Scaffolding High School Students' Reading of Complex Texts Using Linked Text Sets

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As teachers and students face the challenges of complex texts required by the Common Core State Standards, Linked Text Sets offer a practical and engaging approach to support student learning.

J anessa is a typical 10th grader. After school she hangs out with friends at a coffee shop near her high school. She arrives home at 4:30 and then engages in "screen time" by logging into Instagram and Facebook, texting her friends, and listening to music. After dinner she starts her homework and works on it until just before midnight while simultaneously using her iPhone to listen to music and interact with friends via phone and Snapchat photo messages. At midnight she shifts back into "screen time" mode, postponing her homework assignment to read two chapters of To Kill a Mockingbird (Lee, 1960). Instead of reading the chapters, she searches online to find summaries and notes on the book.

Janessa earns mostly Bs, with some As and Cs on her report card. When asked about her feelings toward reading, she admits, "I don't really have time for reading books during the school year. I mostly read online and some magazines." When asked about the books they read in her English class, Janessa sighs and replies, "They are pretty dull and boring. I usually go to Sparknotes.com to get the summaries or analysis information. I mean, why read the book if the information is online?"

The Challenges for Adolescent Literacy

Nationwide, adolescents are reading less for enjoyment and engaging significantly more in the use of digital literacies. Over 78% of teens have cell phones, and 48% of those own smartphones that offer texting and Internet access (Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013). Concurrently, teens describe being disinterested in academics because they view assignments as irrelevant (Bintz, 1997; Wold, Elish-Piper, & Schultz, 2009). Given these challenges, Gallagher (2009) argued that educators need to find ways to build relevancy for the texts that students read and the tasks they complete in school. To connect with teens, English language arts teachers
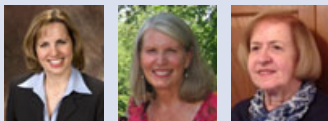
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must consider the literacies of current culture in ways that attract adolescents to participate in the learning process (Jacobs, 2012; Lewis, 2011/2012). Mobile learning approaches that embrace portable technologies hold promise, but teachers and students must find realistic and manageable ways to link traditional and new literacies in and out of the classroom (Gee, 2013; Traxler, 2009). Furthermore, the range of reading levels and English language proficiency in a high school classroom can be expansive, necessitating approaches such as tiered texts, wherein multiple versions of a text written at different levels can be used to teach students with different abilities and backgrounds (Moss, Lapp, & O'Shea, 2011). Lee's (2003) cultural modeling framework has also been used to provide culturally diverse students with subject-specific instruction through leveraging their everyday knowledge and using familiar, accessible, culturally relevant texts.

Although these approaches offer promise, expectations for teens and their teachers have changed dramatically since the release of the Common Core State Standards (National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices [NGA Center] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010). The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) focus on college- and career-readiness anchor standards in the areas of reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. The CCSS have brought about important instructional shifts that affect how high school students are expected to read, learn about, and respond to literature and informational texts. These shifts include (a) balancing informational and literary text, (b) reading increasingly complex texts, (c) responding to text-based questions, and (d) writing from sources (New York State Education Department, 2012). One of the most demanding shifts is the emphasis on reading complex texts independently. The CCSS define complex texts using a three-part model that addresses quantitative and qualitative dimensions and reader/task considerations. Collectively, these shifts provide challenges as well as opportunities to make instruction in the English language arts (ELA) more relevant, meaningful, rigorous, and compelling for today's adolescents.

Mobile learning approaches that embrace portable technologies hold promise.

Acknowledging Out-of-School Literacies As literacy educators, we are heartened by the increasing expectations for adolescent literacy advocated by the CCSS, but in light of this transition, we find Janessa's remarks jarring because her approach to reading represents that of many teens (Clark, 2012). Adolescents like Janessa often see school-based reading as an efferent process focused on tasks to be completed rather than as important opportunities to learn with texts. Many students do not view reading and discussing literature as the transformative, meaningful process that researchers envision (e.g., Purves, Rogers, & Soter, 1990; Rosenblatt, 1978).

