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Good afternoon. Thank you for letting me share with you my concerns about Common Core and all that it entails, and quite specifically, the Common Core English standards. I am a former high school teacher, a current university professor of English, and today, I speak to you as a parent and scholar of literature.

First, please support HB 2292 and put a stop to the madness that is Common Core. We want standards written by Kansans, for Kansans, in Kansas!

Second, our U.S. Constitution is arguably the best document ever written besides the Bible and if we would just use it the way it was intended that we would, we wouldn't be here today. The states were not at the forefront of adopting Common Core the way some would have you believe. The National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers are not working on behalf of Kansas, per se. They are non-governmental trade organizations. There was not any legislative involvement when Kansas adopted Common Core and the Next Generation Science Standards. Therefore, Kansas was wildly unrepresented when these things were imposed. Where is our tenth amendment in all of this? I would argue that there is room for legal action against the State School Board. I am just a teacher of English, not an attorney, but if I can see it, then I am certain that for those trained in constitutional law, they must be able to see it just as clearly as the noses on their faces.

Next, upon examining the English standards, I wasn't surprised when I found out that the writing group selected by the powers behind the Common Core didn't include any high school English teachers or university professors of English. The writing team, bereft of the two most critical groups in ascertaining college readiness in English, missed the mark completely, unless we have redefined college readiness to a very low level.

English teachers understand that the skill of literacy is an essential part of their work. However, as children progress in age, literary knowledge also becomes central to the students' education.

Books are not just an exercise in reading, and what you read does matter. The CCS have several issues. The most concerning is the diminishment of literature in the English classroom in favor of informational text, like newspapers, magazines, technical reading-like manuals, historical documents, and non-fiction in academic subject areas, not the traditional non-fiction English teachers have always taught like biographies or memoirs they want it to be in a subject area.

Yes, the supporters of CC claim that people are misinterpreting the standards, and the increase in informational texts is supposed to be across all the classes, including math, science, history, and art. However, this argument doesn't hold up when examining the reading standards in grades K-8; they are distinctly divided with ten reading standards for informational text and nine for literature. The decrease in the study of literature is directly related to how the standards are written. ([link to the](#)

standards page for reading standards- click on the tabs to the left and select the grade to confirm if you want. <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/6> )

In defense of this shift to informational text, the claim is made that students read more informational texts in college, and if we want kids to be prepared, we must have them read more of it in K-12. Of course, this sounds logical, but there isn't any research showing that it works. In fact, the research points in the opposite direction.

According to a report released from the ACT testing company, the highest indicators for successful readers capable of college work is directly related to reading complex texts. The report shows the main characteristics found in complex texts include subtle or deeply embedded interaction among characters and ideas, highly sophisticated information conveyed through literary devices or data, text is organized in elaborate ways that are unconventional, the tone and use of language is intricate, the words used are highly context dependent, and the author's intent is ambiguous or implicit. The students' ability to "read between the lines" and make assumptions and infer meaning makes them successful.

(this links to the actual report from ACT read page 6 and 7 if you don't want to do the whole report for background info:

[http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/reading\\_summary.pdf](http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/reading_summary.pdf))

Let me share with you something from a fellow English professor, Anthony Esolen, published February 6, 2014, called **"How Common Core Devalues Great Literature."**

"Many years ago, a prominent man wrote to one of his favorite authors about his latest book. This man had been a soldier, a hunter, an athlete, an historian, and a social reformer, and was now employed in a post of some significant responsibility. He had many children, and was by all accounts a bluff and hearty father.

"My dear Mr. Grahame," he wrote,

My mind moves in ruts, as I suppose most minds do, and at first I could not reconcile myself to the change from the ever-delightful Harold and his associates, and so for some time I could not accept the toad, the mole, the water-rat, and the badger as substitutes. But after a while [my wife] and two of the boys, Kermit and Ted, all quite independently, got hold of *The Wind Among the Willows* [sic] and took such delight in it that I began to feel that I might have to revise my judgment. Then [she] read it aloud to the younger children, and I listened now and then. Now I have read it and reread it, and have come to accept the characters as old friends; and I am almost more fond of it than your previous books. Indeed, I feel about going to Africa very much as the sea-faring rat did when he almost made the water-rat wish to forsake everything and start wandering!

I felt I must give myself the pleasure of telling you how much we had all enjoyed your book.

And he closes with all good wishes, "Sincerely yours, Theodore Roosevelt."

