

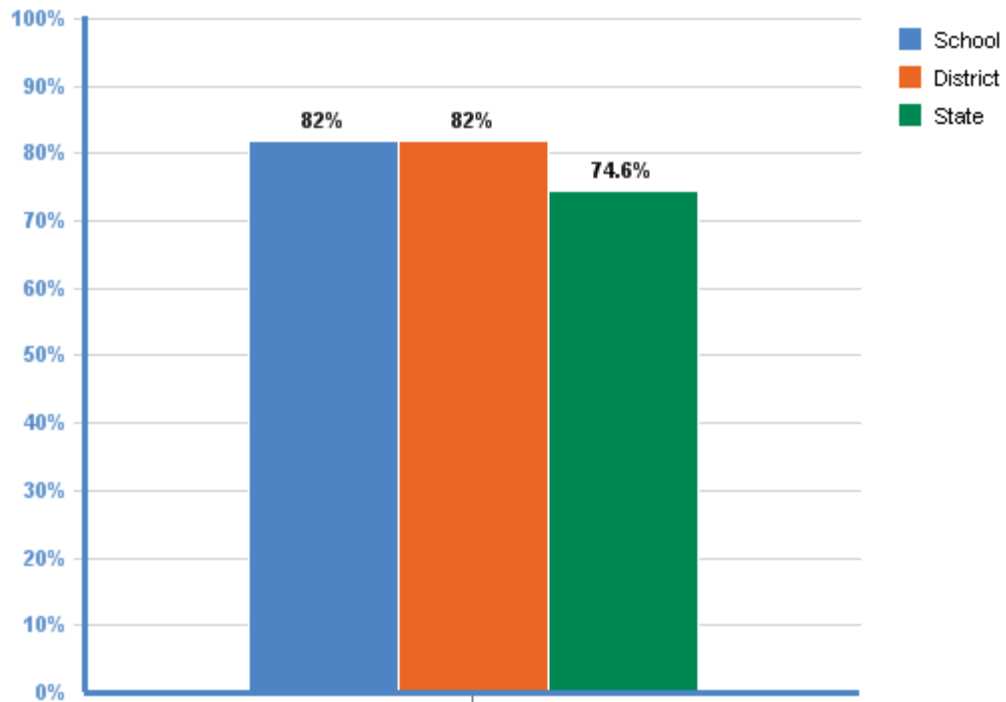
**802 Literacy Inquiry**  
**Mrs. Shorna/ Ms. Converse English Language Arts**  
**5th Hour**

***Introduction***

Holt Junior high school is a school of choice, dealing with the many issues and complications that can arise from such a situation. Many students are from Lansing, their parents having rejected the offerings of inner city schools. The major complaint that I hear from parents who approach us about the academic success of their child in terms of the Lansing school district use terminology like, "They don't feel safe," or that they wanted their child to, "have the attention they need". For the most part, I think their concerns are legitimate- at least in light of the juxtaposition that Holt Junior High imposes on other schools with their superior environment. The community of Holt Junior High is less focused on the academic success of its school than it is on the individual experience of its students. That is not to say that they are not successful academically- but one results in the other.

