

Learn from yesterday, live for today,  
hope for tomorrow.

The important thing  
is not to stop questioning.

Albert Einstein

Getting to the Core

Superior standards

Supportive school climate

Successful students



# BIG IDEAS AND ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

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**SEPTEMBER 13, 2012**

# Learning Goals...

1. Why are big ideas and essential questions crucial for student learning?
2. What is the criteria for “big ideas” and “essential questions”?

# Common Core Unit



## Santa Ana Unified School District Common Core Unit Planner-Literacy

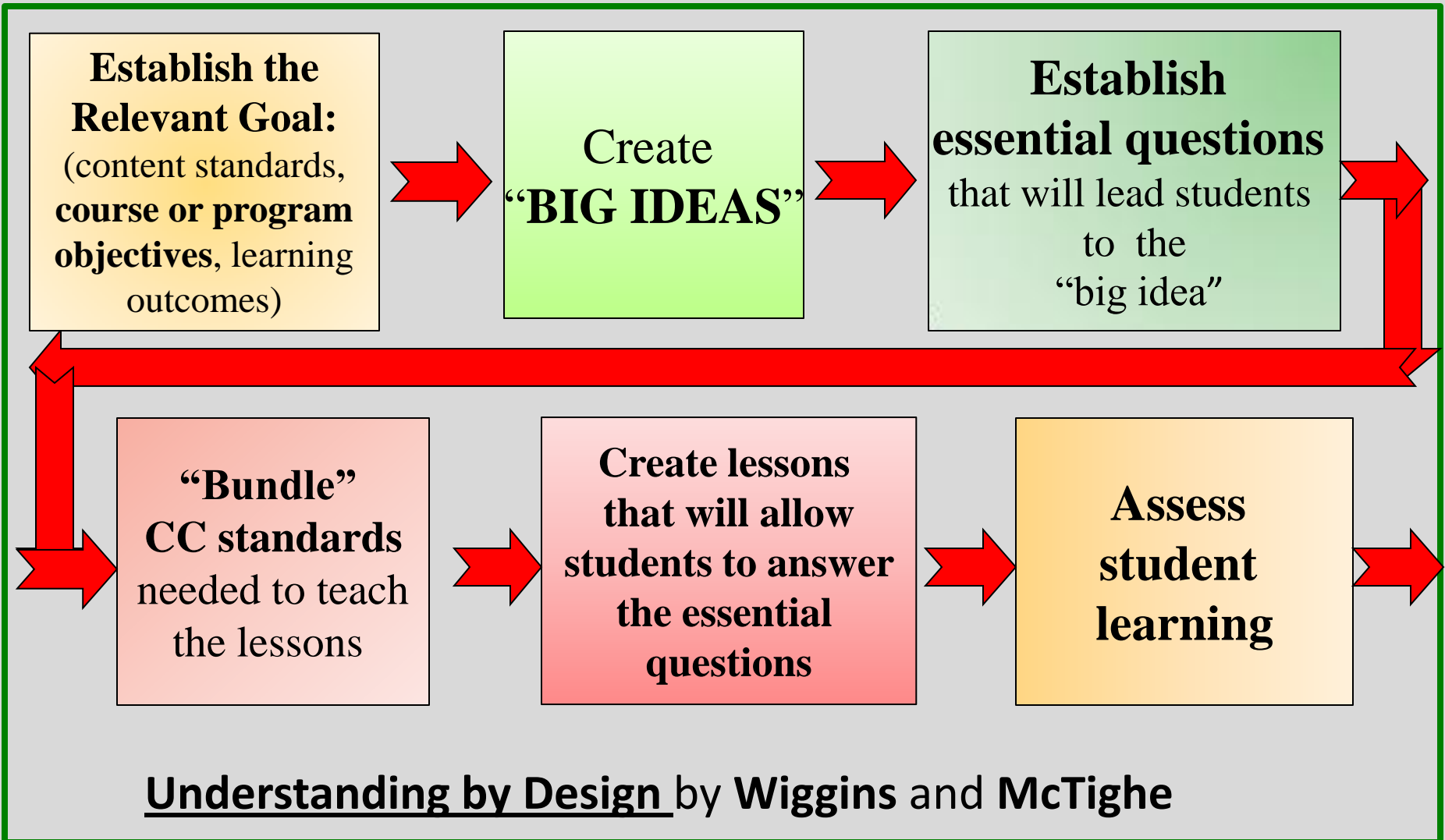
<b>Unit Title:</b>		
<b>Grade Level/Course:</b>		<b>Time Frame:</b>
<b>Big Idea (Enduring Understandings):</b>		
<b>Essential Questions:</b>		
<b>Instructional Activities: Activities/Tasks</b>		
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Date ____ to ____</p> <div style="background-color: #f08080; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;">Complex Text:</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; gap: 10px;"> <div style="background-color: #800000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Read 1</div> <div style="background-color: #800000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Read</div> <div style="background-color: #800000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Read</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; gap: 10px;"> <div style="background-color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Supporting activity, text, collab</div> <div style="background-color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Supporting activity, text, collab</div> <div style="background-color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Supporting activity, text, collab</div> </div> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Date ____ to ____</p> <div style="background-color: #ffcc99; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;">Complex Text:</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; gap: 10px;"> <div style="background-color: #ff6600; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Read 1</div> <div style="background-color: #ff6600; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Read</div> <div style="background-color: #ff6600; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Read</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; gap: 10px;"> <div style="background-color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Supporting activity, text, collab</div> <div style="background-color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Supporting activity, text, collab</div> <div style="background-color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Supporting activity, text, collab</div> </div> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Date ____ to ____</p> <div style="background-color: #add8e6; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;">Complex Text:</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; gap: 10px;"> <div style="background-color: #000080; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Read 1</div> <div style="background-color: #000080; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Read</div> <div style="background-color: #000080; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Read</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; gap: 10px;"> <div style="background-color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Supporting activity, text, collab</div> <div style="background-color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Supporting activity, text, collab</div> <div style="background-color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Supporting activity, text, collab</div> </div> </div> </div>		
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# Looking at the Big Picture