Janessa and teens like her reveal that their out-of-school literacies are distant from the school-based literacies taught in many high schools. Reeves (2004) argued that the "secondary school reading curriculum is saturated with literature written by adults for adults, and leaves little space for adolescents' interests that are often connected to the psychological work of becoming an adult" (p. 68). As one frustrated high school student we encountered wondered, "Why are they giving old books to young people?" Although the CCSS provide opportunities to increase the rigor in teaching and learning in the English language arts, they also raise concerns, such as how to harness the promise of polymedia in literacy education (Madianou & Miller, 2013). Polymedia addresses the link between media and interpersonal relationships as users manage those relationships, taking advantage of the unique affordances of different forms of technology for different purposes. Within the framework of polymedia, users can engage in and contribute to literate communities.

Jacobs (2012) described the tension between providing relevant, current instruction that embraces polymedia and standards such as Common Core as being caught between "the proverbial rock and hard place" (p. 98); Burns (2012) further cautions that standards are insufficient to improve education. But the purpose of this article is not to debate the value or appropriateness of the CCSS. Because these standards are a reality for U.S. teachers in 45 states, our intention is to offer Linked Texts Sets (LTS) as a way to bridge students' out-of-school literacies to in-school learning, including the use of polymedia to address the types of complex texts required by the CCSS (Wold, Elish-Piper, & Schultz, 2009, 2010). LTS engage teens in reading meaningful texts that connect to their own lives. Further, we propose that LTS provide a manageable approach to address the

Common Core's lofty call for all high school graduates to be college and career ready in the English language arts by comprehending and critiquing, valuing evidence, using technology and digital media strategically and capably, and understanding other cultures and perspectives (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010, p. 7).

Linked Text Sets

Linked Text Sets include a range of print and media, from music lyrics and movie clips to poetry, short stories, picture books, informational texts, adolescent literature, and canonical texts. By using LTS, we can build on students' cultures and interests while also providing scaffolded opportunities to examine various forms of text. With the Common Core's call that high school students "read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently" (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010, p. 25), the strategic scaffolding and motivational considerations addressed by LTS provide an effective approach to help teens meet this standard.

Linked text sets address the Common Core's expectation that students read multiple texts on similar topics or themes to develop their skills related to key ideas and details (RL9-10.1, 2, and 3), craft and structure (RL9-10.4 and 5), and integration of knowledge and ideas (RL9-10.7 and 9). Alsup (2013) argued that in ELA classrooms the emphasis should be placed on reading literary fiction and fictional narratives because these promote not only "critical thinking, close reading, and analytical writing but also…personal enjoyment, cognitive engagement, and increased ability to empathize or relate to others" (p. 182). Furthermore, by engaging with a wide variety of texts, including literature, students are able to build their "knowledge base and joy in reading" (NGA Center & CCSS0, 2012, p. 4). By providing high school students with scaffolded opportunities to read and respond to a variety of complex texts, and inviting them to inquire into meaningful questions and issues addressed by these texts, we can create compelling classroom environments and instruction that challenge and support students to become engaged, effective readers.

Engaging With All Kinds of Texts. Linked text sets provide a three-pronged process for developing student interest and providing appropriate scaffolding to read a variety of texts at the high school level. With this approach, we first engage students in texts that link to their lived experiences and provide scaffolding toward more complex texts, including pieces from the canon, such as the exemplar texts listed in Appendix B of the CCSS (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2012; Guthrie, 2004; NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010). Then we encourage students to explore texts for connections to their lives and to think critically about the significance of the ideas presented in the texts. Finally, we provide opportunities for students to expand on what they know and are learning by synthesizing themes across multiple texts.

Coupling the LTS with an Essential Question. Instead of focusing solely on the literary canon, we organize texts around essential questions that provoke discussions of ideas relevant to adolescents (McTighe, Seif, & Wiggins, 2004; Showalter, 1981). To move students to care deeply about an essential question, we consider adolescent problems and resolutions, similar to protagonists' experiences in the texts they read. An essential question is intentionally provocative because we expect students to think deeply as they read texts with an inquiry stance to identify with characters, understand challenging issues, and make discoveries about the human condition and themselves.

