

# COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CLAIRE DAVIS

**BY GRACE NALL**

WHEN IT COMES to changes in educational publishing, the countdown to 2014 continues and it's intensifying nationwide. So, what's the buzz?

As of August 2012, published reports indicate that forty-six of the fifty states (and the District of Columbia) have adopted the Common Core Standards, the new educational standards sweeping the nation. The goal is for students to aim for "college and career readiness."

Although fiction is still in, nonfiction is gaining momentum. The educational budget crisis has affected how and what to teach in a limited amount of time. Teachers are scrambling to find nonfiction material for students that focus on "supporting their thinking by citing evidence from the text or book."

On a sales and marketing end, it could mean a peaked interest in picture books, especially high-concept books, historical fiction, biographies, and works representing diverse cultures. Authors need to make sure their stories are still fact-based. This could mean a boost in website searches as to what primary sources authors used to write their books.

If you attended the 41st Annual Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators Summer Conference, then you were “in the nonfiction know” with keynote speaker and editor Deborah Halverson, editor-in-chief (Grosset & Dunlap) Bonnie Bader, literary agent (Writers House) Ken Wright, author Melissa Stewart, and author and illustrator Melissa Sweet, to name a few.

Authors should take note that the Common Core Standards website ([www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)) has publishers’ criteria for the following:

- » Grades K–2 ([http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Publishers\\_Criteria\\_for\\_K-2.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Publishers_Criteria_for_K-2.pdf))
- » Grades 3–12 ([www.corestandards.org/assets/Publishers\\_Criteria\\_for\\_3-12.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Publishers_Criteria_for_3-12.pdf))

### Why the push for nonfiction?

Student assessments will change nationwide from multiple-choice questions to an essay or citing from the text computerized-type testing. The push toward nonfiction reading requires students to apply higher-level thinking. According to Lucy Calkins, Mary Ehrenworth, and Christopher Lehman, authors of *Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Achievement* (2012), the Common Core Standards recommends following the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) distribution:

- » 50 percent literary texts and 50 percent informational texts at fourth grade
- » 45 percent literary texts and 55 percent informational texts at eighth grade
- » 30 percent literary texts and 70 percent informational texts at twelfth grade

This could create a domino effect from the educational book publishers to the classroom.

### Tips for authors

For grade-level appropriate topics, look at social studies and science textbooks by educational publishers (e.g., McGraw Hill, Pearson, and Houghton Mifflin, Harcourt). Refer to the table of contents and index.

- » Science: Physical Science, Life Science, and Earth Science.
- » Social Studies: 3rd Grade (community), 4th Grade (state), 5th Grade (United States), and 6th Grade (World History).
- » Look at the primary sources used in the textbook.
- » Know the difference between primary and secondary sources.

**Primary sources** are firsthand accounts or direct knowledge of the event. It includes “the records and/or artifacts made by people who saw or took part during an event.”

Examples: journals, letters, photographs, speeches, etc.

**Secondary sources** are not direct links to an event, but an interpretation of a primary source.

Example: school textbooks.

**Author websites:** Provide links or helpful information on the historical research you did to write your book. You may also want to include the English/Language Arts “Connections to Common Core Standards.”

**Author visits:** Provide a primary source as a “gold nugget” you used to write your story.

Example: *Mr. Lincoln’s Whiskers* (written and illustrated by Karen Winnick, Boyds Mills Press, 1996)

A letter by eleven-year-old Grace Bedell to former US President Abraham Lincoln.

Link to the Library of Congress website:

[memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mal&fileName=mal1/040/0404000/malpage.db&recNum=0](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mal&fileName=mal1/040/0404000/malpage.db&recNum=0)

Transcription of Grace Bedell’s letter, October 18, 1860:

[www.loc.gov/teachers/newsevents/events/lincoln/pdf/transcription.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/newsevents/events/lincoln/pdf/transcription.pdf)

Link to author and illustrator Karen Winnick:

[www.karenwinnick.com/lincoln\\_reviews.html](http://www.karenwinnick.com/lincoln_reviews.html)

*Grace Nall, a SCBWI member and National Board-certified teacher, coauthored an article with Dr. Priscilla Porter (senior author of Reflections, Harcourt Publishers, a K-6 social studies program). A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words: Using Primary Sources to Enhance Content Knowledge was published in the Social Studies Annual Review 2012: Journal of the California Council for the Social Studies. She was among a select group of teachers nationwide to attend the Library of Congress’s Summer Teacher Institute 2012 in Washington, DC.*