**How do you create a unit of study  
with deeper meaning and better  
understanding of the content?**

# The Process of Unit Design



# What makes it different from a theme-based unit?

## Before UbD\*: A Typical 5th Grade Social Studies Unit

### *Topic*

#### Westward Movement

### *Activities*

- Read textbook section - "Westward Expansion." Answer the end of chapter questions.
- Read and discuss Sarah Plain and Tall. Complete a "word search" puzzle of pioneer vocabulary terms contained in the story.
- Create a "pioneer life" memory box with artifacts showing what life might be like for a child traveling west or living on the prairie.
- PRAIRIE DAY activities: Dress in pioneer clothes and complete seven learning stations.
  - churn butter
  - play 19th century game
  - send letter home w/ sealing wax
  - make a corn husk doll
  - quilting
  - tin punching

### *Assessment*

- quiz on pioneer vocabulary terms from Sarah Plain and Tall.
- answers to end of chapter questions on pioneer life
- show and tell for Memory Box contents
- completion of seven learning stations during Prairie Day
- student reflections on the unit.
- create a report on Westward Expansion to share at Open House

Let's look at a typical theme-based unit *without* a big idea or essential questions to guide instruction and student learning.

# Leading with Big Idea and Essential Questions

Common Core Learning Standards Taught and Assessed (include one or more standards for one or more of the areas below. Please write out the complete text for the standard(s) you include.)		What assessment(s) will be utilized for this unit? (include the types of both formative assessments (F) that will be used throughout the unit to inform your instruction and the summative assessments (S) that will demonstrate student mastery of the standards.)	What does the assessment tell us?
Bundled Writing Standard(s): RW 1-2; 5-6; 8-9		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write a diary to friend “back east” describing your life on the trail, where you travel, what you see and experience.</li> <li>• Written explanation of museum display</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of Lang. /Conventions, Academic Voc</li> <li>• Understanding of information &amp; perspectives</li> </ul>
Bundled Speaking and Listening Standard (s): RW 1-2; 5-6; 8-9		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oral explanation of museum display</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of Lang.</li> <li>• Understanding of information &amp; perspectives</li> </ul>
Bundled Language Standard(s): RSL 1a,c,d, 2-4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written explanation of museum display</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of Lang.</li> <li>• Academic Vocabulary</li> </ul>
Resources/ Materials:	<p><b>Complex Texts to be used:</b></p> <p><b>Informational Text(s) Titles:</b> OCR Buffalo Hunt; SS text: Chapter 7 ; Perspectives: Transcontinental Railroad: Just the Facts</p> <p><b>Literature Titles:</b> Poetry:      Perspectives: <b>The Year of the Iron Road</b>      Perspectives: East Meets West</p> <p><b>Primary Sources:</b> Native American Perspective of Railroad; Painting and Early Photos (National Archives)</p> <p><b>Media/Technology:</b> Social Studies Text and leveled readers on Digital Path</p> <p><b>Other Materials:</b> Poetry and Songs</p>		
Interdisciplinary Connections:	<p>Cite several interdisciplinary or cross-content connections made in this unit of study (i.e. math, social studies, art, etc.) Literature, Social Studies Text and Historical Primary Sources are interwoven; art, poetry, cultural representations. Environmental impact and Economic Factors</p>		



# Creating





**An idea is “big” if it helps us make sense of lots of confusing experiences and seemingly isolated facts.**

**It’s like the picture that connects the dots or a simple rule of thumb in a complex field.**

**Grant Wiggins**

# The Big Idea ...

- emphasizes the common characteristics of a unifying concept
- is a concise statement, principle, or generalization
- promotes in-depth understanding
- applies across disciplines

## Big Idea Criteria Guidelines



Can you apply the big idea to more than one discipline?	
Can you look at other grade levels and find similar or recurring “big ideas” around which to organize learning?	
Will this concept stand “the test of time?”	
Will students be able to apply the “big idea” to their lives?	
Will students remember this “big idea” long after they leave your classroom?	
Does it promote in-depth understanding?	
Is it a concise statement, principle, theory, generalization?	
Does one have to dig deep to truly understand its meaning or implications?	
Might you change your mind about it over time?	
Does it reflect the core ideas as judged by experts?	
Does it help you make sense of things?	
Is it prone to disagreement (arguable)?	

**Questions to  
Help  
Determine the  
“Big Idea”**

# Practice Examples - Non Examples



# Answers

## Big Ideas

### Example

Friendships can be deepened or undone by hard times.

Price is a function of supply and demand.

The storyteller rarely tells the meaning of the story.

Reading is more than just the words on a page.

Healthy nutrition practices influence all aspects of our lives.

All life is interrelated as evidenced by the differences and similarities among species.

Words are power.

Relationships exist in all disciplines.

Critical Literacy is key to understanding the past.

### Non Example

Pee Wee Reese and Jackie Robinson were true friends through good times and bad.

Gas prices fluctuate with the availability of oil.

Students must identify author's purpose.

One practice of learning to read is phonetically.

Fruits and vegetables contain essential vitamins.

Whales and humans are both warm blooded; salamanders and sharks are both cold blooded.

Word origins unlock the potential for learning vocabulary

Relationships between quantities can be represented by graphs, tables, and equations.

Informational text is made up manuals, directions, and text books.

# Using Current Resources

## Open Court Themes – 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade

### Exploring the Theme: Look Again

The big idea of each story is connected to the theme.