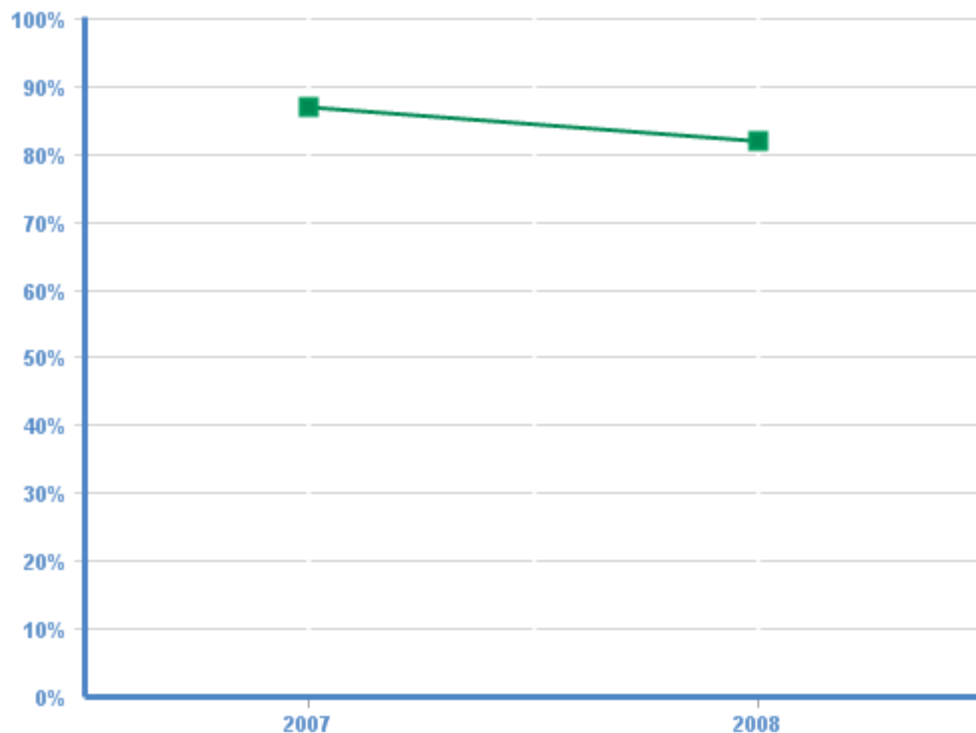
Holt Junior high is composed of over 1000 students and staff- 961 children in 2008 according to Standard and Poors\*. The ratio of students to teachers in 2007 was nineteen, but currently my smallest class is at least twenty six kids. Over 30% of the school body is disadvantaged, using free or reduced lunches. Approximately 80% are White, 11% are Black, 6% are Hispanic, and about 2% are Asian/Pacific Islander. Holt Junior High has reportedly hovered around an 80% proficiency in both Math and Language Arts, give or take.

**Holt Junior High School**  
**2008 Grade 7 Reading Proficiency**



This is encouraging, however, this isn't exactly progress from previous years, as demonstrated below. Note, though that the graph shows only the progress of two years.

### **Holt Junior High School Grade 7 Reading Proficiency Over Time**



My classroom reflects these statistics pretty well. Thirteen are boys, and fifteen are girls. Five are Black, three are Hispanic, and the rest are Caucasian, or of indeterminate race, making the 70% majority white. One student is autistic, two have 504 plans, one of which has repeated at least one grade level, one student has a hearing disability, and one other has ADHD but has not been given a list of accommodations. I've placed most of the kids with special needs near the front to give them an ease of access to the board and myself, if I'm limited to the desk and/or ELMO. It is a very quiet group- quiet enough that I spend more time trying to get them to participate than to be quiet. Their skill level seems to also reflect the statistics as the majority have fallen within range of their grade level, 7th grade.

\* All statistics in the section were taken from "[Schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com)" - Portions © 2010 Council of Chief State School Officers | Portions © 2010 Standard & Poor's

URL: <http://www.schoolmatters.com/schools.aspx/q/page=sp/sid=102635>

## ***Part 1***

The bell tones throughout the building and I can almost hear the sighs of relief and dismay that echo throughout sounds of "packing up". I know papers will be crackling and zippers will hum as kids are frantic to move onto their fifth period- my class for twenty eight of them. Actually, my kids will be tearing themselves away from

their burgers and basketballs. Some of them will walk through my doors sweaty and sticky, huffing with the exertion that they were finally able to express after four hours of sitting in chairs staring at a white screen. I throw the rest of my own lunch into the trash and turn to put their 'do-now' on the screen.

The first to arrive is Josh, a boy who has very recently been diagnosed as hearing impaired- to his ultimate horror. He scoots in with his head hunched and his shaggy hair in his eyes, disguising the misery he feels at having to wear the ear piece that has become mandatory for most of his classes. I know what he needs, but I also know that he won't ask me or remind me to give him the aid- he doesn't want me to remember. I already have the battery pack on my hip, and the microphone in place though, as I unzip the tiny ear piece and discreetly hand it to him. I try not to watch him openly as he puts it on, but lately he's taken to slipping it into his pocket when he thinks I'm not looking. I sigh quietly. I don't understand why so many students will blatantly resist any tool that would help them to succeed- but I do understand the overwhelming embarrassment of pre-pubescent awkwardness and the shame of being different.

The next few file in, sweaty grins on their faces, and trapper-keepers bulging with folded papers and sloppy binders. Several will look up at the screen to see what they're supposed to be doing, but most of them will fail to accomplish even the small task of filling out their agenda, and opening their binders to the desired section.

