



**In the Best Interest of Students:
Staying True to What Works in the ELA Classroom**
By Kelly Gallagher (Stenhouse Publishers, 2015)

S.O.S. (A Summary of the Summary)

The main ideas of the book are:

- ~ Educators have become so hung up on covering all of the Common Core standards, that they have lost sight of the key literacy skills our students need.
- ~ This book reminds us what works in the teaching of reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Why I chose this book:

I don't know about you, but I didn't go into education to become embroiled in the politics of it all. I imagine that you, also, entered the field to do what's in the best interest of students. While this may sound simplistic and naïve, there's something to be said for people who can remain above the fray and see the larger picture.

Kelly Gallagher is one of those people. I have yet to summarize a book by any other author *three times*, but this is my third book of his. I like how he uses his decades of experience to calmly examine what *works* in the Common Core and what needs *to be improved*. His goal is not to help us fall in line with the latest fad, but to encourage us to think deeply about those literacy practices that stand the test of time and truly help our students succeed as thoughtful, literate, people prepared for the modern world.

The Scoop (In this summary you will learn...)

- ✓ There are both strengths *and* weaknesses in the CCSS and we should explore both sides.
- ✓ The CC reading standards are much more rigorous and ask students to go beyond what the text says to also determine what the text *does* and what it *means*.
- ✓ The CC reading standards underemphasize some key components of reading – such as recreational reading and prereading activities -- while overemphasizing other areas such as informational reading and the use of excerpts.
- ✓ After NCLB practically ignored writing, the CCSS have brought back writing to its rightful place alongside the teaching of reading.
- ✓ The CC writing standards can be limiting because teachers often don't stray from the “big three” types of writing (narrative, informative, and argumentative) and give students less choice in their writing.
- ✓ The good news is that the CCSS include listening and speaking skills, so this should encourage us to focus more on these vital 21st century communication skills.
- ✓ PD suggestions for implementing the ideas in this book from The Main Idea at the end of the summary

Chapter 1

Students' Best Interests Don't Always Align with the Current Standards Movement

Education reform, unfortunately, does not always align with what is in the best interest of students. For example, when No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was put into place, many educators went overboard. A number of states were afraid of having students perform poorly and adopted easier exams so students would appear “proficient.” Even states with more rigorous standards began implementing shallower tests because of the testing pressures they faced. As a result, a number of important skills – such as the ability to write a multi-draft essay – were discarded in the name of raising test scores. Teachers began to emphasize surface-level understanding over deeper reading and writing skills. Now that we have the Common Core State Standards, are we once again focusing on compliance at the expense of implementing what we know to be the best practices of literary instruction? To make sure we don't lose sight of quality instruction, and to avoid repeating the mistakes we made under NCLB, below are three vital lessons to keep in mind:

Lesson 1: Don't fall in love with these standards; they won't be here forever. History shows that standards come and standards go. There is often initial excitement for new standards, but when tests are given and consequences become real, popularity usually wanes. These standards are no exception as we can already see from those states that have opted out of the Common Core standards or are in the process of doing so (Wisconsin, Oklahoma, North Carolina, and Indiana).

Lesson 2: Recognize that the standards are necessary but not sufficient by themselves. While the Common Core standards are better than almost all other education standards we've had, there are two issues. First, the standards do have shortcomings (which will be described later in the book), and second, no matter how strong any standards are, they don't ensure that teaching improves. They point to *what* should be taught, but not *how*, and can still result in bad teaching. We need to remember that the standards represent a *starting point* in raising student achievement, but that's it, just a beginning.

Lesson 3: Remember that “good teaching” is far more than covering a list of standards; it is about utilizing those practices proven to strengthen our students' literacy skills. Sometimes teachers are so focused on “covering” all of the standards, they lose sight of the goal: to strengthen literacy skills.

Under NCLB, students' literacy skills clearly suffered. The 2012 reading SAT scores were the lowest they had ever been in *four decades*. This is significant because those who took the exam that year were the first group of students to have been entirely educated under NCLB from grades K to 12. While the Common Core state standards bring hope for deeper thinking and learning, it is important to keep in mind both the good news *and* the bad news about these standards.

The Good News About the Common Core

The Common Core does a good job of moving away from the surface-level, multiple-choice thinking of the NCLB era. The new standards clearly value and promote rigorous thinking. By raising the bar for what it means to be literate, the new standards reintroduce rigor to the teaching of reading and writing. This is definitely good. In addition, because writing was not emphasized on tests during NCLB, the teaching of writing declined at this time. Now that Common Core aligned tests -- the PARCC and SBAC assessments -- *do* require that students demonstrate their thinking through writing, there is a new emphasis on writing across the curriculum. Accountability for writing is another good thing about the Common Core.

The Bad News About the Common Core

While there are many good aspects of the Common Core, along with the good come some concerns. First, there have been questions about the *sequencing* of skills. For example, why is one skill introduced in fourth rather than fifth grade? Rather than accepting this sequence blindly, educators should work together with those who teach similar grades to determine the appropriateness of introducing new skills at certain grade levels. This is particularly true for our youngest students. While kindergarten used to be a time for socialization, creativity, and wonder, it is now a time when five-year-olds are learning what used to be taught in the first grade. Finally, there is a concern that the Common Core is calling for even *more* testing than we saw under NCLB. In addition to final tests, we are seeing pretests and interim tests all in the name of preparing students for the SBAC and PARCC. Furthermore, these tests shape what is being taught in classrooms by emphasizing certain standards. For example, because the tests overemphasize close reading, teachers spend too much time having students analyze short passages. Also, because the tests don't assess the development of student thinking across 300 pages, teachers end up spending less time on longer works in class.

The chapters that follow go into more depth about what works and what doesn't in the teaching of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Rather than frantically following the Common Core standards, educators need to focus on what they know is in the best interest of students when it comes to developing essential literacy skills.

Chapter 2 – What the Common Core Gets Right About the Teaching of *Reading*

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, there are a number of things the Common Core State Standards get right when it comes to teaching reading. This chapter takes a closer look at how the Common Core can help us improve the teaching of reading and gives some concrete suggestions to help our students become better readers. Note that the suggestions in this chapter, and in the rest of the book, are useful to anyone teaching literacy skills whether your state has adopted the Common Core or not.