Implementing the LTS

We present a framework for implementation of LTS that can be adapted to various contexts, depending on the demands of the curriculum, the teacher's goals, and the students' needs. We offer options for engaging students by introducing an essential question and pieces of a Linked Text Set to scaffold students' reading of complex texts. Then we suggest specific methods for exploring themes that "tap into the universality of human experience" (Gibbons 2009, p. 13) and discuss how to guide students to read texts closely to understand key ideas and details as well as craft and structure. Finally, we offer expansion projects that can help students develop their critical thinking as they integrate knowledge and ideas by analyzing how two or more texts address similar themes (see Figure 1 for complete LTS).

Engagement Phase

To illustrate the LTS approach in action, we will share how Mr. Bernie Johnson, a 10th-grade English teacher, incorporates LTS in his teaching. His classroom is next to Janessa's English class, but he teaches in a way that differs markedly from her teacher's method. Both teachers work in the same

FIGURE 1 Linked Text Set on "Why Is Growing Up So Difficult?"

Phase	Text Title and Type	Locating the Text
Engagement	"Unfair" (song)	Warren, D. (2008). Unfair [Recorded by J. Kelley].On *Special Company* [CD]. Auckland, Australia: DNK Records. Lyrics: www.elyrics.net/read/j/josh-kelley-lyrics/unfair-lyrics.html Song performance: www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbNMGGJrgnE
	"Epiphany" (short story)	Wittlinger, E. (2004). Epiphany. In M. Singer (Ed.), *Face relations: 11 stories about seeing beyond color* (pp. 89–108). New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
	"Angus" (short story)	Crutcher, C. (1989). A brief moment in the life of Angus Bethune. In *Athletic Shorts* (pp. 5–29). New York: NY: HarperCollins.
Exploration	*To Kill a Mockingbird* (core text; novel)	Lee, H. (1960). *To kill a mockingbird*. New York, NY: Grand Central.
	"Jim Crow Laws 1930's Intro" (YouTube video)	t bro. (2010). www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IfLzgaJOMU
	"Jim Crow and the Detested Number Ten" (book chapter)	Hoose, P.M. (2009). *Claudette Colvin: Twice toward justice*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.
	To Kill a Mockingbird (movie clip of opening scene)	www.tcm.com/mediaroom/video/332457/To-Kill-A-Mockingbird-Movie-Clip-Opening-Maycomb.html
	"Incident" (poem)	Cullen, C. (1925). www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/171327
	"Lynching" (informational article)	www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAlynching.htm
Expansion	Adolescent novels	Crutcher, C. (1993). *Staying fat for Sarah Byrnes*. New York, NY: Greenwillow. Griffin, J.H. (1961) *Black like me*. Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin. Jiang, J.L. (1997). *Red scarf girl: A memoir of the cultural revolution.* New York, NY: HarperCollins. Konigsberg, B. (2008). *Out of the pocket*. New York, NY: Penguin. Martinez, V. (1996). *Parrot in the oven: Mi vida.* New York, NY: Harper Collins.
	"Angus"	Movie trailer: www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Q4Xmh6XKto
	"I Have a Dream" (speech)	Text: www.archives.gov/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf Video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=smEqnnklfYs
	Picture books	Bridges, R. (1999). *Through my eyes*. New York, NY: Scholastic. Capaldi, G. (2008). *A boy named Beckoning: The true story of Dr. Carlos Montezuma, Native American hero* . New York, NY: Carolrhoda Books. Morrison, T. (2004). *Remember the journey to school integration*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Co. Sturm, J., & Tomaso, R. (2007). *Satchel Paige: Striking out Jim Crow*. New York, NY: Jump at the Sun/Hyperion Books for Children. Sullivan, G. (2007). *Helen Keller: Her life in pictures*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

high school that enrolls approximately 2,300 students, 42% of whom qualify for free/reduced price lunches. Seventy-two percent of the students are from minority backgrounds, and 11% are classified as English learners. During his six years of teaching, Mr. Johnson has come to understand that many of his students perceive the curriculum as boring and irrelevant. He believes students learn best when he can help them forge connections from the curriculum and current technologies to their own lives; he further believes that by actively engaging his students in a variety of activities, he is able to facilitate their learning.