"Those who are coming in presently, please remember that you are passing into a 'learning zone'. What should you be doing?" I try not to bark, but my raised voice is in its infancy and to me I feel like I'm screaming at them. I try to soften it with a smile, and turn to greet a student by name. I wait a couple more minutes, bringing up attendance on the computer screen and preparing to mark tardies. I reflect on the multiple curriculum that I am teaching. How to be organized, how to be polite and respectful, how to engage in a task and follow through, how to build up a classroom community, and how to "do" the job of 7th grade. Oh, and how to succeed onto 8th grade English.

"Successful, dedicated students will be opening their agendas, copying down what's on the board, opening their binder to their spelling section... what else, ladies and gentlemen?" I hear some murmurs..., "Excuse me?" Some speak up louder, "have our consent forms..."

"That's right, please have out your consent forms." I walk around to pick up the forms, noting who is squinting at the board, and who is staring at their neighbor and/or unopened binder. I tap a few shoulders and urge some students to move it.

"Hey, why are you wearing that microphone!?" One boy blurts out loudly. Tayler, one of my only headaches in this hour. "Where are the speakers!? Can I wear it?!" I shush him and shake my head sternly. I politely tell him that it's none of his business and that it's for my purposes. He laughs like it's a joke, but I can see Josh frozen across the aisle.

“I don’t see the humor.” I say with an acrid tone. I tap his agenda, and prod him to get started. I look out over the room to see where everyone else’s attention is. I can see that the early morning glaze in the eyes of some of them have been replaced with the food coma glaze of lots of high carbohydrate foods. Returning to the front of the room I gaze out at the students who now watch me, expectantly waiting for me to impart my wisdom to them. *Gulp...*

This is an average opening to my 5th hour. Students seem eager to learn and do well, but they are also pulled away from their ambitions by the need to fit in and be liked. Most of them don’t seem to have the literacy for either skill. In terms of reading comprehension in literacy, most have just become aware that reading leads to stories and creativity. They’re just not certain that that holds any real value. One boy told me that he doesn’t need to learn how to read anymore, he’s already at high school level and ready for anything. I looked him in the eye and asked what he thinks he’s going to do after high school. He only shrugged. Some of them don’t seem to see the real life application. Some see it too well.

Our first piece of homework for the year was a letter they wrote to Mrs. Shorna and myself describing their (honest) reading habits for the summer, what their reading goals for the year would be, and how they want us to help them accomplish their goals. I could tell that the assignment to fill a page completely with words was daunting to them. I was surprised, however, at some of their responses. Many of them listed their goals as wanted to be at the right “level”. Some of them boasted that they were at an 8th grade reading level, or a high school reading level, while some of them confided that they were below, and really wanted to catch up. Some stated that they really wanted to be able to read for a sustained amount of time, while others stated merely that they would like to commit to a book, and actually finish one for once.

Now, I am all about reading goals and growth in literacy, but I don’t see the use in all this anxiety about “levels”. Some of these kids were truly upset that they didn’t spell, read, or write, at the level they “should” be at. This seems like an anxiety their mom’s and teachers should have, not themselves. I’m still thinking that over, and evaluating this concept of “level”. While, as their 7th grade English teacher my goal is for them to succeed to their 8th grade year proficient in the standards and goals I have for them, I do want their learning to have an authenticity that is probably not captured simply by “level”.

I had the drawing below created for the purposes of this assignment by my friend Caitlin Schneider, a graphic designer, to show my students in light of what I believe they are not. They are not just like each other, they are not open vessels waiting to be filled with only what me and my curriculum have to offer them, and they certainly don’t sit quietly with their hands in their laps waiting.

# 7<sup>th</sup> grade english language arts



My students bring their own literacies with them to the table. They are girls and boys, African American, Asian American, Latino American, and a variety of all of those.

There is an exchange of information in the classroom, where we negotiate what we know, and what we can learn. There are text- text connections, text-world, and text to self connections that I'll not only acknowledge as their teacher, but that I'll use to help them connect authentically to ALL the curriculums in the classroom. They will have different levels of reading, math, social skills, and strategies for success. I don't think it's even as linear as the word "level" suggests. They're on different "planes", perhaps, and need to learn to navigate between them with the literacies I hope to help them learn.

