

A Common Core State Anchor
Standards-Aligned Educator Guide

Illegal

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Written by Francisco X. Stork
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What does it mean to be illegal in the United States?

Life in Mexico is a death sentence for Emiliano and his sister Sara.

To escape the violent cartel that is after them, they flee across the border, seeking a better life in the United States and hoping that they can find a way to bring their pursuers to justice.

Sara turns herself over to the authorities to apply for asylum.

Emiliano enters the country illegally, planning to live with their father.

But now Sara is being held indefinitely in a detention facility, awaiting an asylum hearing that may never come, finding it harder every day to hold on to her faith and hope. Life for Emiliano is not easy either. Everywhere he goes, it's clear that he doesn't belong. And all the while, the cartel is closing in on them...

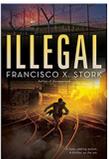
Emiliano sets off on a tense and dangerous race to find justice, but can he expose the web of crimes from his place in the shadows?

Guide created by
Debbie Gonzales, MFA



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Discussion: Chapters 1 – 9

“I’m illegal. You could get in trouble” (pg. 9).

- The word *illegal* is defined as unlawful, banned, and forbidden. Explain how a person who has not committed any crime can be considered to be illegal.
- In this scene, Emiliano is concerned that Gustaf might get into trouble by simply being associated with Emiliano. Tell why this is so.
- What sort of “trouble” is Emiliano referring to? In trouble with whom? Why?



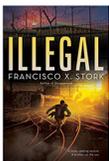
I raised my hand to my mouth and glanced up at the camera in the corner of the room, leaned, and whispered, “It’s very important that no one know where he is or where he is going. No one should know that he is still here in the United States” (pg. 32).

- Even though she is being unfairly held in a detention center, Sara’s primary concern is for her brother’s safety. What does this reveal about Sara’s character?
- Tell why she states that “it’s very important that no one know where he is.” Who is she concerned that might discover his whereabouts? Why?
- Earlier in this scene, Sara says, “Anger is not very helpful here” (pg. 31). What does she mean by this statement? Is anger ever helpful? How so?
- Who are the Desaparecidas? Make a connection with Hinojosa, the Desaparecidas, and Emiliano.



“I don’t know how to thank you for all you’ve done for us,” I heard my father say to Gustaf. “I’d like to pay you” (pg. 39).

- In this scene, Emiliano finds his father’s offer to pay Gustaf for his help to be inappropriate and off-putting. Explain why he feels this way.
- Compare and contrast Gustaf and Bob. List ways that they are alike and very different.
- Explore their connection with Emiliano. Which has a more genuine relationship with Emiliano. Why is this so?
- Earlier in this scene, Bob was stopped by Border Patrol to search his van. Afterwards, his response was, “Do I look like someone who would sneak in a Mexican? (pg. 38)” Analyze this statement. Do you think that, since he lives a full life in Chicago, he doesn’t consider himself to be Mexican? An illegal?



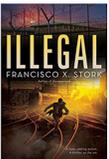
What would it be like to do business with people who don't like you as a human being (pg. 64).

- In this scene, Bob explains about his business practices and relationships to Emiliano. Explain the differences between person-to-person and political connections. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each.
- The word *ethics* means values, belief, and the difference between right and wrong. Are there times when a person must put aside their ethics to do business? If true, what are the justifications for doing so?



I wasn't crying just for me. I was crying for Emiliano. I was crying for all of us (pg. 78).

- Earlier in the scene, Sara is cross-examined by Mello regarding her entry to the United States. Though he probed with insinuating questions, Sara maintained her composure. She looked him straight in the eye when denying that she was joined by a family member when she crossed. Discuss the amount of self-control required to lie in effort to protect her brother.
- Examine Sara's relationship with La Treinta Y Cuatro. Predict why La Treinta Y Cuatro seems to loathe Sara's presence.
- In reference to the quote above, identify who Sara is referencing in her statement, "I was crying for all of us." Her mother? The other detainees? The Desaparecidas? Why?



