



## Guide for Parents and Educators

# *Cooper and Me* and the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts

### **Welcome Parents and Educators!**

Each book in the *Cooper and Me* series helps children acquire skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening consistent with the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. Below you can find answers to frequently asked questions about how the *Cooper and Me* series helps children create a foundation for learning and gain emotional resilience as they navigate the challenges of everyday life.

### **What are the Common Core State Standards?**

The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy are the culmination of an extended, broad-based effort by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the National Governors Association (NGA), and representatives from many different states to provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn. Teachers, parents, and community leaders have weighed in and culled the best from their individual states and from educational leaders worldwide to create one set of standards that clearly communicates what is expected of students at each grade level. Chances are your state has already adopted these standards and is in the process of incorporating the standards into existing educational plans. Go to [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org) to learn more about this nationwide effort.

### **How do common educational standards benefit children?**

The Common Core State Standards were developed with the goal that all students, no matter where they live, are prepared for success in college and the workforce by the time they graduate from high school. The Common Core State Standards don't tell teachers how to teach or parents how to help their children practice skills. Instead, the standards help teachers and parents figure out the knowledge and skills children should have at each grade level so that teachers can build the best lessons and environments for classrooms and parents can reinforce this at home.

### **How does the *Cooper and Me* series fit into the Common Core State Standards?**

The *Cooper and Me* series allows children in preschool through 2nd grade to interact with the stories through four special sections located at the end of each book:

## **Memory Creation**

The special Memory Creation page is a place for young readers to express themselves and reflect on what they've learned. See the Reading Guide for each book to print out this page for classroom or home use.

## **Life Lesson**

In the Life Lesson section, young readers reinforce their understanding of the story and its theme and important message.

## **Connections**

With the Connections component, young readers are encouraged to relate the story to their own lives and form opinions about the experiences and issues presented.

## **Learning Together**

The Learning Together questions provide an additional opportunity to review with young readers important literary elements, such as character, setting, and theme, and encourage them to infer and deduct using both the plot of the story and the expressive illustrations. Through these multi-level questions, young readers realize that their opinions and experiences are valuable. These questions offer a perfect opportunity to reinforce that special bond between adult and child through direct communication about the text. Download the Reading Guide of each book to see activities using these four components.

## **How can I tell that a child is meeting the educational standards?**

Young students who meet the standards in reading, writing, speaking, and listening in their grade levels:

- demonstrate independence,
- begin building strong content knowledge,
- respond to varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline,
- comprehend as well as critique,
- value evidence,
- use technology and digital media, and
- understand other perspectives and cultures.

Of course, learning is a process. As listeners and then eventually competent readers themselves, young students will be prompted in the *Cooper and Me* series to collect and recall data and facts from the stories, discover relationships, concepts, and generalizations from the stories, relate the stories to their own lives, state and eventually write their opinions about the themes of the stories, and enrich their understanding of other people and their views.

Although the standards are divided into reading, writing, speaking, and listening, these processes are closely linked, and the four components in each book of Memory Creation, Life Lesson, Connections, and Learning Together acknowledge this close connection and promote an integrated approach applicable to a range of subjects, including but not limited to English Language Arts.

## **What are some specific examples of how *Cooper and Me* books meet the reading standards?**

When young readers are exposed to a range of texts and tasks at home and at school, they create an important foundation for learning. Pre-reading skills of preschoolers and kindergartners focus on (with prompting and support from parents and educators) asking and answering questions about key details in stories read to them, retelling and summarizing stories, identifying characters, settings, and major events

in stories, describing the relationship between the illustrations and the story, and making the connection between stories and themselves.

As young students gain skills, they build upon this foundation and rely less upon the prompting and support of adults. By grade 2, young readers should be able to answer such questions as who, what, when, where, why, and how, demonstrate understanding of key details in a story, and describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges. They may also be able to describe how words and phrases (e.g. regular beats, rhymes, alliteration) and illustrations supply meaning to a story, describe the overall structure of a story, and acknowledge different points of view (Core Standards, 2011). Certainly as they gain skill in reading, they should also begin to make important connections between self, text, and the world.

Each book in the *Cooper and Me* series supports the acquisition of these core skills and values. For example, in the first book, *Cooper and Me*, young readers are asked to talk about or fill in the Memory Creation page called “My First Day of School” at the end of the story. By expressing how they felt on their first day of school and recalling specific details about the first days of school, they use their personal experiences to clarify the book’s theme.

