

*Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show.*

SECOND  
EDITION

## **WITH RIGOR FOR ALL STUDY GUIDE**

*Good Night, Good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow,  
that I shall say good night till it be morrow.*

*Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing  
animosity or registering wrongs.*

*Prejudices, it is well known, are most difficult to eradicate  
from the heart whose soil has never been loosened or fertilized  
by education: they grow there, firm as weeds among stones.*

## Questions for Discussion

1. Carol Jago argues that if students find the books in your curriculum difficult to read, the solution is not to seek simpler texts but to help students become better readers. What do you think? What are the biggest obstacles you face? How can teachers work together to overcome these obstacles?
2. What concerns you the most about implementing the Common Core Standards for reading literature in your classroom? What resources do you need to help your students meet these standards? Think of ways to articulate these needs to the powers that be.
3. In Chapter 5, Carol Jago talks about making literature study “blissfully productive,” capitalizing on the way video games appeal to students. How does the way in which lessons typically are structured work against blissful productivity? Can you think of ways to bring more pleasure into the study of literature?
4. Chapter 6 explores Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s research on working in a state of flow: “Contrary to what we usually believe, the best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times—although such experiences can also be enjoyable, if we have worked hard to attain them. The best moments usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile.” (1990, 3) Can you think of a time when you experienced this state of flow? Think of a time you observed students so absorbed in their reading and writing that the task itself seemed to disappear. What was it about the lesson that produced this effect?
5. One often hears the mantra that “assessment drives instruction.” How can you apply the ideas from Chapter 7 on testing that teaches to use classroom assessment to drive instruction in a productive rather than abusive direction?
6. Social networks and the online environment are a natural part of our students’ lives. How can we integrate technology into the teaching of literature in ways that enhance rather than distract from deep reading and deep thinking?
7. Think about your own experiences as a reader in middle and high school. What were the formative moments in your own literacy development, moments that possibly led to your becoming an English teacher? How might these experiences inform your instruction?

## A Conversation with Carol Jago

**Q** You write with such passion about teaching literature, Carol. What's the source of this passion?

*I take inspiration from Sin'ichi Suzuki. Most of us know the Suzuki Method as a way to teach very young children to play the violin or piano, but Suzuki was actually an educational philosopher. He wrote, "I want to make good citizens. If a child hears fine music from the day of his birth and learns to play it himself, he develops sensitivity, discipline and endurance. He gets a beautiful heart." (Suzuki 1986) That's what I want for my students, too.*

**Q** But how does this apply to teaching literature?

*The Suzuki method employs immersion, encouragement, small steps, imitating examples, internalizing principles, contributing novel ideas to help students develop mastery over their instrument. The kind of instruction I've described in *With Rigor* employs these same ideas to the teaching of literature. When each step is small, students develop confidence. Though the goal—for example, reading *Macbeth*—may be hugely challenging, students feel they are making progress along the way.*

**Q** What do you think gets in the way of students making progress?

*One issue is students' feelings of helplessness in the face of a big, fat book. Another is that students haven't heard fine literature from the day of their birth. Suzuki was onto something very important when he recognized the critical importance of immersion in music—or poetry, or stories—in the development of future musicians and readers.*

*I also think that it is really hard to sell books you don't love to students. If I were in charge of the world, I'd give teachers a great deal more professional discretion in which books they teach. Right now, our choices are often limited by whatever books we can find in the school bookroom. What if public access to online texts made the universe of literature available at no charge to every teacher and student? Call me a dreamer, but if the Vatican can put its library online, why can't the Library of Congress?*

**Q** But isn't that a dangerous idea, giving every teacher total control over his or her curriculum?

*I don't envision decisions about which texts to teach being made in a vacuum. English departments should put their heads together, read together in book clubs that include parents and students, talk*

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about the pros and cons of particular titles, and make collaborative decisions. The Common Core offers examples of the kinds of texts students at each grade level should be reading. These can be used as touchstones for selecting books that everyone is excited about.

**Q** I've got to ask. When do you find time to read?

*There's always time to do the things we love. Where do kids find twenty hours a week to play video games? Where do dog owners find time for walking their beloved pets? I'm never without a book—and haven't been since I was about nine years old. It's a habit—one I try to instill in my students. Lately I see everyone on a bus or train staring into a phone rather than into a book. Do people really have so many friends with so many important things to say? Or is it for distraction? I'd rather be distracted by art, by literature.*

## Your Turn: Guidelines for Curriculum Development

These guidelines for applying the concepts presented in *With Rigor for All* to your curriculum will be most valuable if used collaboratively in professional learning communities or within an English department study group.

1. Select a piece of literature you would like to include in your curriculum. Reread the Common Core's explanation of the three-part model for measuring text complexity in Appendix A.

### Three-Part Model for Measuring Text Complexity

- (1) **Qualitative dimensions of text complexity.**
- (2) **Quantitative dimensions of text complexity.**
- (3) **Reader and task considerations.**

[www.corestandards.org/the-standards](http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards)

2. Consider the book you have chosen in light of the Common Core explanations regarding text complexity and the text exemplars for the grade level where you plan to teach the book. Develop a rationale for why you believe this piece of literature is a good choice for students.
3. Identify the textual challenges that this piece of literature is likely to pose for students. Using the index of *With Rigor for All* to help you find what you are looking for, find instructional suggestions for helping students overcome these obstacles. Common challenges include: vocabulary, syntax, background knowledge, figurative language, story structures, and length.

4. Adapt the ideas presented in *With Rigor for All* to the piece of literature for which you are developing curriculum. Remember to consider students with special needs who might need differentiated instruction.
5. Create a flexible pacing guide for lessons and homework reading assignments. Design both formative and summative assessments for the unit.
6. Acquire a class set of copies of the new book and have one teacher in your study group pilot teaching the text using the lessons the group has drafted.
7. Develop an instrument the teacher and students involved in the pilot program can use to offer feedback on the book and lessons. Survey questions you might use or adapt include:
  - What do you think you will remember one year from now from your reading of this book? Why?
  - Identify portions of aspects of the book that you had difficulty comprehending. What did you do when you found that you didn't understand what you had read?
  - Which of the assignments did you find most valuable, most fun? What did they help you learn?
  - Were there any assignments you felt were busywork or pointless? Please explain.
  - How did you feel about the way your learning was assessed? Was it too easy, too hard, or just right?
  - Would you recommend this book for next year's class? Why or why not?
8. After the pilot program is complete, examine and discuss feedback from the teacher and students who participated. Look for specific suggestions from the survey to help you determine what revisions need to be made to the sample lesson plans.
9. Read and discuss student performances on the summative assessment. Do they demonstrate the kind of learning you had hoped to see? Do they demonstrate progress toward the Common Core Standards in reading literature?
10. Revise, revise, revise! Email Carol Jago at [cjago@caroljago.com](mailto:cjago@caroljago.com) if you have questions or concerns.
11. Implement (or jettison) the proposed addition to your literature curriculum.

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