Character Analysis

Objective: Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Materials:

- *Illegal*, the book
- Character Analysis Template (Guide, pg. 6)
- Pencil

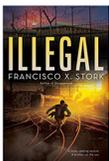
Procedure:

- Distribute a copies of the Character Analysis template to the students.
- Instruct students to consider each character listed on the template. Encourage them to find one word to describe their characterization, then identify the character’s significance to the story.
- Lead a discussion in which the students share their impressions and reactions to the character roles listed on the template, or any other character of their choosing.

Character	One Word Description	Significance to the Story
Gustaf	←	
Brother Patricio		
Trevor		
Mello		←
Abe Gropper		
Stanislaw		

Choose one word to describe the character's nature.

Analyze this character's relationship or connection with the story. How do they relate to the other characters? What impact do they have on the overall plot?



Character Analysis Template

<i>Character</i>	<i>One Word Description</i>	<i>Significance to the Story</i>
Gustaf		
Brother Patricio		
Trevor		
Mello		
Bob		
La Treinta Y Cuatro		



Discussion: Chapters 10 – 18

There. Finally. A full smile. The kid had a sense of humor. You had to dig for it, but it was there. Trevor reminded me of Javier – a boy in Juarez who made the most beautiful pinatas. Javier was a former drug addict who at twelve was wise beyond his years (pg. 87).

- In this scene, though he felt unwanted and out-of-place in his father’s home, Emiliano persisted in efforts to bring a smile to his half-brother’s face. Why is Emiliano willing to do so? Why does he care?
- Compare and contrast Javier and Trevor’s characters. Examine ways that they are similar. Explore reasons for their differences.



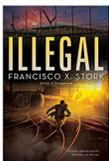
“Well, now I know that Mello specifically requested the report and we know why he requested it. I found an older email in Mello’s computer. It was an email from someone calling himself furryfox” (pg. 103).

- As a reader, you are aware of that danger Mello poses to Sara. Yet, being separated from his sister, the character of Emiliano does not know what has transpired in the detention center. Tell how this gap in space and time establishes a feeling of tension and concern for the characters.
- Authors use a literary device called *transitions* to establish emotional connections between characters, events, and scenes. Examine the transition the author created in the last of line of chapter 12 and the quote above.
- Which character is less “safe,” Emiliano or Sara? Explain your answer.



But Sara knew that during that trip, Brother Patricio did not give me any instructions. He never once told me where to walk or where to step or what to do with my life. He let the mountains teach me whatever I needed to learn” (pg. 149).

- Analyze the message Sara sent Emiliano. Notice phrases that suggest control, rather than freedom to choose. What is she attempting to communicate to her brother?
- Discuss the impact Brother Patricio had upon Emiliano. Explain how surviving the struggle in the desert regions can teach life lessons. What type of lessons can the mountains teach?
- Make a connection between the tough life lessons Emiliano learned in the desert and learning to navigate life as an “illegal” in the United States on a mission to expose heinous acts of social injustice.



Key Concept Synthesis

Objective: To use textual clues to determine the important ideas and concepts that occur within a story.

Materials:

- *Illegal*, the book
- Key Concept Synthesis Template (Guide, pg. 9)
- Pencil

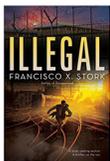
Procedure:

- The term *concept* refers to an abstract idea; some sort of thought or truth explored in a story. In *Illegal*, author Francisco Stork presents a number of concepts that can be life-altering. Tell the students that, in this activity, they're to consider how the each concept listed on the Key Concept Synthesis template is developed or demonstrated in the story.
- Distribute a copies of the Key Concept Synthesis template to the students.
- Instruct students to consider each key idea or concept listed on the template.
- Encourage students to rephrase the key idea in their own words.
- Tell students to explore how the concepts connect characters and the overall theme of the story.
- Lead a discussion in which the students share their impressions and reactions to the key concepts or ideas presented in the story.

Key Ideas/Concept	Re-phrase concept	Connect concept & characters
<i>freedom</i>		
<i>loyalty</i>		
<i>faith</i>		
<i>justice</i>		
<i>strength</i>		
<i>family</i>		

Re-phrase the concept in your own words. Define it. What does the concept mean to you?

Explore ways that the author has developed the concept in the story through plot development and/or character connections.



