

Guide to Creating Text Sets

Rationale

The Iowa Core Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies focus on building student understanding of grade-level complex text and express that understanding clearly through writing and speaking. A coherent sequence of texts around a clear inquiry-based question will support students in building vocabulary and background knowledge. The Standards also support the idea that it is only through the use of multiple texts that students can explore multiple perspectives and gather evidence to make coherent arguments about a given question. Text sets are one tool for educators in planning units of instruction to help students meet the demands of the Standards.

What is a Text Set?

A text set is a collection of related texts organized around a unit topic, theme, concept, or idea. The set is focused on an anchor text- a rich, complex grade-level text. The anchor text is the focus of a close reading with instructional supports. The number of texts in a set can vary depending on purpose and resource availability around a given topic. What is important is that the texts in the set are connected meaningfully to each other to deepen student understanding of the anchor text. In a sense, the texts need to “talk to one another” so that in reading the set, students build a coherent body of knowledge around a topic.

The meaning of “text” has greatly expanded under the Iowa Core. Text is no longer just written material. In addition to written material, text should now be seen as images, artifacts, maps, songs, video clips, etc. Really, it is anything that helps students build knowledge.

There are many ways of organizing text sets. Often, strong sets will be organized around the topic of the anchor text, so that students have the opportunity to build additional knowledge about that topic. For example, with an anchor text like “When Mr. Jefferson Came to Philadelphia,” a piece of historical fiction for the 4-5 grade band, an accompanying set would likely include texts on the topic of the American Revolution. Building vocabulary and content knowledge about that period of history will help students make rich meaning out of the anchor text. We encourage you to consider a range of approaches to organizing sets, constantly returning to the question: “What would this set help my students build knowledge about in the world?”

Features of Strong and Weak Text Sets

Strong Text Sets	Weak Text Sets
Build student knowledge about a topic; meaningful connection to the anchor text	Texts are not related or connected across sets or they are only superficially connected
Texts are authentic, rich, and worthy of study	<i>Only</i> contains commissioned texts or textbook passages
Range of text types (literary and informational) and formats (written, images, etc.)	Focused exclusively on one genre or format
Text complexity levels support student achievement of the grade-level complexity demands of the Iowa Core	Text complexity levels are erratic and do not support the staircase of complexity in the Iowa Core
Text set presents a variety of viewpoints/perspectives	Text set presents limited viewpoints/perspectives

Unit Compelling Question: Were African-Americans really free during Reconstruction?

Examples of Strong and Weak Text Sets

Strong Text Set Example	Weak Text Set Example
Anchor Text: 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments	Anchor Text: 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendment
Reconstruction Timeline	Letter from Frederick Douglass
Black Codes	Sharecropping (photo)
Henry Adams Statement	Background on Reconstruction (www.ushistory.org)
Elected Black Officials during Reconstruction (photo)	Reconstruction Timeline
Joint Report on Reconstruction	Abraham Lincoln's 2nd Inaugural Address

Plantation Account Book (photo)	
Education Among the Freedmen	
Ku Klux Klan Letter	
Reconstruction Map	

While there are some merits to the weaker set, the connection between some of the texts are superficial or tangential, and it is not clear and it is not clear how a teacher would use these texts to support student knowledge building. The stronger set is more focused. The anchor text and related texts are connected concretely by the topic of Reconstruction. Thematically, these texts provide a comment on the social and political effects of gaining knowledge through reading and writing. Strong sets often present opportunities for both topic connections and thematic connections that students are able to discern through reading and deep analysis. They provide a rich context for close, analytical reading, comparison, and synthesis of texts through which students are more likely to meet the expectations of the Iowa Core. The strong text set example can be viewed [here](#).

