“Reading well is one of the great pleasures that solitude can afford you, because it is, at least in my experience, the most healing of pleasures. It returns you to otherness, whether in yourself or in friends, or in those who may become friends. Imaginative literature is otherness, and as such alleviates loneliness. We read not only because we cannot know enough people, but because friendship is so vulnerable, so likely to diminish and disappear, overcome by space, time, imperfect sympathies, and all the sorrows of familial and passiona life”. (Bloom, 2000; p.19)

Reading Literature in the Common Core:
The CCS follow the National Assessment Educational Progress (2009) and in grades K-3rd. narrative reading takes precedence over nonfiction. It is only in 4th grade were both genres balance out. By the time that students reach high school, the CCS undoubtedly favors nonfiction reading (70%). An important distinction though, is that according to NAEP, nonfiction reading is not solely the responsibility of the ELA middle and high school teachers. Science and technology teachers should also focus on nonfiction reading.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Literary Reading</th>
<th>Informational Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Common Core Standards, page 4

It is necessary to safeguard the importance of literature in the lives of students. It is not only that through literature (encompassing stories, drama, poetry) students are exposed to beautiful language and rich descriptions. The power of literature lies in describing and naming emotions; in finding humanity and integrity. 'The way
through the world is more difficult to find than the way beyond it’ said Wallace Stevens. Finding our way can become a little easier by having literature around us.

Understanding fiction: Growing with and through books:

We have come to associate literature with language, culture and tradition. But literature is much more than a cultural or historical artifact. Narratives give us a depth of emotional and ethical understanding that we may not capture when we go through the motions of our everyday lives. The power of persuasion in narratives lies in the ethical, moral and cultural underpinnings they portray. They can impact an individual and they have proven to be able to change a whole society.

In 1852 Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1853/1981). Her discernment of ‘otherness’ transcended individuals. She not only contributed to build an awareness of the "destructive power of slavery...; she also laid the groundwork for the Civil War" (Strange, 2002, p.19; Kaufman, 2006).

**Persuasion in Fiction:**
Harriet Beecher Stowe’s book is an example of how fiction can help transform a society. It represents the power that narratives have on us, how they affect us and transform us. Like the characters in fairy tales, we can also fall into the magic of a story’s spell. We can be part of other worlds and lives that are unreachable or otherwise unknown. By being engaged and immersed, fiction enhances our ability to understand other people’s motivations and actions, as well as ourselves.

This persuasive element in fiction has often been unrecognized. However, fiction seems to be more effective at changing long term beliefs. Nonfiction is designed to persuade through argument and evidence; and we tend to discard the persuasive and subtle power of fiction to change our views. Studies show that when we read nonfiction, readers recognize the argument and evidence, but they can be defensive about integrating information that doesn't fit their prior or background knowledge. This changes when the reader is absorbed in a story. When the argument and description is presented through a human lens, the reader is likely to put his intellectual guard down. When we are moved emotionally, we are easily molded and shaped. (Green & Brock, 2000; Prentice & Gerrig, 1999; Strange & Leung, 1999).

Narratives follow a structure that always includes a setting, a number of characters that have to face a conflict and find a way to resolve it. Many narratives (particularly those associated with elementary and middle school) show us how characters with lofty ideals tend to succeed. The opposite applies to petty and egotistical characters. Within this framework, authors can emphasize different aspects and pursue different goals that affect the structure and objective of the narratives:
1. Narratives that emphasize the setting (or milieu): In *Gulliver's Travels* (1735/1996), Jonathan Swift's objective was to describe and compare strange and unfamiliar settings with English society of the time. The setting is also emphasized in *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* by Selma Lagerlof (1907/2001). Lagerlof received a commission from the National Teachers Association in 1902 to write a geography reader for the Norway public schools. Nils is depicted as flying on a gigantic goose over Norway describing in detail its wildlife and nature and including myths and fables of the different lands he sees.

2. Narratives that emphasize an idea: are about the process of seeking and discovering new information through the eyes of characters. Mysteries are constructed around specific ideas (i.e. Who did it?; Why? How?); from *Nate the Great* (Weinman Sharmat, 2002) to Agatha Christie, the story ends when the identity and motive of the crime or situation is revealed.

3. Narratives that emphasize a character: the story begins at the moment when the main character becomes so unhappy, impatient or angry in her present role that she begins the process of change; it ends when the character either settles into a new role (happily or not) or gives up the struggle and remains in the old role (happily or not). Books that emphasize a character’s point of view are *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (MacLachlan, 1996) and *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2002);

4. Narratives that emphasize the event: Many books that are considered classics fall under this category. Something is terribly wrong; the universe is falling apart. The murder of Hamlet's father by his own brother (and Hamlet's uncle); the birth of a child who is pre-destined to restore order (i.e. Harry Potter); or a quest (i.e. *The Lord of the Rings*). In all these cases “a golden age” has been destroyed; the world is hanging by a thread. Most of the time, the event story ends at the point when a new order is established.

Readers' Goals when reading narratives:

When a reader engages in fictional reading, s/he has to focus to find the author’s goal (i.e. identifying the structure). The reader needs to align his/her thinking with that of the author. The reader’s driving desire is to gain full understanding of why settings, events, ideas or emotions are described in the text (Graesser, Singer and Trabasso, 1995).

Gaining in depth understanding and language knowledge when reading narratives:
Discussion is a valuable approach to promote in depth understanding that has been gaining ground in the field of education Beck and McKeown (2001) have described how questions before and during read aloud supports K to 3 children in maintaining focus and avoiding tangential contributions. The same holds true for students in middle and high school levels. Discussions that target a moral and/or ethical issues, spark the interest of all students, driving understanding and engagement to deeper levels (Snow, 2010).