Key Concept Synthesis Template

Key Ideas/Concept	Re-phrase concept	Connect concept & characters
<i>freedom</i>		
<i>loyalty</i>		
<i>faith</i>		
<i>justice</i>		
<i>strength</i>		
<i>family</i>		



Discussion: Chapters 19 – 26

Could I have been so wrong about this country? I had to believe there were people who would help Emiliano. There must be people who would protect his life and help him save the lives of women who were in captivity. I was counting on Emiliano to be resourceful enough to find those people” (pg. 157).

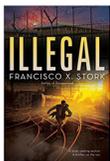
- The word *faith* means assurance, confidence, and hope. Explore the notion that, in this scene, Sara has no choice but to have faith that her brother will be cared for by someone in America. Furthermore, that he will be able to hand over Hinojosa’s phone to the authorities. What’s at stake if he doesn’t?
- Where does this type of insurmountable type of faith required of Sara come from?
- Has Sara misjudged the integrity of the United States? Explain your answer.

Was I still Jipari, then? It must be as Brother Patricio always said— once the Jipari oath is in your blood, it says there. Then it came to me: Who are the others for whose benefit I’m supposed to use the knowledge and strength the desert gave me? Did those “others” include the Groppers, including Popsy?(pg. 171)

- Identify the “others” who benefit from Emiliano’s refusal to drink alcohol? How do they benefit if he practices self-discipline?
- Describe your impression of Abe Gropper.
- What does Abe’s comment regarding Mexicans and alcohol reveal about his character?
- Later in the scene, Abe tells Emiliano that he thought Bob was “just another illegal (pg. 173).” Is he aware of Emiliano’s immigration status? If so, what would Abe gain by making a statement such as this to Emiliano?

“Five thousand dollars. All yours. There’ll be another five thousand when you do what I ask” (pg. 175).

- The word *extortion* means bribery, coercion, and blackmail. Respond to Abe’s efforts to extort Emiliano. Did you find this act to be a surprise? Explain your answer.
- Abe says that he doesn’t know what information is contained in the phone. Do you believe this statement? Why or why not?
- Predict when Abe first found out about the phone. Was it before Emiliano arrived in Chicago? Explain your answer.
- Abe says, “. . . my government needs that phone. . . (pg. 175)” Could it be that the government he’s referencing is the same one that Sara has faith will care for her brother? How so?



It was done. I felt a quiet, sad peace (pg. 192).

- Describe the depth of disappointment Emiliano must have felt in this moment, knowing that his father had deceived him. Do you think he found this to be a surprise? How so?
- Explain why he felt a sense of peace instead of rage or despair.
- Consider the metaphor of the stone tossed into calm waters. Interpret the statement, “It was so easy to become another ripple (pg. 192).” Do you agree? Explain your answer.
- If it is “...easy to become another ripple,” how has Emiliano been able to resist?



I saw the flagpole with the United States flag as soon as I turned onto North Springfield Avenue. Stanislaw Kaluza’s house was the smallest on the street (pg. 216).

- Consider the relevance of the flag in Stanislaw’s yard. What does having a flagpole such as this erected in one’s front yard suggest about the homeowner’s beliefs and values?
- Earlier in the story, Abe made a comment that “his” government needed the phone. Being that Abe and Stanislaw are both Americans, do they practice their patriotism in the same manner? Explain your answer.



Theme Search

Objective: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text.

Materials:

- *Illegal*, the book
- Theme Search Template (Guide, pg. 13)

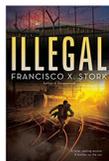
Procedure:

- Lead a discussion exploring the premise of the story. Guide them to consider how various characters and their relationships to each other establish an overarching theme of some sort.
- Using the Theme Search template a guide, instruct students to select a word or phrase from each of the three columns that best describe the theme of the story.
- Students may extend the theme by inserting a descriptor in front of their column choices, such as using a character's name or adding words to better clarify their message.
- Instruct students to write an informative or explanatory essay describing the connection between the theme defined using the Theme Search template and the characters's relationships. Tell how the theme is dramatized in the story.
- Encourage students to share their work with the class.

