# A Century of Change in High School English Assessments: An Analysis of 110 New York State Regents Exams, 1900–2018

**Sarah Levine**
*Stanford University*

*Those interested in English education have long debated the role and value of literature in high school students' education and lives, developing a range of visions about what and how students should read. This study provides a historical perspective on the visions and values of educators and test-makers by analyzing a century's worth of standardized New York State English Language Arts exams (now known as Regents Exams), with a focus on questions about literature. The study introduces a data set of 110 Regents English exams and explores the results of a content analysis of the exams' literature questions. The study's analysis finds significant changes over time in some of the most controversial aspects of English language arts. Specifically, the analysis shows an increase in racial and gender diversity of the authors of exam passages; a decrease in literal comprehension questions and a corresponding increase in interpretive questions; and a diminishing number of questions that ask for students' individual responses to literary texts. These findings act as a valuable lens through which to track the history of changing visions of literary education in US high schools.*

## Introduction

In the United States, those interested in English education have long debated the role and value of literature in high school students' education and lives. Over time, different groups have advocated for a range of sometimes overlapping and sometimes conflicting approaches to teaching literary reading and interpretation, including: an emphasis on historical context and authorial biography; a New Critical turn away from biography and toward the self-contained stylistic coherence of a text; a "reader response" model that argued for the importance of individual readers' experiences of—and active contributions to—literary meaning-making; and the application of critical theories about race, class, gender, and power to examine a text's potential complicity in silencing minoritized voices.

Central to all these interpretive movements (along with many others not mentioned here) are two fundamental questions: What texts should students read? And how should they read those texts?

Over the last century, students, teachers, parents, boards of education, universities, activists, commercial test-makers, and others have brought varied perspectives to these questions. As the influence of these perspectives has ebbed and flowed, English language arts (ELA) has seen corresponding changes in the artifacts of



f31-57-Aug19-RTE.indd 31 8/13/19 7:52 PM

the field: classroom curricula, student testing, teacher assessments, professional development materials, and more.

Studies of these artifacts offer snapshots of the visions and values ascendant at particular moments in time. For example, surveys of teachers' syllabi and text choices provide insight into schools' adherence to the traditional Western canon at the turn of the twentieth century (Tanner, 1907) and the turn of the twenty-first century (Stotsky, 2010), as do critical content analyses of textbooks and popular trade books (Evans & Davies, 2000; Smolkin & Young, 2011). Analyses of English methods course syllabi reveal ways in which transactional and New Critical theories informed approaches to teacher education (Smagorinsky & Whiting, 1995). And content analyses of standardized exams allow for a deep dive into test-makers' goals for students' content knowledge and cognition at different points in time (Applebee, 1990; Brody, DeMilo, & Purves, 1989; Genovese, 2002; Gorlewski & Gorlewski, 2013).

The current study differs in that it offers a broad historical perspective on more than a century of changing ideas and expectations about literary reading, by analyzing 118 years of standardized New York State ELA exams (now known as Regents Exams). Specifically, this study analyzes the content of all text-based and literature-related questions ($N = 2{,}792$) in 110 New York State Regents Exams administered mostly to high school seniors between 1900 and 2018.

Although this study does not examine direct correlations between standardized tests and school curriculum and instruction, evidence clearly shows that standardized exams such as the Regents do influence those things. In the United States, some of the first iterations of standardized exams were integral to the development of English literature as a subject for study in high school classrooms. For example, in 1874, Harvard created an entrance exam that, for the first time, required prospective students to write compositions about literary texts (in 1874 those included *Ivanhoe* and *The Vicar of Wakefield*). High school teachers across the country then felt compelled to use those exams as curricular guides, even if only a few of their students planned to attend college (Applebee, 1974; Graff, 2008; Hook, 1979). By the 1890s, some high school and college teachers were already protesting that "training in English is given not for the lasting benefit of the student, but to enable him to pass the Harvard entrance" (Hill, Briggs, & Hurlbut, 1896, p. 49). These protests were in large part the catalyst for the founding of the National Council of Teachers of English in 1911.

In New York, a 1939 study found that high school ELA teachers felt their jobs depended on their students' success on the Regents Exam, and thus they focused on "what they expect to be covered in the [Regents] examinations whether the material [was] suited to . . . their pupils or not" (Smith, 1939, p. 179). More than a half century later, Crocco and Costigan (2007) made similar findings when interviewing over 100 preservice ELA teachers regarding their attitudes toward the Regents Exam. Most dramatically, a small New York study found that some teachers design instruction "precisely and only to help the students pass the Regents exam at the end of the year" (Giouroukakis & Honigsfeld, 2010, p. 480).

Beyond New York, a survey of teachers in five states found that about 85% of middle school teachers and 65% of high school teachers rated their state exams as "important" or "very important" in shaping curriculum and instruction (Applebee & Langer, 2011). Other research from across the country has similarly found that teachers "narrow the curriculum" to account for the often conventional or canonical content demands of standardized tests, or tailor their writing instruction to address standardized tests' essay formulas (Au, 2011; Hillocks, 2002).

Thus, a historical content analysis of standardized tests like the Regents offers a wide window to observe test-makers' changing views on what and how students should read, with the knowledge that those views have influenced the evolution of high school literature instruction.

To explore test-makers' visions of what and how students should read, this content analysis addresses four questions:

1. What were the genders, nationalities, and races/ethnicities of authors of reading selections and referenced works in the Regents Exams?
2. What genres were represented in these selections and referenced works?
3. What kinds of sense-making demands did exam questions make upon students?
4. What literary lenses did exams invoke?

The study is outlined here in four steps. The first section explains the motivations for each research question, reviewing historical context and relevant empirical research. A second section briefly describes the history and general content of the Regents English exams. The third section describes both quantitative and qualitative coding processes and a methodology for content analysis that quantifies the value that test-makers placed on texts and interpretive approaches. Finally, the results and discussion sections shed light on the Regents' competing and evolving visions for students' literary reading.

