CONTENTS

Introduction ........................................................................................................... 3

Chapter 1: Our Students’ Best Interest Does Not Always Align with the Current Standards Movement ........................................ 4

Chapter 2: Staying True to What Works in the Teaching of Reading ........ 5

Chapter 3: Where the Common Core Reading Standards Fall Short .......... 7

Chapter 4: Staying True to What Works in the Teaching of Writing .......... 8

Chapter 5: Where the Common Core Writing Standards Fall Short .......... 9

Chapter 6: Using Models to Elevate Our Students’ Reading and Writing Abilities ........................................................................ 10

Chapter 7: Sharpening Our Students’ Listening and Speaking Skills .... 11

Chapter 8: Shift Happens .................................................................................... 12
After thirty years in the classroom, Kelly Gallagher has become familiar with the challenges of trying to balance the requirements of ever-changing school reform movements with what he believes to be in the best interest of students. Yet, he acknowledges that he “can’t think of another time . . . where teaching was as stressful as it is now” (188). In a political landscape harsh with extremism, he offers a reasonable response to those who seek to reshape literacy instruction for secondary students.

Examining the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for reading, writing, speaking, and listening with a nuanced eye, Kelly finds strengths and weaknesses that he carefully analyzes for teachers. Throughout the book, he shares effective and practical strategies to help teachers stay true to what works in the English Language Arts classroom.
Chapter 1: Our Students’ Best Interest Does Not Always Align with the Current Standards Movement

Reflection

Writing in your professional journal or sharing through your collegial book study, discuss the three key lessons of education reform movements that Kelly Gallagher summarizes on page 3. Don’t settle for easy griping; instead, use the lessons to gain some perspective on the current reform era.

Exploration and Action

- Discuss your beliefs about what it means to “always serve the best interest of students.” Provide details about how well your teaching team or school is upholding these ideals. Without blaming anyone, share concerns you have about policies or practices that are misaligned with your best intentions. What could you do to adjust them?

- Create a graphic that represents your collective thinking about what it means to “always serve the best interest of students.” Display the visual reminder of your ideals in the faculty lounge or other common spaces for teachers.
Chapter 2: Staying True to What Works in the Teaching of Reading

Reflection

Review the figure on page 17, which summarizes the reading focus of the CCSS English Language Arts anchor standards for reading. Consider how you could convey this clear message about the focus of reading to your students. Rather than emphasize the pedagogical frame of content standards, refer to the skills that students will develop as they ask the three essential questions throughout the school year: What does the text say? What does the text do? What does the text mean?

Exploration and Action

- In this chapter, Kelly shares seven summary activities to help students gain a literal understanding of text. Using the following grid, review the summary activities and the scaffolding of summary skills represented. Use as many of the activities as possible with your students, and note the results to inform your instruction going forward. If you are working with a collegial group, you might choose different activities to emphasize; report back about the results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUMMARY ACTIVITY</th>
<th>SKILLS EMPHASIZED</th>
<th>FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT RESULTS (WHAT DO STUDENTS UNDERSTAND? WHAT ARE THEY MISSING IN THEIR INITIAL READING?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17-WORD SUMMARIES</td>
<td>• Recognizing sentence structure and word choice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRITE A HEADLINE</td>
<td>• Understanding purpose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recognizing significance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WINDOW QUOTES</td>
<td>• Capturing the big idea</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIGITAL TEXT SUMMARIES</td>
<td>• Note taking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GROUP SUMMARIES</td>
<td>• Refining note taking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Collaborating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Noticing similarities and differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY PLUS</td>
<td>• Learning Cornell notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Moving students into deeper thinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Writing reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Group reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHAT IS LEFT OUT?</td>
<td>• Reviewing vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Reading” digital texts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Capturing the big ideas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Deeper thinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Review the section about craft and structure beginning on page 30. Choose a text that you will soon use with your students for close reading, and develop some questions to help them learn how to read like a writer.

• Choose one of the activities that Kelly shares to develop inference skills (What does the text mean?); ask colleagues to experience it together to understand how it could be used effectively with students. Discuss the claims you could make about the text. Reflect on the different interpretations from group members.
Reflection

“If we teach students to think only inside the four corners of the text, we are telling them what not to think. And when we tell students what they cannot think, oppression and hegemony occur” (51).

