Literacy Initiative

Responding to the changing nature of literacy by providing students with skills that will endure beyond the classroom.

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
• Reading Comprehension Skills and Strategies
• Fluency
• Literacy Response
• Independent Reading/Application

• Reading Comprehension
• Discourse
• Writing - More Advanced Application
• Self Discovery/Career Awareness

• Critical Analysis/Synthesis
• Evaluation
• Inquiry/Research
• Authentic Application
The Talent Development (TD) Literacy Initiative comprises three first semester English Language Arts courses: Strategic Reading grade 9; Reading and Writing in Your Career grade 10; and College Prep Reading and Writing grade 11. These double dose courses offer students additional time with literacy instruction before they take required second semester courses.

The TD Literacy Initiative is a comprehensive approach to instruction, providing a variety of learning contexts so students can build and apply a range of knowledge, strategies, and skills. Working collaboratively, students are encouraged to think creatively and critically in response to specific academic tasks. Talent Development teachers provide ongoing support to students, allowing them to take charge of their learning while managing challenges that prepare them to move beyond high school.

As teachers interact with students through discussion, inquiry, research, explicit modeling, and cooperative learning, they are encouraged to use a variety of instructional approaches. These instructional practices are used consistently in collaboration with ongoing formative and summative assessments.

While the TD Literacy Initiative uses assessment to identify student deficits, it compels teachers to rethink literacy instruction, and craft learning experiences that move students to work at grade level. Part of rethinking teacher practice is contingent upon an understanding of how TD perceives the concept of acceleration. When acceleration is viewed as a process that moves students forward and away from their assessed deficiency levels, teachers can maximize their ability to promote academic achievement. This initiative helps teachers build on the relative strengths of their students while accelerating their proficiencies.

In response to the flow of information that surrounds adolescent literacy, the TD program recognizes the significant role that motivation plays in the lives of adolescent learners. The instructional design and materials enable students to make choices and take ownership of learning experiences within a responsive classroom environment. By motivating students, teachers are encouraged to help them build confidence, and to promote a high level of engagement. Most students stay engaged when they are making meaningful choices and can assume ownership of practices that support their academic success.

The TD Literacy Initiative is built upon guiding principles that serve as standard modes of operation. These principles require teachers to maintain high expectations for all students, considering what each brings to the literacy experience. Underpinning this belief is the philosophy that teachers must view what adolescents bring to the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom as valuable resources for influencing decisions regarding instructional practices.

Underlying the TD Literacy Initiative are the following functions:

- Student Motivation
- Literate Environment
- Teacher Expectations
- Instruction with Guided Practice & Immediate Feedback
- Student Engagement
- Teacher Modeling
- Cooperative Learning Teams and Text-based Discussions
- On-going Formative & Summative Assessment

The overall foundation that supports this initiative is the belief that talented, competent, caring teachers, who are willing to participate in continuous professional development, can promote student success when supported by a research-based literacy intervention.

The learning capacity of challenged adolescents is contingent upon actualizing, strengthening, and maximizing their potential to meet post-secondary goals.
Strategic Reading (SR) is an evidence-based, intervention course designed to provide adolescent learners with extra time to strengthen their reading and writing skills. Specifically targeted toward students who enter ninth grade poorly prepared in literacy, Strategic Reading offers a non-traditional approach to accelerating students’ proficiencies in reading fluency and comprehension. This first semester double-dose course helps English teachers narrow skills gaps so students can succeed in their second-semester core course. The overall design of Strategic Reading addresses the interests and motivation of adolescents.

Typically, students who enter high school underperforming in reading face many challenges in comprehending ninth-grade material, especially expository text and grade-level literature. Embedded in the Strategic Reading conceptual framework is a safety net for catching these struggling readers and writers. Strategic Reading accelerates the achievement of incoming freshmen and enables them to successfully meet the demands of a credit-based English course. SR students are assigned to a “double-dose” of language arts (Strategic Reading first semester and English 1 second semester). Students remain with the same teacher throughout the year, maximizing teachers’ ability to transfer instructional techniques and learning strategies. Ultimately, SR provides a systematic approach to preventing students from moving farther away from their expected grade level.