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
Happiness	often	just shows up.
Friendship	never	requires effort.
Love	usually	is misunderstood.
Courage	rarely	hurts others.
Honesty	unexpectedly	makes a difference.
Deception	slowly	changes people.
Freedom	simply	takes over.
Cowardice	completely	becomes its opposite.
Success	mildly	is achieved.
Pride	quietly	is forgotten.
Honor	quickly	scars the soul.
Loyalty	hardly	overpowers others.
Hatred	sort of	is lost.
Faith	occasionally	is found.
Power	sometimes	changes nothing.
Failure	literally	changes everything.
Compassion	almost	cannot compare.

Theme:

Loyalty literally changes everything.



Theme Search Template

Select a word or phrase from each of the three column that best describe a theme idea for the story. Insert descriptors as needed to better clarify message.

Column 1

*Happiness
Friendship
Love
Courage
Honesty
Deception
Freedom
Cowardice
Success
Pride
Honor
Loyalty
Hatred
Faith
Power
Failure
Compassion*

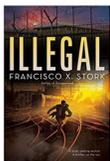
Column 2

*often
never
usually
rarely
unexpectedly
slowly
simply
completely
mildly
quietly
quickly
hardly
sort of
occasionally
sometimes
literally
almost*

Column 3

*just shows up.
requires effort.
is misunderstood.
hurts others.
makes a difference.
changes people.
takes over.
becomes its opposite.
is achieved.
is forgotten.
scars the soul.
overpowers others.
is lost.
is found.
changes nothing.
changes everything.
cannot compare.*

Theme:



Discussion: Chapters 27 – Epilogue

“I don’t know. I . . . I’m not here . . . legally. If I get caught. . .” (pg. 237).

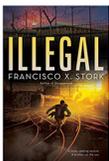
- Who do you think Emiliano is most concerned for, himself or Aneila? How so?
- The word *illegal* means lawless, banned, and criminal. Determine which of these three descriptors best represent Emiliano and Sara’s character. Identify the descriptor(s) that represent Mello or Abe. Explain your answer.
- Consider the last sentence in chapter 27. Discuss the symbolic significance of Aniela waiting for Emiliano beside the flagpole.

“The people his politics want to keep out are just images in their heads or from a television screen or monsters created to scare other people. You are flesh and blood. And . . . you’re the kind of person he likes” (pg. 249).

- Earlier in the story, Sara had concern regarding the goodness of Americans. She fervently hoped that Emiliano would find individuals who would care for him as well as the Desaparecidas. Were her concerns warranted? Explain your answer.
- To *articulate* means to speak meaningfully, intelligently, and clearly. Emiliano asked Aneila to articulate her position regarding immigration. Interpret her response.
- When exploring the notion of hatred, Aneila poses the question, “Is liberal hatred different than conservative hatred? (pg. 250)” What are your thoughts?
- Tell why Emiliano was undecided when asked if desired to return to Mexico (pg. 251).

“Me? I’m not the one saving God knows how many women. I stood, then sat down again when she touched my arm” (pg. 276).

- Examine the impact of spiritual and interpersonal faith as portrayed throughout the story.
- Do you believe that Bob and Abe were unaware of the governmental corruption they had become a part of? Explain your answer.
- In the end, do you think Sara and Emiliano found the U.S. to be a compassionate country? Explain your answer.



Articulate!