And we do have a variety of learners in 5th. Many of them LOVE to read. We've had complaints from other teachers that students have been reading their "Book Club" books in their classes when they're supposed to be participating. (Book Club is a Wednesday activity in our class, where they read and recommend to the class a book of their choice about once a month). Then we also have kids who absolutely hate reading. They hate books, and they'll play the system as much as possible. We have an in class library that they can draw books from if they don't have another avenue. However, if they have failed to bring a book that day, and every day as they are supposed to, there are some who will meander around the shelves, making noise and distracting others as they look. There are also some who "pretend" to read, as this comic of Calvin and Hobbes, drawn by Bill Watterson, is meant to demonstrate, who will carry the same book around for weeks, who will stare over their book watching everything except the words to get away with not reading but still appear that they are. Or who WILL read the words, but not bother to stop and check their progress for comprehension, complaining that the book is boring, or that they're just not able to get into it. I think these are readers who struggle and just don't want to show it. They're embarrassed and at this point, extremely adept at flying under teacher radar.



\* Can find this comic at: <http://www.cooperativeindividualism.org/political-economy-of-calvin-and-hobbes-5.html>

These are the readers that I worry about. I was never that reader. I loved to read, found it easy, enjoyable, and often rewarding since adults would "pay" me to read. It's more difficult for me to get into their heads/shoes to understand what they need. It's one

of my goals as a teacher to uncover some strategies that I can use for those readers, who don't want help, don't want to need help, and have been trained by past phonetics curriculum to look, for all intents and purposes, like skilled readers.

## ***Part Two***

### *Class Prospectus*

The title of our class is "English Language Arts 7". Truly, my mentor is a wonderful educator. She has posted a course prospectus, the alternative to a syllabus, under the team "Aries" on the Holt Junior High website. I didn't realize this at all until she pointed it out to a parent at "Back-to-School" night, and I felt pretty foolish. Here is the URL, which will also include the supplies we request and the list of classroom procedures we expect.

<http://www.hpsk12.net/juniorhigh/pages/teamseven.html> This is the URL that will show her original link with the PDF version. However, I downloaded a "scribd" version with the hopes of embedding the document directly into this document, but apparently google docs will not allow me to edit HTML which is really unfortunate. So here it is the full screen version URL that will take you directly to the document. [http://www.scribd.com/full/38191211?access\\_key=key-6hci961xjl6j40e7pcf](http://www.scribd.com/full/38191211?access_key=key-6hci961xjl6j40e7pcf)

I have talked often about our course outcomes with Mrs. Shorna, and have requested, multiple times, an extended layout and/or constructive opportunity to make a new draft should she desire it, for our year long plan. I have received on these multiple occasions this same prospectus. She seems unwilling to actually sit down and sketch exactly what we are doing and when. While this is a little frustrating for me, I have complete faith in her skill both as a teacher of 7th grade and as my teacher in many respects. She has proven to be very flexible and willing to work with me, so I do not anticipate any unwillingness to my taking advantage of any opportunity to plan a unit. I don't know why she won't just sit down with me and discuss exactly what's going to happen and when. At any rate, I will be planning our "first" unit reflected in the chart below as we head into MEAP and scaffold reading/testing strategies for the rest of the year.

Below are the charts we worked on for the Standards assignment. They are a little more complete and I do expect to use and complete more and more as time goes on. In them are the details for what I have planned for my focus class students to learn about ELA this year. I will be leaning heavily upon the Standards, as I find them helpful to identify what it is that defines a 7th grade level, and what they will need as they head into 8th grade. I spoke with Tammy about the "big disciplinary ideas" that she or the district have for this year, but curiously she just shrugged her shoulders and said that there weren't really any essential questions. Which is strange because she puts such a big emphasis on Universal Themes/ideas in class with the kids and their thinking. I have a goal though. Developing a safe and productive classroom and/or outside community



is important to me, so my essential question has become, “How can we use this to build up our sense of community?” I have no idea if this is going to stretch into everything we do, but I’m realizing the more I teach that teaching 7th grade ELA is less about English than it is about literacy, partnership, cooperation, citizenship, etc. The themes of taking part in a group and society. So starting with a theme of community to tie to just makes sense for me.