## Context for Research Questions

### *Debates about Authors*

This study's first question—about authors' genders, nationalities, and races/ethnicities—is motivated by historical and ongoing debates and changing beliefs about the importance of the white Western canon in the ELA classroom. At the turn of the twentieth century, US high school English teachers followed the lead of US universities and began to include English language literature in their classrooms. They focused on white, male, and mostly British authors such as Milton, Shakespeare, Chaucer, and Burns, taking up the Arnoldian idea that knowledge of these men's lives and words would ennoble and uplift their students. The board of the New York State Association of English Teachers embraced this argument in an "open letter to English teachers," urging their colleagues to use such texts to "present ideals of conduct and character" to their students, and to help "standardize

f31-57-Aug19-RTE.indd 33 8/13/19 7:52 PM

the taste of the pupils" (Executive Committee of the New York State Association of Teachers of English, 1912).

The focus on white authors persisted not only in segregated all-white schools, but in segregated African American schools as well, where the curriculum might include German and English literature (Bertaux & Washington, 2005). Carter Woodson's "The Mis-education of the Negro" (1933/2016) cites a study of "hundreds of Negro high schools" which found that "only eighteen offer a course taking up the history of the Negro" (p. 1). Woodson and other writers and leaders, such as Langston Hughes (1926), called for increased representation of African American authors in schoolrooms and libraries, and protested racially demeaning content of canonical literature by white authors. By the 1960s and 1970s, a growing number of teachers and scholars called for diversity in text choices (e.g., Ellmann, 1968). The "canon wars" of the 1980s and 1990s saw more conservative educators defending the Western canon and the social, cultural, and humanistic capital it could provide (e.g., Hirsch, 1988); meanwhile, more progressive scholars argued for newer and more diverse curricula that could offer, using Rudine Bishop's (1990) metaphor, mirrors in which students could see themselves reflected, as well as windows and sliding doors through which students could explore other worlds.

Throughout the twentieth century, surveys of teachers' and schools' text choices reflected an "entrenched pedagogy" built on white and Western authors (Sewell, 2008). A 1907 survey of 67 Midwestern high schools (Tanner, 1907) showed that white men authored all but one of the most commonly taught texts (George Eliot was the lone white woman). Teachers felt obliged to teach many of these texts because they were required reading for a Midwest college entrance exam, but they voiced concern that some texts "seem[ed] to deaden any love for literature a pupil may have" (Tanner, 1907, p. 37).

Surveys over the next hundred years continued to show the dominance of Western white male authors, including a 1964 national survey of over 200 US middle and high schools (Anderson, as cited in Stotsky, 1991) and, almost thirty years later, a replication of that study in over 300 high schools (Applebee, 1992). The latter study showed that the same 27 texts were required in 30% or more of surveyed schools. Of those, two were by white women (*To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Outsiders*), with the rest by white men. Subsequent surveys of schools in two Southern states and a content analysis of ELA textbooks reported similar findings (Sewell, 2008; Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006; Stotsky, Goering, & Jolliffe, 2010).

However, the most recent national survey as of this writing (Stotsky, 2010) shows movement away from a uniform canon, with even works like *Romeo and Juliet* or *To Kill a Mockingbird* taught by only 6% of 400 teachers surveyed.

### *Debates about Genres*

The study's second question, about the genres of exam excerpts, arises out of a more recent concern expressed by many ELA teachers at the beginning of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI). Led by state agencies, the CCSSI represents

f31-57-Aug19-RTE.indd 34 8/13/19 7:52 PM

an effort to create learning standards to "help ensure that all students are college and career ready" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 3). In ELA, the standards focus, among other things, on close reading and text-based argument. ELA teachers have protested that meeting CCSSI standards would require them to neglect essays, prose fiction, drama, and poetry in favor of informational nonfiction texts (e.g., Taylor, 2015). To investigate that concern, this study tracked exam selections by genre from 1900 to 2018, to better understand (1) in general, how the Regents have valued different genres over the years, and (2) in particular, whether CCSSI-aligned exams use more informational nonfiction than previous, non-CCSSI exams.

### *Literal and Interpretive Sense-Making*

This study's third research question—about the nature of the Regents' sense-making demands over time—tracks the Regents' emphases on literal comprehension as opposed to literary interpretation. While there are many shades of sense-making in literary reading and response, *literal* and *interpretive* are standard umbrella categories in literary research (Hillocks & Ludlow, 1984; Holyoak, 1982; Purves, as cited in Bloom, Hastings, & Madaus, 1971). Unquestionably, teachers' emphasis on literal understanding (as demanded in turn-of-the-twentieth-century classrooms through recitation and memorization) has dramatically declined over the years. For example, a study of several standardized tests from the first and last decades of the twentieth century documented a shift in emphasis from memorizing content to enacting literacy skills (Genovese, 2002).

However, analyses of classroom discussions, textbooks, and other artifacts of the field from the turn of the twenty-first century still indicate a pedagogical emphasis on literal comprehension as opposed to literary interpretation. For example, two analyses of ELA textbooks from the early 2000s show heavy use of "closed questions" (as opposed to open-ended questions) and a framing of literary reading as summary or a search for "one right answer" (Kane-Mainier, 2015; Mihalakis, 2010). Likewise, a well-known US study of hundreds of classroom discussions found that teachers most often asked literal comprehension questions about literary texts, and students rarely had extended discussions about their own responses or their analysis of authorial craft, particularly in lower-tracked classrooms (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003).

### *Literary Theories and Pedagogical Approaches*

The study's fourth question explores the exams' invocation of some of the literary theories that emerged and developed over the twentieth century. While these theories are often described in opposition to one another, they are in fact overlapping and multifaceted. The following is a simplified account of a few of the theoretical movements that prompted debate over the last hundred years, and that are most salient to this study. For more detailed histories of these movements and debates, see resources such as Marshall (2000); for broader histories of the development of ELA as a school discipline, see Applebee (1974), Graff (2008), or Willinsky (1991).

