure would depend on what he did in the next few seconds.

Remember the Virtual Gallery Walks? How did the different texts build, activate, and assess students' background knowledge?

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-  
 -ing for you guys with flags  
 flowers and balloons We  
~~will~~ will 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 can all play together.  
 We can invite him to birthday  
 parties and he will teach us another  
 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 striped white  
 bunny. And I will share my  
 bike and I will teach him  
 how to ride it. I will teach  
 him additions and subtraction  
 in math and he will call Catherine  
 his little green 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



Omar Daqueneesh

## 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.

Damascus is the capital of Syria.

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.

### 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. (Do you do they work?)

**HELICOPTER DROP**  
 Soldiers in Russian Mi-8 helicopters drop the bombs.

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

**FINS** welded to an section of cylinder to increase stability and probability of bomb landing on impact zone.

**IMPACT FUSE**, using rotation used to ignite the bulk of TNT charge. The bomb needs to land on the impact fuse to detonate.

**Barrel bombs are Syrian** improvised explosive devices - oil drums or other large containers packed with explosives, fuel, shrapnel, glass and other lethal 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](http://globalsecurity.org/military/world/syria/barrel-bomb.htm)

Source: Brown Moses Blog info.Bild

## 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

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



## Time for Some REFLECTION:

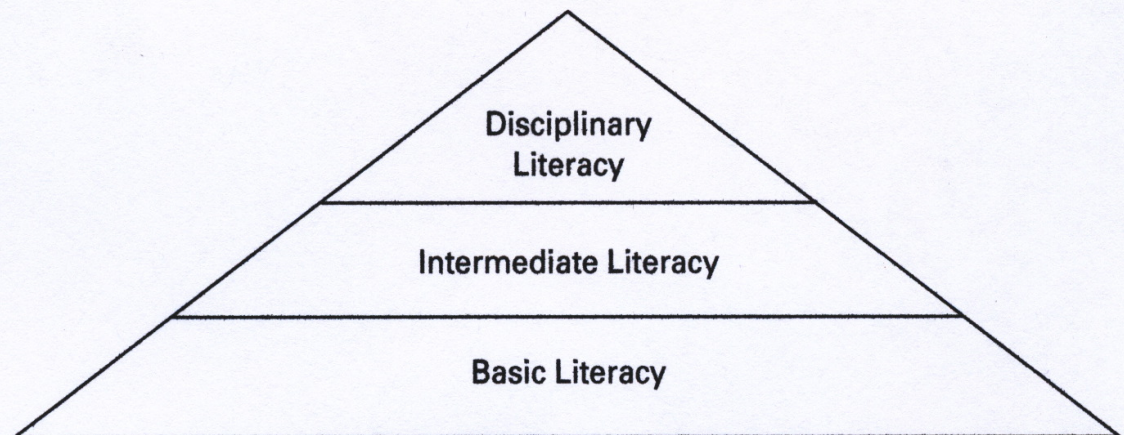
- How will you define prior/background knowledge for your students? How do you build it? What do you do when you don't have it? Where do you go to get the fastest, best information?
- How does prior/background knowledge on a topic enhance comprehension?
- What role does the teacher play in building prior/background knowledge?
- What role do students have when they lack prior/background knowledge?

## Using Different Texts to Increase Fluency, Vocabulary and Comprehension

From: Shanahan and Shanahan, 2008

*Harvard Educational Review*

**FIGURE 1** *The Increasing Specialization of Literacy Development*



## The Marlup

A marlup ws poving his kump. Parmily, a narg, horped some whey in kump. "Why did vump horp whey in my frinkle," the marlup jufd the narg?

"Er'n nurily trungy," the narg gruppued. "Vump horped whey in my kump. Do vump pove your kump frinkle?"

Answer the following questions:

1. What did the narg horp put in the marlup's kump?
2. What did the marlup juf the narg?
3. Was the narg trungy?
4. What does the narg ask the marlup?

## IDEAS ABOUT *INNER VOICE*

### **Conversation Voice (useful voice)**

#### **This voice helps readers to:**

- ❑ Relate to the text
- ❑ Make connections between the book and the reader
- ❑ Ask questions
- ❑ Give opinions
- ❑ Talk back to the text
- ❑ Remember what is read

### **Reciting Voice (waste of time voice)**

#### **This voice causes readers to:**

- ❑ Lose track of what is being read
- ❑ Stray from the text
- ❑ Forget what is read
- ❑ Not care about the reading

Turn off the reciting voice by **rereading** and giving yourself a job or a **purpose** to read for.