Our goals are clearly outlined below in the chart, but as is indicated are mantra for the year is, “Students will read more than ever, from a variety of genres”, and this will stretch to writing as well. Our “required texts” for the course will include, for this reason, their own choice in books as they are required to have a book at all times throughout the year wherever they go. They can bring them from home, take them from the classroom library or each other, or the Holt District library. In addition to their personal books, we will be reading from *Literature and Language* McDougal, Littel and Company, our text book, *The Writer’s Craft*, Littel and Company, for reference, *Write Source, 2000*, again for reference, and *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, by Avi, a fictional account written for young adults. I’m not thrilled about this book, but it’s the approved book by the administration and taught across the entire 7th grade, team to team. We will also be reading a variety of other stories and selections to be added as we progress through our planning of the tentative units below.

#### ELA Concepts & Skills

ELA Concept/Skill	Related Standard
Decode and understand meanings of words in context	R.WS.07.01/02/ 07
Recognize frequently used words	R.WS.07.03/04
Acquire/apply strategies to identify unknown words	R.WS.07.05
Fluently read grade level texts	R.WS.07.06
Relate Narr. Texts to their own experience	R.NT.07.01
Analyze elements of Narr Genre	R.NT.07.02/03
Analyze author’s craft	R.NT.07.04
Analyze structure of info text	R.IT.07.01

Analyze organizational text patterns	R.IT.07.02
Analyze writer's craft	R.IT.07.03
Make connections from the text to their self, identified universal themes, and other content areas (science, math, etc.)	R.CM.07.01/03/04
Summarize Info and Narr texts	R.CM.07.02
Monitor their comprehension through reading strategies, and guides	R.MT.07.01/02
Will develop an enthusiasm for reading	R.AT.07.01
Write a narr. Piece, and a research piece	W.GN.07.01/02
Form research questions and pursue thesis questions	W.GN.07.03
Apply pre-writing strategies	W.PR.07.01/02/04
Revise drafts	W.PR.07.03/05
Exhibit personal style and voice	W.PS.07.01
Correctly use style conventions	W.GR.07.01
Spell and write legibly	W.SP/HW.07.01/01
Be enthusiastic about writing	W.AT.07.01
Develop and adjust their speech to be effective orators.	S.CN.07.01/02/03
Engage and plan in multiple discourse settings/texts	S.DS.07.01/04
Respond, discuss, and present texts in mult. Discourse settings	S.DS.07.02/03/04

Distinguish fact from opinion	L.CN.07.01
Listen/view critically while demonst. Appropriate audience behav.	L.CN.07.02
Examine (while viewing/listening) multiple genres critically, and identify bias, credibility, opinion, propaganda, etc from fact.	L.RP.07.01/03/06/07
View and respond (question) thoughtfully to multiple genres of oration	L.RP.07.01/02/04/05

**Course Outcomes\***

1	SWBAT read and analyze a variety of classic and contemporary literature and other texts to seek information, ideas, enjoyment, and understanding
2	SWBAT make sense of texts by predicting, making connections, making inferences, reflecting, asking questions, and analyzing.
3	SWBAT read in a variety of genres
4	SWBAT write frequently in a variety of modes including narrative, journal, expressive, persuasive, informative, and comparative.
5	SWBAT use a variety of pre-writing strategies
6	SWBAT demonstrate revision skills
7	SWBAT share their writing with an audience
8	SWBAT organize information in meaningful formats
9	SWBAT demonstrate proper grammar use in writing and speaking
10	SWBAT Learn spelling strategies and develop vocabulary skills

\*Please note that these course outcomes have been taken almost directly from Tammy Shorna's Course prospectus- linked above for easy viewing.

Unit #	# of Days	Unit Concept	Unit Goal*	Unit Assessment	Course Outcomes
1	10	Reading Strategies	Success in MEAP and testing; scaffolding for the year	Handouts	1,2,3,8,9,10
2	i	Memoir	SWBAT identify, and demonstrate the use of memoir as a genre	Handouts, and student memoir	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10
3		Mystery	SWBAT identify, and demonstrate the use of mystery as a genre	Handouts, and student mystery demo	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10
4		Poetry	SWBAT identify, and demonstrate the use of poetry as a genre	Handouts, and student poetry demo	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10
5		Drama	SWBAT identify, and demonstrate the use of drama as a genre	Handouts, and student recitations	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10
6		Myths and legends	SWBAT identify, and demonstrate the use of myths and legends as a genre	Handouts, and student myths demo	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10
7		Public Speaking	SWBAT identify and demonstrate the use of public speaking strategies, effective and discriminative (evaluative) listening skills	Handouts, and student demonstrations / critiques	2,4,5,6,7,8,9,10
8		Research/info texts	SWBAT identify, and demonstrate the use of research projects and info texts and legends as a genre	Handouts, and student demonstrations	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10

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\* Please note that I have used a limited amount of “Bloom’s verbs” in the Unit Goals of this chart. While that is not to say that Bloom’s Taxonomy is unimportant- not by far- but that it was easier for the purposes of this chart. I have included a variety of student objective verbs in my ELA concepts/ skills that I drew almost directly from their respective related standards, as well as in my course outcomes. Reader will please assume that these will carry throughout each unit, lesson, and day of my teaching.

