How to START

We designed the framework around the acronym START because it spells out a set of planning components that all teachers can use to create content-rich lessons that develop core literacy skills. Here's what the acronym stands for:

S is for standards.

Use your content standards as a starting point for mapping out your lesson. Ask yourself, *What standards do I want to target? What key understandings do I want students to develop? What knowledge or skills will they need to acquire?* Use this information to develop lesson-specific learning targets and share those targets with students.

T is for texts.

Select a text or texts that align with your learning targets. Develop a question or prompt that will give students a purpose for reading and engage them in thinking deeply about the content (e.g., "Does treating everyone fairly mean treating everyone the same?" or "What does it mean for a chemical equation to be balanced?"). When selecting texts, be creative and consider options in addition to the textbook. Can you find opportunities to incorporate primary texts? Up-to-date online content? High-interest readings? How about multimedia, video, or visual resources?

A is for assessment.

Well-designed assessments will require students to demonstrate a deep understanding of what they've read and learned (e.g., by explaining, evaluating, applying, or expressing an opinion). Assessments should also test students' command of the reading and literacy skills you choose to target. Assessments don't have to be formal to be effective. They can involve anything from observing a student's note-taking process, to listening in on a discussion, to reviewing a polished piece of writing.

R is for reading and literacy skills.

Target specific literacy skills in your lesson. These can be reading, writing, speaking, listening, or language skills. You can focus on skills that will help students understand the content—skills like previewing a text before reading it, calling up prior knowledge and comparing it with new information in a reading, or taking organized notes. You can also pick skills that will help students demonstrate their learning either orally or in writing—skills like writing a well-organized paragraph, supporting a position with evidence, or summarizing.

T is for tools.

Look for instructional tools and strategies that will help students develop the literacy skills you identified *and* deepen their understanding of the content. Ask colleagues for suggestions. Look online for tried-and-true standbys. Or try one of the following literacy tools we've developed (Boutz et al., 2012; Silver & Boutz, 2015). These tools address common challenges students face when we ask them to use literacy skills to deepen their understanding of classroom content, and they're designed for easy integration into lessons and units:

- **Single-Sentence Summaries** help students slow down their reading and create deeper understanding. Students read assigned texts one chunk at a time and summarize each chunk using a single sentence or an image.
- **Speak-Up Stems** help students overcome that "I don't know what to say" feeling that can hold them back in classroom discussions. This tool provides students with a list of options for what to say. For example, "I agree/disagree because _ _ _." "To summarize what I've heard so far, _ _ _." "That reminds me of _ _ _."
- **Map It Out** is a prewriting tool that helps students assemble and shape ideas so they can draft them into common writing genres: arguments, explanatory pieces, and narratives. By mapping out their ideas on specially designed visual organizers, students begin to internalize the structural elements of different kinds of writing.
- **Most Valuable Point (MVP)** helps students focus on the main idea. Students draft a single paragraph in which they identify the most valuable point in the text and elaborate on it using information from the text.

Having a common bank of instructional techniques can be especially helpful in the pursuit of literacy across the curriculum. In Williamsville Central School District in New York, for example, making sure that all teachers are equipped with the same high-impact literacy tools—like "Reading for Meaning" (in Boutz et al., 2012), which

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uses simple statements to help students collect and evaluate textual evidence—is a goal that's built into the district's teacher induction program. This establishes a common language for teachers to collaborate with one another and refine instructional practices.

What Does START Look Like in Practice?

The examples that follow show how the START framework helped content-area teachers (whose primary focus isn't literacy) build texts and literacy skills into their lessons. As you read the examples, notice how core reading and literacy skills are being developed alongside the relevant content knowledge.

Figure 2 shows how the START template guided a middle school science team to incorporate rigorous texts and core literacy skills into a lesson on the impact of plastic water bottles. To get students interested and engaged, the teachers opened their lesson with this provocative prompt: Should plastic water bottles be banned? Students used multiple texts to learn about the issue and developed core note-taking skills by collecting relevant information on a graphic organizer. They then shaped and sharpened their positions using Speak-Up Stems to discuss their thoughts and ideas as a class. To assess students' grasp of the content, as well as their ability to gather and organize key ideas from a text, the teachers had students draft a written response to the prompt for homework. They prepared students to write strong, well-organized arguments by having them use the Map It Out tool to map out their positions and supporting evidence in advance.

FIGURE 2. Using START to Explore a Controversy in Middle School Science	
Standards	*Standard*: Analyze the causes behind ecological challenges, and propose solutions that will reduce the effect that human activity has on the environment and on other living things.
Texts	• *Online text*: "Water, Water Everywhere, but Guilt by the Bottleful" by Alex Williams • *Online text*: "Should Plastic Water Bottles Be Banned?" (wisevoter.com) *Focus question*: Should plastic water bottles be banned?
Assessment	Is banning the sale of bottled water the right solution? If yes, explain why. If not, suggest an alternative, and explain why you think it's better. Use details from the texts to support your ideas.
Reading and Literacy Skills	• Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources. • Craft a well-supported argument, drawing on evidence from multiple texts. • Converse productively; build on others' ideas, and express your own ideas clearly and persuasively.
Tools	• Use a **graphic organizer** to record information on the pros and cons of plastic water bottles. • Use **Map It Out** to map out ideas and evidence before responding to the assessment prompt. • Use **Speak-Up Stems** to help you discuss, defend, and respond to one another's ideas.

Source: Harvey F. Silver, Matthew J. Perini, and Abigail L. Boutz