Mr. Johnson is required to teach *To Kill a Mockingbird* to his sophomores, but he wants to prepare students to understand fully the insights and human lessons in the novel. Because he wants to engage even the most reluctant learners, he selects an essential question that will immediately engage all students: "Why is growing up so difficult?" Mr. Johnson has selected the theme of prejudice as a primary focus in the LTS. Within that theme, he plans to have students explore unfairness, abuse, bullying, characters who stand up for justice, and peer pressure.

Mr. Johnson invites his students to begin thinking about this essential question and their experiences with unfairness by sharing the music of Josh Kelley (Figure 2 provides options for song lyrics). Mr. Johnson asks the class to listen to the lyrics of "Unfair" and discuss with a partner the unfairness of love and other teen experiences they have had. He poses such questions as, "What's unfair in your life?" and "What's unfair in our school?" and "What's unfair in our community?" Throughout this activity, students share some experiences and ideas freely, such as when Jaime voices this complaint: "Those popular girls think they are all that. They just try to make the rest of us feel like we don't matter, like we don't deserve to fit in." Brandon adds his opinion: "The jocks do that, too. It's like they think we are worthless because we don't play football." Other contributions are more personal, such as when Kayleigh confides in her classmates about a relationship gone wrong: "I thought we were going out, and then I saw these pictures all over Facebook. I didn't know he was such a player." Or when Hugo grumbled under his breath: "Don't even make me go there about how cruel people can be to someone short or fat or who has bad skin–how cruel and unfair!"

FIGURE 2 Song Lyric Options for Addressing Unfairness

Audio versions of songs available at www.itunes.com. Lyrics available at www.lyrics.com.

Loser Like Me by Glee
Boss of Me by They Might Be Giants
Mean by Taylor Swift
Runaway Love by Ludacris
Cradle Song by Rob Thomas

After students discuss their ideas with partners, Mr. Johnson asks them to share their responses and make notes on the dry-erase board. He then asks two students to categorize ideas by using keywords. It is clear from the chart that emerges on the board that their peers have experienced similar unfair treatment, including abuse, bullying, peer pressure, monetary limitations, and prejudice.

At the end of this 15-minute discussion, Mr. Johnson informs the students that they have just identified various manifestations of prejudice, such as unfairness, bullying, cliques, social rejection, and abuse. He introduces the essential question, "Why is growing up so difficult?" to set the stage for understanding the relationships of the two teens in the short story "Epiphany" (see Figure 1). The main characters are life-long friends who must now deal with social outcasts, peer pressure, and prejudice. Mr. Johnson asks if students have ever had an epiphany. Based on their answers, he leads them to an understanding of the meaning of the word and directs them to watch for examples in the text. As he reads the story aloud, he stops periodically for students to "pair/share" to discuss such questions as "How would you feel?" and "What would you do?" At the end of the story, he reminds students of their purpose in reading it—to look for reasons why growing up is so difficult. He then asks them to do a quick-write that addresses this question from the perspective of the story's two main characters, DeMaris and Epiphany. Several minutes later, he invites students to share their quick-writes in small groups, and finally he explains that they will be expanding their study of the essential question and prejudice to include other texts.

As the end of the class period approaches, Mr. Johnson assigns homework: The students are to write a tweet to post on Twitter (www.twitter.com) about some aspect of the issues they have discussed so far (unfairness, prejudice, bullying, peer pressure, and so on). He reminds them to select high-impact words to represent their ideas in 140 characters or fewer.

Most of the students will post their tweets from their smartphones, iPads, or home computers, but those who lack Internet access at home will use school computers in the library or classroom. Mr. Johnson's students are familiar with Twitter because at the beginning of the year he set up a Twitter account for this class, and the students "follow" it to have access to the tweets posted by him and others in the class. He also uses a weekly hashtag (#) to organize the tweets that he and his students post about texts they are reading, the essential question they are investigating, and assignments. This week he is using #growingup to represent the essential question under examination.

The next morning, Mr. Johnson displays the live Twitter feed using a data projector so that students can discuss common threads and dialogue about provocative ideas. For example, a tweet that Lauren posted produces a great deal of discussion. Her post read: "Growing up is hard and sad as we see how things really are. Living thru cliques, bullying, & prejudice makes us strong & brave & adult." Students grapple with Lauren's assertion that growing up is not only hard but also sad, as well as her interpretation that living through cliques, bullying, and prejudice makes one an adult. During the discussion, Mr. Johnson invites students to post tweets as they are talking so that their ideas are documented to reflect their current thinking about the essential question.

