

WHAT KIDS CHOOSE...THEY USE!



By Carole Marsh,
The Queen of Common Core
(Uh, no, that would be YOU!*)
*or King, guys!

Teachers, as students are bombarded with all the new Common Core terms, here are some tips and ideas to help your students become enthusiastic, active participants in the Common Core process. How about a little rigor and rowdiness!

READING FOR INFORMATION: At first this had me flummoxed! So that would be also called non-fiction? Allow students to help you build a well-rounded, serious, and fun Common Core Classroom Library. Include very illustrative informational texts, books, posters, and all types of data to read, so that finding and reading it seems doable and a lot of fun. A “scavenger hunt” that matches the material you have can keep them seeking and sharing and enjoying the variety. See Gallopade’s American Milestone books!

VOCABULARY: While vocabulary’s nothing new, we can hope that Common Core ratchets up the depth and breadth of wonderful new words to learn in an enriching manner. (Well, I didn’t read that in the standards, but YOU can make it happen!) I think this is a great time to brainstorm with your students (What They Choose, They Use) on how they would like to learn new words and definitions. The old ways do get sort of boring, and we do not want Common Core to rhyme with “bore,” do we? For a great idea go to www.gallopade.com and see our “Wow Words” book, where kids can collect unique words and then use them. That’s just one idea; I’m counting on your students to suggest things like, “Let’s each have a pet word for the week and carry it around with us like it really is a pet,” and other creative ideas.

PARTS OF SPEECH: I always tell kids to learn the parts of speech so they can learn when to break the rules; they like that! Again, ask students their favorite things, then adapt that for learning POS. For example, if they like to do the Hokey Pokey (I do!), then change the lyrics to “Put your NOUN leg in, put your NOUN leg out...” etc., then later, “Put VERB your arm in, put VERB your arm out, put VERB your arm in and shake VERB it all about.” Silly, yeah; learning, yeah. See my Writing Tree Tips and Tricks for other ideas. (Honestly, this was never meant as a sales pitch, but this is what I know!)

HIGHER ORDER THINKING SKILLS: There’s no doubt your kids need H.O.T. brains to survive in this world. As a single mom with 2 elementary age kids once upon a time, I saw my kids learn H.O.T.S. easily and logically when they worked in my small publishing business. There’s just something about “real world” tasks that turn kids on. They clearly know the difference between a “pretend” problem and a “real” problem to solve. Let them take over the school, so to speak, and apply many of the things they learn to school solutions. “Our school has no money for iPads for each of you; think of what we can do to change that.” Motivation matters; if it’s real, it motivates brains to engage. See our new Common Core Concept Classroom Signs; one is a big bubblegum pink brain to remind kids to THINK!

WRITING PROMPTS/WRITING: Now you’re talkin’! Remember, I hire kids, and recent college grads. Very few can write. To keep this short just order my whole Writing Tree series, but seriously, my top three tips (which may go against the entire grain of what you’re allowed to teach but are common sense, so hopefully that’s Common Core) are:

- Every child is a natural-born writer; when they TELL you a story, they are writing, just verbally; help them understand that!
- You can only write in your own voice; let them—that is real writing!
- Always help them know who their audience is. Let’s say it’s you, their teacher: do you want them to bore you? If not, what do you want them to do: write so funny you pee your pants laughing? Well, at least tell them you want to laugh VERY HARD at what they write. Once I made a teacher laugh so hard she fell off her desk into the trash can! I got an A, she kept on reading, and really, it was three pages of hiccoughs, burps, and old ladies spitting snuff into a spittoon. So do let your kids be creative!

PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS: Well, do we really have to use that term with the kids? It just sounds boring! Let your students come up with something snazzier than PSA...something more detective-sounding, more Indiana Jones I’m-searching-for-treasure sounding... hmm, Searching the Vaults? I sincerely believe that students will buy into your drama of original resource documents if you can “paint a picture” of, say, the Founding Fathers, all gathered around the Declaration of Independence, all hot and sweaty, tired and hungry, nervous, disagreeing, and full of powerful emotions over creating a new nation—IMAGINE! I, personally, have a secret attic space where my real writing takes place because it is the home of all my favorite original resources and books and such, and that is where my passion and inspiration are born! Give your students a chance to create a space, a passion, an understanding of how powerful the original words, the original voices, the original video (as the case may be) is...just one step from being there; they WILL get it! PSA... POWERFUL STUFF...and AWESOME! (If you don’t believe it, go to the D-Day Museum in New Orleans or the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, and see the real words and hear the real voices and watch the real people tell their tales!) Common Core does NOT have to be text-based or one-dimensional!