The Common Core reading standards are a definite improvement in comparison to the standards used by most states during the NCLB era. The anchor standards in reading require our students to read in a deeper, closer, more rigorous way than before. Those standards start by asking students *What does the text say?* Then they move to *What does the text do?* And finally, they have students examine *What does the text mean?* By answering these three questions, students are developing essential reading skills. The anchor standards can be roughly categorized by these three questions:

Standards	Focus of the Standards
Standards 1-3: Key Ideas and Details	<i>What does the text say?</i>
Standards 4-6: Craft and Structure	<i>What does the text do?</i>
Standards 7-9: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas	<i>What does the text mean?</i>

1. What does the text say?

Standard 1: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 – 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.

Standard 2: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2 – Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Standard 3: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3 – Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

If students don't know what a text means – if they cannot retell the events they've read – then they cannot move to the next level and conduct a closer reading that leads to a deeper understanding of the text. One excellent way to help students understand on a literal level is through *summary* activities. Summaries are a great and concise way for students to demonstrate their understanding of a text and for teachers to determine the accuracy of that understanding. Below are a few suggestions the author uses for students to strengthen their summarization skills.

17-Word Summaries – At the beginning of reading *Lord of the Flies*, Gallagher asks his students to write a 17-word summary of the first chapter to ensure they understand what's happening before moving on. They must summarize the first chapter in exactly seventeen words. Not eighteen. Not sixteen. This encourages students to think carefully about sentence structure and word choice. It also makes it easy for Gallagher to quickly determine which students have understood what they've read. Below are two examples from his students:

Ralph and Piggy are stranded, but with the help of a conch shell, they discover more kids.

Ralph, who's "fair," becomes leader of the plane-crash survivors after uniting them by blowing on the conch.

Write a Headline – Another way to help students improve their summary skills is to provide them with a piece of writing, and have them come up with a headline. Start with newspaper stories that have had their headlines removed and ask students to come up with headlines that capture the gist of the articles. Once they have been successful with this, try giving them pieces of literature as part of a reading check. Along with the headline, students can also write an explanation for why this heading is appropriate.

What is Left Out – Another useful summarizing skill that also takes thinking to the next level is to ask students what has been left out of a text. Students create a T-chart on their papers. In the left column they write what the text says and in the right column they write what has been left out.

2. What does the text do?

Standard 4: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4 – Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

Standard 5: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5 – Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

Standard 6: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6 – Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

To move students toward deeper levels of reading, they must consider what a text *does*. What is the author trying to *do*? To understand how this is different from what was required under NCLB, consider Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Under NCLB, students would have been asked to simply read the passage for more surface-level meaning with questions like:

- List three things that Dr. King rails against.
- What is Dr. King's central claim in this piece?
- What evidence supports his claim?

Now we encourage our students to think more deeply about their reading and consider what the text *does*:

- What makes this an effective piece of writing?
- What techniques are used by the writer that elevates the writing?

Moving beyond what the text says, students are now asked to recognize his use of repetition (“when you...when you...when you...”) or the inclusion of an anecdote about his daughter in order to connect to the reader, in other words, *how* the text is written.

3. *What does the text mean?*

Standard 7: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 – Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Standard 8: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.8 – Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

Standard 9: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9 – Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
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The first set of standards focuses on what the text says, the second set on what it does, and the final set looks at what it means. Students are asked to move beyond literal understanding and to interpret and infer. To give students practice with this, consider providing a set of facts or a visual diagram and ask them to come up with possible claims based on the facts. For example, in one infographic that shows a map of the hours per week people read all over the world, students learned that people in India read more than anywhere else in the world. When they were asked to infer why, students came up with possible claims, such as:

- There are fewer technological distractions for children in India.
- Kids in India do more reading in school.
- India has more bookstores.

While these claims may be incorrect, the only way to begin making correct assertions is to have a lot of practice with inferential skills which students will need to truly understand what a text *means*.

Chapter 3 – Where the Common Core *Reading* Standards Fall Short

While the last chapter was an overview of what the Common Core reading standards get right, this chapter explores eight areas the standards get wrong.

Concern 1: Readers should NOT be confined to stay “within the four corners of the text.”

Two of the primary authors of the CCSS have repeatedly said that students should “stay within the four corners of the text.” They mean that students should focus on the text and not make connections to the outside world. As Gallagher writes, “To put it bluntly, this is ludicrous.” Imagine you come across this sentence:

Syria missed an important deadline this week, failing to turn over all its chemical weapons.

How can you read this and *not* delve into your knowledge of the outside world? Of course you can understand what this sentence means without straying from the four corners of the text, but to deeply comprehend what this means, you would have to have some knowledge of Syria, the president of Syria, the current conflict there, and the context of turning over its chemical weapons. Of course we want our students to be able to tell us what a text says. This is necessary, but it is not sufficient, and if students stop there, it limits their thinking. When students read *The Grapes of Wrath*, this should give them insight into today’s immigration debate. When they read *Animal Farm*, they should be able to apply their new thinking to today’s concerns about propaganda. If students don’t do this type of thinking, then they are simply reading stories.

Concern 2: Prereading activities are undervalued.

The authors of the CCSS are concerned that teachers are doing more of the work than the students, particularly through their use of prereading activities. When teachers provide too much scaffolding up front, they are essentially doing the reading *for* the students. While it is certainly a concern that teachers are doing more than their fair share of the heavy lifting, these activities should not be thrown out all together as the Common Core authors suggest:

Effective scaffolding aligned with the standards should result in the reader encountering the text *on its own terms*.

This is analogous to taking an inexperienced wrestler and throwing him into the ring with a powerful opponent. Of course you want your wrestler to be able to eventually take on such a challenge, but there is still a lot of work to do before that happens. You would want to model wrestling moves, provide time for practice, and show videos of experienced wrestlers before your young wrestler is ready for a serious challenge. Anyone who has ever taught Shakespeare knows you can’t simply hand a play to the students and expect them to “encounter the text on its own terms.” Particularly for reluctant readers or those reading behind grade level, a gradual-release approach is key to their success with the text.

Concern 3: Recreational reading is all but ignored.