### Biographical.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, many teachers took a historical or biographical approach to literature, placing particular value on authors' lives and environments. The cognitive demands of such an approach were often limited to memorization of publication dates, recitation of texts, and listening to lectures about textual themes (Applebee, 1974; Graff, 2008).

### Formalist.

In response to this stance, a generation of theorists, now almost universally called the "New Critics," rose to prominence in the middle of the twentieth century (e.g., Brooks, 1947; Ransom, 1941). Related to the older movement of Russian formalism, New Criticism was interested in authorial craft and the qualities of a text that made it distinctly literary. These scholars argued that the focus of literary meaning-making should be on the relationship between form and content within the text itself, and not the reader's individual experience or emotional response, or the author's history or personality.

### Reader response.

In 1938, in "Literature as Exploration," Louise Rosenblatt argued for the fundamental role of the reader in interpretive meaning-making. Meaning did not travel from text to reader, but rather, readers drew on their particular cultural norms, world knowledge, and experiences to make both literal and interpretive meaning in transaction with a text. While some of her contemporaries attended to Rosenblatt's arguments (Applebee, 1974), her ideas did not take hold more broadly until the 1960s, when teachers and theorists began to focus more on readers' identities and experiences as part of a movement more broadly called "reader response" (e.g., Bleich, 1975; Probst, 1986; Rosenblatt, 1978).

This trend toward reader-response approaches is corroborated by a historical content analysis of twentieth-century *English Journal* articles about teaching poetry (Faust & Dressman, 2009). This study found a gradual increase in articles—many by teachers—that supported the teaching of "populist" (or reader response) approaches to poetry, as opposed to formalist approaches.

### Critical theory.

At about the same time that Rosenblatt was expanding her work on reader response and transactional reading, a growing movement of scholars and teachers (e.g., Gates, 1988; Said, 1983) developed a range of literary theories and critical lenses that resisted formalist readings, and instead called for a renewed and critical focus on the political and social contexts from which literary texts arose, and the role that literature played in preserving the norms of white, Western culture. These scholars and teachers pointed out that historically, most literary reading and meaning-making had been reserved for the dominant culture, and that literature and literary interpretation had systematically ignored or reductively portrayed people of color, women of all races, and the working class—to name just a few historically underrepresented groups.

## Background on the Regents Exams

Although state and university archives offer many examples of high school–level exams, the New York State Board of Education and New York State Library archives offered the most complete and accessible collection of high school exams I could find. The Regents Exams are also a useful data set because they represent the views of education leaders in an influential, populous, and diverse state that had a well-established public school system by the turn of the twentieth century.

The Board of Regents administers exams three different exams during each school year. This study analyzed one of those exams for every year of the study, with the exception of the 1900s through the 1920s, when I only had access to 6 exams per decade. From 2014 to 2016, as New York State transitioned to CCSSI-aligned exams, students could choose to take aligned or unaligned exams. This study analyzed both types of exams.

### *History of the Regents Exams*

An 1890 report by the Board of Regents stated that the primary goal of the exam was to "provide an equitable method" for distributing state monies to schools; that is, schools qualified for funding when enough students passed the exams. Secondary goals included "furnishing a healthy stimulus to study, testing the work of teachers, and raising the standard of academic scholarship" (University of the State of New York, 1890, p. 462). Tertiary goals included determination of student readiness for postsecondary study (Beadie, 1999). For more detailed histories of the Regents Exams, including details about who made and graded the exams, see Johnson (2009) and Kang (2015).

The first high school exit exams in New York were administered in 1878. Fewer than half of eligible schools participated, and only a small percentage of students in those schools actually took those exams. Soon after, the state tied exam passage to funding, and almost all public schools administered the exams (Beadie, 1999; Office of State Assessment, 1987). Still in 1900, the first year included in this study, only 8% of New York's teenagers graduated from secondary schools (Folts, 1996). At least 98% of them were white (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993), and they tended to be from middle-class or wealthy families.

While the number of students taking the exams grew steadily over the century, the test remained optional until 1994. Until that time, students who took Regents courses and exams were essentially choosing an accelerated track (Hursh, 2013). Since 1994, all public school students have been required to take the exam (Riede, 2013).

In 2010, 41 states, including New York, began aligning their standardized tests with the CCSSI to meet the requirements of a federal "Race to the Top" grant. Some states adopted new exams such as PARCC or Smarter Balanced, while others (like New York) adapted their current tests to the new standards.

### *Content of the Regents Exams*

In addition to text-based questions, the Regents English exams addressed many aspects of a traditional ELA class, including spelling, pronunciation, grammar,

vocabulary, and general literacy skills (e.g., using the Dewey Decimal System). Also, until the 2000s, almost every exam instructed students to write a non-text-based composition on one of a given range of topics, such as these options from a 1965 exam:

- Defense spending and the economy
- Why diet?
- Can we reach the moon by 1970?
- The most relaxing sport

In the 2000s, the Regents began to include informational texts accompanied by policy questions, as in the 2016 CCSSI-aligned exam, which provided two articles about voting and asked, "Should American citizens be required to vote in national elections?"

The current study focuses *only* on text-based questions, where students either responded to open-ended or multiple-choice (MC) questions about a provided text or were asked to recall details about previously read texts. This study's sample of 110 exams includes 2,503 text-based MC questions and 289 open-ended, text-based essay questions (sometimes called "constructed response" questions).

### *Existing Research on the Regents English Exams*

This study is not the first to analyze the Regents English exam. Gorlewski and Gorlewski (2013) conducted a critical content analysis of 19 fourth- and eleventh-grade English exams administered between 1999 and 2004, to examine the topics, attitudes, and epistemologies privileged by the test-makers. They found, among other things, that male authors outnumbered female authors by 3 to 1, and that "male-authored texts re-inscribed women in traditional roles" (Gorlewski & Gorlewski, 2013, p. 69). A dissertation study of 14 Regents English exams administered between 1950 and 2010 (Kang, 2015) similarly found an emphasis on white male authors. The study also found that the exams explicitly endorsed the idea that "literature is purposefully constructed by an author, for a specific purpose" (Kang, 2015, p. 151). In terms of sense-making, the study found that exams consistently asked students to respond to questions about (1) the main point of the passage, (2) the author's purpose, or (3) the meaning of specific words.