INSTRUCTIONAL FRAMEWORK

A student’s ability to sustain specific strategies and skills is crucial to increasing his or her independence with thinking and learning. After transitioning through Strategic Reading, those students who demonstrate the ability to integrate new ideas with existing knowledge, and to construct, examine, and extend meaning from print, are prepared to meet the demands typically placed on students in English 1. Strategic Reading’s goal is to strengthen students’ reading comprehension and fluency by empowering them to independently employ learning strategies and ultimately demonstrate the behaviors of independent readers and thinkers. SR uses different instructional practices to implement the framework.

- Establishing a media-rich learning environment where self-monitoring and self-regulation are demonstrated by the students and reinforced by the teacher.
- Using materials representing a range of reading levels and genre.
- Guiding students through activities with immediate reinforcement and feedback.
- Moving students through four distinct course components while helping them make meaningful connections among the components.
- Supporting students before, during, and after reading and writing.
- Using informal assessment techniques to help gauge the continuous level of support needed for individual students.
COURSE COMPONENTS

Ninth-graders taking Strategic Reading benefit tremendously from daily movement through the four course components. These components collectively involve students in a balance of language experiences: teacher read-aloud activities; guided reading in multiple genres; different modes of reading for different purposes; team/group reading and discussion; explicit skill and strategy instruction with guided practice; responsive writing, and self-selected reading. First addressing fluency, with reading comprehension as the ultimate goal, teachers engage students in daily silent, oral, and partner reading opportunities. When planning for daily instruction, Strategic Reading teachers align the course components to make activities meaningful and relevant to their students’ needs and experiences.

SHOWCASE (20 MINUTES)
During Reading Showcase, teachers read aloud from a selected text. While reading, the teacher pauses to “think-aloud,” modeling the internal monologue a reader typically conducts through self-questioning, focusing on key vocabulary, relating personal experiences/opinions, or asking questions about an author’s intention. Teachers also model: how readers use specific strategies to construct and monitor their understanding of text-based meaning. Although the teacher leads this activity, students engage in conversation and demonstrate their own thinking beyond personal opinion, including applications of reading strategies, interpretation, and evaluation.

FOCUS LESSON (20 MINUTES)
During the Focus Lesson, teachers target a skill, strategy or concept students can apply to any text during silent and oral reading, and when working on learning activities. After a brief period of direct instruction, which can include media and technology to enhance students’ concept of background knowledge, teachers engage students in monitored practice sessions where they model, write, discuss, and analyze fiction and non-fiction. Student learning teams function academically and socially if teachers model explicitly for them, clarify, use analogies, problem solve, use research to promote learning, think students through answers to essential questions, and most importantly, assess students’ progress. Essentially, this mini-lesson format allows teachers the time to reinforce student capabilities through immediate feedback, and additional practice.

STUDENT TEAM LITERATURE (30 MINUTES)
The Student Team Literature component enables students to work intensively with an assortment of core texts while interacting with peers in cooperative learning groups. Students read and interact with books and materials at varied grade levels, representing different degrees of conceptual difficulty, as they engage in text-related reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities detailed in a Partner Discussion Guide.

These discussion guides are distributed to individual students for each core text; they provide structure for student teams during the guided reading, and responsive writing segments. This instructional framework breaks students’ literacy experiences into manageable steps while providing a platform for students to engage in high-level team discussions. During Student Team Literature, students are motivated by regular opportunities to work together in an interactive social setting.

SELF-SELECTED READING AND LEARNING CENTERS (20 MINUTES)
For the final segment of the class, students work in one of four independent work stations: Self-Selected Reading, Composer’s Square, Data Central, and Word Play. Each station supports students by developing their independent reading and writing skills. Students gain additional opportunities to strengthen reading fluency by reading authentic books and articles.

