ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (ELA) COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND INSTRUCTIONAL SHIFTS

High school equivalency tests and Common Core State Standards (CCSS) emphasize reading comprehension, critical thinking, and analytic and expository writing. Visit our High School Equivalency Exams page to access more resources addressing new high school equivalency exams and CCSS.

YouthBuild staff should consider engaging students in the following activities when developing students' reading and writing skills:

Close reading of nonfiction informational texts. "What is Close Reading?" discusses strategies for helping students practice close reading and comprehension. While using nonfiction texts, encourage students to read and reread small sections of texts (1-3 paragraphs) while summarizing main ideas, paraphrasing, learning academic vocabulary words and responding to text-dependent questions. Read these texts to students out loud so students have the opportunity to hear an experienced reader.

Engaging with complex texts: This Text Complexity Assessment Rubric provides useful criteria with which to select complex texts. In addition, this Informational Text Types worksheet outlines the informational text types that you can incorporate into your classrooms and program.

Answering text-dependent questions that require careful reading of non-fiction texts. This Text-Dependent Examples worksheet provides clear examples of specific types of text-dependent questions to assist you as you develop your own text-dependent questions. The Text-Dependent Question Guide provides useful tips and strategies to create strong text-dependent questions while supporting students' efforts to engage with these questions.

Writing analytic and expository statements, drawing upon evidence from relevant texts. These graphic organizers offer templates that educators can use across subject areas to engage students in complex academic tasks such as organizing a 5-paragraph essay, taking notes, and analyzing literature.

YouthBuild USA Education Department
Emphasizing academic vocabulary within texts. Fun Strategies to Learn Academic Vocabulary and Word Work Activities are simple guides, developed by the Youth Development Institute, that suggest effective and engaging ways that students can expand their academic vocabulary. These activities include drawing pictures to demonstrate the meanings of words, creating cartoons to express the conceptual meanings of these words, and developing lexical arrays.

Developing Common Core-aligned lesson plans. Tri-State Quality Review Rubric for Lessons & Units, ELA Literacy offers useful guidance to develop quality lesson plans aligned with Common Core standards.

Six Shifts in ELA/Literacy

- Balancing Informational and Literary Text
- Building Knowledge in the Disciplines
- Staircase of Complexity
- Text-Based Answers
- Writing From Sources
- Academic Vocabulary

There are six key instructional shifts that YouthBuild educators and staff should keep in mind when addressing Common Core State Standards, TASC (Testing Assessing Secondary Completion) tests, and GED (General Education Development) tests. These shifts include having students read sections of complex informational texts, answer text-dependent questions, and expand their academic vocabulary.

In this 15 minute ELA Webinar, Resource YouthBuild instructor Rebecca Dezan describes in detail how she has adopted these instructional shifts into her literacy instruction.
COMMON CORE-ALIGNED ACTIVITIES AND LESSONS

YouthBuild USA collaborates with YouthBuild classroom teachers to document their classroom practices, activities, and lesson plans so that we can share their great work with other teachers through the Education Resource Hub, a growing library of relevant instructional resources that address new high school equivalency exams and Common Core State Standards.

**Connecting with our Natural History**, Carly Moline, Wisconsin Fresh Start
Students will take a trip to a local park or natural area and learn about the area’s natural and human history, which could include how some geological formations came to be, as well as the role humans played in the landscape today. Students will then use this knowledge to write about what they have learned, using the 11-sentence paragraph or essay format.

**Song of the Week: A Classroom Activity**, Nikki Sorola, Mile High YouthBuild
During this weekly-warm up, students share lyrics from songs that they have found meaningful and utilize literary and vocabulary skills in an applicable and enjoyable way.

**Literature Circles**, Mike Deragon, YouthBuild Providence
This lesson encourages students to strengthen their reading and analytical skills through the use of group reading.

**Summarizing Summaries**, Willa Deitch, YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School
In this activity, the instructor scaffolds students’ summary writing abilities by introducing the concept of summarizing through a series of warm-up activities such as a KWL (Know, Want to Know, and Learn) chart.

**Walk and Talk Jigsaw**, Emily Bautista, YouthBuild Charter School of California
In this lesson, students learn about the concept of “point of view” while reading about historical or literary figures, answering specific questions, and then acting out
the point of view of these figures.