The current study expands on this and other research. It tracks the Regents' changing visions and values regarding the conventional canon, student sense-making, and theoretical lenses since the turn of the twentieth century.

## Methods

This is a mixed-methods study, relying on both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The research team included three university undergraduate English majors, paid hourly through a work-study program. The study's first stage involved quantitative coding of authors' genders (coded in binary terms), nationalities, and races/ethnicities; text genres; and a word count for each exam. The next stages of coding

involved qualitative analysis of test questions' cognitive demands and theoretical assumptions.

### *Question 1: Coding Authors' Genders, Nationalities, and Races/Ethnicities*

There are many useful ways to conceptualize the Regents' visions for diversity of authorial representation, from geography to sexuality to social class. The current study presents only an initial description of diversity in the Regents Exams by identifying binary gender identity, nationalities, and races/ethnicities of all authors ($N$ = 1,791) referenced in the study's 110 exams. These categories were generally easy to identify through public record. Each category represents a way of tracking the test-makers' changing visions of diversity and the white, Western canon.

#### Nationality

The vast majority of authors included in Regents Exams were either from the United States or the British Isles (mainly England). Fewer than 20 of the 1,791 authors came from other countries commonly identified as "Western," such as Norway (Henrik Ibsen), France (Victor Hugo), and Spain (Miguel de Cervantes). Only four authors came from countries commonly identified as "non-Western," such as China (Lin Yutang and Shu Ting) or Iran (Omar Khayyam). Thus, we used a binary code for nationality: *Western* or *non-Western.*

#### Gender

Although it is likely that at least a few authors in older exams identified as transgender or gender nonbinary, a detailed exploration of authors' gender identities was beyond the scope of this study. As far as we could tell, the authors included in more recent exams identified as cisgender. Thus, this study also used a binary code for gender (*female* or *male*).

#### Race/Ethnicity

A powerful measure of the exam's growing attention to diversity was its movement away from an all-white set of authors. In the first decade of exams included in this study, all referenced or excerpted authors were white men, except for one white woman (George Eliot). When the test-makers began to include authors of color, those authors were almost exclusively African American or Latinx. To most clearly illustrate shifts toward a more racially/ethnically diverse set of authors, we again created binary categories using the terms *authors of color* and *white authors.*

We then combined race and gender codes, ultimately identifying authors who were men of color, white men, women of color, and white women.

### *Question 2: Coding Genres*

Almost all of the Regents' MC and open-ended questions referred to drama, fiction, poetry, and nonfiction. Thus, the research team focused on these genres, as did prior content analyses of ELA curricula and tests (Applebee, 1993; Brody et al., 1989). Because we were specifically interested in tracking the growth of informa-

tional texts, as well as literary nonfiction, we further divided *nonfiction* into two categories: *essay/narrative* and *informational* (Table 1).

Table 1. **Examples of Two Types of Nonfiction**

| Code | Definition | Example Texts and Authors |
|---|---|---|
| Essay/narrative | Rhetorically powerful essays, speeches, biographies | "Gifts," by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1930 exam) |
| | Personal narratives, memoirs | "Aria: A Memoir of a Bilingual Childhood," by Richard Rodriguez (2016 exam) |
| Informational | Texts that use data to inform or explain | "Child Labor," by Hugh Cleland (1999 exam) |
| | Primary texts and raw data | Maps, diagrams, charts (mostly exams in the 1990s and 2000s) |

### *Question 3: Coding Exams' Sense-Making Demands*

To code sense-making demands, we used a subset of 55 exams that included 1,230 MC questions and 167 open-ended questions. When possible, we selected every other exam from a decade and also switched from odd- to even-year exams every decade. Doing so allowed for greater efficiency while still capturing overall trends. For each of the 55 exams, at least two raters read and answered all MC literature questions. Two raters also wrote outlines of responses to at least one open-ended essay prompt per exam. We used Cohen's kappa to measure inter-rater reliability for the coding of MC questions ($k = .89$).

#### Literal and Interpretive Demands

The team initially used top-down and bottom-up coding to identify a range of literary sense-making demands in MC and open-ended questions. For instance, we identified questions that required students to recognize irony, assess character traits, or choose thematic statements. However, for the purposes of this broad overview of sense-making trends, we ultimately condensed sense-making categories into two groups: literal comprehension or interpretation, two standard categories in literary reading research (e.g., Purves as cited in Bloom et al., 1971; Hillocks & Ludlow, 1984).

We used Holyoak's (1982) definition of literal sense-making to characterize exam questions that asked for recall, summary, or identification of word meaning, but did not ask students to go "beyond the overt topic domain" of the text (p. 108). The interpretive category included any questions that did go beyond the text's overt topic domain, generally by asking students to infer tones, evaluate character traits, or determine the structural impact of particular literary devices (Table 2).

Table 2. **Codes for Sense-Making Demands of Questions**

| Code | What Are Students Asked to Do or Know? | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Literal | Summarize or paraphrase a given passage | Summarize the selection in a well-constructed sentence. (1918 exam) |
| | Recall details of text | A person who earned her living as a governess was (1) Jane Eyre (2) Alice Adams (3) Nancy Lammeter (4) Elizabeth Bennet (1958 exam) |
| | Identify the literal meaning of a word in context | As used in line 86, the word "derided" most nearly means (1) taunted (2) restrained (3) rewarded (4) flattered (2016 exam) |
| Interpretive | Identify or interpret character traits, moods, tones, or themes | On the whole, the attitude of the speaker can best be described as (1) scornful (2) romantic (3) optimistic (4) fearful (1984 exam)<br><br>What is the theme of "The Rape of the Lock"? (1904 exam) |

Multiple-choice answer keys accompanied many tests, allowing review of test-sanctioned responses. Where we could not locate scoring guides, we used our best judgment as to acceptable answers. We coded sense-making demands by looking at both the MC question and the answer.