Teddy did not praise Kenneth Grahame for helping the Roosevelt children to learn how to analyze what the CCC calls, with revealing ugliness and reductiveness, "text," so that he would "reflexively demonstrate the cogent

reasoning and use of evidence that is essential to both private deliberation and responsible citizenship in a democratic republic,” as if the noblest task of mankind was to listen to a political advertisement or to cast a vote. Teddy praised the man for giving him new friends: Toad of Toad-Hall, the Rat, the Mole, and the Badger. If you are not reading novels to make new friends, or to wander across the fields, or to sail the sea, then you should not read them at all.

And that, as it happens, is one of the very things you learn from *The Wind in the Willows* itself. When the story begins, the shy and pleasant Mole is invited to join the Rat in a boat. The Mole, being a Mole, hasn’t ever been in a boat before, and he finds it really quite nice, as he leans back and feels the swell of the water beneath him.

“Nice? It’s the *only* thing,” said the Water Rat solemnly, as he leant forward for his stroke. “Believe me, my young friend, there is *nothing*—absolutely nothing—half so much worth doing as simply messing around in boats. Simply messing,” he went on dreamily: “messing—about—in—boats.”

The Common Corers get things exactly backwards. You do not read *The Wind in the Willows* so that you can gain some utilitarian skill for handling “text.” If anything, we want our children to gain a little bit of linguistic maturity **so that they can read** *The Wind in the Willows*. That is the aim. I want them to become “friends” with Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. I want them to climb with Dante and Virgil the glorious mountain of Purgatory. I want them to stand heart to heart with the Geats as they watch the flames devour the body of their deceased king Beowulf.

I show them some of the techniques as an artist, since they’re mature enough to appreciate them, but *not* so that they can reduce the poem to an exercise in rhetoric. I show them those techniques so that they may understand and cherish the poem all the more.

Those are the important things, the permanent things. If you are not reading *The Wind in the Willows* as Theodore and Edith Roosevelt and their children were reading it, then you should not read it at all. If you are turning *Tom Sawyer* into a linguistic exercise with a veneer of intellectual sophistication, then you should not read *Tom Sawyer*—in fact, you cannot have understood a blessed thing about *Tom Sawyer*.” (emphasis mine)

I can personally and professionally confirm what Professor Esolen is explaining here. My tenth grade son was signed up for Honors English 10 at our public school. When I found out that my 15 year old would be reading a vile, repulsive, and completely inappropriate “novel” for this age group, Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*, and openly discussing it in class, I immediately went to the teacher. Ironically, when I asked my son how he felt about reading something so graphic and having open discussions in class (as that is what the teacher told me the goal would be), my son replied, “That sounds like it’ll be a pretty short discussion. Mom.” (Out of the mouths of babes!)

The long story short is that not only is my son not reading this garbage, but he is not taking the class at our public school at all. He is taking the class online at Liberty Online Academy where he is reading “great literature” like Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, Hugo’s *Les Miserables*, Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*, Paton’s *Cry the Beloved Country*, and yes, Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, among others. **Because this course is not Common Core aligned curriculum, my son is becoming “friends’ with Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.”** Every student deserves this opportunity, and frankly, Common Core is sorely lacking in opportunity.

If any one of you think that teachers can continue teaching as they always have, choosing whatever books they like and keeping the curriculum that serves the students best, you are wrong.

Before I began teaching at the university level, I taught high school English. I also served on the school’s committee to develop Annual Yearly Progress required by No Child Left Behind. I witnessed schools and teachers discarding what they knew served students best in order to comply with testing requirements put in place through requirements of the federal government.

Unfortunately, under Common Core, this problem is only magnified. When Common Core aligned assessments stop testing students over literature and consist entirely of informational text, there is no doubt literature will soon occupy a very small part of the English class. Because students’ results on these tests dictate teacher evaluations, merit pay, and school rankings, any diversion from the standards and aligned assessments will be non-existent.

The control over the English classroom isn’t a “what if,” but rather a current reality. Take a look at the sample Smarter Balanced English exam (and even though Kansas has left the Smarter Balanced Consortium and reverted back to CETE, guess what...CETE farms out the test making to whom? Smarter Balanced!) for 11th graders. It consists entirely of informational text—no literature. The topics for the readings are “Meditation,” “Fashion,” and a dialogue between students. (link to sample test: <http://sbac.portal.airast.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Grade11ELA.pdf>)

Because Common Core and all that goes along with it steps on states’ rights, and because the testing, the data collecting, and the standards themselves are costly, burdensome, and insufficient (among other things), I urge you to support HB 2292. And again, to close with Professor Esolen’s words, **“For the most important thing that any teacher of reading can do for children is to read good and great books with them and for them, with imagination and love. It is not like designing a rocket to go to the moon. It is at once far easier and far more profound than that. It is like silence, and play, and prayer. It is like messing around in boats.”** (emphasis mine)

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