If you look at the CCSS website, recreational reading is not mentioned in the introduction, the ten anchor reading standards, the grade-specific standards for reading literature, the grade-specific standards for reading informational texts, the discussion of “foundational skills,” or in the appendices. This clearly sends the message that recreational reading is not valued. Yet we know how important it is to get our kids to read. The students who read the most for fun are the students who read the *best*. Even if the CC reading standards are excellent, they won’t help if our students simply aren’t reading. And the primary obstacle to students becoming proficient readers may be that they simply do not have access to interesting books to read.

Concern 4: There are no reading targets.

The CCSS do not provide guidance for reading targets, that is, how much *time* students should spend reading. There is a strong connection between how much students read and how well they perform on reading assessments, yet there is no mention in the standards of how much students should be reading. Even if you teach your students the most powerful reading skills, if your students are not reading a lot, the skills just won’t matter. To address this, the author has his high school students read one self-selected book a month in addition to all of the required reading they do for his class. To hold them accountable, he has them keep a chart of the books they are reading, and he confers with them when they finish each book. Reading a lot helps with fluency and comprehension. Clearly reading volume matters.

Concern 5: The reading standards may be developmentally inappropriate.

As was mentioned earlier, the CCSS were written with college and career readiness in mind, so the authors mapped the standards backward from where students should be when they finish high school. Unfortunately, this has raised some concerns about whether the standards are developmentally appropriate at the younger grades. For example, the CCSS asks students in the younger grades to provide a peer response as a type of revision technique. However, if one student tells another student that her cat should have been colored black, not orange, this can have damaging effects on creativity. This may not be the most developmentally appropriate task at this age. Instead, we should be focusing our efforts in the earliest grades on developing independence in our young writers. In another example for older third-grade students, one reading literacy standard calls for students to “distinguish shades of meaning among related words that describe states of mind or degrees of certainty.” This type of nuance and abstract thinking may not be appropriate for students at the third-grade level.

Concern 6: There is a misinterpretation regarding the amount of informational reading.

In the upper grades, the CCSS suggest that 30 percent of the reading students do should be literary while 70 percent should be informational. This is the case overall, not just for English classes. If English is one of five major subjects, then this represents 20% of a student’s schedule. If a student does only *literary* reading in English, then other classes (history, math, etc.) would need to take on the additional 10% of the literary reading students need to do. Mathematically, this just doesn’t add up! What this does mean is that we should *not* be cutting literary reading out of English classes. Reading literature exercises different muscles than reading nonfiction. Literature and poetry have always been key components of a strong English program and they should continue to be so.

Concern 7: CCSS is driving an overemphasis of the teaching of excerpts.

Because many of the tests given during the NCLB era included surface-level, multiple-choice questions, this was what was often emphasized in classes. Unfortunately, many of the sample performance tasks in Appendix B of the CCSS include *short* reading excerpts, so this may lead teachers to forgo longer texts and instead focus on primarily teaching reading excerpts. It requires a different type of cognitive skill and perseverance to read longer literary works and it would be a shame for teachers to move away from this type of reading.

Concern 8: The exemplars are problematic.

One last concern is that the exemplars included in Appendix B seem randomly selected without regard for what is being taught. Furthermore, English teachers don’t necessarily have the background to provide the context for the large number of political speeches included here. Finally, many of these exemplars are particularly difficult for students who are several years behind grade level.

Chapter 4 – What the Common Core Gets Right About the Teaching of *Writing*

In the same way Chapter 2 explores ways the Common Core gets reading right, this chapter examines six strengths of the Common Core writing standards. Like with reading, there are ten anchor standards in writing, however, due to space constraints, those standards are not included in this summary.

Strength 1: The CCSS recognize that reading and writing are interconnected.

In contrast to the NCLB era in which writing was essentially ignored, the CCSS integrate writing with reading. Rather than having a stand-alone prompt, students are now asked to read a passage – often a nonfiction passage – and respond in writing. For example, in one sample assessment from SBAC, students are asked to read a passage about space diamonds, and then explain in writing how space diamonds help scientists make diamonds on Earth. Students must perform both science-based reading *and* writing, suggesting that teachers in all subject areas must help students develop these skills.

Strength 2: The CCSS may drive more writing across the curriculum.

Much of what drives instruction is assessment. Because assessments of the CCSS require students to write in multiple content areas, this will encourage teachers outside of English class to include more writing in their classes.

Strength 3: The Common Core writing standards value process writing.

The tenth anchor writing standard asks students to “write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision)” suggesting that much more is expected of students than writing a single draft. It increases the cognitive challenge when students must work on a paper over an extended period of time. To help students develop the skills needed for this deeper work, teachers can provide a number of important experiences for students: model outlining and brainstorming, write alongside students, show them mentor and model texts as exemplary examples, and more.

Strength 4: The Common Core writing standards sharpen our students’ narrative writing skills.

Narrative writing is one of the three major writing genres prioritized in the Common Core. This is good news because the ability to tell a story is a skill students need even outside of the ELA classroom. Gallagher has many suggestions for how to prompt students to write longer narrative pieces. Below is one example in which Gallagher lists moments that have mattered to him, and asks students to brainstorm the equivalent in their lives as a jumping off point for writing narrative pieces (sample student responses are included in the column on the right):

Mr. Gallagher’s Moments That Mattered	Students’ Moments That Mattered
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The end of a friendship• Meeting my future wife at a wedding• Adopting our dog, Scout• Being told we were moving• Dropping out of school• Reading <i>Sophie’s Choice</i>• Seeing my sister being arrested	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• That kiss• Meeting my best friend• Moving in with my dad• Attending my first funeral• When my dog died• Staying home alone for the first time• Getting hired at Wendy’s

Strength 5: The Common Core writing standards will sharpen our students’ ability to inform and explain.

In addition to being one of the three primary types of writing valued in the Common Core, the ability to inform and explain is an important, real-world writing skill. Gallagher provides models of actual examples of news sources that aim to inform/explain and has his students emulate this type of writing. For example, *ESPN* magazine has a one-page column titled, “Six Things You Should Know About...” and covers topics such as: being a Pro Gamer, the upcoming Olympics, and the Westminster Kennel Club Show. After showing students examples from the magazine, and brainstorming possible topics (that *don’t* have to connect to sports), Gallagher models writing a piece in this format based on one of the brainstormed topics. He does similar activities using samples of the weekly “Who Made That” column in the *New York Times Magazine* (e.g., who made flip flops, who made the tricycle, and who made the contact lens).