For example, a 2003 exam presented the poem "Annie Allen" by Gwendolyn Brooks, about a parent's love for a young son who isn't afraid to take risks as he explores his world. The poem ends with the lines: "His lesions are legion/But reaching is his rule." In a footnote, the exam defines *lesions* to mean injuries, and *legion* to mean numerous. An accompanying question read as follows (with the test-sanctioned answer in bold):

> The sentence "His lesions are legion" emphasizes the child's many (1) wishes and desires **(2) cuts and bruises** (3) fears and restraints (4) strengths and skills

The Regents' sanctioned answer, *cuts and bruises*, supplies concrete synonyms for "lesions," thus asking students to show literal understanding of the text. Because the other three possible answers suggest symbolic meanings for the word "lesions," students may have engaged in interpretive moves before settling on the literal response (or choosing another response); however, because this study focuses on the sense-making privileged by the Regents' sanctioned answer, this question was coded as "literal."

### Word Count as Cognitive Load

As a way of exploring a different set of sense-making demands, we counted the words in all passages in each of the 55 exams. Since the test time remained constant (except for one decade), changes in word count and number of texts could indicate changes in the Regents' expectations about the appropriate cognitive load for students. We did not track text complexity or vocabulary levels over the years, reasoning that using current measures to evaluate the complexity of hundred-year-old texts would not yield reliable results.

### *Question 4: Coding Literary Theories Invoked by the Regents*

We explored the Regents' invocation of four historically significant theories that educators have applied to literary reading across the twentieth century and beyond: biographical, formalist, reader response, and critical. Although the Regents drew on many other theories as well, these four offer a useful window into the Regents' visions because they emerged at different times across the twentieth century, are historically significant, and have (for the most part) shown staying power. Clearly, each theory comprises many sub-theories and offshoots; for instance, Rosenblatt's view of transactional reading differs in assumptions and applications from Stanley Fish's view of interpretive communities, but both fall under the general heading of *reader response.* This study defines the theories broadly to account for general trends in the Regents' visions for literary reading (Table 3). We hope future studies will explore an expanded range of theories as instantiated by the Regents Exams.

### *Measuring Representation with Point Values*

From 1906 until 2009, the Regents assigned a point value to every question. Most MC questions were worth one or two points. Open-ended questions ranged from 20 to 50 points, depending upon the year. We adopted this point system to measure the importance that the Regents assigned to authors, genres, types of sense-making, and theoretical lenses.

For example, a 1974 exam included (1) an excerpt from the nonfiction essay "Fifth Avenue, Uptown" by African American author James Baldwin, accompanied by seven MC questions, and (2) an excerpt from the novel "The Pond" by white author Robert Murphy, accompanied by nine MC questions. We therefore added seven points to the categories *men of color* and *nonfiction*, and nine points to the *white men* and *fiction* categories.

## Results

This study initiates broad exploration of the rich data of 110 New York State Regents Exams administered over 118 years. The findings reported here offer a historical perspective on the Regents' views on issues central to English education communities: diverse authorship and the Western canon; emphasis on particular genres; the balance between literal and interpretive sense-making; and the privileging of different literary theories.

Table 3. **Codes for Theoretical Lenses of Exam Questions**

| Code | What Are Students Asked to Do or Know? | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Biographical | Summarize the life, history, or ideas of a specific author; discuss how the text reveals the author | Select an essay from your required or supplementary reading . . . and show specifically how the essay reveals the mind and character of the author. (1925 exam) |
| Formalist | Analyze authorial craft, and the relationship between literary elements and structural effects | Identify a central idea in the text. Analyze how the author's use of one writing strategy (literary element or literary technique or rhetorical device) develops this central idea. Examples include: characterization, conflict, denotation/connotation, metaphor, simile, irony, language use, point-of-view, setting, structure, symbolism, theme, tone. (2016 exam) |
| Reader Response | Articulate individual reading experiences and/or individual emotional responses | Show that fiction or drama . . . may help us to understand and sympathize with people we should otherwise pass by without interest. Illustrate by instances in your own experience. (1925 exam) |
| Critical | Use critical lenses to interrogate bias | Often television and radio shows, movies, popular songs, and comic strips present people in stereotyped sex roles. Study the cartoons below and . . . identify the stereotypes. Compare them directly with the stereotypes in at least two of the other media. Incorporate into your writing how the media you selected have shaped society's view of sex roles. (1979 exam) |

### *Question 1: Authors' Genders, Nationalities, and Races/Ethnicities*

#### Race/Ethnicity and Gender

In our coding system, the exams assigned a total of 4,004 points to questions related to 1,791 different authors. Recall that in this coding system, a one-point MC question about a Gwendolyn Brooks poem would yield one point for the *women of color* category of authors. Figure 1 represents the percentage of points per decade awarded to each category, ordered from highest to lowest percentage.

Over the decades, the trend toward a more diverse set of authors is clear. From the 1900s to the 1950s, texts by white men received an average of 94% of total points. From the 1960s to the 2010s, texts by white men averaged 70%. In the 2010s (including both CCSSI and non-CCSSI exams), the average was 52%.