COMPARE AND CONTRAST: (Yawn?) Not necessarily! Get girls to think how they stew over WHAT TO WEAR TO SCHOOL TODAY??!! That's comparing and contrasting! Boys might ponder mightily WHICH PLAY TO MAKE IN THE BIG GAME??!! That's comparing and contrasting. Vanilla or chocolate or triple butter pecan...oh, the choices! Every day, in the real world of work, there is compare and contrast: Is this better? More important? More worthy? More beautiful? Kids love when it really matters! In history, is this more beneficial? Is this war really worth it? Do we GO? Or do we STOP? Bring on the drama and kids will not only care, but have glorious opinions...and then, often, wonder why adults did what they did. Now, that's education! See our gallopade.com Common Core tools. We really do care, like you do, and for good reason.

CAUSE AND EFFECT: (Yawn, again?) Ohhhh, not really! Sooo...if you have been starving for three years in Jamestown, do you eat your dead mates? Well, ask the Donner Party! What is the reason? What is the result? I accept that the answer is not always as crystal clear as we might think! My point is...I don't see anything in the new Common Core standards that says you can't dig deep, ponder aplenty, and wonder with wonder: If you had been in their place, what would you have done? Why or why not?

TIMELINES: Lordy, timelines are so boring! Gallopade has done a gob of them and they are useful tools, but sometimes I think we miss the point. Time is an elusive thing. Here today, gone tomorrow? Instant gratification? The Long Haul? The world of real-life time is full of conundrums! Take any timeline that the world of educational products sells, but then delve in deep; does it matter in the long run? Will it matter in a hundred years? What would YOU think if you were the dead one and your loved ones were starving? Oh, yeah, some principal is gonna take me down, but kids love the real world, nitty-gritty, and exploring all aspects of an idea or subject. Please let them!



GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS: Well, you know a lot more about these than I do, although we do include GOs in our new Common Core books. I like the idea of visual organizers, but as you may have figured out by now, I like them best the more real-world and real-use they are. If What Kids Choose, They Use, then help them build some visceral, physical tools to build GOs with: colored paper in various shapes and sizes and string or yarn to connect them with. A giant roll of white paper like you wrap packages in and a big yarn of Martha Stewart-esque brown twine lets kids experiment with shapes, sizes, and how to communicate meaning and purpose. Plus, they can get carried away with a giant shoebox GO, or other 3-dimensional effort. Or why not a wall-size GO all can see...or 12-inch square write on/wipe off boards they can arrange and rearrange and change the comments on. To me, GOs in real life have one thing in common: they are constantly changing and improving as you see what works and what is unclear, or must be adapted or tweaked to make better, more accurate, or indicate a Short Cut, perhaps. Hmm, I think I'd better go and write a GO book. I'm feeling a BOOK COMING ON; imagine that!

GRAPHICAL DATA ANALYSIS: I'm still reading up on Common Core, as I'm sure you are. But GDA using graphs, charts, pies, and other ordinary business graphics is fairly common. I love the ones you might see in USA Today, or a great National Geographic Magazine issue. Flat GDAs are fine; but 3-D versions, when logical, can communicate a lot more effectively. A GDA of the Day could include any current event, whether it's the economy, the tides, the temperature, or averaging the number of "stars" a movie gets. Let kids have a go at all of it and see which works best for them. I'd imagine...creating their own. OH, NO – ANOTHER BOOK IS COMING ON!

MAP ACTIVITIES: If Common Core is indeed Common Sense, nothing is more useful than good map skills. When my husband and I began to travel to do research 30 years ago, I was a navigational klutz! It took awhile, but now I am a backroads whiz! And that is with real maps (complex maps), not a GPS. Like many things, you can learn best when you learn the old-fashioned way; then the flashy, three-dimensional, newfangled things make real sense. A good map skill to learn (whether a map of space, Georgia, the weather forecast, or whatever), is to assess not just what is shown, but what is missing. You can "map" anything—the past, the present, or the future. Allow students to make many choices. I'd love for them to come help me map the May River at low tide, yes, but also at high tide...when you can't see all those underwater obstacles, shifting sandbars, and moving fish. Another book? I am such a believer that if you go back over the list above and students "do them" for their own home, backyard, or neighborhood, where they get a visceral feel for how accurately they are doing things, they will get the real-world benefit of so many Common Core skills.

My favorite Top Ten Common Core = Common Sense Skills?:

- How to make eye contact with an adult.
- How to have good posture.
- How to do a great handshake.
- How to say please and thank you (and not "No problem.")
- How to organize your own stuff; it is your stuff.
- How to be responsible for your own deadlines; they are your deadlines.
- How to make a daily priority list and do the least thrilling thing first and get it out of the way.
- How to be respectful, positive, and generous.
- How to listen and take notes.
- How to make a good telephone call, write a good short note, use a dictionary, and not make excuses. (Oops, that's beginning to sound like more than 10 skills...)