Steps to Creating a Text Set

Selecting texts for teaching is a complex and nuanced process. There is no single process for creating a text set; educators may take a variety of different approaches given their aims and available resources. The following can be used as a basic guide to creating your own text sets:

Step 1: Identify the Anchor Text and Develop a Unit Compelling Question (*in no particular order*)

Focusing a text set around a compelling question is critical. The use of questions is vitally important in a social studies classroom. First, the compelling question focuses the unit and promotes the idea that social studies is about questions, not answers. It also provides a pathway for students to gather evidence from texts in order to make an argument. Developing compelling questions is not easy work. Here are some general guidelines to think about when developing compelling questions:

Student	Thinking	Content
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the question get under students' skin? • Is the question 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the question encourage analysis, synthesis, evaluation, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the question require students to apply specific disciplinary

<p>interesting?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a way to engage students in this question? • is the question written in student friendly language? 	<p>and creativity?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the question open ended and allow for multiple possible answers? • Does the question require students to argue with evidence? 	<p>concepts?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the question raise other important questions that are sequenced in the unit of study (supporting questions)? • Why is this important?
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Examples:

- How revolutionary was the American Revolution?
- How free were African-Americans during Reconstruction?
- Was the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s a success?

An educator may first identify an anchor text, from which they formulate a line of inquiry (i.e. compelling question) for the set OR an educator may choose to first identify a compelling question and then seek out an anchor text around which to build the set.

An important part of this step is that the anchor text be a grade-level complex text that meets the complexity demands of the Standards and is worthy of the time and attention of students. Without a rich anchor text and compelling question, it is impossible to create a worthwhile text set.

Step 2: Use Various Resources to Find Other Texts

Once you have identified the anchor text, you can use a variety of databases and other resources to search for texts. As you search, keep in mind that you want to protect the coherence of the set, but also think about how you can include a wide variety of texts. Also keep in mind that a unit text set generally contains a minimum of 8-10 texts.

Several databases allow you to organize texts according to quantitative measure. These databases are exceptionally helpful in building a text set, as otherwise you need to run the quantitative analysis for each text you consider. If the text complexity is not apparent, one possible resource is Lexile (www.lexile.com).

Some other resources include:

Resource	Link	Notes
EBSCO	http://www.statelibraryofio.wa.org/ld/c-d/directories/main-directory	EBSCO is made available through most public libraries.

AP Images	www.iowaaeaonline.org	Check your local school library or AEA for login information.
Britannica Online	www.iowaaeaonline.org	Check your local school library or AEA for login information.
CultureGrams	http://online.culturegrams.com/	Check your local school library or AEA for login information.
Gale	http://galesites.com/state/iowa/	Check your local school library or AEA for login information.
Learn 360	http://www.learn360.com/index.aspx	Check your local school library or AEA for login information.
SIRS Researcher	http://auth.proquestk12.com/IA/	Check your local school library or AEA for login information.
True Flix	http://tfx.grolier.com/splash	Check your local school library or AEA for login information.
Library of Congress	www.loc.gov	
National Archives	www.nara.gov	
NCSS Notable Trade Books in Social Studies	http://www.socialstudies.org/notable	

Step 3: Evaluate Texts for Inclusion in the Set

In choosing your texts for the set, you will want to consider the features of strong text sets. Ask yourself the following questions to determine whether a text is worthy of inclusion in the set:

- Does the text contribute to the students building a body of knowledge connected meaningfully to the anchor text?
- Is the text worthy of student time and attention?
- Does the text contribute to a range and balance of text types and formats in the overall set?

- Does the quantitative measure of the text place it in the grade band of the anchor text? A range of texts spanning the band will support student-knowledge building over the course of the unit.

Step Four: Refine, Finalize, and Produce Text Set

Continue to refine your selections until you are satisfied that you have a range and balance of texts that support student engagement. Then, finalize your selections and document the text set for use in your instructional unit and to share with other educators. In documenting your set, we recommend including the title, author, quantitative measure, source, text type, and brief summary/justification for the text in the set. See text set [template](#) for additional guidance.

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