

## Common Core Standards for English Literature

I have read many articles articulating why some people support or oppose the Common Core Standards for k-12 students of English literature. Debates center on the value of reading nonfiction versus fiction writings. After re-reading the intended purposes of teaching literature, I concluded that both types of writings are essential to the pedagogical realm on teaching. Literature teaches us about life, empathy, sympathy, and critical thinking.

For example, if one were to read a government report on the ecological system or food safety, would he or she be able to link Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, or Sinclair's *The Jungle*, to the purpose and functions of government? Both books are works of fiction. Steinbeck's book focused on the plight of migrant workers during the Great Depression. Sinclair's book focused on the unsanitary conditions of meatpacking plants in Chicago. In 1938, Congress enacted the Fair Labor Standards Act, partly in response to unfair labor practices inferred in Steinbeck's book. The Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food Drug Act of 1906 were laws designed to ensure the safety and health of citizens.



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The Founding Fathers of the Constitution wisely perceived the need for an educated citizenry in Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution: "To promote the progress of science and useful arts...", followed by Thomas Jefferson's 1808 Reply to American Philosophical Society: "I feel...an ardent desire to see knowledge so disseminated through the mass of mankind that it may, at length, reach even the extremes of society: beggars and kings." Even today, the government places high value on education programs in the humanities. On September 29, 1965, President Johnson signed the Arts and Humanities Act. Two federal, independent agencies were created: The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). These agencies promote excellence in the humanities, convey lessons of history, and support artistic excellence to benefit individuals and communities. Howard Sackler's 1967 play, *The Great White Hope*, was funded by NEA. There is much literature on the websites of these agencies that are used by educators in the humanities and social sciences.

Interpreting and reflecting on life are two more reasons why reading fiction and nonfiction complement each other. One should not be ignored for the sake of the other. Eduardo Galeano's 1971 book, the *Open Veins of Latin America*, is an essay on colonialism, capitalism, and economics. It provides a history on the plunder of natural resources and the rulers who chose economic gain over investment in human capital. During a summit of the Americas in 2009, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez gave a copy of the book to President Barack Obama. The book could be used as a teaching tool by relating some causes of the on-going immigration debates in the United States. Citizens in Latin America are risking the lives of themselves and their children to escape abject poverty and crime by illegally crossing borders to enter the United States. It might be difficult for some people to wrap their heads around the reasons why people risk their lives in this manner, while those who attempt to escape such atrocious conditions are dealing with life in real time.

I am sure that debates on this issue will continue, but a well-rounded education, will benefit students and society as a whole. That is truly the meaning of an educated citizenry.