A student’s ability to sustain specific strategies and skills is crucial to increasing his or her independence with thinking and learning.
STRENGTHENING THE POTENTIAL OF ADOLESCENT LEARNERS

Reading and Writing in Your Career (RWYC) provides 10th-grade students whose reading levels are considerably lower than grade expectancy with a double-dose of instructional time during the first semester. These challenged readers and writers need more time to increase their literacy competency. Despite their individual literacy challenges, second-year high school students are required to read a wide range of texts written at varied levels of difficulty. Regrettably, these students are usually not equipped to make choices (reading choices or course choices) necessary for post-secondary preparation. This course assumes that students who have a basic knowledge of reading and writing strategies need to practice more advanced applications under the guidance of classroom teachers. Consequently, RWYC students participate daily in peer discussion groups around thematically linked texts organized under the unit titles: Who am I? Where am I going? How will I get there? RWYC teachers follow carefully designed, flexible, instructional plans that enable students to read fiction and non-fiction daily with discussion, writing, and multiple opportunities to engage in inquiry and research. While working to accelerate their proficiencies in 10th-grade literacy, RWYC students also begin to explore college and career opportunities.

INSTRUCTIONAL FRAMEWORK

A student’s ability to sustain specific reading and writing strategies and make application of skills continues to be crucial to increasing their independence with thinking and learning. After completing RWYC, those students who demonstrate the ability to integrate new ideas with existing knowledge, and to construct, examine, and extend meaning from print, are prepared to meet the demands typically placed on students in 10th-grade English classrooms. The goal of SR and RWYC is to strengthen students’ reading comprehension and fluency by empowering them to independently employ learning strategies and ultimately demonstrate the behaviors of independent readers and thinkers. Both double-dose courses (9th and 10th) use a variety of instructional practices to implement the framework.

- Establishing a media-rich learning environment where self-monitoring and self-regulation are demonstrated by the students and reinforced by the teacher.
- Transitioning students through four distinct course components while helping them make meaningful connections between the components,
- Using materials representing a range of reading levels and genre.
- Engaging students in listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities that integrate content and procedural knowledge.
- Explicitly guiding students through activities with immediate reinforcement and feedback.
- Using informal assessment techniques to help gauge the continuous level of support needed for student success.
- Promoting mental habits that facilitate students’ ability to take control of their own learning and demonstrate higher level skills, i.e., seeking clarity and accuracy, engaging intensely when solutions are not obvious, using available resources, monitoring and evaluating their own thinking, and being sensitive to feedback.

And uniquely in 10th grade

- Exposing students to frequent writing opportunities for personal growth, reflection and expression.
- Using thematic units to provide students with personal discovery experiences while making a variety of text-to-text and text-self connections.
**Course Components**

**Reading Showcase (20 Minutes)**
Teachers read aloud from a selected text during this time. As the teacher reads, he/she pauses to “think aloud,” modeling the internal monologue a reader typically has by asking questions about what an author means, the plot, vocabulary, or relating a personal opinion/experience to what is being read. In addition to providing students with a regular opportunity to interact with the reader and question the author, the activity’s emphasis is twofold: first, eliciting responses from students about what is being read and second, asking students to visualize as they read. The activity also emphasizes how readers adjust their behavior based on the type of material they read and the purpose for reading. Teachers receive a variety of texts to use during this time, and they are also welcome to supplement the resources with their own texts. Like in SR, this component gives teachers daily opportunities to model learning to read and reading to learn.

**Focus Lesson (20 Minutes)**
During the second 20 minutes of class, teachers directly instruct students in a skill or concept they will be immediately applying to that day’s (or an upcoming day’s) Student Team Literature component. The purpose is for teachers to not only explain, but also model for students the selected skill or concept based on the needs of students. Additionally, students have an opportunity to practice in a meaningful way, therefore, providing a window for teachers to assess student performance. In RWYC, the Focus Lesson heavily emphasizes writing and the developmental “springboard” activities that come before the assignments themselves. Additionally, unit themes call for students to research careers, personalizing the literacy projects.

**Student Team Literature (30 Minutes)**
During this 30-minute block, students work intensively with one of several core texts. These texts vary in difficulty and provide an opportunity for teachers to choose selections that are most appropriate to the students’ reading levels. Using Partner Discussion Guides for a selected text, teachers move students through three units that parallel the questions: Who am I? Where am I going? and How do I get there? Partner Discussion Guides include a wide variety of activities including pre-reading, partner activities, team discussions, individual activities, extension activities, and vocabulary and literature tests. Students write for multiple purposes from varied perspectives. The unique relationship between reading and writing enables students to explore fluency, clarity, and the use of conventions in writing. Like SR’s team literature component, this activity engages students in cooperative learning teams.