## **Exploring the Theme**

### **Introduction**

---

Children love animals and have a natural curiosity about them. This unit draws on that natural curiosity and offers students the opportunity to learn about one aspect of animals: their camouflage. Because camouflage depends on the nature of an animal's environment, this unit also allows students to deepen their understanding of the relationship between an animal and the ecosystem of which it is a part.

Six selections are included in the unit Look Again. They combine expository prose and fictional stories.

Remarkable photographs and illustrations help guide students through the selections as they are introduced to basic concepts of camouflage: protective coloration, mimicry, and patterns of movement. The selections help students make connections between stories using the same theme.

In the previous units, the primary emphasis was on the narrative genre. With this unit, the program begins its second major focus—expository prose. Students now begin to learn about expository prose.



# Using Current Text...

Children love animals and have a natural curiosity about them. This unit draws on that natural curiosity and offers students the opportunity to learn about one aspect of animals: their camouflage. Because camouflage depends on the nature of an animal's environment, this unit also allows students to deepen their understanding of the relationship between an animal and the ecosystem of which it is a part.

## Big Idea:

**An animal has a relationship with the ecosystem of which it is a part.**



# Using Current Resources

- Holt 6<sup>th</sup> Course-12<sup>th</sup> grade
- Exploring the Unit: The Romantic Period
- Big Idea: Shifts in society result in cultural change.

of the eighteenth-century Augustans to a more private, spontaneous, lyric poetry. These lyrics expressed the Romantics' belief that imagination, rather than mere reason, was the best response to the forces of change. Wordsworth spoke of imagination this way:

“... spiritual love acts not nor can exist  
Without imagination, which, in truth,  
Is but another name for absolute power  
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,  
And Reason in her most exalted mood.”

—from *The Prelude*

## What Does “Romantic” Mean?

The word *romantic* comes from the term *romance*, one of the most popular genres of medieval literature (see page 193). Later, Romantic writers self-consciously used the elements of romance in an attempt to go back beyond the refinements of neoclassical literature to older types of writing that they saw as more “genuine.” The romance genre also allowed writers to explore new, more psychological and mysterious aspects of human experience.

Today, the word *romantic* is often a negative label used to describe sentimental writing. The word is particularly applied to bestselling paperback “romances” about love—a subject that many people mistakenly think the Romantic poets popularized. As a historical term, however, *romantic* has at least three useful meanings, all of them relevant to the Romantic poets.

## What Was Romanticism?

Romanticism is characterized by these general features:

- Romanticism turned away from the eighteenth-century emphasis on reason and artifice. Instead, the Romantics embraced imagination and naturalness.
- Romantic-era poets rejected the public, formal, and witty works of the previous century. They preferred poetry that spoke of personal experiences and emotions, often in simple, unadorned language.
- Many Romantics turned to a past or a

# Look Below The Surface....

A photograph of an iceberg floating in the ocean. The tip of the iceberg is visible above the water line, while the much larger, submerged part is visible below. The water is a deep blue, and the sky is a lighter blue with some clouds. The text "to uncover the Big Ideas." is overlaid in white on the submerged part of the iceberg.

to uncover the Big Ideas.

# Essential Questions



# Essential questions . . .

- have no right or wrong answers
- promote inquiry
- focus student learning toward the big idea
- foster critical thinking and deeper meaning
- spark curiosity and a sense of wonder
- **Engage students in real life problem-solving**

# Essential Questions Checklist

## Essential Question Criteria Check sheet



Does the question center around a student relevant major issue, problem, concern, or interest?	
Does the question probe for deeper meaning?	
Does the question set the stage for further questioning? Is the question open-ended?	
Is the question non-judgmental?	
Is the question meaningful and purposeful?	
Does the question appeal to emotions?	
Is the question intellectual?	
Does the question invite an exploration of ideas and beliefs?	
Does the question encourage collaboration?	
Does the question have more than one right answer?	
Is the question do-able as a project?	
Does the question ask the learner to make a decision?  <i>Should? Which? <b>OR</b> ask the learner to plan a course of action?</i>  <i>How? Why? What if?</i>	
Is the question framed in "kid friendly" language?	
Do you have a reasonable number of questions? 1 or 2 for a lesson; between 3 and 5 for a unit of study that ranges 3-12 weeks.	