### **Reading Purposes**

#### **Some purposes are:**

- ❑ Ask a question
- ❑ Look for the answer to a question
- ❑ Make a connection
- ❑ Look for clues to help draw an inference
- ❑ Retell what has been read
- ❑ Try to visualize a picture



## **Thinking Strategies Used by Proficient Readers**

(Based on the research synthesis of P. David Pearson and Janice A. Dole)

A strategy is an intentional plan that is flexible and can be adapted to meet the demands of the situation.

Proficient Readers:

- **Activate background knowledge** and make connections between new and known information.
- **Question the text** in order to clarify ambiguity and deepen understanding.
- **Draw inferences** using background knowledge and clues from the text.
- **Determine importance** in order to distinguish details from main ideas.
- **Monitor comprehension** in order to make sure meaning is being constructed.
- **Reread and employ fix-up strategies** to repair confusion.
- **Use sensory images** to enhance comprehension and visualize the reading.
- **Synthesize** and extend thinking.

**ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS THINKING STRATEGIES for Fiction** Tovani, Gillespie, Whitlock **DRAFT 2020**

Thinking Strategies	Disciplinary Literacy Strategies
<b>Activating and Building Background Knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do I know about the time period &amp; setting of the work?</li> <li>• How does setting drive plot?</li> <li>• How do current issues connect to the themes presented in the text?</li> <li>• How does this text relate to other works I have studied?</li> <li>• What do I know about the author?</li> <li>• What do I know about the text structure?</li> <li>• What do I notice about the author's craft moves?</li> <li>• How can I relate the text to my own experiences?</li> <li>• How do the allusions in the work connect to other works, times periods, characters, real people?</li> </ul>
<b>Asking Questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What questions do I have about plot and characters?</li> <li>• What questions can be answered in the text and which ones require an inference?</li> </ul>
<b>Inferring to Draw Conclusions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do the words and actions of a character help me to infer why the character does what s/he does?</li> <li>• What information about the characters or events can help me predict &amp; generalize?</li> <li>• How do characters change or stay the same over time? What might this mean?</li> <li>• What themes are emerging? What lines or examples from the text support the theme(s) I'm tracking?</li> <li>• How does the figurative language support a selected theme?</li> </ul>
<b>Determining Importance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the work begin? What characters and setting descriptions do I need to track and pay attention to?</li> <li>• What symbols, ideas, objects, and motifs recur in the text? What might they mean?</li> <li>• How is the author using figurative language to convey meaning?</li> <li>• What lines from the text support what I think?</li> <li>• How are the author and narrator different?</li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring Comprehension</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What makes sense and where am I confused?</li> <li>• Do I need to keep reading or go back and reread where "my camera" shut off?</li> <li>• How will I hold and show my thinking so I can remember and reuse it?</li> </ul>
<b>Rereading to Repair Meaning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where do I need to reread? Why am I rereading?</li> <li>• What part do I need to share with others to understand it better?</li> <li>• What does the picture in my head look like?</li> <li>• What can I ask to isolate my confusion?</li> <li>• What connection could I make to help me understand?</li> </ul>
<b>Sensory Images</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do I see, hear, feel, taste, sense as I read?</li> <li>• What words cause me to picture what I am picturing?</li> </ul>
<b>Synthesizing &amp; Extending Thinking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can I use what I've read as a model to improve and inform my writing?</li> <li>• So what? How does what I read help me to think in new ways?</li> <li>• What do I need to retell or share with others?</li> </ul>

## What Are Text Sets and How Can I Design One?

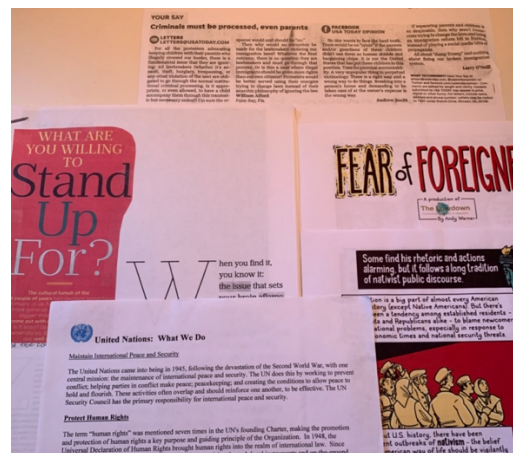
- Text sets complement the required content and build prior/background knowledge for units of study.
- Text sets contain a wide variety of text that varies in length, difficulty, and text structure. (commentaries, poems, tweets, Facebook posts, picture books, informational books, historical text, current events, lyrics, political cartoons, data, infographics, graphic novels, newspaper articles, editorials, photos, letters....)
- Text sets give students access to unfamiliar text structures and content.



**Nonfiction provides information. Narrative helps readers care about the information.**

**Finding examples of text that exists in the world, helps students see what criteria of success looks like.**

**Real world examples also serve as mentor texts for students own work.**



## When Building Text Sets, Consider:

- **Themes, Topics, and Case Studies Connected** to the Required Reading.
- A **Wide Range** of Reading Materials that includes **text structure and readability**.
- What Students Will **Make and Do** to Demonstrate They've Hit the Standards. Look for **Mentor Texts** that Students Can Use as a **Model** for Criteria of Success.

