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Series: Applying Common Core

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## Introduction

### Goals

The main goal of this book is to help students develop skills outlined in the Common Core Standards by clarifying what the standards are asking for and by giving teachers specific activities they can use to address the standards.

### Organization

The book is mostly organized by the categories into which Common Core places its standards. The first three chapters are “Key Ideas and Details,” “Craft and Structure,” and “Integration of Knowledge and Ideas.” Because “Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity” is addressed every time students read, it does not have its own chapter. Also, because it is common for many writing categories to overlap on a paper, the fourth chapter covers all the writing standards and is divided into the three main paper types: argumentative, informative, and narrative.

Activities open with an introductory page that includes every standard covered by the activities, directions, estimated lesson length, and additional teaching ideas. At the back of the book are selected answers for the reading activities.

### Tracking Common Core Standards

On page 3, there is a chart that can help you track which Common Core Standards you have addressed and with which activities.

### Narrative Writing

Narrative writing is not required for social studies teachers, which is why there is no WHST.6-8.3. However, this form of writing was included in this book (W.6-8.3) because numerous social studies teachers also teach language arts, for the many educators who find creative writing a valuable way to explore history, and because other required writing standards can be covered with narrative writing.

### Common Core Standards

If a teacher covers the six reading activities and three papers outlined in this book, he or she will have addressed every 6–8 History/Social Studies Common Core Standard at least once. Although it is not expected that teachers cover every standard in each unit of study, this gives teachers a great way to see examples of every standard and have numerous assignments to choose from.

# Common Core Standards

## READING

### Key Ideas and Details

#### **RH.6-8.1**

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

#### **RH.6-8.2**

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

» *Summarize primary or secondary sources.*

#### **RH.6-8.3**

Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes law, how interest rates are raised or lowered).

» *Summarize the steps of a process or historical event.*

### Craft and Structure

#### **RH.6-8.4**

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

» *Use context to decipher the meanings of difficult words.*

#### **RH.6-8.5**

Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally).

» *Determine how the author has ordered the information.*

#### **RH.6-8.6**

Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

### Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

#### **RH.6-8.7**

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

» *Interpret a reading with a visual.*

#### **RH.6-8.8**

Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

#### **RH.6-8.9**

Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

### Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

#### **RH.6-8.10**

By the end of grade 8, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 6–8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

## SPEAKING AND LISTENING

### Comprehension and Collaboration

#### **SL.8.1**

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6–8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

## WRITING

### Text Types and Purposes

#### **WHST.6-8.1**

Write arguments focused on *discipline-specific content*.

» *Argumentative writing.*

#### **WHST.6-8.2**

Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes.

» *Informative writing.*

#### **W.6-8.3**

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

» *Creative writing. (This is not required for social studies teachers.)*

### Production and Distribution of Writing

#### **WHST.6-8.4**

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization,

and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

» *Write for a specific audience.*

#### **WHST.6-8.5**

With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.

» *Use writing process.*

#### **WHST.6-8.6**

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas clearly and efficiently.

» *Publish writing for an audience.*

### Research to Build and Present Knowledge

#### **WHST.6-8.7**

Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

» *Research to answer a question.*

#### **WHST.6-8.8**

Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

» *Use multiple credible sources when researching and summarize findings in own words.*

#### **WHST.6-8.9**

Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

» *Support essays with information or quotes from texts.*

### Range of Writing

#### **WHST.6-8.10**

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

# Was Alger Hiss a Spy?

## COMMON CORE STANDARDS

### **RH.6-8.1**

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

### **RH.6-8.2**

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

### **RH.6-8.9**

Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

### **RH.6-8.10**

By the end of grade 8, read and comprehend history/ social studies texts in the grades 6–8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

### **WHST.6-8.1**

Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.

### **WHST.6-8.9**

Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

### **WHST.6-8.10**

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

## DIRECTIONS

- The class reads “Background on the Alger Hiss Case” together, filling in “Evidence Table” as they go.
- Students are placed into four-person groups. Each member of the group will focus on a different source: “Quotations,” “Pumpkin Papers,” “Pointing Fingers,” and open research on a laptop. Students use their different sources and work together to add to “Evidence Table.”
- As a group, students decide whether they think Hiss is guilty or innocent. They select their three strongest pieces of evidence and write a claim together.
- Groups share their claims and evidence with the class. Students listen, adding anything they missed to “Evidence Table.”
- Students independently answer the two questions on “Was Alger Hiss a Spy?”