The language of narratives:
Students who engage in extensive reading of narratives, discussions and conversations, gain control over structures associated with literature: sequential and past tense markers, dialogue features, variety in adverbs and adjectives that add richness to the descriptions; abstract words that describe emotions and motivations and figurative language (similes and metaphors) are all found in narratives. Nonfiction strives for clarity; fiction strives for beauty and clarity. Good narratives employ aesthetic language; they are carefully crafted and offer a with rhythm and flow that is not necessarily found in nonfiction.

Background Knowledge and Text Complexity when reading narratives:
The interaction between background knowledge and text complexity is not a simple one. Analyzing the two lexile classifications that *The Old Man and the Sea* (Hemingway, 1951-1996) reflects the complexities associated with categorizing books. Lexile leveling or classification takes into account word variation and sentence structures. Within the same website, (http://www.lexile.com/) *The Old Man and the Sea* receives two significantly different classifications. One is 1370L and the other one is 940L. The first level is associated with 12th grade and beyond, whereas the second level corresponds to a sixth grade reading level. Surprisingly, both levels are right but they take different factors into consideration. The result for text complexity (940L), reflects the short and simple sentences employed throughout the book. The words are everyday words. The 1370L classification takes into consideration more than just text complexity. It takes into account the maturity and judgement needed to understand the book. It would have to be a very special 6th grader who can fully grasp the dignity, frustration and hope that the book’s main character, a Cuban fisherman, experiences throughout the book.

The content of Rowling’s (1997) *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (880 Lexile level), reflects a theme that elicits motivation and interest from most 6th graders. Undoubtedly, no sixth grader has had first hand experience with magic and magicians; giants, and broken wands. But their imaginations and interest are ignited when they come in contact with Rowling’s depictions of good and evil; the struggle they elicit and the reliance on friendship to confront everything (and everyone). To
fully absorb a book’s power requires taking into account the maturity level expected of the content, its topic as well as the reader’s motivation, background knowledge and purpose for reading.

**Cross Cultural Background Knowledge and Reading comprehension:**
Students in any one classroom may represent many backgrounds and bring to the reading task the diversity and richness of many languages and cultures. While there are basic similarities in the fluent reading process across languages (Hudelson, 1981), specific language and cultural differences can affect reading, especially as differences exist in orthographies, morphology, syntax, and patterns of discourse. On a broader level, how do cultural differences in background knowledge influence reading comprehension? How can teachers facilitate reading comprehension in a new language of culturally different students?
The first study that examined this question (Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey, & Anderson, 1981) investigated the effects of cultural differences between urban, working-class black students and white students from an agricultural area. Eighth graders from the two populations read a letter written by a friend who had moved away, describing an episode in a school cafeteria. The letter contained verbal insults among the students such as “You so ugly that when the doctor delivered you he slapped you in the face.” Asked to read the letter and recall it, the urban black students tended to interpret the passage to be about verbal play, ritual insults, or “sounding,” a common verbal style in the black community, whereas the white students tended to interpret the passage as involving physical aggression.

Religious schemata, too, affects children’s comprehension of texts that reflect religious practices. Fourth, fifth, and sixth graders, some Catholic, some Jewish, reading two passages entitled “Bar Mitzvah” and “First Communion” (Lipson, 1983), recalled more information and were able to generate more inferences when they were familiar with the events in the passage. They also made fewer errors in recall and took less time to read the familiar passage. Cultural-religious schemata influenced the children’s comprehension of familiar and unfamiliar texts about religious events.

What we take from these studies is that culture plays a role in comprehension; it can facilitate it or hinder it if the student has not been given the tools to understand. But children are also curious about learning different ways and different understandings. And literature is one of the best ways to understand the culture developed by a particular group. In this sense, reading literature is also bound to that sense of reaching out and finding the *otherness* described before by Bloom. Learning has to be paved by spending time building the schema or background knowledge to understand the different cultural or historical implications portrayed in books. Building background knowledge is not wasted time; it is the best way, or the only way to ensure comprehension and learning.
The Anchor Standards for Reading for Literature:
The Anchor Standards for Reading for Information and Reading Literature are the same. The Main Academic demands allows us to analyze the core of these standards. The first three address inferencing and determining main idea and supporting details as well as analysis of cause and effect interactions:

Standard 1: MAD: Draw Inferences using evidence from text
Standard 2: MAD: Summarize text by determining main ideas and supporting details
Standard 3: MAD: Analyze cause/effect interactions between key text elements

The next two standards target the language that the text employs:

Standard 4: MAD: Analyze the meaning and impact of word choice
Standard 5: MAD: Analyze the relationship of linguistic and text structures

Standard 6 and 7 focus on finding the structure and goal of the writer:

Standard 6: MAD: Assess author’s point of view
Standard 7: MAD: Synthesize and evaluate content presented in various formats

Standard 8: (not applicable to Literature)

Standard 9 requires that the reader compares and contrasts similar texts and subjects. Standard 10 requires that the previous analysis is carried out in a grade appropriate text.

Conclusion:
The pedagogical practices outlined in the core standards are to be practiced within educational settings. But their long term goal is to teach students how to read well and on their own. Reading literature might not offer the practical edge that nonfiction offers, but knowing how to read literature well can become a source of solace and pleasure. Narratives have the power to make us transcend our world. Perhaps there is no better teaching than the one that accomplishes that goal.

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