Strength 6: The Common Core writing standards sharpen our students’ argumentative writing skills.

Out of the three main types of writing, the Common Core places the heaviest emphasis on *argumentative* writing. The goal is that by the end of high school, 40 percent of what students write should be argumentative. There are some problems with this (discussed in the next chapter), but it is a good thing to teach students to craft an effective argument.

To teach this skill effectively, it is important to distinguish between persuasion and argument. Persuasion is a skill we often see in advertisements (or political campaigns!) as a means of propaganda. It is not always grounded in facts and therefore not always truthful. In contrast, an *argument* must be grounded in logic and critical thinking. Rather than having students write “persuasive essays,” we should have them write both of the following types of argument essays:

- **Arguments of judgment** – This type of argument requires judgment on the part of the writer – Is the president doing a good job? Who is the greatest live baseball player? What makes a good teacher? However, this judgment must be supported by facts and evidence.
- **Arguments of policy** – In these arguments, the writer makes a case to change rules, procedures, or projects that affect people’s lives. Again, this type of argument must be grounded in evidence and facts.

Both of these types of arguments should include the following elements (originally from Stephen Toulman’s *The Use of Argument*):

1. *A claim*: what is the big idea being argued?
2. *Evidence* that supports the claim that is based in data
3. *A warrant*: this explains how the evidence supports the claim
4. *Backing* supporting the warrants
5. *Qualifications* and *rebuttals* or *counterarguments* that refute countering claims

One way to introduce students to the components of an argument is to provide a sample of a well-written argument (there is a short one on p. 88 of the book) and have students identify the claim, evidence, warrant, backing, and rebuttal.

There are three other key points to keep in mind in teaching argument. First, in order for students to write an argument piece, there must be genuine sides in the argument. For example, you might want students to write an argument about the theme in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. However, when students write, “It takes courage to stand up to racism” this isn’t a true argument. No one is arguing the other side. It’s actually a theme. The second thing to keep in mind is that true arguments don’t start with a claim, they start with the evidence. Students often go about writing arguments in the wrong order. They create an argument and then look for evidence to back their claim. Instead, provide students with lots of data – then have them come up with an argument after pouring through this data. Finally, although it is used in many classrooms, truly effective arguments do *not* take the form of the five-paragraph essay. If you look around, this is not how the best arguments are crafted. To highlight the absurdity of this, Gallagher takes a commercial for a Chevy truck and translates it into a typical five-paragraph essay (just the beginning is excerpted below):

A Chevy Commercial Re-Imagined as a Five-Paragraph Essay

There are lots of trucks to choose from, but the Chevy Silverado is the right truck for you. In this commercial, we will tell you three reasons why.

The first reason you should buy a Chevy Silverado is that it has a new, more fuel-efficient engine. This is important because you will now get better gas mileage, which will save you some of your hard-earned money.

The second reason you should buy a Chevy Silverado is that it has a quiet highway ride. After a hard day at work, you will want a peaceful ride home.... etc.

Chapter 5 – Where the Common Core *Writing* Standards Fall Short

While there is a lot that the Common Core gets *right* about writing, this chapter focuses on five shortcomings of these standards.

Shortcoming 1: Though narrative writing is one of the genres required by the CCSS, it remains undervalued.

One of the authors of the CCSS, in what has become an infamous speech, states that “people don’t really give a shit about what you feel or think.” He devalues the importance of narrative writing because in real life, it’s rare that someone would say, “Johnson, I need a market analysis by Friday but before that I need a compelling account of your childhood.” As a result, narrative writing becomes gradually more deemphasized in the Common Core as students move from kindergarten to 12th grade and calls for the “overwhelming focus of writing throughout high school to be on arguments and informative/explanatory pieces.” However, Gallagher counters this with an important point when he says that all the best doctors, lawyers, football coaches, and politicians have one thing in common – they can connect with other people through storytelling. In fact, he argues, telling a good story is a *life* skill, not just a school skill. Furthermore, studies have shown that reading and writing narrative texts develops other life skills like empathy and social skills (contrary to the stereotype of the bookish person who is isolated!)

Shortcoming 2: The big three writing discourses are too limiting.

While it is good that the Common Core focuses on narrative, informative/explanatory, and argumentative writing, the truth is that there are many other genres in the world. People write all the time for other purposes – to say thank you, to enquire about a property for sale, or to simply to clarify one’s own thoughts. Teachers may end up focusing exclusively on the “big three” and never introduce any other kind of writing to students.

Shortcoming 3: There is an artificial separation between writing discourses.

After the school shootings in Newtown, Connecticut in 2013, when President Obama was appealing to the American people to strengthen gun laws, he included a personal anecdote about a girl who lost her life in a school shooting. Could you characterize this as an argument (he was trying to persuade the nation) or as a narrative (he told stories in the speech)? Obama decided to weave in a story in order to strengthen his argument. In real life, we don’t artificially separate different forms of writing; we blend them as we see necessary. To see an example of a unit in which the author has students write arguments on the topic of immigration that includes anecdotes to strengthen their pieces, see pages 108 to 118 in the book. (The section includes a graphic organizer he uses and two sample essays in which narrative segments are woven into the arguments to make them more powerful.)

Shortcoming 4: The Common Core anchor writing standards endanger student choice.

Because the tests that assess the CCSS demand a specific type of writing – the “three big” areas – teachers may feel pressured to prescribe exactly what students should write. Gallagher makes a point to ensure that students have a lot of *choices* in their writing throughout the year. One way he does this is through weekly writing groups. Students choose their own topics and genres and share their writing with peers who provide responses and feedback. Gallagher does not grade this, but it gives students the opportunity to explore a wide range of genres and topics (see pp. 199-122 for details on how he has students conduct these groups.) Another way Gallagher ensures student choice in writing is to give students a list of all of the types of writing they will need to include in their end-of-year portfolio (a baseline essay, a reflective letter, their best on-demand piece, their best narrative, their best argument, their best explanatory piece, their best writing from another class, their best poem, a wild card of any piece they would like to include, etc.) This ensures that students write across many genres and write about a number of topics of their choosing.

