Sneaking a Peek
Item and task prototypes have recently been released from PARCC, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. This is the multi-state consortium which will be guiding the creation of the Common Core Assessments that will replace the current ISAT tests in 2014-2015. The online prototypes found on the PARCC website are designed to guide educators on the importance of content of the standards in the future technology-based assessments.

What follows is an excerpt from the PARCC website concerning the released items.

PARCC Item and Task Prototypes
The primary purpose of sharing item and task prototypes is to provide information and to support educators as they transition to the CCSS and the PARCC assessments. The dynamic, online prototypes presented on the PARCC website are designed to shine a light on important elements of the CCSS and to show how critical content in the standards may be manifested on PARCC’s next-generation, technology-based assessments. The PARCC sample items and tasks can and should be viewed as one of the many types of materials educators can use during the transition to the CCSS and PARCC.

To view the sample items, go to: http://www.parcconline.org/ and click on Item and Task Prototypes. The sample links are about half way down the page.
Creating Text-Dependent Questions for Close Reading

One way to create text-dependent questions is to follow these steps:

1. **Identify the Core Understanding and Key Ideas of the Text**
   Using a “backwards design” concept, teachers should begin the process of developing questions by identifying the major points students should understand.

2. **Start Small to Build Confidence**
   Students should be able to answer opening questions whose purpose is to orient students to the text. This will build their confidence and enable them to answer more difficult questions which should follow.

3. **Target Vocabulary and Text Structure**
   Develop questions which target the connections between the most powerful academic words and key ideas in the text.

4. **Tackle Tough Sections Head-on**
   Develop questions which assess the student’s understanding of the difficult sections of the text such as ones with difficult syntax or dense information.

5. **Create Coherent Sequences of Text Dependent Questions**
   The sequence of questions should not be random but begin with basic, opening questions and lead into a more difficult level of questions.

6. **Identify the Standards That Are Being Addressed**
   Identify the standards addressed in the questions developed and, if possible, create additional questions which address additional standards.

7. **Create the Culminating Assessment**
   The culminating activity should reflect the mastery of one or more of the standards, involve writing and be completed by students independently.

**A Close Reading of “Living Like Weasels”**

A close reading of Annie Dillard’s “Living Like Weasels” can span four days of instruction and reflection which incorporate the following tasks.

1. **Rereading:** Two readings of the text are done before students are required to respond to text-dependent questions.

2. **Vocabulary:** Crucial vocabulary words have been underlined and defined or bolded so they will be included as part of the lesson.

3. **Sentence Syntax:** Students are provided support in understanding what the author is saying and the reasoning behind his/her sentence construction.

4. **Discussion:** The passage is discussed in depth, including answering questions by drawing evidence from the text.

5. **Writing:** Students paraphrase sections of the text, write journal entries and compose an informative essay on why the author chose the title “Living Like Weasels.”

“Close reading is a careful and purposeful rereading of a text.”
- Dr. Douglas Fisher

**Examples of Guiding Questions for “Living Like Weasels”**

1. What features of a weasel’s existence make it wild? Make it violent?

2. What instances in the text show a display of weasels being “obedient to instinct”?

3. At what point does the author start speaking about herself? What is the focus of her observations?

4. Why is this shift to first person important? What significance do these observations hold?

5. What features of Hollins Pond does Dillard mention?

6. What evidence is there in paragraphs 5 and 6 regarding a human presence at the pond?

7. Dillard is careful to place these opposing descriptions (of the natural and man made) side-by-side. How does this juxtaposition fit with or challenge what we have already read? Why might she have chosen this point in the text for these descriptions?