**Required Reading:** *The Great Gatsby*

<b>Possible Case Studies, Compelling Topics, or Themes Connected to the Required Reading:</b>	White Privilege Income Disparity Economic Crash of 2009 Dark Side of the American Dream
<b>Possible Big Makes/Summative Assessments:</b>	Commentary Dream Speech Comparison-Contrast Infographic
<b>Possible Texts:</b>	Excerpts from: Caste, White Fragility James Baldwin: A Talk to Teachers MLK's Dream Speech Maya Angelou's Inauguration Speech What Makes a Good Speech (Purdue Writing Center) Dear Me Letters Speeches by teens Historical text on 1920's prohibition Economic charts Commentaries

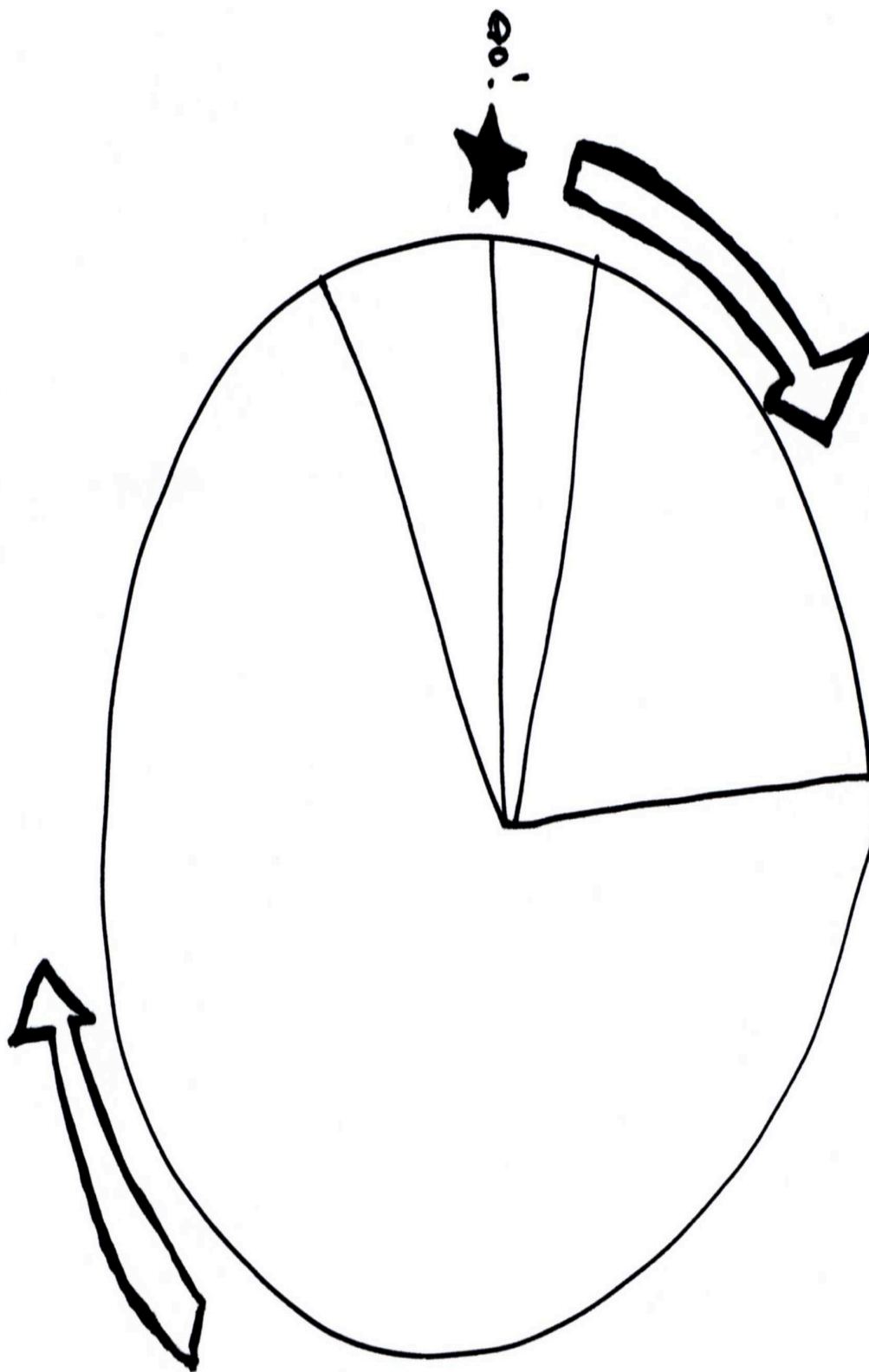
**Required Reading:** *Refugee or Escape from Syria*