Shortcoming 5: The CCSS exam may actually lower the writing bar.

In one Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium test prompt, students are asked to write an argument for or against cell phones in school. Below the prompt are examples of arguments the students may use (students share test answers on cell phones, cell phones interrupt class activities, students can contact parents in case of emergencies, etc.) However, this essay prompt actually hands students both the thesis and the arguments. They are not asked to do any type of deeper, more inquiry-based writing. If we teach students to do more in-depth writing, they will do fine on these tests. If we just teach to the tests, they will not learn how to craft the most powerful argumentative pieces.

Chapter 6 – Using *Models* to Improve Our Students’ Reading and Writing

*The Importance of Models in the Teaching of **Writing***

Providing students with *models* to emulate is an effective way to deepen their ability to read and write. To show just how important models are, Gallagher conducts the following activity. He asks his students to do their best in drawing a “Kakapo.” Of course most students ask, “What’s a Kakapo?” He responds that they should just guess and draw it. While many of the drawings are quite creative, most are completely off base. After this exercise, he shares a photo of a Kakapo – a flightless type of parrot with a green-yellow underbelly, a large head and bill, and an owl-like facial disk. When asked to redraw their pictures, the student work immediately improves. Clearly, the lesson is that having a model vastly improves your work.

Models in the Prewriting, Drafting, and Revising Stages of Writing

Beyond simply providing students with one model of a finished piece of writing, it is helpful to use models *throughout* the writing process. First, in the *prewriting* stage, it is useful to share numerous examples of texts so students can understand the decisions, techniques, and moves the authors have made. That is to say, students need to learn how to read like writers. Many students are used to identifying *what* the text is about, now we need to help them understand *how* the text has been constructed. These skills come directly from the Common Core reading standards, such as:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5 Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

Learning to recognize these techniques *before* they begin their own writing helps students write their own drafts. Then, when it is time to write a draft, it helps for students to view exemplars. For example, when Gallagher was asked to write a grant for the first time, he had never written one before and had no idea how to do this. He decided to find successful grant proposals and examine just what the writers had done that made the pieces effective so he could emulate these techniques. Students benefit from seeing final, polished pieces, but not just texts from professional writers. It helps when they see the *teacher’s* examples as well. Teachers can write for five to seven minutes in front of students while thinking out loud through the process. Understandably, this may make some teachers nervous, but the truth is that all writing requires struggle and if teachers struggle in front of students, this can be a valuable lesson.

At the *drafting* stage, sometimes it is more beneficial to model sentences and passages rather than entire pieces of writing. For example, Gallagher gives several mentor sentences and asks students to look for patterns. Below is an example:

“I want to go,” she said, “but I don’t have any money.”
“If you think I am happy,” John yelled, “you are wrong!”
“I bought tickets for the game,” he said, “for I am a huge fan.”

Then he asks students to be the ones to note patterns – e.g., how to write with middle attributions and where the quotation marks and punctuation belong. These types of mentor sentences often come from student writing – when the teacher notices students are having trouble with punctuation rules or frequently writing simple sentences (provide mentor sentences with dependent clauses!) Furthermore, providing chunks of texts and having students emulate these pieces is a good way for students to learn everything from how to cite research to how to develop voice in a text.

When it is time to *revise* a paper, one idea is to provide students with two drafts of a sample written piece and ask them to note which is better and why. There are several examples on pages 138, 141, 142, and 143. It is by reading a later draft of a paper that students recognize the importance of a clear claim, better use of evidence, an effective conclusion, and other craft moves.

*The Importance of Models in the Teaching of **Reading***

Modeling plays a key role in helping students learn what skilled readers do, such as:

1. Read for enjoyment – Because the Common Core all but ignores recreational reading, this must be our number one priority. However, teachers can’t model reading for enjoyment unless they have classroom libraries stocked with high interest books. So make sure to build extensive classroom libraries!

2. Read widely – As Gallagher writes so eloquently, “You have to know stuff to read stuff.” For example, a recent cover of *The New Yorker* showed Vladimir Putin, looking effeminate, in a skating outfit. If you didn’t know some important facts – that Putin is the president of Russia, that Russia passed some antigay laws, and that Russia hosted the winter Olympics, it would be impossible to “read” this magazine cover no matter how many reading strategies you tried. To build this type of background knowledge, teachers should find ways to help students read widely – share the blogs, news, and books you are reading; bring in current events; and have students share what they are reading with each other;

3. Know what readers do when they are confused – Experienced readers become aware when they are confused. Teachers can do a lot of read-aloud/think-alouds to model how to handle this confusion. Readers are not always able to overcome this confusion, so it helps to model living with ambiguity for a while until the text unfolds a bit more.

4. Track their thinking over the course of a book – Good readers are aware of how their thinking changes throughout the course of a book. Students can use sentence starters to note how their thinking changes:

- I started by thinking _____ and as I read I added/learned _____
- I used to think _____, but now I think _____

However, more than encouraging students to keep track of how their thinking changes for its own sake, we should help them do so with the goal of discovering one of the author’s big ideas. This is *different* from telling them what the author’s big ideas are and then having them look for proof of those ideas. Instead, it deepens their thinking if they have a purpose for annotating a text.

5. Be able to read between the lines – to infer -- Students will deepen their thinking about a text when they can identify what is *not* being said – that is, what is inferred. Teachers can help by providing a variety of texts that require students to infer – such as a photo, a painting, or a comic strip – and have them infer what is going on. Then once students are proficient with these texts, give them model passages from novels to further develop their inferring skills.

6. Be able to meaningfully discuss their reading – In too many classes, discussions are dominated by the teacher so it is the teacher who does the majority of the thinking. Whatever types of discussions teachers use in their classes (whole class, small group, Socratic Seminars, etc.) we need to make sure that it is the students who are generating the thinking. Rather than coming to class with a list of prepared questions that aim to uncover the teacher’s ideas about a text, teachers should ask more open-ended questions, such as “What’s worth talking about in this chapter?” and “What big ideas are starting to emerge?”

7. Think about their reading via writing -- As was mentioned earlier, when students *read* strong writing, this improves their writing. The reverse is also true – writing itself helps to deepen our comprehension when reading. For example, if students have read a chapter of *The Giver*, before asking them to discuss “What’s worth talking about in this chapter?” it is useful to have them explore their thinking on this topic in *writing* beforehand. After a five-minute quick-write, students can read each other’s papers in small groups to learn what others are thinking and deepen their own comprehension.