Source: [http://www.achievethecore.org/steal-these-tools/close-reading-exemplars](http://www.achievethecore.org/steal-these-tools/close-reading-exemplars)
Focus on Standard for Mathematical Practice 1

The first Practice Standard, **Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them**, requires students to start a problem by looking for entry points and explaining to themselves the meaning of the problems. Students need to make conjectures, plan a pathway (rather than jumping in), monitor their progress and change course when necessary. When students finish a problem they need to check using a different method or representation (consider equations, verbal descriptions, tables, graphs or diagrams) and then ask themselves, “Does this answer make sense?” Proficient students should also understand the approaches of others and be able to identify correspondences between different approaches.

How do I encourage MP1?
- Ask what information they need and how to start.
- Provide ample wait time throughout a problem allowing students to go down a variety of paths.
- Have students reflect on how a problem relates to previous work.
- Ask students to construct their own solution pathway rather than following a provided one.
- Employ problems involving ideas that are currently at the forefront of the student’s developing mathematical knowledge.
- Provide students the answer to a problem and ask them to create a strategy that would lead to that answer.

Focus on Standard for Mathematical Practice 2

The second Practice Standard, **Reason abstractly and quantitatively**, requires students to make sense of quantities and relationships in problem situations. Mathematically proficient students should decontextualize and contextualize.

Decontextualizing is taking necessary information from a given situation, representing it symbolically and treating these symbols as if they have a life of their own. Contextualizing is pausing during the manipulation process to probe into the meaning of the symbols. Students should be able to create a coherent representation, consider units, and attend to the meaning of quantities.

How do I encourage MP2?
- Have students justify their answer using a different representation.
- Have students label their answers.
- Have students write a real-life example.
- Have students explain their think-

Key Content Changes for High School

Students should:
- Focus on rewriting roots and equivalent expressions to reveal new information rather than “simplifying”.
- Use the concept of equals to reason through a problem.
- Model data and every day situations by creating, interpreting and comparing equations and functions.
- Use transformations to prove geometric ideas including congruence and similarity.

Some include:
- Vectors
- Complex conjugates and graphs
- Matrices
- Advanced inverse functions
- Laws of sines and cosines
- Expected value

Useful free resources:
- www.geogebra.org
- www.desmos.com
This month, let's take a closer look at just one, but a very significant, Conditions for Learning indicator:

“The environment of the school (physical, social emotional, and behavioral) is safe, welcoming, and conducive to learning.” *

Note that the learning environment, or school climate, includes so much more than physical surroundings! Research proves that the nature of interactions among people hugely impacts student and family engagement and therefore, student achievement.

As a classroom teacher, **you are the most important professional impacting your students’ school experience.** Teachers often create positive environments intuitively, but we know that making our efforts **intentional** significantly improves outcomes.

How do you foster support, respect, and high expectations in your classroom? Now is the time to set and model behavioral norms, by applying the “three Cs”:

- **Collaboratively develop.** Invite your students to add thoughtful input when determining their class norms.
- **Clearly communicate.** Norms require learning, as do academics. **Teach and model** with dignity and clarity.
- **Consistently reinforce.** Acknowledge appropriate actions, correct inappropriate responses with dignity.

Learn more about school climate by clicking “CL7” at www.isbe.net/learningsupports/html/conditions.htm.

* **Continuous School Improvement Connection:**
This best practice indicator is listed as a “Smart Start” Indicator, CL7, in the Rising Star on IIRC system.

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**Helpful Resources**

- [http://resourcesforhistoryteachers.wikispaces.com/](http://resourcesforhistoryteachers.wikispaces.com/) - features primary source, multicultural, and multimedia resources for teaching history in K-12 schools
- [http://www.parcconline.org/](http://www.parcconline.org/) - features the most up to date information on the progress of the assessments and the prototype items for CCSS.
- [http://illustrativemathematics.org/](http://illustrativemathematics.org/) - provides K-12 illustrations of the range and type of work students experience in Common Core and publishes tools to support implementation.
- [www.isbe.net/learningsupports](http://www.isbe.net/learningsupports) - includes Conditions for Learning indicators and an A-Z list of topics related to specific issues that create barriers to student learning.

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Visit [www.isbe.net](http://www.isbe.net) to download this newsletter.