<b>Possible Case Studies, Compelling Topics, or Themes Connected to the Required Reading:</b>	Humanitarian Crisis-Displaced People Syrian Refugee Crisis
<b>Possible Big Makes/Summative Assessments:</b>	Participation in Awareness, Action, Empathy Summit Open Letter Syrian Refugee Infographic
<b>Possible Texts:</b>	Open Letters and Commentaries Feature Articles Firsthand Accounts, Facebook Posts Picture Books, Graphic Novels, Poems Infographics on displaced people Texts from the UN and WHO Information pieces about refugees and immigrants

**Unit of Study:**

**Required Reading:**

<p><b>Possible Case Studies, Compelling Topics, or Themes Connected to the Required Reading:</b></p>	
<p><b>Possible Big Makes/Summative Assessments:</b></p>	
<p><b>Possible Texts:</b></p>	



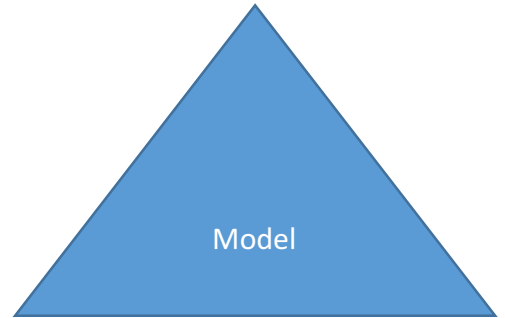


**Unit Summary:** Students will study the Syrian Refugee Crisis as a case study to build awareness about the political and social effects that humanitarian crises have on individuals and world stability.

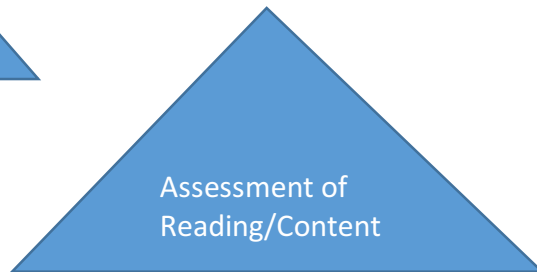
<b>Long-Term Targets</b>	<b>Provocative Questions</b>	<b>Big and Small “Makes”</b>
<p><b>I can analyze a humanitarian crisis to discuss the implications of political and social upheavals on individuals and the world (US, nearby countries, countries accepting refugees).</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can identify how political upheaval affects social upheaval.</li> <li>• I can discuss the differences between refugees, asylees, immigrants, and migrants.</li> <li>• I can explain different challenges each population faces.</li> </ul>	<p>Is the United States losing its humanity?</p> <p>How do I decide when to take action and if I choose to, what can I do?</p> <p>Should the US resettle its “fair share” of refugees? Why?</p> <p>Is everything destined to be or can I change my fate?</p>	<p><b>Reflection Journal</b></p> <p><b>Open Letter:</b> Create awareness and take a position about an issue connected to the Syrian Refugee Crisis. Using examples of political and social upheaval, current events, and stories students will support their position with evidence.</p> <p><b>Annotations and Think Sheets</b></p> <p><b>Awareness, Empathy, and Action Summit</b> (preparation, performance, and reflection)</p>
<p><b>I can use thinking strategies to read and write complex text.</b></p>		<p><b>Learning Target</b></p> <p><b>Reflection:</b> My Growth as a Reader</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before and After Reflection Letters to Tovani</li> <li>• Annotations and Think Sheets</li> </ul>
<p><b>I can logically and politely argue my position with someone who has a different point of view.</b></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annotations and Think Sheets</li> <li>• Open Letter</li> <li>• Awareness, Empathy, and Action Summit</li> </ul>



1. Drafts
2. Quick Writes



1. Drafts
2. Written Response
3. Peer Feedback



1. Annotation
2. Inner Voice Sheets
3. Double Entry Diaries
4. Quizzes
5. Response Journal
6. Sticky Notes

Topic	Task
<p><b>Compelling topic brings the need to know and purpose so that students care to learn</b></p> <p>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.</p>	<p><b>The culminating assignment – a product or performance task</b></p> <p>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.</p>
Targets	Text
<p><b>Learning targets derived from the literacy and content standards that students are expected to meet</b></p> <p>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.</p>	<p><b>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</b></p> <p>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.</p>

**Plus Two More from Cris Tovani: Time and Tend**

Time	Tend
<p><b>Time for students to read, write, and think</b></p> <p>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.</p>	<p><b>Tending to students emotional and instructional needs</b></p> <p>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.</p>

## Remaining Sessions in the the Series

- 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 grueling. 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.