The Life Lesson component in *Cooper and Me* explicitly reinforces the book’s theme of separation anxiety in a way that young readers can understand:

*“Sometimes you may feel nervous or anxious about being away from your parents or the people that you love. When you feel this way, you should talk to someone you love about how you feel, explain your fears, and find special ways, like the miniature Cooper doll, to comfort you and make you feel better.”*

To further their connection to the story, the Connections section asks open-ended questions of the young reader so that he or she uses prior knowledge about the theme to clarify and extend meaning.

- *The little girl is not happy going to school. Have you ever felt this way?*
- *At school, the little girl discovers lot of fun things to do. What are your favorite things to do at school?*
- *The miniature Cooper doll makes the little girl feel better. What kinds of things can you do to make yourself feel better when you feel nervous?*

Finally, in the Learning Together section of *Cooper and Me*, specific questions direct the young readers to paraphrase what they have heard or read, recall details from the story, and define the importance of certain significant information in the story. The questions range from “Who is the little girl’s best friend?” to “Why do you think the little girl feels nervous about going to school?”

Another great example of how young readers can use the *Cooper and Me* series to build their early reading skills is through *Cooper and Me and the Winter Adventure!* The lesson is about safety and being prepared in case you get lost. In the Memory Creation activity, educators and parents help children write down important information, such as their full name, their address, their phone number, and people to contact in an emergency. Each time the adult reads the story to the child, he or she can reinforce this important information.

In the Connections section, young readers have an opportunity to describe how the characters in this story respond to the challenge of being temporarily lost:

- *How did Cooper and Bella feel when they realized they were lost?*
- *Have you ever felt this way?*
- *What would you do if you were lost? What did Cooper and Bella do?*
- *What do you think Cooper and Bella will do the next time they are sledding?*

Questions in the Learning Together section range from using the illustrations and details in the story to identify setting, characters, and events to open-ended questions about making good decisions. For example, “What is the weather like?” and “Who does Cooper play with in the snow?” prompt readers to recall details from the story. “How do you think they felt when they realized they were lost?” and “What kinds of things could they have done before they went sledding to help them in case they got lost?” encourage young readers to consider their own planning and decision-making skills.

## **What are some specific examples of how *Cooper and Me* books meet the writing standards?**

For the writing standards at each grade level, students should demonstrate increasing sophistication in all aspects of language use, from vocabulary and syntax to the development and organization of ideas (Common Core, 2011). Preschool and kindergarten students would likely use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to tell the topic or theme of a book or state an opinion or preference about a book. Young students might also draw, dictate, or write the events of a book in the order in which they occur and provide a reaction to what happened. They might also participate in shared/group writing projects with guidance from adults as needed.

By grade 2, students should rely less on drawing pictures and dictation and become more independent in their writing. Guidance from teachers and parents helps them strengthen their writing through revising and editing their work and using a variety of digital tools to produce and publish their writing.

The *Cooper and Me* series offers many opportunities for sharpening writing skills. For example, in the special Memory Creation page of *Cooper and Me and the First Halloween!* young readers are asked to describe the traits of a good friend and write down what makes them a good friend. This section allows them to contribute a personal response to the story and practice their writing skills.

The Life Lesson component in *Cooper and Me and the First Halloween!* reinforces the book’s theme of treating others the way you want to be treated and learning to stand up for yourself. It is a perfect opportunity for students to state an opinion or work in a group to recall the events in the story and how the key details teach this lesson:

*“Sometimes people say or do things that aren’t nice. You may not always understand why they do the things they do, but it can still hurt your feelings. When someone does or says something that isn’t nice and you don’t know what to do, you should talk to your parents or someone you love about how you feel, talk about your fears, and learn how to stand up for yourself.”*

The Connections section asks open-ended questions of the young reader so that he or she can draw on personal experiences and knowledge to understand the story. The very youngest students can draw pictures to answer the questions. By grade 2, students might answers these questions in a writer’s notebook or journal.

- *Have you ever had someone say or do something that wasn't nice? Describe what it was and how you felt.*
- *When someone is not treating you nicely, you have some choices about what to do. Name some good things you can do.*
- *The next time you play with your friends, what are some good ways to act?*

In the Learning Together section of *Cooper and Me and the First Halloween!*, specific questions direct the young writers to identify some facts and details from the story, recount two or more sequenced events using temporal words to signal event order, and express opinions related to the story. By grade 2, young writers might supply reasons for their opinion and some sense of closure to their opinion and supporting details. The Learning Together questions range from “What do Cooper and Trooper dress up as for Halloween?” to “Why does Bella turn Cooper and Trooper into unicorns?” and “Do you have friends like Bella who would stand up for you?” The expressive illustrations in the story will help even the youngest students translate their thoughts to paper.