**Self-Selected Reading, Writing, and Investigating Learning Centers (20 Minutes)**
For the final 20 minutes of class, students work in one of three independent work stations: Self-Selected Reading Center, Career Resource Center, and Publishing Center. Each station helps students develop their independent reading and writing skills. Additionally, the Career Resource Center gives students an opportunity to investigate college and career references and other materials. Publishing is also emphasized, encouraging students to take pride in their work and think about each piece of writing eventually as a finished product. The centers focus on the development of creative writing, silent reading, and the exploration of post-secondary options.
MAXIMIZING THE POTENTIAL OF ADOLESCENT LEARNERS

College Prep Reading and Writing (CPRW) moves the TD Literacy Initiative forward by providing additional and sustained support to 11th-grade students who have not acquired the necessary skills for college and post-high school careers. Like Strategic Reading and Reading and Writing in Your Career, this course engages students in age-appropriate materials and topics while building their confidence and skill levels. CPRW also prepares students to meet the challenges of state assessments while enabling them to begin the planning necessary to benefit from post-secondary options. This level of support for “challenged adolescent literacy learners” is significant because instruction directly related to college preparation often cannot be addressed in the senior year when most colleges are already accepting applications. CPRW is designed to promote the belief that given an appropriate awareness, intensive instructional support and personalized encouragement, a targeted population of students can be ready to explore institutions of higher learning and specialized post-secondary careers.

INSTRUCTIONAL FRAMEWORK

College Prep Reading and Writing (CPRW) is the first semester 11th-grade course for students who will benefit from daily exposure to skills that are essential for college and the workplace. As the upper-level double-dose course of English Language Arts, CPRW requires students to assume more responsibility for independent reading, analysis, and writing. Using informational texts, thematic readings, and fiction, teachers lead students through activities that include short pieces of journalism that are different from what they may be accustomed to reading. These texts help students become aware of key topics, cultural debates, and vocabulary associated with post-high school education and training.

As students explore non-fiction and fiction, they are challenged to read about contemporary topics written in a variety of voices and styles. This exposure helps students increase their writing fluency, while enabling them to experience the interrelated aspects of reading and writing.

CPRW is also a project-based course that engages students in completing assignments and making presentations. Essentially, this element of the instructional design is considered critical because it represents an ongoing opportunity for students to apply their knowledge. To ensure that students leave high school with the confidence and motivation needed for college and/or the workplace, CPRW is set in a college-like environment where students are challenged, daily, to appreciate and respect the opinions of others, while developing their own perspectives based on background knowledge and research.

Developing a portfolio for final assessment allows students to understand their progress. Consequently, as students complete assignments for the various units that make up the course they are able to reflect, revise, and synthesize.
COURSE COMPONENTS

CPRW uses four timed instructional components to move students through various activities designed to provide practice in reading short, higher-level selections. Additionally, students are engaged in analyzing style as a way of conveying meaning; recognizing unidentified unfamiliar vocabulary through context; learning and practicing specific writing and speaking techniques and formats in literature-based or research assignments; answering critical thinking questions about what they have read by citing textual evidence; completing a common college application, and applying their knowledge to real-world situations.

READING COLLOQUY (20 MINUTES)
Students independently read a brief current events article for no more than 10 minutes. Then they work with a partner for five minutes to discuss questions or problems that each had and to help one another. The last five minutes are for a structured, analytical discussion during which students respond to the article giving their opinions and reactions while using the article as evidence for their response. This activity engages students in reading about the world outside of themselves (much like college), asks them to make educated, opinionated responses about what they have read, and holds them accountable for participating. Evaluation rubrics and scoring tools are provided for the teacher.

