



STELLAR

**STAAR® Techniques to Engage Learners
in Literacy and Academic Rigor**

Grade 8



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Introduction

STAAR Techniques to Engage Learners in Literacy and Academic Rigor (STELLAR) was developed as a resource for classroom teachers to use in preparing their students for the STAAR Grade 8 Reading Assessment. Through the course of four units, it incorporates multigenre reading selections that are thematically linked and creatively crafted to encourage inquiry, discussion, and ongoing reflection. Every unit offers value-added enrichments through technology, research, and listening and speaking, while providing relevant scaffolding options for diverse learners and gifted and talented students. Also included are suggestions for big ideas, skills-based vocabulary, literary extensions, and benchmark and summative assessment options to support authentic literacy experiences.

STELLAR Grade 7 and STELLAR Grade 8 were developed in tandem and utilize the same passages, vocabulary, key questions, extensions, and applications, but the assessments have been customized to meet the rigor and standards of each grade level.

Value-Added Components

STELLAR is carefully crafted to provide big-picture ideas in the form of essential unit questions, themed passages, and assessments based on these passages. In addition to the basics, each unit contains applications for listening and speaking, research, skills-based vocabulary, technology, and project ideas. To aid in planning for unit instruction, *STELLAR* offers ideas for differentiation for diverse learners, adaptation for gifted learners, and lesson-planning tools. The text also contains several appendices for research-based study-skills practice, product options, grouping strategies and activities, and discussion formats and models, all of which can be utilized within each unit. Finally, in order to allow extensions with the selected themes beyond the materials provided within each unit, additional appendices on choosing themed passages and integrating instruction with technology are included.

Thematic Instruction

STELLAR puts forth the best practice of thematic instruction in integrated language arts. It utilizes the English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) as its foundational document. There are five strands of instructional skills outlined in the TEKS: Reading (including Figure 19), Writing, Oral and Written Conventions, Research, and

Listening and Speaking. These skills are meant to be taught in conjunction with one another in order to help students make connections between the different literacy strands. In any unit of study, therefore, educators are encouraged to integrate the literacy strands so that students must synthesize skills and concepts from each to gain meaning and insight.

The study of themes is a naturally recurring element within the TEKS; students are expected to make thematic connections within and between the many different genres:

(2) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/**Theme** and Genre. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about **theme** and genre in different cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. Students are expected to:

(A) analyze how the genre of texts with similar **themes** shapes meaning

All the components of the *STELLAR* series are based on the design schematic for the state summative assessment and the TEKS; therefore, it requires students to demonstrate understanding of theme through themed passages, crossover multiple-choice and short-answer questions for reading, and thematically linked writing tasks.

Assessments

The assessments contained in *STELLAR* are custom designed for Texas students. The assessments measure a student's level of performance on clearly defined standards, objectives, and skills. Student scores will be based on test questions that have been developed and aligned to the most current version of the ELAR TEKS as well as the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS).

The chosen selections meet the criteria for high-interest, 21st-century context and age-appropriate content. The Lexile score, which considers word frequency and sentence length, of each selection was used to determine ability-level applicability. Selections were then linked by theme, which allowed assessment questions to be written to a higher cognitive level for an

upward cognitive spiral. Each test comprises a set of themed selections with unique questions and an additional set of questions that draw upon the theme.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires that state assessments be aligned and “measure the depth and breadth of the state academic content standards for a given grade level” (US Department of Education, 2003, p. 12). Alignment is the match between the expectations of student learning described in the TEKS and the questions on STAAR. Depth of Knowledge (DOK) was formulated in 1997 by Dr. Norman Webb in response to a need generated by states to objectively and accurately align assessment questions to standards for compliance with federal guidelines. DOK, which measures the cognitive complexity of a task, was the alignment tool used for these assessments. It is a federally approved method of alignment for state summative assessments that is currently used by over twenty states, including Texas.

How to Use This Book

STELLAR is divided into four thematic stand-alone units. Each unit offers three options for planning.

Option One encompasses instruction with components of the assessment given when appropriate. The suggested time frame, based on 45-minute instructional periods, is a total of 10 days for instruction, 3 days for assessment, and 2 days for review and debrief. An overview of the planning steps for Option One along with a sample calendar immediately follow this foreword.

Option Two documents student improvement through baseline testing, targeted instruction, and retesting. The suggested time frame, based on 45-minute instructional periods, is 4 days for baseline testing, 7 days for instruction and practice, 2 days for retesting, and 2 days for review and debrief. An overview of the planning steps for Option Two along with a sample calendar immediately follow this foreword.