Exploration and Action

With your collegial group, consider Kelly’s challenge to “think about the hardest book that you teach—the one book you know will present a major challenge to your students” (53). Share effective prereading strategies you have used to build students’ background knowledge and scaffold their understanding. With your colleagues, brainstorm additional ways to guide students as they “settle in” to the text.
Chapter 4: Staying True to What Works in the Teaching of Writing

Reflection

Review the CCSS English Language Arts Standards for Writing shown on pages 63–64. Consider the six strengths that Kelly believes are represented in the anchor writing standards. Discuss any surprises or disagreements. Would you add anything to the list?

Exploration and Action

- Revisit the writing curriculum for your grade level and compare it to the major strands reflected in the CCSS standards. Do the learning objectives align with the strands of the anchor standards (Text Types and Purpose, Production and Distribution of Writing, Research to Build and Present Knowledge, and Range of Writing)?

- Choose one or more of the activities Kelly uses to sharpen students’ narrative, informational, or argumentative writing skills and try them with your students. Collect and review samples of students’ work at your next team or grade-level meeting.
Chapter 5: Where the Common Core Writing Standards Fall Short

Reflection

Think about the most important feedback you have received as a writer over the years. What made the feedback meaningful? Now, consider how you provide feedback to your students.

Exploration and Action

- In this chapter, Kelly argues that “the kinds of writing we want our students to develop do not always fit neatly under the umbrella of the three big writing types pushed by the CCSS,” and that the standards create an artificial separation among these writing discourses (106). Do you agree or disagree? Working with a colleague or your group, select five or six articles and advertisements from a recent newspaper and consider which discourse each sample falls under: narrative, informative, or argument. Use a graphic organizer to chart what you have noticed. Discuss how you could integrate the discourses in a writing activity for your students.

- Review the chart on pages 121–122 and discuss common problems in setting up and running writing groups. Share effective strategies, and try some of the suggestions Kelly offers to address the problems.

- Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the Common Core anchor writing standards, which Kelly summarizes on page 127. Would you change the list or add anything to it? Use the discussion to help you refine your own core values about the teaching of writing.
Chapter 6: Using Models to Elevate Our Students’ Reading and Writing Abilities

Reflection

“If we want our students to make connections between the books they are reading and the modern world, we need to design lessons that ask students to make those connections” (157).

Exploration and Action

• How do you currently model exemplary writing for your students? Which mentor texts do you use? Does your modeling extend through the entire writing process (Prewriting Stage, Drafting Stage, and Revision Stage)?

• Discuss the question, What do I want my students to be able to do as readers? With a colleague or group, create a chart that lists all of your goals and some recent examples of how you have modeled these goals in your classroom. Then, note any gaps and how you might work on each of these.
Chapter 7: Sharpening Our Students’ Listening and Speaking Skills

Reflection

Review the CCSS Speaking and Listening Standards, Grades 9-10, shown on pages 161–162. Do the learning objectives in your reading and writing curriculum reflect these standards?

Exploration and Action

• In this chapter, Kelly shares twenty-two effective speaking and listening exercises. Looking at your next unit of study, consider how you could incorporate several of the exercises into your lessons. Use the table on page 183 as a model for how you can adapt reading and writing activities to include more opportunities for students to speak and listen.

• Collect additional resources that share effective ways to integrate speaking and listening skills into literacy lessons. Examples include Erik Palmer’s books Well Spoken (Stenhouse, 2011) and Digitally Speaking (Stenhouse, 2012).
Chapter 8: Shift Happens

Reflection

In a class discussion, describe the “zone” where you do most of your reading. Is it, as Kelly suggests, somewhere between “too easy” and “too hard”? Ask your students to do the same. Then hold their reading up to the “Goldilocks” test: Is it too easy, just right, or too hard? Talk about how you can work together to create your own Nirvana High School (203).

Exploration and Action

- Consider the idealized rubric of teacher effectiveness that Kelly shares on page 188. Brainstorm additions or changes. Write about how your teaching would change if the rubric were a reality.

- Distribute slips of paper and ask each teacher in your group to write down his or her best example of students reading well in the last semester. Shuffle the notes and ask each teacher to read aloud the example on his or her paper. Celebrate the successes and discuss how you could create opportunities to expand them in the next semester.

- Write yourself a letter and date it one year from today. In the letter, set three professional goals that will help you stay true to what works in the ELA classroom. Write specific action steps for each goal. Seal the letter. In a year, read the letter and reflect on what you have achieved.