FOCUS LESSON (20 MINUTES)
During the second 20 minutes, teachers instruct students in a skill or concept that they will immediately apply to that day’s (or upcoming days’) Literature Exploration or Project-based Application. The purpose is for teachers to not only explain, but to also model the selected skill or concept. Additionally, students have an opportunity to practice during this time in an authentic or meaningful way. By limiting the time for direct instruction, teachers are more likely to keep challenged readers’ attention while giving them the modeling and practice time they need to actually incorporate a skill into their own knowledge base. Focus Lesson time emphasizes the elements of literature, aspects of research, and analytical thinking and writing.

LITERATURE EXPLORATION (30 MINUTES)
During this 30-minute block, students work intensively with an anthology of thematic reading, and with the support of Partner Discussion Guides, they read grade-level novels. Students not only work with higher-level texts, but they also formulate the types of written responses with textual support common to state-based exams and college courses. In addition, they are asked to participate in discussions common to both college and post-secondary careers. All of the literature deals with complex and diverse themes that encourage students to begin to think about the world outside themselves and how they fit into the larger global community.

PROJECT-BASED APPLICATIONS (20 MINUTES)
Part of what makes CPRW unique is the variety of student projects. Some of the suggested projects provide authentic learning applications for students: delivering a two-minute persuasive speech, participating in a formal debate, completing the common college application, writing a research paper with emphasis on the early stages of gathering resources, and reading an upper-level novel and finding current-events articles that demonstrate its relevance. In addition, teachers have the option of requiring students to develop a performance portfolio that they can use as a culminating project; here students describe and demonstrate the gains they made in particular skill areas as a result of their course work.
The Talent Development Literacy Initiative believes that the presence of strong, well-prepared, highly motivated teachers in secondary classrooms is an indicator of successful program implementation. This belief is reinforced by the sustained, relevant professional development and access to materials that are developmentally appropriate for adolescents. Given that support is essential, teachers are expected to maintain healthy, productive relationships with their students while expecting that students will take advantage of learning opportunities. The TD model endorses the assignment of instructional coaches to subject-area teachers to support high expectations for all students. Rather than assume a supervisory relationship with teachers, coaches co-plan, model, access relevant materials, and assist with monitoring student progress.

Allowing for the strong influence that well-prepared, motivated teachers have on student success, the literacy initiative includes the time and resources needed to build teacher expertise. This adolescent literacy intervention, complete with tools and materials, provides vision, organization, materials, and practical suggestions, with consideration for individual teacher judgement. Because a large number secondary English teachers are not trained to teach reading or literacy, this initiative offers several layers of support:

- Intensive teacher training prior to initial implementation and prior to the beginning of second semester.
- Classroom availability of materials and resources aimed to promote student interaction and high engagement in literacy learning.
- Mid-year professional development with emphasis on the transition of strategies and skills to promote student success during the second semester.
- Ongoing professional development opportunities, including in-class support, teacher to teacher collaboration, coaching, and frequent opportunities to exercise reflective practices.
- Tools and resources that help teachers accentuate student motivation and growth.
- Exposure to research-based practices for accelerating literacy proficiencies.

**POTENTIAL OF ADOLESCENT LEARNERS**

**COACHING**

Job-embedded professional development is critical for the success of secondary teachers, and in particular for high school English teachers who may not have been trained to teach Literacy. The relationship between coach and teacher is dependent upon both individuals’ respect for reflective learning and strategic planning. Talented coaches view themselves as co-learners rather than experts, and their skillful use of the coaching cycle creates a strong foundation for successful program implementation.

One simple but significant element that solidifies the teacher-coach relationship is the coaches’ willingness to provide teachers with resources and tools. Sensitivity to offering feedback to teachers, is a skill that enables coaches to support teachers while respecting their dignity.
**STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

As the *Adolescent Literacy Initiative Study*, conducted at Johns Hopkins University, reflects, *Strategic Reading* yields significant impact on student achievement. When recommended & research-based approaches are used by SR teachers, student achievement is significantly impacted:

- Teacher modeling of comprehension skills and strategies and interpretation of author’s use of literary devices.
- Background and vocabulary preparation for reading and writing.
- Self-selected reading.
- Regular opportunity for student application of strategies and skills.
- Ongoing guided reading experiences allowing students to read for a variety of purposes.
- Student team discussion of shared reading.