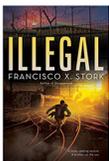
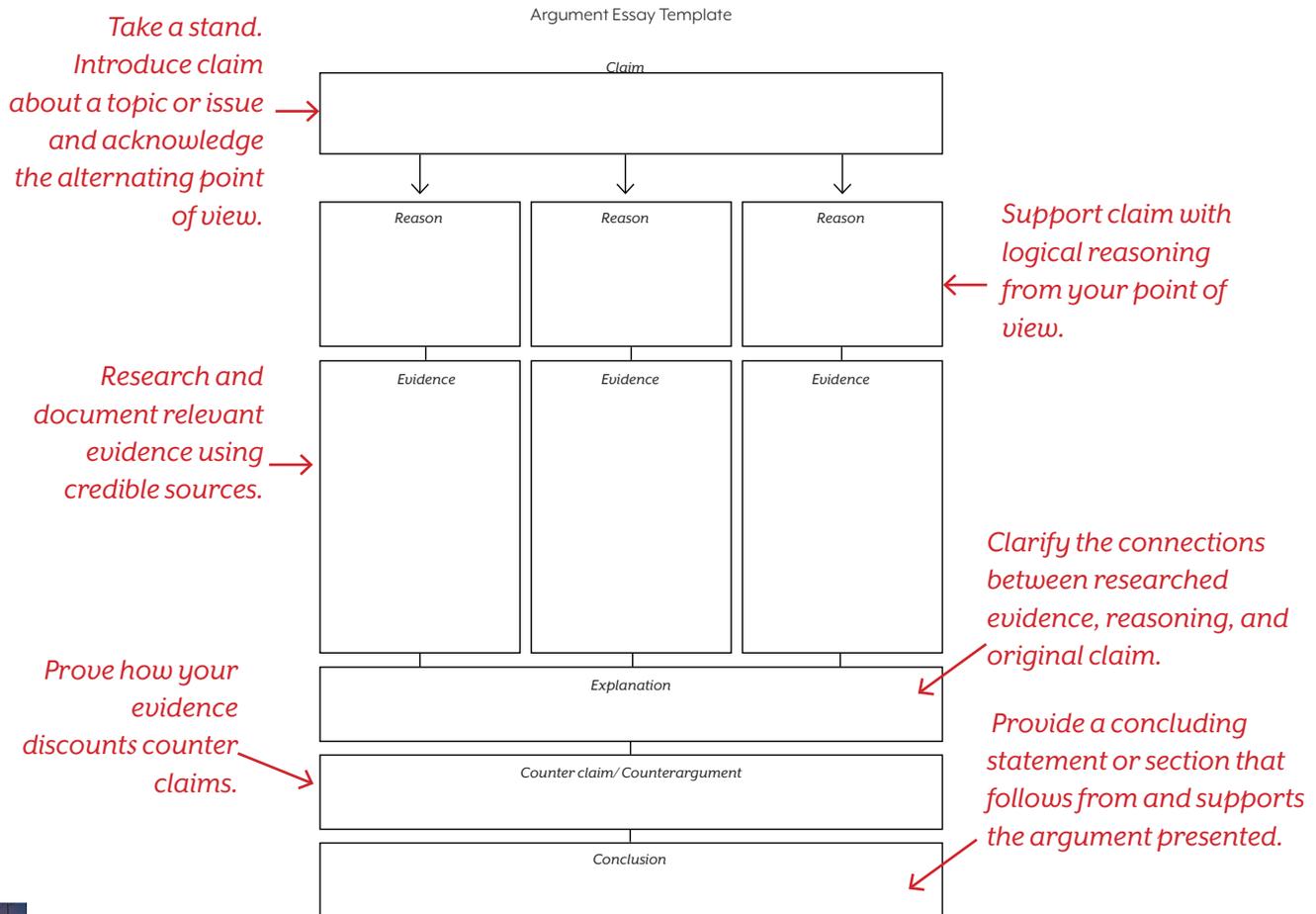
Objective: To write an argument focused on discipline-specific content.

Materials:

- *Illegal*, the book
- Reference materials
- Argument Essay Template (Guide, pg. 16)

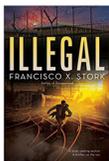
Procedure:

- Lead a discussion exploring the vast number of social justice related topics presented in *Illegal* such as asylum seekers, governmental corruption, and human trafficking. Explain that, in order to communicate the importance of lasting change, students need to articulate their position on these and other troubling issues in logical and factual ways.
- Instruct students to use the Argument Essay template as a guide to write and present an argument that supports their point of view of a chosen topic. Students are required to support claims through reference documentation.