Option Three strictly consists of test preparation (e.g., practice in test-taking skills, gaining familiarity with format and vocabulary, and understanding the expectations of a standardized assessment). The instructor may use the passages and assessments at the beginning of each unit to prepare students for the STAAR Grade 8 Reading Assessment. The suggested time frame, based on 45-minute instructional periods, is 4 days for assessment and 3 days for review and debrief. A sample planning calendar immediately follows this foreword.

Assessments are formatted as continuous free-standing documents. When printed as laid out, they do not reflect the format of the STAAR. To mirror STAAR formatting and layout, insert the questions after each reading selection after printing.

A Note to the Teacher: Every *STELLAR* unit is designed to engage students' interest by addressing subjects and content they will encounter in their everyday lives. All activities and facilitation questions contained herein are suggestions. Please preview all selections for applicability and appropriateness before using the materials in your classroom. All movie suggestions are sourced from The Internet Movie Database, and music selections are sourced from iTunes.

Throughout the units, you may notice passages reprinted from open-source web sites such as Wikipedia. Due to the nature of wiki sites, which are

How to Use This Book

editable by the general public, the information they contain is often incorrect. For instructional purposes, the passages appear unaltered, but they should not be viewed as accurate representations of facts.

SAMPLE



The "Top-Secret" Ball

Notes about my reading

- 1 Steve and Dave Jolliffe founded TopGolf® in the United Kingdom in 2000. The brothers envisioned their brainchild as a kind of high-tech driving range. Since then, their concept has morphed into an entertainment experience. TopGolf allows serious golfers to practice driving and hone their skills; it also offers competitive target games, much like darts.
- 2 Walking into TopGolf is like entering a state-of-the-art arcade. Guests check in and are assigned to a climate-controlled bay that houses a bank of monitors, golf clubs, seating, and a golf ball dispenser. There are seven golf games that allow any player, from beginner to experienced, to sharpen his or her expertise and have fun. The experience is made possible by a specially designed golf ball. Each golf ball contains a microchip that reports the accuracy and distance of each shot. TopGolf considers the technology inside the ball to be top secret. TopGolf Senior Communications Manager Adrienne Brown states, "TopGolf holds five distinct international concept patents that protect each key aspect of the TopGolf experience. The patents are secured in the US and every major global market."
- 3 Every time a ball is hit, the monitors display the information transmitted from the ball. TopGolf knows where every ball lands. The top-secret balls even identify the person who hit them over the outfield

fences. TopGolf also knows how many balls are used and if a ball has been damaged. Some of this information is made possible through the age-old tradition of ball collection and washing. A ball picker drives around the outfield vacuuming up the balls that missed the targets. It also retrieves the balls that landed in the targets. To do this, a man enters through a hatch and climbs down a ladder into the target. Large nets cover each target, which is about 10 feet deep and similar to an in-ground swimming pool without the water. Using a vacuum hose, the balls are swept up and into the ball picker. Next, the balls go through a washer and are dried. The balls are all scanned, and each ball is inspected to make sure the chip is still functioning and the outside of the ball, or cover, is not damaged. The good balls are put back in play, and the damaged balls are sent for repair or replacement.

- 4 The Jolliffie brothers visualized an interactive golfing experience. Fifteen years later, TopGolf has thirteen locations in the US, ten more opening within a year, and three locations in the United Kingdom. That translates into 13.3 million games played and over 267 million ball hits in just 2014. All of this is because of their top-secret ball!

S. K. Starr

**Use "The 'Top-Secret' Ball" (pp. 22–23)
to answer questions 62–71.**

62 Which excerpt helps determine the appropriate meaning for brainchild in paragraph 1.

- F *competitive target games*
- G *state-of-the-art arcade*
- H *top-secret balls*
- J *interactive golfing experience*

63 What is the best synonym for morphed in paragraph 1?

- A Mutilated
- B Transformed
- C Switched
- D Changed

64 What type of organization pattern does this selection have?

- F Problem and solution
- G Description
- H Order of importance
- J Cause and effect

Prompt for Expository Writing

Read the following quotation.

Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while.

—Steve Jobs

Think carefully about the following statement.

The more experiences you have had, the easier it is to be creative.

Write an essay explaining creativity.

Be sure to—

- clearly state your controlling idea
- organize and develop your explanation effectively
- provide specific support for your argument
- choose your words carefully
- use correct spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and sentences