## BACKGROUND ON THE ALGER HISS CASE

In 1948 Americans were forced to confront a frightening question: Could Soviet spies be working for the American government? The case against Alger Hiss forced Americans to consider this possibility. It captivated the nation and continues to be debated today.

The Alger Hiss trial began in 1949 after an editor for *Time* magazine, Whittaker Chambers, claimed Hiss was a communist. Before the accusation, Alger Hiss had played a prominent role in American politics, starting as a law clerk for a Supreme Court Justice right out of law school, continuing in the 1930s as a lawyer for Franklin Roosevelt's government, and later working for the Department of Justice, Department of Agriculture, and the State Department. When accused by Chambers, he was not part of the government, but working for a foreign-policy think tank.

Hiss denied Chambers's charge, and after Chambers repeated the claim on a radio show, Hiss sued Chambers for libel (for spreading harmful lies about him). Chambers then declared that Hiss was not only a communist, but also a spy for the Soviet Union.

The FBI had already been suspicious of Alger Hiss. Chambers had told the assistant secretary of state about Hiss's communist affiliations in 1939. In 1945 a Soviet defector (Igor Gouzenko) claimed that a member of the State Department was a Soviet spy. Later that year, Elizabeth Bentley, who had been a Soviet spy, became a government informant. Among many other bombshells, she mentioned that she had heard a man with the last name Hiss was involved in espionage. J. Edgar Hoover responded by having the FBI tail Hiss and tap his phone for two years. They did not find any incriminating evidence during this time. In 1948 Chambers was called in to answer questions.

Chambers claimed that he and Hiss had met in the communist underground and become close friends. In 1937 Hiss began to pass him State Department documents, which Chambers delivered to a Soviet agent. Chambers saved four handwritten notes, sixty-five typed State Department documents, and five strips of microfilm. Chambers handed everything over but the film at first. Then one night he grew concerned about "Hiss forces" and hid them in a pumpkin. Chambers called the FBI, who came over to Chambers' farm to get them. (The press seized on this detail, nicknaming the documents the "Pumpkin Papers.")

Because of the statute of limitations (a rule that after a certain amount of time one can't be charged with a crime), Hiss was not sent to jail for being a spy. Instead, he served over three and a half years for perjury (lying under oath). Upon his release from jail, Hiss continued to work to clear his name and get a retrial. These attempts were unsuccessful. He died in 1996 still maintaining his innocence.

Ironically, although this case ended Alger Hiss's political career, it jump-started the future of a first-term representative from California—Richard Nixon. Nixon was charged with leading a subcommittee dedicated to finding out whether it was Chambers or Hiss that was lying. He gained national recognition during the investigation. It helped him gain a senatorial seat in 1950 and the vice presidency in 1952.



Alger Hiss, 1950

Image source: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

## QUOTATIONS 1/2



Whittaker Chambers, 1948

### Chambers Quotations

In 1952 Whittaker Chambers published *Witness*, his account of the Alger Hiss case. The following are selected excerpts from the book.

I do not hate Mr. Hiss. We were close friends, but we are caught in a tragedy of history. Mr. Hiss represents the concealed enemy we are all fighting and I am fighting. I have testified against him with remorse and pity.

My intention was clear, too. I did not wish to harm, more than was unavoidable, those whom I must testify against. . . . But I must testify that they had been concealed Communists and that an underground had existed in the Government.

I came to Washington as a Communist functionary. . . . I was connected with the underground group of which Mr. Hiss was a member. Mr. Hiss and I became friends.

The system of transmission was as follows. In the case of Alger Hiss, he would bring home a brief case containing documents from the State Department. . . . We would transfer the documents from Hiss's brief case to one that I had brought (thus if the documents were found in my possession, Hiss could always claim I stole them). I would then take the documents to Baltimore to be photographed, returning them to Alger Hiss late the same night.

Source: Chambers, Whittaker. *Witness*. Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 1952.