# Essential Questions

## Examples

- What traits and characteristics determine a classification?
- Where do artists get their ideas?
- What determines “value”?
- What distinguishes a fluent foreigner from a native speaker?
- How does habitat influence how we live?

## Non Examples

- How many legs does a spider have?
- Did nature influence Monet?
- How many dimes in a dollar?
- What is the meaning of the Greek term technology from its Greek root “techne”?
- Why were settlements developed around lakes and rivers?

# Essential Questions Tips

- Organize unit around EQs
- Post 1-2 per lesson/3-5 per unit
- Link to lesson activities
- Sequence questions to assure a natural flow of thought.
- Use student-friendly language





**CREATING  
ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS  
USING OUR  
CORE PROGRAM**



# Using Current Text

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade OCR Story: “I See Animals Hiding”

**Inquiry Connections:**  
(at the beginning of  
each story in the TE! )

### **Inquiry Connections**

“I See Animals Hiding” is a well-illustrated account of how animals blend in with their natural surroundings. The key concepts to be explored are:

- Animals are everywhere but often are hard to spot because their color, shape, and movement match those of their surroundings.
- Animals need to hide to protect themselves.
- Some animals even change their color to match the season. They do this by shedding one coat and growing another.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade OCR Story: “I See Animals Hiding”

*Focus Question:* at the  
top of each story.

***Focus Questions*** Why do animals need to hide?  
What does “there’s more to the animal world  
than meets the eye” mean?

# Using Current Text

## Holt 6<sup>th</sup> Course-12<sup>th</sup> grade

**Preview: Think About...**

**Turn these into Essential Questions!**

# Using Current Text

## The Romantic Period 1798–1832

*by* Harley Henry

### PREVIEW

#### Think About ...

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, English society was being rocked by great political, economic, and social changes. The neoclassical faith in reason and its reverence for order and tradition, which had dominated English thought and literature for more than a century, seemed inadequate in the face of these profound upheavals. New ways of thinking, feeling, and responding to change seemed needed.

As you read about this period, look for answers to these questions:

- How did political events in America and France in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries affect English society?
- How did the industrialization of England revolutionize the ways in which people lived and worked?
- What political and economic theories developed in response to the changes brought about by England's rapid industrialization?
- What new values and responses to change did the Romantic poets offer?

# Concept → Big Idea → EQ

Current Texts Aligned with Common Core Unit  
First Grade

Concept	Big Idea	Essential Question
Unit 3 Our Neighborhood at Work	People in a community depend on each other for the things they need.	What are some things you and your family need, and where do you go to get them?