8. Develop agency as readers, thus reducing their dependence on the teacher -- In some ELA classes the teacher goes overboard in hyperanalyzing every aspect of a book. In others, students read independently with no assistance or oversight from the teacher at all. Students need a combination of these types of experiences.

9. Consider their reading in the context of their worlds -- More than simply identifying theme or foreshadowing, students need to learn to read in order to apply the book’s wisdom to their own world. Rather than limit student thinking to, “How does the author use personification?” help students explore larger questions such as, “What lessons does *The Great Gatsby* teach the modern reader?” If we want our students to make these kinds of connections between books and the modern world, as teachers we need to design our lessons to help them do so.

Chapter 7 – Sharpening Our Students’ Listening and Speaking Skills

A recent study showed that adults spent an average of 70 percent of their time engaged in communication (primarily listening and speaking). However, many students enter the world of adulthood inadequately prepared to be active listeners and effective speakers. Instead, schools are spending a lot more time on reading and writing. This is true partly because speaking and listening skills are not usually tested. Also, we seem to assume that students will naturally pick up speaking and listening skills in school by simply participating in whole- and small-group class discussions. However, to fully develop the types of communication skills employers say they value when hiring, students need much deeper and more purposeful instruction in these areas. The good news is that the CCSS include career readiness as a goal, and also contain speaking and listening standards. Below is one of the ten speaking and listening standards for grades 9 and 10:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, text, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

This chapter introduces over twenty exercises to help teachers sharpen their students’ speaking and listening skills. Below are some overviews of a few; see pages 163 to 182 for the rest.

How Should It Be Read – Show students a clip of a television newscast several times. Each time, ask them to focus on a different aspect of the reporter’s communication style. The first time, ask them to note the vocal “moves” – does the reporter pause for effect? Speed up? Raise or lower his or her voice? The second time, have students take note of the person’s mannerisms – how he or she uses the body such as through facial expressions, eye contact, or the hands. Then, after providing them with several other clips as practice, give students an excerpt from a newspaper and have them read the lines aloud, using voice and body moves for effect. Before doing this, make sure to introduce elements of effective speaking (below is an example from Erik Palmer’s book *Well Spoken*, that uses the acronym PVLEGS):

- P**oise – appear calm and confident and avoid distracting behaviors
- V**oice – speak every word clearly and use a “just right” volume
- L**ife – express passion and emotions in your voice
- E**ye Contact – connect visually with the audience, making sure to look at each audience member
- G**estures – use hand movements, move your body, and have an expressive face
- S**peed – talk with appropriate speed and use pauses for effect and emphasis

Poker Chip Discussion – This is a suggestion from another Erik Palmer book, *Teaching the Core Skills of Listening and Speaking*. Before having a discussion, distribute one to three poker chips per student. Each time students speak, they “spend” one of their poker chips. To encourage all students to participate, rather than the usual five or six, ask everyone to spend their chips by the end of the discussion.

Interrupted Book Report – This exercise holds students accountable for their independent reading. Choose a student randomly and have this student begin to tell the class about the book she is reading. Interrupt at some point by saying, “Stop.” Then have another student go and repeat this process. The fun comes from students not knowing how long they will need to speak about their books. Furthermore, this is a great way for other students to get ideas for which book they would like to read next.

Say Something – After assigning a large chunk of reading, have students sit in a circle and begin by simply instructing students to “Say something.” The first student starts the conversation and the next can add to what was said or move the conversation in a different direction. Go around the circle or allow students to jump in randomly. This can be done with the exercise below.

Trace the Conversation – This exercise helps students develop specific speaking skills and allows the teacher to assess those skills. Arrange students around the periphery of the room and have a sheet of paper in front of you indicating where students are sitting. In this example, the students are being assessed on speaking, evidence, and leadership and the symbols are in the center to remind the teacher what to write.

Jose	Susan	Etc.	Etc.															Manuel	Keith	
Beth																			Gil	
John	Speaking			Evidence						Leadership										Etc.
Etc.	C = clear and convincing U = unclear/trails off ↑ = too loud/disruptive ↓ = too quiet/hard to hear			A = sophisticated, original, convincing argument DR = uses direct textual reference DNQ = alludes to text but doesn’t quote it O = uses relevant outside information EC = evidence does not connect						BLD = builds on other arguments CQ = asks a clarifying question of a student Q = poses a question to the class S = offers a summary/synthesis L = links one student’s ideas to another’s										Etc.
										Mike	Julie	Etc.	Etc.							

By drawing a line between those who are speaking, and using symbols to indicate the quality of the speech, this sheet of paper provides a history of who spoke (and how frequently), who did not speak, and the quality of each person’s contribution to the discussion. To see an example of this document after a discussion, see page 174, and for a blank template, see Appendix B.

Teach Us Something – Provide each student with four minutes to teach the class something they didn’t already know. Encourage students to supplement their talk with visual aids.

Listen Closely – To further develop students’ listening skills, you can use some resources on the Internet. For example, have students listen to famous speeches that are a part of the “Top 100 Speeches” on the American Rhetoric website (americanrhetoric.com). Students can take notes on a wide variety of topics to help sharpen their active listening skills.

These are just a few suggested exercises, but what is important is that we continue to grow our students’ speaking and listening skills since these are so valued in the outside world, regardless of whether they appear on any end-of-year exam.

Chapter 8 – A Better Way

Currently, teachers feel extraordinary pressure to have their students perform well on annual state tests. The “effectiveness” of many teachers is often determined by the results on those tests. However, when teachers focus almost exclusively on preparing students for these standardized tests, three problems arise.

First, preparing students for a standardized *reading* test is inane because there is no such thing as a standardized reading test. While we attempt to measure the skill of reading, we end up measuring our students’ background knowledge. For example, if students read the sentence, “A-Rod hit into a 6-4-3 double play to end the game,” those with the domain-specific vocabulary to understand these terms will comprehend the sentence. Others will struggle. Because of situations like this, we end up using standardized reading tests without regard to whether our students possess the adequate background knowledge.