Mr. Johnson has moved through the engagement phase of the LTS process in less than two class periods, but he has built students' personal connections with the essential question, engaged students with the theme and underlying ideas they will be studying, and incorporated social media to support students' learning and engagement. He and his class are now ready to move to the heart of the LTS process—the exploration phase.

Exploration Phase

During the exploration phase, Mr. Johnson has his students read the young adult (YA) novel *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (1993) to examine the essential question through the lens of adolescents. He

Become aware of excellent YA novels that may encourage them to read for pleasure.

selected this novel so that students can consider the difficulties of growing up and become aware of excellent YA novels that may encourage them to read for pleasure. Another reason he chose this novel is because it is "complex but not too complex" for his students to read independently. The Lexile level is 920, which is well within the comfort zone of most of the sophomores in the class, but the book is complex in its use of literary language that will be new and challenging to students, references to historical events and cultural figures, layers of meaning, and vivid imagery.

Mr. Johnson distributes copies of the novel and assigns students to book clubs of 4–5 members each. He explains that students will spend only one week reading and discussing the novel, so they need to devise a plan to read several chapters each day. His students have participated in book clubs before, and he repeats the four basic rules: (1) Prepare for each book club meeting; (2) Share your ideas and be open to the ideas of others, even if you don't agree; (3) Support your opinions with specific evidence from the text; (4) Stay on task.

Each day the book clubs meet, Mr. Johnson builds students' understanding of and empathy with the characters' difficulties through discussion topics, such as Eric's conflicts, Sarah's desperation, the father's hatred, friends' methods of coping, and actions of other adults. To start some book club discussions, Mr. Johnson writes quotes on the board to evoke students' responses, including the following example:

> Eric says, "In truth, the only reason I don't allow people up and close and personal with my emotional self is that I hate to be embarrassed. I can't afford it. I spent *years* being embarrassed because I was fat and clumsy and afraid. I wanted to be tough like Sarah Byrnes, to stand straight and tall, oblivious to my gut eclipsing my belt buckle, and say, 'up yours'! But I was paralyzed, so I developed this pretty credible comedy act—I'm the I-Don't-Care-Kid—which I assume is what most other kids do. But I'm not stupid: I believe there is important shit to deal with" (Crutcher, 1993, p. 77).

He also queries, What does it take to be "champions of the underdog" (p. 90)? After the book club discussions, he has students work collaboratively to create responses using various forms of media, such as posting on Twitter, recording 6-second looping videos on

Vine (www.vine-videos.com), or posting to the class blog or discussion board on the secure social networking site Edmodo (www.edmodo.com). After completing the book, Mr. Johnson asks them to synthesize their ideas about dealing with difficulties growing up by writing a short essay (350–500 words) using the "This I Believe" format (www.thisibelieve.org), which they have read about and discussed in conjunction with other units of study.

Expansion Phase

Mr. Johnson uses the expansion stage to provide closure to the novel study of *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* while setting the context for *To Kill a Mockingbird*. To do this, he asks students to think about peer pressure, bullying, and abuse while he reads the introduction to "Angus Bethune" (Crutcher, 1989) and asks for students' impressions. He then shows a trailer of the movie from YouTube and asks, "Why might growing up be so difficult for Angus?" Then he assigns the short story for homework and suggests that students look for examples of people who help Angus handle his challenges.

The next day he asks students to respond to the question "Have you ever known someone who stood up against injustice and unfairness?" using Poll Everywhere (www.polleverywhere.com). Students answer using their cell phones or a classroom computer, and their responses are displayed in real time via a data projector. The poll results reveal the status of the class and prompt a discussion, both verbal and by anonymous responses posted by students on Poll Everywhere, about ways to change social environments by addressing injustice and unfairness.