# Concept → Big Idea → EQs

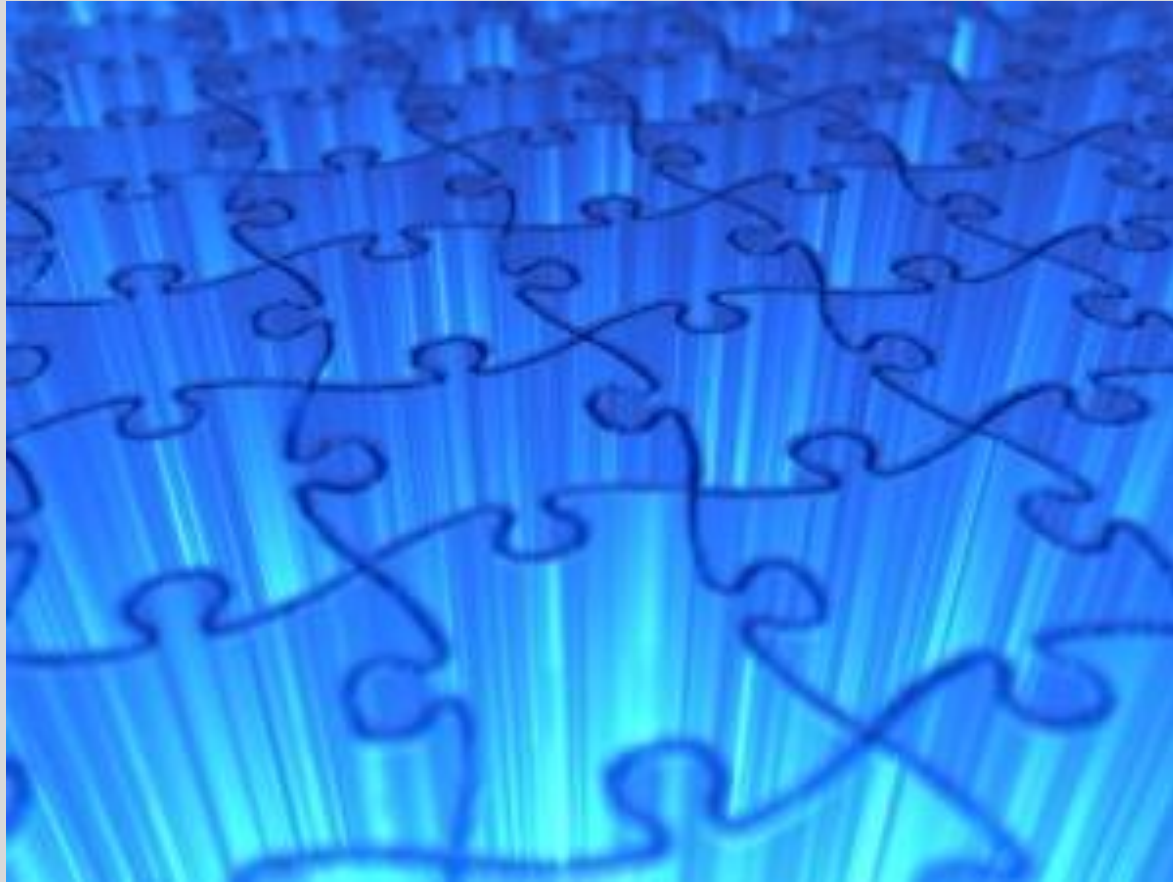
Current Texts Aligned with the Common Core  
Fourth Grade

Concept	Big Idea	Essential Questions
Unit 2 Dollars and Sense	Success in business depends on being able to meet people's needs.	What does it take to start a business?  What makes a business successful?

# Concept → Big Idea → EQ

Current Texts Aligned with the Common Core  
Secondary Level

Concept	Big Idea	Essential Question
Revolution	Conflict leads to change.	Does the Bill of Rights serve all citizens?



**Back to the  
BIG PICTURE!**

# The CCSS Shift

Grade	Literary	Informational
4	50%	50%
8	45%	55%
12	30%	70%



# Moving forward, teachers will use core programs to shift toward CCSS:

- Choose **the best selections** from the unit that help students understand the big idea.
- **Remove some selections** while maintaining the foundational skills.
- Replace these selections with **expository/informational texts** that help us understand the big idea.

# Teaching Strategies

- Students will use “close read” strategies to comprehend varied **complex texts**
- Students will **cite evidence to answer text dependent questions**
- Teachers will **embed the teaching of academic vocabulary** within the text
- Students will **express their understanding** through oral presentations or writing

# Common Core Unit Next Steps...



## Santa Ana Unified School District Common Core Unit Planner-Literacy

<b>Unit Title:</b>		
<b>Grade Level/Course:</b>		<b>Time Frame:</b>
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Finally . . .



The words *know* and *understand* are not synonyms. A student can have an accurate and thorough knowledge of something without understanding why the knowledge is justified, what the knowledge means, or what can be done with that knowledge.

Wiggins and McTighe, 1999, UbD Handbook