*Cooper and Me and the Military* is another book in the series that has activities specifically to foster early writing skills. The Memory Creation page encourages students to write a letter to someone in the military expressing thanks. This section allows them to think beyond the text of the story and apply what they have learned to a real-life writing assignment.

The Connections section asks open-ended questions of the young reader so that he or she can analyze and evaluate the experience of the main characters and form opinions about the story based on his or her own experiences and feelings:

- *Have you ever missed someone? How does that feel?*
- *What are some things you can do to feel closer to people you love who are far away?*
- *What is your favorite memory with someone who doesn't live close to you?*

In the Learning Together section of *Cooper and Me and the Military*, specific questions direct the young readers to both facts and opinions in the story. Questions range from “What do Gracie and Joe’s mom and dad do?” to “Why are Gracie and Joe sad?” Students can draw, dictate, or write the answers to these questions or participate collaboratively in book groups or reader response writing groups.

## **What are some specific examples of how *Cooper and Me* books meet the speaking and listening standards?**

In the speaking and listening standards, young readers acquire the skills necessary to speak and listen to others effectively. The earliest stage of these standards involves simply listening attentively and recognizing when it is appropriate to respond, learning how to take turns, and learning how to interact appropriately for different circumstances. As students mature and gain skills, they will demonstrate the ability to see similarities of interests, experiences, and feelings of other people, understand and use the rules, protocols, and traditional practices of behavior, and become independent in initiating conversations and adapting language to a specific audience.

All the books in the *Cooper and Me* series have the complexity, quality, and thematic range necessary to foster these early speaking and listening skills. For example, on the Memory Creation page of *Cooper and Me To Catch a Dream*, releasing in spring 2012, young readers are encouraged to essentially “show and tell” by writing down a dream they have. By using this prompt, young readers may take their connection

to the story one step further and participate in group discussion where they not only express a personal wish but also observe the conventions and protocols for social interaction.

The Life Lesson component in *Cooper and Me To Catch a Dream* explicitly reinforces the book's theme of following your dreams and always trying your best in a way that young readers can easily understand:

*When you are young, you begin to learn what you like to do as you explore new things. You decide what you like to do by what you get excited about and look forward to. Having interests, or dreams of things you think are fun and you are good at, is very important. You shouldn't get disappointed if at times it seems like your dreams will not come true. If you do the things that make you happy and always try your best, you're a winner.*

To further their understanding of the story, the Connections section asks open-ended questions of the child so that he or she can practice communicating effectively:

- *What are some things that you enjoy doing?*
- *Can you think of things that you haven't tried yet but might be fun? Try to think of three or four new things.*
- *What if you aren't good at something right away? How does that make you feel? What should you do?*

In the Learning Together section of *Cooper and Me To Catch a Dream*, specific questions direct the young readers to think about the social conventions of communicating and respond directly to an adult or small group of peers in an appropriate way. For example, sometimes it is appropriate to answer a question concisely using facts only, and sometimes it is appropriate to offer a personal vignette or add one to a conversation in progress. Questions range from "Does Lily usually sing in front of anyone or just by herself?" to "What does it mean to have courage?" Depending on the setting that these questions are asked, young readers may adapt their responses to different people. Most important, young readers will begin to see similarities and connections between their interests, experiences, and feeling with those of others.

## **Where do I get more information about how to incorporate the *Cooper and Me* series into existing state and local educational plans?**

For more information on individual states and their progress toward adopting the Common Core State Standards, or for a full copy of these national standards, go to [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org). If your state has not adopted these core standards yet, you can search your state's Department of Education website for a copy of your state's educational frameworks or standards. You'll find that the *Cooper and Me* series is a great fit for all.

If you are looking for specific activities to use with each book, download the Reading Guides and reproduce the worksheets for use in your classroom or for home.

If you would like to download the answers in this document as one complete booklet to present to schools or districts to encourage them to adopt the *Cooper and Me* series, download the PDF called Cooper-Research.

We hope that the *Cooper and Me* series becomes an integral building block in classrooms and helps students gain emotional resilience as they navigate the challenges of everyday life.