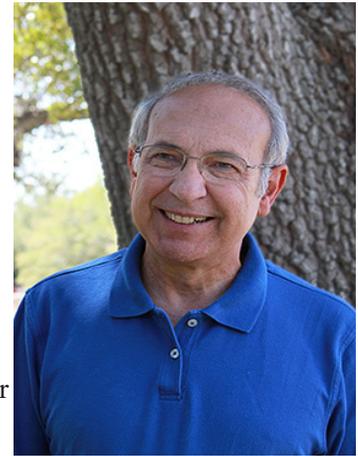
Argument Essay Template

<i>Claim</i>		
↓	↓	↓
<i>Reason</i>	<i>Reason</i>	<i>Reason</i>
<i>Evidence</i>	<i>Evidence</i>	<i>Evidence</i>
<i>Explanation</i>		
<i>Counter claim/ Counterargument</i>		
<i>Conclusion</i>		



Meet the Author – Francisco X. Stork

Francisco Xavier Arguelles was born in 1953 in Monterrey, Mexico. Ruth Arguelles, his mother, was a single mother from a middle class family in Tampico (a city on the Gulf of Mexico). The reason Francisco was born in Monterrey rather than in Tampico, where Ruth lived, is that her father did not want anyone to know that she was going to have a child out of wedlock. She was sent to Monterrey to live in a convent until the baby was born. The baby was supposed to be given up for adoption, but Ruth changed her mind. After a while, Grandfather Adalberto relented and mother and baby Francisco were allowed to come home.



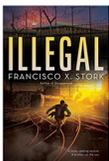
Six years later Ruth married Charles Stork, a retired man more twenty years her senior. Charles Stork adopted Francisco and gave him his name. Charlie was a kind but strict Dutch man who quickly went about instilling needed discipline in his new son. For his seventh birthday, Charlie gave Francisco a portable typewriter because Francisco announced that he wanted to be a writer. After wandering about Mexico for a few years trying to live on a Social Security pension, Charlie decided to bring the family to the United States where he hoped they would fare better.

The three of them came to El Paso, Texas when Francisco was nine. Charlie, an American citizen was able to obtain the necessary visas for Ruth and Francisco. Francisco was sent to grammar school where he learned English on the go. Unfortunately, no one was willing to give the sixty-five-year-old Charlie a job and so it became even harder for the family to survive in the United States. They lived in a variety of apartments and trailer houses staying in each for as long as possible before getting evicted.

When Francisco was thirteen, Charlie Stork died in an automobile accident. Ruth decided to stay in the United States. She and the boy obtained an apartment in one of the public housing projects of El Paso. Francisco was awarded a scholarship to the local Jesuit High School and soon rose to the top of his class. During his senior year, he received an Honor's Scholarship (full tuition and living expenses) to attend Spring Hill College, a small Jesuit College in Mobile Alabama.

At Spring Hill College, Francisco majored in English Literature and Philosophy and received the college's creative writing award. After college, a Danforth Fellowship (awarded to 40 college seniors out of approximately 5,000 applicants) allowed him to attend graduate school at Harvard University. At Harvard he studied Latin American Literature with people like Octavio Paz, the Mexican Nobel Laureate. However, the emphasis on scholarly research and writing seemed too remote and irrelevant to all that was important. So, after four years of Harvard, Francisco went to Columbia Law School. His plan was to make a living as a lawyer without abandoning his plan to write fiction. Twenty years and twelve or so legal jobs later, Francisco published his first novel. Francisco practiced law for thirty-three years in a variety of private and public venues. For the last fifteen years as a lawyer he worked at MassHousing, a state agency dedicated to financing affordable housing. He retired in 2015 and spends his time writing outside of Boston. Francisco is married to Jill Syverson-Stork. He is the father of Nicholas and Anna and the grandfather of Charlotte, Rosie and Willem.

Francisco Stork is the author of eight novels.



franciscostork.com

guidesbydeb.com
debbiegonzales.com



Common Core State Anchor Standards Alignment

		Discussion	Character Analysis	Key Concept Synthesis	Theme Search	Argument Essay
English Language Arts Standards » Anchor Standards for Reading						
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.	•				
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2	Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.	•				
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3	Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.	•	•			
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4	Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.	•		•	•	
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8	Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.	•				•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.10	Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.	•	•	•	•	•
English Language Arts Standards » Anchor Standards for Writing						
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1	Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.					•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.					•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7	Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.					•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.8	Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.					•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.9	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.	•	•	•	•	•
English Language Arts Standards » Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening						
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1	Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.	•	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2	Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.	•	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.4	Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience	•	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.6	Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.	•	•	•	•	•