Second, standardized testing leads to a narrowing of the curriculum. The tests drive the curriculum. During the era of NCLB, 60% of school districts increased the instructional time for math and ELA while 44% reported they reduced the time in the schedule for other subjects such as social science, science, art, music, and physical education. We can already see how the CCSS are driving the curriculum with the increased use of nonfiction and the close reading of unconnected passages.

Third, standardized testing leads to the creation of standardized students. Preparing all of our students for one standardized test lowers the bar in many cases. It rarely leads to excellence. Instead, creativity and intellectual risk – both valued in a time of globalization – are shortchanged.

A Better Way

Gallagher is concerned about the level of stress educators are currently facing. In fact, there are some schools in which the teacher dropout rate is higher than the student dropout rate! In this final chapter of the book, Gallagher does some imagining about how things could be better. To begin, he suggests that instead of measuring a teacher’s effectiveness by test scores, we evaluate teachers on four simple criteria:

1. What percentage of your students can walk into a bookstore (or visit Goodreads.com) and know where to find books that interest them?
2. What percentage of your students write without being asked to do so by a teacher?
3. What percentage of your students can stand and speak effectively and confidently in front of a group of people?
4. What percentage of your students can actively listen to others – can carefully consider both what is said and what is not said?

Gallagher imagines the changes that would occur in classrooms if this new criteria were in place. Teachers would build extensive classroom libraries filled with high-interest books; provide students with more choice about their reading; include more book talks and book sharing; and abandon worksheets, test prep, and long units involving the overanalysis of books.

Along with this shift in evaluation criteria, Gallagher argues for a shift to more reading at the appropriate levels in order to prevent the killing of reading. Too many classes drag students through the dissection of *Hamlet* and *Beowulf*. Often, these books are too hard so students end up skimming and listening to the teacher who is the one really doing the hard work. On the flip side, there are also too many classrooms in which struggling readers never choose anything more difficult than *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. Gallagher proposes we find a spot somewhere between “too easy” and “too hard.”

To accomplish this, he believes there should be a shift in the types of reading students do to 20/80. That is, 20 percent of all reading should be whole-class books and 80 percent should be comprised of extended reading, book club reading, and independent reading. This provides students with more time for reading books at their level. In extended and book club reading, students read books in groups. With extended reading groups, once students finish one book – for example *1984* – they choose from a limited list of titles that focus on a similar topic or theme, in this case a list of dystopian novels. For more information about what these three different types of reading entail, along with an overview of what a curriculum using a 20/80 approach might look like, see Chapter 8.

There are many obstacles to the type of approach Gallagher proposes – from philosophical obstacles to monetary ones (filling all those classroom libraries with high-interest books!) However you approach the teaching of ELA, keep in mind that regardless of what is required by the CCSS, we should be motivated to move beyond the standards and provide the deepest and richest literacy instruction we can based on what is in the best interest of students.

THE MAIN IDEA's PD suggestions for *In the Best Interest of Students*

I. The Literacy CCSS - The Good and the Bad

[Have teachers discuss what works and what doesn't about the Common Core standards in reading and writing](#)

At this point, most teachers are familiar with the Common Core State Standards if they have been adopted in your state. Rather than insisting that teachers follow these standards blindly, it can actually improve teaching if teachers take a critical look at the CCSS. To prepare to facilitate, read Gallagher's ideas about the good and the bad of the CCSS in Chapter 1.

In smaller groups or one large group, ask the open-ended question, "From your experience so far, what works and what doesn't work about the literacy CCSS?" After discussing a number of ideas, have someone lead a brainstorm to collect the ideas. Be sure to weave in Gallagher's thoughtful arguments from Chapter 1.

What works about the CCSS?	What doesn't work about the CCSS?

II. The Common Core Standards in Reading

[1. Have teachers share successful ideas for implementing what *does* work about the Common Core Standards in reading](#)

It is important for teachers to recognize what *works* about the Common Core reading standards and to share successful ideas for implementing these strengths. The reading standards do a good job of going beyond a surface-level understanding and bring kids through three layers of understanding—what the text *says*, what the text *does*, and what the text *means*. Have teachers discuss some of Gallagher's suggestions for addressing these areas and then share their own successful ideas.

The CC reading standards ask:	Gallagher's activities	Teachers' ideas to address these three levels of comprehension
What does the text <i>say</i> ?	Summarization activities like: 17-Word Summaries, Write a Headline, and What is Left Out	
What does the text <i>do</i> ?	Instead of asking students questions about the <i>content</i> of a text, ask what makes the text effective as an argument or what techniques elevate or strengthen the writing	
What does the text <i>mean</i> ?	Help students practice their inferential skills by providing charts and claims and other data sets or infographics, and ask them to make inferences	

[2. Have teachers explore the drawbacks of the Common Core standards in reading](#)

a. Conduct either a **silent forced choices** or **continuum activity** depending on which would work better for your teachers in order to explore problems with the Common Core reading standards that may need to be addressed. As the facilitator, state the two opposing options in the chart below (for example, "Go to the wall with the door if you believe students should stay 'within the four corners of the text' when reading and *not* make connections to their own lives or the outside world. Go to the opposite wall with the windows if you believe students should make connections between what they are reading and the real world.") For the *forced choices* activity, teachers must choose one side and silently walk to one wall. If you choose the *continuum* activity, teachers don't need to completely agree with either side and can choose which one they are leaning toward and stand closer to that wall. Below are the different sides:

One end of the spectrum	The other end of the spectrum
1. Readers should be confined to stay "within the four corners of the text," that is, they should not connect what they are reading with their own experiences and the outside world.	1. Readers should NOT be confined to stay "within the four corners of the text." They SHOULD connect texts to the outside world.
2. Prereading activities are undervalued. We can't just drop a text into students' hands and expect them to absorb it "on its own terms."	2. Prereading activities are overused. More often, we need to hand students a text and expect them to encounter it "on its own terms."
3. Recreational reading is all but ignored in the CCSS and therefore should not be a regular part of the ELA classroom.	3. Although recreational reading is practically ignored in the CCSS, we should include it in ELA because students need to read a lot to improve.
4. The CCSS have here no reading targets for how much time students should be reading so we don't need to set any targets.	4. Although the CCSS do not state how much time students should be reading, we want students to read a lot so we should set targets.
5. The CC reading standards may be developmentally inappropriate.	5. The CC reading standards are developmentally appropriate.
6. English teachers should NOT be cutting down on literary reading to provide more time for nonfiction reading.	6. English teachers <u>should</u> be cutting down on literary reading to provide more time for nonfiction reading.
7. The CCSS overemphasize the teaching of excerpts. Teachers should replace the reading of longer texts/novels with more excerpts.	7. Although the CCSS emphasize the teaching of excerpts, English teachers should not completely replace longer texts and novels with shorter excerpts.

b. **Read and Discuss:** After doing the above activity in complete silence, have teachers go back and read Chapter 3 or the summary of Chapter 3 which outlines Gallagher's concerns about the Common Core standards in reading. Then choose a few of the concerns in the chart above to discuss with teachers. (As a bonus, use the Poker Chip approach, described below, to conduct this discussion!)