Much of that reduction corresponds to the growing inclusion of texts by white women. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, authors such as George Eliot or Elizabeth Gaskell repeatedly occupied the few slots for white women. By

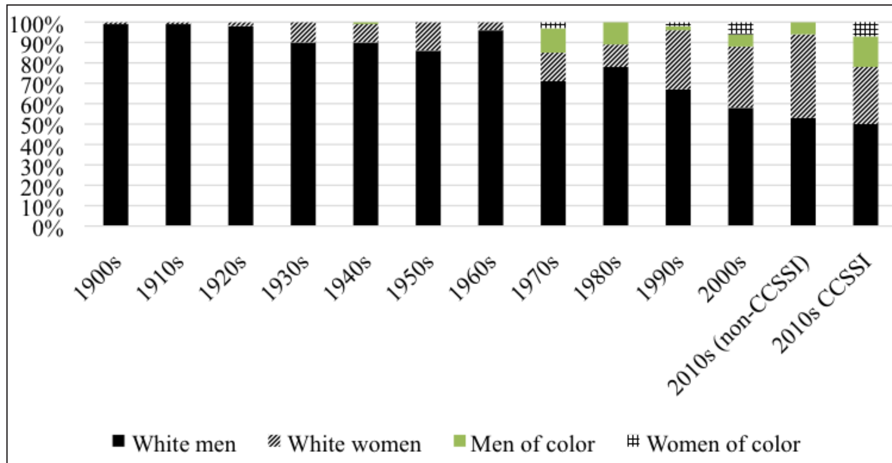


FIGURE 1. *Average percentage of points for authors by gender and race/ethnicity across 110 exams*

the 1970s, the Regents included a more varied list of white women, and from the 1990s through the 2010s, a range of well-known and little-known white women authors accounted for 32% of total points on the exams.

The Regents failed to include any authors of color until 1939, when an exam referenced Booker T. Washington in a one-point MC recall question. The Regents did not include a full passage by an author of color until 1971, when a test presented "Aunt Jane Allen" by Harlem Renaissance poet Fenton Johnson. The 1970s also included the first reference to an author who was a woman of color, in a one-point question about Lorraine Hansberry.

The CCSSI-aligned 2010s included the highest percentage of points (23%) for texts by authors of color. However, this diversity was not evenly distributed across exams. In the 2015 CCSSI-aligned Regents Exam, for instance, test-makers included authors with varied backgrounds and interests, all of whom were white. Meanwhile, two of the three literary excerpts in the 2016 CCSSI-aligned exam were by authors of color, including poet Shu Ting and nonfiction writer Richard Rodriguez.

There are notable qualitative differences between Regents Exam texts by white authors and authors of color. First, the exams' fiction and poetry selections represented a greater degree of racial and gender diversity than did informational nonfiction, which was largely written by white authors. Second, many texts by authors of color addressed issues of race, ethnicity, and inequality. A much smaller proportion of texts by white authors addressed social or political issues; their subjects were wide-ranging, from a passage on blimps to one on the nature of friendship. Third, many of the authors of color, such as James Baldwin, Richard Rodriguez, Gwendolyn Brooks, and N. Scott Momaday, were well-known in the ELA world. In contrast, the status of white authors ran the gamut from famous to unknown.

## Nationality

The authors referenced or excerpted in the Regents Exams were mostly British and American, and almost all were from Western countries. Of the 1,791 authors in our sample, only four were from non-Western countries: from China, poets Lin Yutang (referenced in a one-point recall question in 1937) and Shu Ting, also known as Gong Peiyu (her poem "Assembly Line" appeared in a 2016 exam); from Iran, Omar Khayyam (featured twice in MC questions in the 1940s); and from South Korea, Chong Ju Choi (an economist who authored an informational piece used in the 2016 exam).

### *Question 2: Exam Genres*

The research team assigned one of five genre codes to each selection and referenced text in the study sample: *nonfiction informational, nonfiction essay/narrative, fiction, poetry,* or *drama* (Figure 2).

Nonfiction essays, fiction, poetry, and drama were included in almost every decade. However, questions about drama decreased in the 1930s and disappeared entirely by the 2010s. Questions about fiction doubled from 1930 to 1940, and averaged 28% of exam points from 1940 until the advent of the CCSSI, when the percentage of questions about fiction decreased to 18%. From 1900 through the 1990s, questions about nonfiction essays made up the greatest proportion of exam points in every decade.

Test-makers first used informational nonfiction texts from the 1940s to the 1960s, presenting four to five short passages about topics as varied as city life, the use of props in Shakespeare's day, and motor fuel. The accompanying MC questions averaged 14% of total genre points for those decades. Informational nonfiction then reappeared in the 1990s, averaging 12% of total points. In the 2000s,