**Question Formulation Technique**, Catherine Pautsch, YouthBuild Just-a-Start
This activity provides students with an interactive method to generate student interest around a topic. Students will have five to ten minutes to generate as many questions as they can, prioritizing three of those questions.

**Word Work Wednesday**, Willa Deitch, YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School
In this activity, students will interact directly with a text by creating hand gestures that describe select vocabulary words.

**Egg Vocabulary**, Miki Aberle, YouthBuild McLean County
This hands-on vocabulary building activity allows students to approach vocabulary within a text in a way that is accessible and fun.

**Cooperative Learning**, Jill Pate, Prevention Plus YouthBuild
As students work on a project throughout the duration of the course, this activity will ask them to assume/choose a series of certain social/work roles in order to improve emotional intelligence and navigational skills, and ultimately enhance their learning experience.

**Approaching Qualitative Research through Interviews**, Celine Massuger, R.U.T.H. Youthbuild – Canoga Park
This lesson helps students carefully read informational text so that they can develop effective interviewing skills.
YOUTHBUILD EDUCATORS' FAVORITE ELA RESOURCES

YouthBuild Teachers have also shared their favorite ELA websites and resources. These websites offer a wealth of free lesson plans, classroom ideas, and games to develop students' reading and writing skills.

Informational Text Sources

- **Newsela** is a free and innovative way to build reading comprehension with nonfiction that's always relevant: daily news.
- **The New York Times' Learning Network** offers useful, relevant articles to engage students in close reading of nonfiction texts.
- **Upfront Magazine** is an affordable monthly magazine from the New York Times that provides updated information on timely events. A great way to find rich, relevant, complex nonfiction texts.
- Common Core State Standards offers a free list of recommended texts that you can use in your classroom. Try to select texts that draw on themes that resonate with students.
- **Teaching Tolerance**, from the Southern Poverty Law Center, has resources that engage students in reading informational, nonfiction texts that touch on social justice themes.

Reading and Writing Skill Development

- **Annotation Acronyms** helps students remember important writing and reading habits and skills.
- **Book Lists for YouthBuild Students** provides book recommendations for YouthBuild students. The books are highly relevant to our young people and grapple with topics such as racial discrimination and poverty and are organized by reading level.
- **Pearson Reading Maturity Metric** helps identify the reading level of students and improve their literacy skills by allowing educators to find readings that are challenging without being overwhelming.
The Oatmeal’s “Semicolons” helps teachers re-conceptualize how to teach grammar in a visually appealing and simplified way.

Games and Interactive Resources

- Brainpop Games provides free, fun learning games that support students’ learning in all subject areas.
- QUIZLET provides free vocabulary development resources. Use these tools with students on a daily basis to improve their vocabulary skills and increase their chances of success on the GED/high school exit exam.
- Wordle is a tool for generating “word clouds” from a given text. The clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source text. A great resource for helping students identify major themes within texts.

Instructional Strategies

- Balanced Rotational Instructional Model offers a balanced, literacy-based, interactive approach to teaching and learning across the curriculum.
- Core Learning: Assessing What Matters Most offers resources to help educators build instruction and assessment around CCSS and authentic performance tasks.
- National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) offers resources to help teachers teach promising research-based instructional strategies, including free lesson plans, units, and course curricula.
- Strategies for Promoting Literacy offers comprehensive and concise classroom tips and strategies to improve students’ reading and writing skills. Math, social studies, and science teachers can also use these strategies while teaching course content.
- Teaching College English is a blog written by a college professor that offers useful strategies and supports for English instructors at all grade levels. Willa Deitch, 2013-14 Teacher Fellow, recommends that YouthBuild teachers check out the “Character Analysis” essay.
- VTS offers visual thinking strategies that support students’ development of Common Core skills.

Lesson Plan Ideas

- EngageNY provides ready-to-use CCSS curricula, assessments, videos of classroom instruction, and other professional development opportunities.
- Goodwill Community Foundation provides free tutorials and lessons that support students’ reading and writing, Microsoft Office, consumer finance, career planning, and workplace skills.
- Learn Zillion is an excellent database of ready-made lesson plans built around common core skills (and GED competencies).

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- **National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL)** offers resources to help teachers teach promising research-based instructional strategies, including free lesson plans, units, and course curricula.
- **Understanding What Reading is All About** offers a wealth of free and engaging lesson plans for engaging students at a 6th grade reading level and below.