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**Talent Development Literacy Initiative**

*The TD model endorses the assignment of instructional coaches to subject-area teachers to support high expectations for all students.*
RESEARCH RESULTS

Recent research evidence has shown that reading achievement gains are significantly larger for ninth-grade students whose teachers make more frequent and stronger use of the instructional practices recommended in the Strategic Reading program of Talent Development High Schools.

In addition, recent experimental studies have found that the expert coaching recommended for high school English teachers under the Talent Development model results in much stronger teacher implementation of these effective approaches than in schools that rely only on professional development workshops or written lessons to support their teachers.

These results come from a large, three-year study that included 64 high schools in urban, suburban, and rural locations, involving 130 ninth-grade teachers and 3,236 ninth-grade students.

POSITIVE READING ACHIEVEMENT GAINS

Figure 1 shows that students’ one-year reading achievement gains are significantly greater when their teachers are high on a scale of implementing instructional practices recommended by the Talent Development model, compared to other classes with less frequent and weaker use of these approaches. This implementation scale combined the recommended practices of teacher modeling of comprehension strategies (such as reading and thinking aloud) and student team discussions of shared readings after the teacher has presented background on the selection and its new vocabulary. The scale contrasted these recommended practices with the more traditional approaches of extensive drill-and-practice exercises and teacher-dominated instruction to the whole class. In Figure 1, the “low” category includes all teachers’ classes below average on the implementation scale, while the “high” category is average or above. The difference between the categories is about five months of additional gain over the year.

FIGURE 1: STUDENT READING TEST BY TEACHER IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL
**Benefits of Coaching**

Figure 2 compares three different conditions of teacher support on the implementation of the recommended literacy instructional approaches by ninth-grade teachers, to show that coaching has the strongest benefits.

In this study, schools were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions: (a) Workshops on the recommended approaches twice during the year, (b) Daily written lesson materials using the recommended approaches in addition to the workshops, and (c) Expert coaching at least once per week in addition to the workshops and materials. Using an implementation scale that combined three classroom observations with survey reports from students and teachers on the frequency of different practices, a clear pattern emerged across the three experimental conditions. Coaching produced the strongest implementation of the recommended literacy practices, followed in order by lesson materials and workshops and workshops only. The differences favoring coaching are statistically significant and represent both more frequent and higher quality use of the recommended Talent Development instructional practices.

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![Figure 2: Use of Recommended Practices](image-url)
# Core Text Options

## Strategic Reading (9th)
- One More River to Cross
- Night of the Twisters
- Breaking Through
- Coming of Age in America
- America Street
- Seedfolks
- Eleanor Roosevelt
- The Friendship
- Walk Two Moons
- The Secret Life of Bees
- Leaving Home

## Reading and Writing in Your Career (10th)
- Trino’s Choice
- A Hope in the Unseen
- Things Fall Apart
- Touching Spirit Bear
- A Long Way Gone
- Amazing Grace
- An Island Like You
- Big Mouth and Ugly Girl
- The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle
- The Giver
- Shabanu

## College Prep Reading and Writing (11th)
- Animal Farm
- Somebody Told Me
- In Fact: The Best Creative Non-Fiction
- Hunger of Memory
- 75 Thematic Readings

## Second Semester (for use in SR and RWYC)
- Romeo & Juliet
- To Kill a Mockingbird
- I Am the Cheese
- Of Mice and Men
- The Odyssey
- The Pearl
- The Pigman
- All Quite on the Western Front
- Journalistas: 100 Years of the Best Writing and Reporting
Talent Development High Schools offers a wide array of courses. If you would like a course prospectus or more information on any of our courses, please contact us, and we will be happy to forward you additional information. You are also invited to visit our website at [www.csos.jhu.edu](http://www.csos.jhu.edu) for complete information on Talent Development programs and curricula.

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS**
- Strategic Reading
- Reading & Writing in Your Career
- College Prep Reading & Writing
- Literacy Lab

**MATHEMATICS**
- Transition to Advanced Mathematics
- Geometry Foundations
- Algebra II Foundations
- Career Academy Blended Mathematics

**SOCIAL STUDIES**
- Freshman Seminar

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