III. The Common Core Standards in *Writing*

[1. Have teachers share successful ideas for implementing what *does* work about the Common Core Standards in *writing*](#)

Gallagher points out the enormous advantage of the CCSS even mentioning writing when NCLB seemed to ignore it all together! However, it is an entire workshop (or rather, PD focus for the year!) to discuss writing across the curriculum or teaching argumentative writing, so although this is a wonderful focus for your PD, it is too large to include here right now.

[2. Have teachers explore the drawbacks of the Common Core standards in *writing*](#)

a. Conduct a *forced choices* or *continuum activity* using the directions on the previous page but using the following arguments/statements about the Common Core standards in *writing*:

One end of the spectrum	The other end of the spectrum
1. Though narrative writing is one of the genres required by the CCSS, it remains undervalued. We need to teach both the reading and writing of narratives to help students develop life skills such as connecting to people through telling stories, empathy, and social skills.	1. Though narrative writing is one of the genres required by the CCSS, because it is not as valued as explanatory and argumentative writing, we should teach less of it.
2. The CCSS emphasize the big three writing discourses -- narrative, informative/explanatory, and argumentative writing – so teachers should focus on these and not introduce other forms of writing.	2. The big three writing discourses in the CCSS are too limiting. Teachers should introduce a variety of other types of writing.
3. Teachers should teach the big three writing discourses -- narrative, informative, and argumentative writing – independently of each other.	3. In real life there is no artificial separation between writing discourses so teachers should combine them when it makes writing stronger.
4. Teachers must dictate the writing curriculum because there is already so much in the CCSS.	4. Teachers must provide students with choice over topics and genres in their writing.
5. Teachers must prepare students for the CCSS exams by providing them with the same types of prompts they will see on these exams.	5. Teachers must go beyond what is asked for in the CCSS exams to have students come up with their own original theses and arguments.

b. [Read and Discuss](#): After doing the above activity in complete silence, have teachers go back and read Chapter 5 or the summary of Chapter 5 which outlines Gallagher’s concerns about the Common Core standards in *writing*. Then choose a few of the concerns in the chart above to discuss with teachers. (As a bonus, use the Poker Chip approach, described below, to conduct this discussion!)

IV. Weaving Literacy Common Core Standards into Regular ELA Meetings

[Have teachers try Gallagher’s strategies then test them out in their classes](#)

Gallagher’s books always contain a wealth of compelling literacy strategies that he has already tried and found to be successful in his own classroom. Charge grade-level teams or the English department with choosing a few of his strategies to commit to trying in between meetings, and then reporting back at the next meeting. When teachers meet again, have them give each other suggestions for fine-tuning the strategies, and then choose the next set of exercises to implement before the following meeting.

To learn about Gallagher’s suggested literacy strategies, teachers can read Gallagher’s book or the summary of the book. If it is too much for them to digest an entire book, have them read Chapter 6 (Using Models to Improve Reading and Writing) and Chapter 7 (Listening and Speaking Skills) for ideas.

You or another designated leader could conduct the first ELA meeting with the following suggestions from Gallagher. The best way to introduce these strategies is to have teachers *actually do them the way the students would*.

From Chapter 6

[Use photos, paintings, or comics to develop the ability to infer](#) – Bring in an image – such as one of National Geographic’s most memorable photos of the year (there’s a great one on p. 150 of the book) and have teachers look at the photo and practice writing inferences for what might have happened.

[Use models to revise papers](#) – Either have teachers bring in two drafts of a student paper OR use the examples of *before* and *after* drafts in the book and make copies for teachers. (There are several examples you can use on pages 138, 141, 142, and 143.) Ask teachers to determine which draft is better and why in order to practice using models to improve revision skills.

From Chapter 7

[Poker Chip Discussion](#) – To practice getting everyone involved in a discussion, distribute three poker chips to each teacher and ask them to spend all of their chips in the following discussion. Then either discuss how effective they felt the two exercises from Chapter 6 above were OR discuss the importance of teaching speaking and listening skills regardless of whether these skills are tested.

[Interrupted Book Report](#) – Ask which teachers would feel comfortable discussing the book they are currently reading with the other teachers. Then model the use of the Interrupted Book Report by calling on those teachers to discuss their books until you interrupt them and move to another teacher to talk about her book.

V. Beyond the Common Core – A Deeper Vision of Literacy from the Leadership

[With the leadership team, come up with a more powerful vision for literacy instruction at your school](#)

In schools, leaders also feel tremendous pressure to ensure students succeed on annual exams. They, too, may inadvertently lose sight of important literacy skills. Although you may not be able to change how teacher evaluation is conducted, take a moment like Gallagher did to imagine (together with your leadership team, if possible) what you would like to see in classes and what you would emphasize in feedback conversations with teachers *if* teacher effectiveness were measured by Gallagher's four simple criteria:

1. What percentage of your students can walk into a bookstore (or visit Goodreads.com) and know where to find books that interest them?
2. What percentage of your students write without being asked to do so by a teacher?
3. What percentage of your students can stand and speak effectively and confidently in front of a group of people?
4. What percentage of your students can actively listen to others – can carefully consider both what is said and what is not said?

Think about and discuss what you would expect to see in classrooms when it comes to:

- student choice of books, writing topics, writing genres
- the availability of interesting books
- how speaking and listening are woven into class activities
- assessment practices for reading, writing, speaking, and listening