## PUMPKIN PAPERS

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### Pumpkin Papers

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After Hiss filed a libel lawsuit against Chambers, Chambers accused Hiss of not only being a communist, but also being a spy for the Soviet Union. As proof, Chambers produced sixty-five pages of typed State Department documents, four notes in Hiss's handwriting, and five strips of microfilm (which he hid in a pumpkin, then later handed over to investigators for the House Un-American Committee). Hiss denied having anything to do with any of them at first, although after an expert connected him to the handwriting, he admitted that he probably wrote the notes.

Chambers claimed the State Department papers were brought home by Hiss, retyped by his wife—she was faster at typing—and given to Chambers, who then took them, or photos of them, to a Soviet agent. Information among the Pumpkin Papers included trivial matters like instructions to paint future government fire extinguishers red, blank slides, and documents available to the public. However, the papers did contain classified documents referring to the Spanish Civil War, Germany's annexation of Austria, and the Soviet Union. These materials were not particular to Hiss's department and could have been acquired by various people who worked for the government.

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### The Woodstock Typewriter

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Hiss continued to deny that he, or his wife, had typed the State Department letters Chambers produced. Since he had given away his typewriter from that time, a search for the typewriter commenced. Eventually, Hiss's chief investigator, Horace Schmahl, helped track it down to a junkyard. Hiss was sure the typewriter would prove his innocence, but instead, the typeface of the letters identically matched the typed documents.

After he was released from jail, one theory Hiss proposed was that the government created a fake typewriter that would match his, and then had Schmahl, who may have been a government agent, find it. As support, Hiss noted that Schmahl later switched to the prosecution's side. Additionally, Schmahl had worked for a government organization OSS, a precursor to the CIA, during World War II, and there is evidence that he was an informant for the FBI during the trial. (Schmahl says he switched sides because Hiss's lies convinced him Hiss was guilty.) It was also later discovered that the serial number showed that the typewriter was produced after the man who sold Hiss the typewriter retired. The FBI knew this, but did not release this information. Lastly, John Dean, a former White House counsel member, claimed he heard from a different counsel member that Nixon admitted they built a typewriter for the Hiss case. Nixon denied this. Still, even if this was not Hiss's typewriter, he, or his wife, still could have retyped the documents on a different typewriter that was not found.

# CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

## Overall

In 1962 the world braced as the United States and the Soviet Union came close to nuclear war. For this assignment, you will learn about the details of the crisis and write a historically accurate narrative where you are one of the main characters.

## Requirements

- Write about the Cuban Missile Crisis from the perspective of President Kennedy
- Write in first person (use "I")
- Length of ¾ to 1 page

## Things to Decide

- **When:** What day does your scene take place? Choose a date between October 16 and October 28, 1962.
- **Setting:** Where does this scene take place?
- **Characters:** Which historical figures will be in this scene?
- **Problem:** What is the specific problem in this scene and how is it resolved?
- **Hook:** How will you hook the read from the beginning? Some options include dialogue, in-depth description, action, onomatopoeia, etc.
- **Conclusion:** How will you end your scene? Some options include foreshadowing, full circle (connect it to beginning), a punch line (a short statement that leaves the reader thinking), or cliffhanger (leave us hanging).

## Rubric

|                    | <b>Exceeding</b>   | <b>Proficient</b>  | <b>Developing</b>   | <b>Beginning</b>   |
|--------------------|--|--|---|--|
| <b>Writing</b>     | Uses numerous accurate details, vivid word choice, and a highly believable voice to write a highly engaging story. | Uses accurate details, appropriate word choice, and a believable voice to write an engaging story. | Story has accurate details, but is not engaging due to ordinary word choice and/or a weak voice.<br><br><i>or</i><br>Story is engaging, but includes too many inaccurate details. | Story is not written in first person.<br><br><i>or</i><br>Story includes few accurate details. |
| <b>Conventions</b> | No convention errors.<br><br><i>or</i><br>Uses high-level conventions with few to no errors.                       | Convention errors in one area.<br><br><i>or</i><br>A single error in a few areas.                  | Convention errors in two or more areas.   | Too short to assess conventions.<br><br><i>or</i><br>Major issues with conventions.            |