Restarting the Cycle Framework: Enter, Explore, Expand

To support the reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Mr. Johnson restarts the cycle and raises the idea of social barriers in both novels as well as other texts the class has read. He leads students to make connections to the isolation in Angus's situation and the social barriers present at the "Blacks only" lunch table in "Epiphany." He questions students about social barriers by asking, "Who created it?" and "What was its purpose?" He then leads students to consider a different form of segregation: institutional segregation established by the Jim Crow laws. By showing a short YouTube video, *Jim Crow Laws 1930's Intro* (t bro, 2010), and by reading aloud to students the first

chapter of *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* (Hoose, 2009), titled "Jim Crow and the Detested Number Ten," he provides information that leads to a class discussion of the unfairness supported by these laws. Then he asks students to think about what the setting of the novel—Maycomb, Alabama—might have been like in the 1930s. To aid students in visualizing the town, he shows a video clip from the film version of the novel.

After laying this groundwork, Mr. Johnson guides the reading of the first three pages of the novel to introduce Scout, and he asks students to identify why she has written her story. Next he uses a chart to explain the family's genealogy. When Mr. Johnson assigns the first seven chapters to be read in two days, he sets purposes for reading: to identify the inhabitants of Maycomb, where they live, and how people treat one another. The students post their responses to Edmodo. Mr. Johnson posts several prompts to encourage students to read and respond to their classmates' postings, and an intense online discussion ensues about prejudice and the possibility of heroes in this small town.

All the chapters in the novel offer important insights, and Mr. Johnson scaffolds instruction to meet his students' needs, keeping in mind Gallagher's (2009) caution about "overteaching." He targets Chapters 15 and 17 through 21 for more extended instruction because of the opportunities they present for students to think critically about prejudice and the acts of cruelty and unfairness it engenders. Chapter 15 tells of the attempted lynching of Tom Robinson. Mr. Johnson shares a copy of the poem "Incident" by Countee Cullen (1925) and guides students to read it closely, considering word choice, images created, and how prejudice is expressed. After reading the poem, he asks students to discuss if they have ever been hurt by words.

Mr. Johnson wants his students to understand lynching in the novel from a historical perspective. To scaffold instruction, he distributes copies of articles with varied reading levels to meet the needs of his students, including "Lynching" from Spartacus Educational Primary Sources and the story of Emmett Till from *Upfront* magazine. He asks each group to write and post a synopsis of their article on Edmodo. To extend the conversations beyond class time so that students can focus on the unfairness that each article reveals, Mr. Johnson requires that they read and respond to at least two postings on Edmodo. As a transition to the reading of Chapter 15, Mr. Johnson asks

his students to suggest which citizens of Maycomb might participate in a lynch mob, providing specific evidence from the text. After discussing their predictions, students read the chapter with the purpose of comparing the mob in the novel to the information in their articles.

The trial of Tom Robinson is the focus of Chapters 17 through 21. Mr. Johnson views the trial as an opportunity for students to think critically and use evidence from the text to draw conclusions. Each student assumes the role of a juror and uses a two-column format to take notes that record the arguments and testimony, looking for examples of lack of logic, abusive behavior, acts of heroism, and assumptions based on prejudice. Students are to tell how they would have voted on the jury by posting to a blog on Edmodo, using their notes and specific evidence from the novel to justify their votes.

The final chapters of the novel offer more opportunities for students to consider why growing up can be so difficult. Mr. Johnson is heartened by the active engagement of his students and their passionate responses to many of the discussions and writing activities, especially when they comment openly that "these are some of the best and only books I've actually read in school."

Now that the students have engaged with a wide variety of texts and examined the relevant themes, they are ready to analyze how these various texts have addressed similar themes and the essential question, "Why is growing up so difficult?" Mr. Johnson has planned the activities to help students understand prejudice and unfairness in life, synthesize ideas across multiple texts, and expand on the essential question. He presents the options to the class, and students self-select to work either in small groups or alone, based on their chosen activities. The options that Mr. Johnson provides are listed below; shorter activities may be substituted based on time and availability of materials.

1. Imagine you are a bystander at the scene of an altercation in one of the novels and viewed as one who is as guilty as the perpetrator of the hurtful or violent act. Use Letter Generator (www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/letter-generator-30005.html) to write a letter of apology to one of the characters in *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* or *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Be sure to convey your feelings and use your senses in the letter to capture the guilt you still feel for not standing up to help others. Post your letter on Edmodo for peer response.