### Part 3

#### Unit Plan

Unit #	1	Estimated Duration
Unit Goal	SWBAT: Identify and demonstrate effective reading and testing strategies	2-3 weeks
Unit Assessment/ Rationale	SW: focus on a brief text from their textbook, “A Crush”. They will read, discuss, write a personal response, submit a variety of step by step handouts, and finally take a test to demonstrate their new knowledge about reading strategies. This will give them multiple chances to show their knowledge/ literacies from prior knowledge, as well as what they are also learning/ new literacy. They will also be given multiple modes with which to show this information- this is for differentiated instruction. They can talk, read, draw, and listen during lessons in this unit. I’m still trying to come up with strategies for my kinesthetic learners.	

Lesson #	# of days	Lesson Objectives Lesson Assessment
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LP 1	1	Objective	SWBAT: preview and use prediction/inference as they begin reading “A Crush” by Cynthia Rylant
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		Assessment	SW: Fill out a graphic organizer and participate in class discussion.
LP 2	1	Objective	SWBAT: outline, interpret, and discuss the characterization of protagonists in “A Crush”
		Assessment	SW: Fill out a graphic organizer, and participate in class discussion.
LP 3	1	Objective	SWBAT: locate and translate vocabulary words into meaning
		Assessment	SW: take notes in their binders, use the dictionary, and collaborate with a partner. (binder checks for assess.)
LP 4	1	Objective	SWBAT: restate, and describe what is happening when they are reading- using “while your reading” strategies like questioning, and identifying purpose.
		Assessment	SW: Participate in class discussion, question, and fill out a handout illustrating in-class discussion about “A Crush”
LP 5		Objective	SWBAT: examine the plot of “A Crush”
		Assessment	SW: use a graphic organizer and fill out a list identifying elements of a summary (Somebody Wanted So But So Finally)
LP 6	1	Objective	SWBAT: analyze “cause and effect” in “A Crush”
		Assessment	SW: complete a handout that will walk them through the meaning of each and how they connect. Will also participate in “discussion”
LP 7	2	Objective	SWBAT: identify, study, and use effective spelling strategies focusing specifically on pre-fixes
		Assessment	SWBAT: study and take a spelling test
LP 8	1	Objective	SWBAT: discuss and respond to “A Crush” using a personal response genre.
		Assessment	SW: Write a personal response essay
LP 9	2	Objective	SWBAT: revise and share their writing with an audience
		Assessment	SW: participate in peer editing and read-aloud their papers to a small group
LP 10	2	Objective	SWBAT: demonstrate effective study skills and all of the above.
		Assessment	SW: take a test on the the text “A Crush”.

Many of my learners seem intimidated by long texts, or texts where a “commitment” is perceived, so “A Crush” will be a good way to ease them into reading

strategies for this year. While we will need to address these fears and help them overcome them, those will be for a different unit, or for “Book Club” as they recommend books for each other. They also have a deep concern for their “level” or ability. I like this piece because it seems to maintain the challenge I’ll need for reading strategies, while also keeping it at an attainable level for my lower readers. The entire unit is Standards based, as well, so it should satisfy any concerns that ANYONE has about it being maintained at their level.

Also, the piece deals with multiple universal themes, and themes that a 7th grader may be thinking about. I’m hoping to draw in the 7th grader social literacy with crushes, and maybe tie something into texting to garner interest and thoughtful synthesis. As we move into MEAP testing too, this will be constantly important. This unit will scaffold others as we focus on new genres, and how to be an effective reader- not just on selected texts, but also in critical reading of directions, and strategies for being a successful test-taker. There seems to be a lot of anxiety around grades and tests in general, having not experienced them before in elementary school and 6th grade. Hopefully this unit will keep them sharp while allaying any paralyzing fears. Actually that would be my hope for any unit.