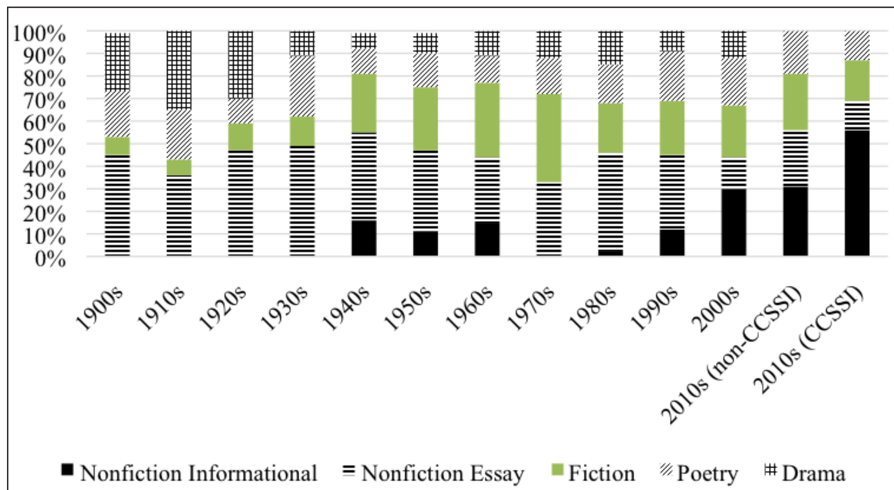


Figure 2. *Average percentage of points for different genres across 110 exams*

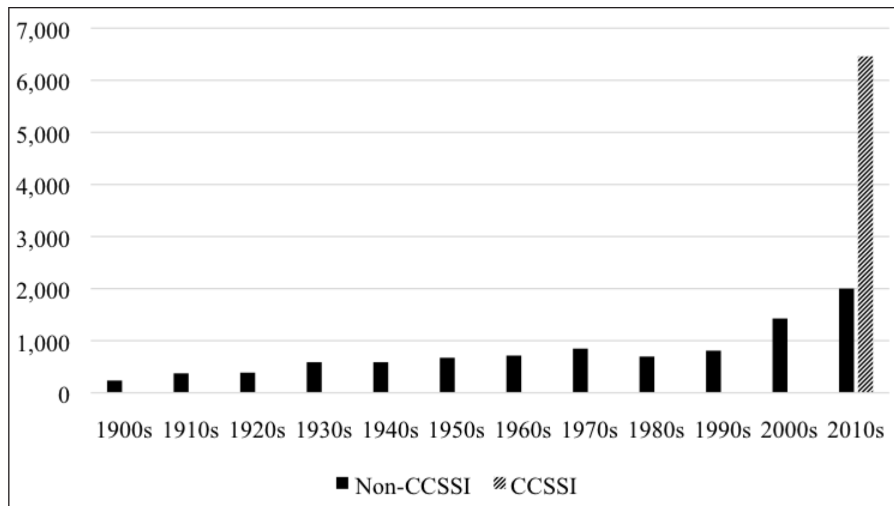


FIGURE 3. *Average word count of texts across sample of 55 exams*

informational texts averaged 30% of total points, and then increased to 56% with the introduction of CCSSI-aligned exams. Unquestionably, CCSSI-aligned exams demand more attention to informational nonfiction than any previous exams.

## *Question 3: Regents' Sense-Making Demands*

### Length of Passages

During the twentieth century, the average word count grew from 235 in the 1900s to 809 in the 1990s. In the 2000s, word count increased by 75%, up to an average of 1,427 words. Word count spiked yet again in the 2010s: non-CCSSI exams averaged 2,001 words, and CCSSI exams averaged 6,460 words. The addition of nonfiction informational texts (two or three separate texts in the non-CCSSI exams, and five to six texts in the CCSSI exams) accounts for almost all of the increases in these two decades.

### Literal and Interpretive Sense-Making

The overarching trajectory of the exams shows that Regents test-makers gradually increased the value they placed on interpretation, with the percentage of points for interpretive questions doubling from the 1940s to 2000s (Figure 4).

From the 1900s through the 1930s, the test-makers explored different formats and reading demands, which may explain some of the variation in percentages of literal and interpretive questions in those decades. From 1900 to 1910, for example, exams asked seven or eight open-ended questions, both literal (e.g., asking students to summarize the plot of *As You Like It, Silas Marner,* or *The Vicar of Wakefield*) and interpretive (e.g., What traits of character are shown by Portia in the trial scene [in *The Merchant of Venice*]?"

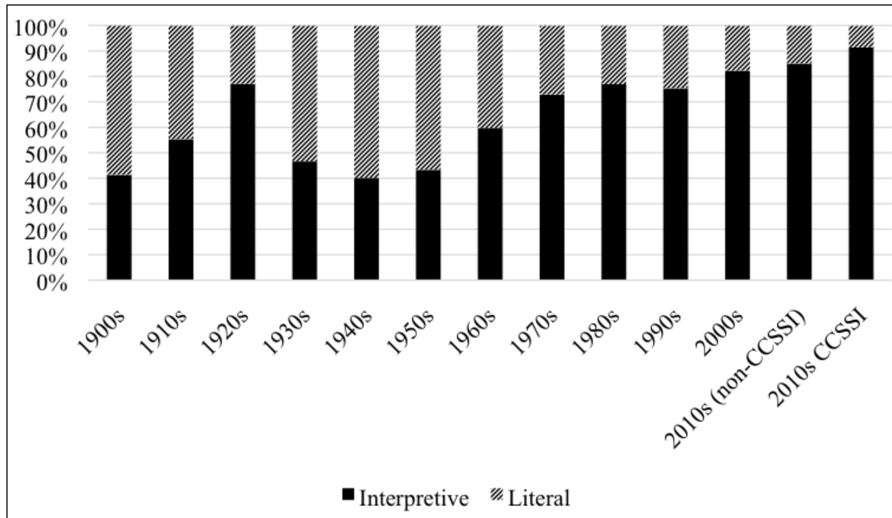


FIGURE 4. *Average percentage of points for literal and interpretive questions across sample of 55 exams*

In the 1920s, on the other hand, students could choose the texts they wished to discuss. Test-makers asked fewer total questions; of those, more were interpretive questions with high point values, such as in one section of a 1927 exam, which assigned 5 points to a summary question and then 45 points to two interpretive questions (Figure 5).

From the mid-1930s onward, the exams became more consistent in form, generally including three to five passages, accompanied by a combination of literal and interpretive MC questions and then a choice of open-ended interpretive prompts. From 1979 to 2014, the Regents also included a "listening section," in which students answered questions about a passage read to them. Most of those questions were literal in nature.

In this basic form, the percentage of points devoted to interpretive questions increased from about 40% in the 1940s to a little over 80% in the 2000s. The CCSSI-aligned 2010s showed the highest percentage of points for interpretive questions (91%).

From the 1940s through the 2000s, the bulk of the Regents' interpretive questions were devoted to prose fiction and poetry. Occasionally, however, interpretive questions referred to informational texts, generally focusing on tone, as in this question from a 1965 exam:

> The author's attitude toward modern trends in travel can best be described as (1) indifferent (2) resigned (3) **optimistic** (4) amused (5) regretful

**Part II**

*No paper notably deficient in the use of English in part II will be accepted.*

2 Study carefully the following selection and then answer *a* and *b* with reference to it:

Life has its limitations. I must be what I am, one person with one person's experience. But through poetry I can have a share in the lives and adventures of others. I can travel on roads that my feet have never touched, visit the houses that I have never entered, share hopes and dreams and conquests that have never been mine. Poetry can be for me the fishing trip I was never able to take, the great city that I have not seen, the personalities that I have not fathomed, the banquets to which I have not been invited, the prizes that I did not win, the achievement that was beyond my reach. It can even be the love that I have not known. Through poetry I shall share the life of my own time, of all times; I shall know the soul of all men, and my own soul. — *Marguerite Wilkinson*

*a* Give in your own words the main thought of the selection. [5]

*b* Develop the last sentence in the selection, using quotations and specific illustrations taken from the poets read or studied during your high school course in English. [25] [Include plays in your discussion, if you like.]

