

Criticisms of the Common Core State Standards For English Language Arts

Criticism 1: Critics of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts argue that the CCSS do not contain enough specificity for literary content (i.e., specific authors, literary periods, or literary traditions) and are primarily skill based.

- Critics claim the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) offer little guidance in literary works or authors to be read other than very general expectations (i.e., myths, mysteries, and graphic novels at 5th grade; traditional stories or religious stories at 8th grade; a work of literature outside of the United States in 9th-10th grade; a specific reference to Shakespeare in 11th-12th grade) (Bauerlein and Stotsky, 2012).
- Critics argue that the focus on skill development rather than on standards that include literary content “make[s] it unlikely that American students will study a meaningful range of culturally and historically significant literary works in high school and learn something about their own literary tradition before graduation” (Bauerlein and Stotsky, 2012). Instead, they contend that the CCSS lay out expectations for developing what the critics refer to as “generic reading skills, not academic standards” such as summarizing works, offering evidence/quotes from the texts to support an analysis or interpretation, analyzing how an author’s word choice or structural decisions impact the meaning of the work, and comparing and contrasting two pieces of literature (Bauerlein and Stotsky, 2012).
- Critics argue that without clear examples of the types of literature to be read as noted above, the standards will fail to raise academic expectations for student learning (Bauerlein and Stotsky, 2012).
- Critics claim that the CCSS do not address the literary and rhetorical (i.e., strategies or techniques writers use to convey an idea or advance an argument) content of English language arts, only the accompanying linguistic skills (e.g., phonics, syntax/grammar, and mechanics, conventions, etc.) (Applebee, 2013).

Criticism 2: Critics of the Common Core State Standards argue that the writing standards are inappropriate at many grade levels, lack rigor, and do not move students toward college- and career-readiness in a meaningful way.

- Critics argue that the CCSS ELA standards stress writing more than reading at every grade level which they imply directly contradicts their stance that the foundation for good writing is good reading. “Students need to spend far more time in and outside of school reading in order to improve reading and writing in every subject” (Stotsky, 2016).

- Critics argue that standards for writing in CCSS lack a framework for thinking about the nature of high quality student performance in writing. They contend that there is an emphasis on the formulaic aspects of writing, rather than the development of writing strategies to address a wide variety of specific audiences and purposes. In other words, students are not pushed to study the types of decisions writers make or how writers think; nor are they asked to explore the strategies writers use to compose written pieces. Instead, critics contend that within the CCSS students are asked to develop surface skills, such as using transitions, formatting essays (e.g., using headings, incorporating visuals), organizing with basic structures (e.g., comparison-contrast, cause/effect), and using facts and examples to support their topic (Applebee, 2013).
- Critics claim that the CCSS writing standards are inappropriate at many grade levels. Expectations about “opinion” writing in the primary grade are artificial and even misleading since “opinion” and “argument” writing are distinctly different. The expectation that students in grades K-3 are to apply the skill of referencing a text to support an argument – a skill best suited for high school students – runs contrary to primary reading goals (i.e., comprehension and enjoyment of reading) at the elementary years (Stotsky, 2016).

Criticism 3: Critics argue that the division of reading between informational and literary texts in the CCSS has a negative impact on college and career-readiness for graduates and that the incorporation of more informational texts in English courses negatively impacts teachers’ instruction.

- Critics argue that the suggested 50/50 division between literature and informational texts in the CCSS reduces the presence of literary fiction, poetry, and drama in the high school English Language Arts curriculum. This belief is challenged by others in the field who argue that the reference to a 50/50 division is meant to be fulfilled throughout the school day through integration of literacy in all subjects not addressed in the English classroom alone. Stotsky and others respond to this thinking by arguing that the way in which the CCSS in English Language Arts standards are divided into literature and informational texts places the responsibility solely on the English classroom educators.
- Critics argue that English teachers should be spending most of their instructional time studying complex literature (e.g., poetry, drama, novels, literary nonfiction) rather than trying to incorporate informational texts (for which critics say English teachers have little training) into their curriculum. They are firm in their stance that the CCSS ELA standards expect English teachers to spend at least half of their reading instructional time at every grade level on informational texts. Critics further state that the study of challenging, complex, culturally relevant literature does, indeed, prepare students for the reading demands in college and career (Stotsky, 2012).
- Critics contend that the literary nonfiction and informational texts such as seminal U.S. documents and U.S. Supreme Court decisions included in the CCSS ELA standards are more relevant and appropriately taught when placed in academic content – that of social studies,

civics, and history classes – and not artificially incorporated in English courses which would, as a result, remove the texts from their cultural and historical context (Stotsky, 2012 and Applebee, 2013).

Criticism 4: *Critics argue that the lack of coherence, structure, and content in the CCSS makes it challenging to develop curriculum to address the standards.*

- Critics believe that the reading and writing standards within the CCSS are not coordinated through the grades. This criticism implies there is an issue of alignment as expectations transition from grade to grade throughout the full standards document (Stotsky, 2013).
- Critics contend that the CCSS do not provide a clear enough indication of the rigor or intellectual challenge students are expected to meet other than a vague expectation that they will read texts of an appropriate complexity for their grade level. Their argument is that without this clarity, educators are unable to develop a coherent curriculum (Stotsky, 2012).
- Critics argue that the CCSS create an artificially linear progression of skill development making curriculum development a challenge. Critics point to the placement of some writing conventions at particular grade levels as arbitrary. As a guide to curriculum and instruction, any perceived artificial breakdown of specific skills at each grade level is problematic (Applebee, 2013).
- Critics claim that because CCSS does not require the reading of specific literary works, the responsibility for ensuring British, American, and World literary traditions in the curriculum falls upon K-12 curriculum directors, English departments, and publishers of literature anthologies. As a result, the literary and cultural foundation will be driven by the literary tastes, agenda, availability, and interests of local districts and schools. Furthermore, with the absence of specific literature, curriculum will be built on the skills identified in the standards and not on a common base of literature and cultural experiences (Stotsky, 2012).
- Critics claim that CCSS standards for English language arts, their organization, and their division, in effect, make it unlikely that American students will study a meaningful range of culturally and historically significant literary works in high school and learn something about their own literary tradition before graduation (Stotsky, 2012).

Criticism 5: *Critics challenge the idea that the CCSS are internationally benchmarked and question the credibility and qualifications of the two main authors of the CCSS ELA standards (Coleman and Pimentel).*

- Critics claim that the standards are not internationally benchmarked and argue that supporters of the CCSS have not provided relevant evidence that the high school standards in ELA and mathematics are internationally benchmarked and research based (Stotsky, 2013).

- Critics argue that the two primary writers of the CCSS lack the credibility, education background, and experience to draft the Standards. Their stance is that David Coleman and Susan Pimentel have never taught English or reading at any grade level from K-12. Neither had produced literary scholarship or research in education. They go on to add that until 2010, Coleman and Pimentel were virtually unknown to the entire field of English and reading educators and higher education faculty in rhetoric, speech, composition, and literary study. (Stotsky, 2016).

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