2. Compare *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* regarding issues of prejudice and unfairness. Write a paper or create a media text (e.g., using presentation tools such as Storify, Themify, or Glogster) that examines how the theme of prejudice is revealed in these two books. Identify and discuss the role models or heroes in each novel and examine their impact on the injustices they stand up against.

3. Choose a picture book that further enhances your understanding of the themes evident in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, such as *Ruby Bridges* (Bridges, 1999; nonfiction, biography); *Remember: The Journey to School Integration* (Morrison, 2004; nonfiction, photobiography); *A Boy Named Beckoning* (Capaldi, 2008; nonfiction, biography); *Helen Keller* (Sullivan, 2007; nonfiction, photobiography); and *Satchel Paige* (Sturm & Tomaso, 2007; sports, graphic novel). Create and deliver a presentation (oral, media, or dramatic) that examines how the characters learn to manage the challenges of growing up.

After the students have completed their projects, Mr. Johnson has them share their projects with others, including parents or classmates, using a media fair format.

Discussion and Conclusions

LTS provide a promising route to scaffold high school students' reading of complex texts as advocated by CCSS. Where Mr. Johnson used the LTS to undergird his teaching of the canonical text *To Kill a Mockingbird*, other teachers may choose to focus on teaching only the adolescent novel and omit the canonical text. This decision will be based on several factors, such as district curriculum requirements, time, student reading levels, and instructional goals.

Sam, a student in Mr. Johnson's class, described his experience with LTS as "probably the most interesting and meaningful thing I've ever

done in English class." When queried further, he explained: "I was really interested in the themes and the question about growing up because I could relate to them, but I never questioned what it really means to be a hero. I read both books, from cover to cover." Compare Sam's reaction to how Janessa, who was introduced at the start of this article, avoided reading in response to her teacher's approach, which focused on reading chapters at home and writing answers to lists of comprehension questions.

As high school literacy educators, engaging instruction is crucial for facilitating engaged reading. We have much to consider when designing culturally relevant instruction interspersed with key polymedia that matter to teens while balancing the CCSS. Linked text sets offer a promising approach to providing strategic scaffolding to help all students engage with complex texts in meaningful ways. Rather than "water down" or replace complex texts with easier-to-read novels, LTS and the guiding questions that frame them enable students to engage with real-life issues and the shared human experiences of fictional characters. Through the use of varied types of print and nonprint texts, participatory activities, guided instruction, close reading, response modes, and choice, LTS offer promise to help high school students choose to read.

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Take Action
STEPS FOR IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION

To implement LTS in the classroom, follow these steps:

1. Select a complex text that students are required to read.

2. Read and examine the text to identify an essential question that will be relevant and meaningful to students. Identify the themes in the text related to the essential question.

3. Plan how you will engage students by building background knowledge, introducing themes to be addressed, and posing the essential question. Consider the time you have available, and be sure to include various types of texts, including media and popular culture references.

4. Plan the explore phase by mapping out the scaffolds to help students read, understand, and connect with the complex text. Consider short texts and adolescent literature you will use during this phase to draw out themes and encourage students to examine the essential question from various perspectives.

5. Plan the expansion phase by developing options for student projects that will allow them to demonstrate their thinking regarding the essential question. Be sure to include multiple modalities, new technologies, and student choice.

6. As you plan your LTS, document the relevant CCSS that you will address in your instruction.

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More to Explore
CONNECTED CONTENT-BASED RESOURCES

✓ Use this news broadcast as an example of standing up for the rights of others: www.nbcnews.com/id/53120398/ns/local_news-nashville_tn/t/high-school-football-coach-suspends-entire-team/

✓ Ask students to create psychological profiles of characters: www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/creating-psychological-profiles-characters-1184.html

✓ View the YouTube trailer of *Bones Brigade: An Autobiography,* which shows a teen outcast who develops confidence and a strong identity through skateboarding: www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIIaJRIr6-Q

✓ For a unique novel review of *To Kill a Mockingbird,* see: www.60secondrecap.com/library/to-kill-a-mockingbird

✓ Listen to Atticus's trial speech, with movie stills: www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8TgqenWW0I