3 Character is not a static thing but is a thing constantly in the process of formation. Under the stress of a great crisis or emotion it manifests an unsuspected strength or weakness.

Illustrate or prove the foregoing statement by discussing *two* characters selected from two different novels (or short stories) read or studied in high school. [20]

FIGURE 5. *Questions from a 1927 exam*

In the 2010s, both CCSSI- and non-CCSSI-aligned exams asked more interpretive questions about nonfiction passages, including questions about structural effects, as in this 2011 question about an informational text:

> The ideas in the passage are supported primarily through the use of (1) claim and counterclaim (2) rhetorical questions (3) **facts and statistics** (4) personal narrative

### *Question 4: Literary Theories*

In analyzing the Regents' invocation of biographical, formalist, reader-response, and critical theories, we focused only on open-ended questions (Figure 6). We reasoned that MC questions by nature could not be coded as reader response, since they do not allow for students' individual responses to a text, and thus including MC questions in our analysis would confuse our results.

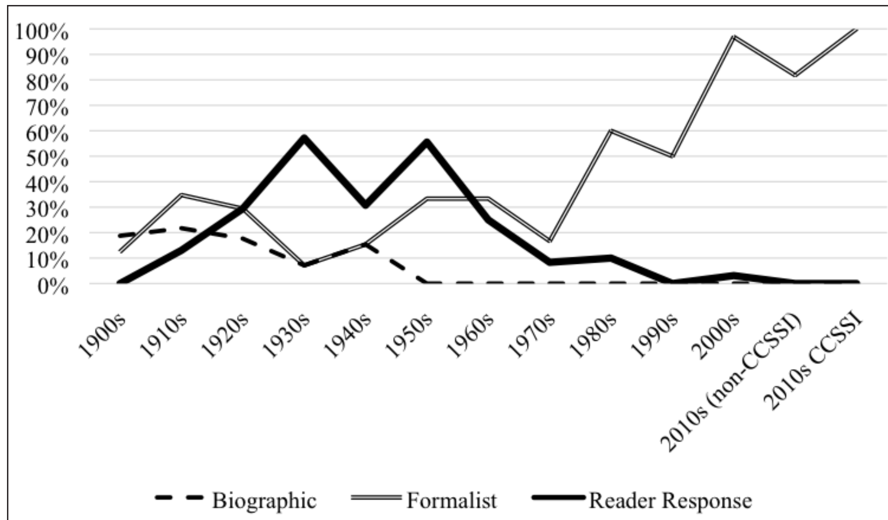


Figure 6. *Average percentage of points for open-ended questions invoking biographical, formalist, and reader-response theories across 110 exams*

## Biographical Lenses

Biographical questions ask a reader to consider the history or personality of an author. The Regents included biographical questions between 1900 and 1950, with a high in the 1910s (16%) and a low in the 1930s (4%).

## Formalist Lenses

Formalist questions generally focus on authorial craft and "literariness" of a text, without regard to cultural context, authorial history, or readers' emotional responses. The Regents asked formalist questions in every decade in our sample, introducing them in the first decade of the 1900s, when Russian formalism was just emerging as a literary movement. The increase in the percentage of formalist questions in the 1950s and 1960s corresponded with the rise of the New Critical movement, and except for a dip in the 1970s, the percentage of formalist questions continued to increase over the decades. In the 2000s and CCSSI-aligned 2010s exams, 100% of open-ended essay prompts about literature were coded as formalist questions.

## Reader Response Lenses

When open-ended essay questions asked students to reflect on their reading experiences, the questions were coded as *reader response*. The Regents asked reader-response questions in every decade between the 1900s and 1980s, with about 55% of all literary theory points going to the reader-response category in the 1930s and 1950s. From the 1990s onward, the Regents eschewed reader-response questions almost completely.

### Critical Lenses

In the exams' open-ended, text-based prompts, we found only one question that asked students to apply critical lenses to their reading. A 1979 exam asked students to read two newspaper cartoons, "Mutt and Jeff" and "The Lockhorns." In both comics, a middle-aged white man is beleaguered by a spendthrift wife or an overbearing mother-in-law. The prompt instructed:

> Often television and radio shows, movies, popular songs, and comic strips present people in stereotyped sex roles. . . . Study the cartoons below . . . and identify the stereotypes. Compare them directly with the stereotypes in at least two of the other media. Incorporate into your writing how the media you selected have shaped society's view of sex roles.

It is worth noting that the term *critical lens* appeared in Regents prompts in the 2000s. However, these exams did not ask readers to examine issues of power in a text, but instead to consider a statement (generally about the nature of literature or humanity, such as "The bravest of individuals is the one who obeys his or her conscience") and then to "agree or disagree with the statement as you have interpreted it, and support your opinion using specific references to appropriate literary elements."

It is also worth noting that the *non*-text-based composition section of the Regents Exam occasionally invited students to write critical essays about power and gender (e.g., a 1982 topic choice, "Too many heroes, not enough heroines") and, very rarely, class or race (e.g., from 1913, the exam assumed a white student body and offered them the topic "The value of minorities").

## Discussion

This study uses the Regents Exams as a data set to track changing visions of literary reading for high school students. This section discusses some implications of the study's findings and raises questions for future research.

### *The Regents' Visions of What Students Should Read*

#### Diversity in Authorship

The increased representation of authors of color (mostly African American and Latinx men) and white women suggests the Regents' increasing appreciation of texts that act as "mirrors" and "windows" for a more diverse student body. However, as others have noted (e.g., Burris & Murphy, 2014), the most recent decade's percentage of texts by nonwhite authors (23%) does not come close to the diversity of New York State's student body, which as of 2017 was 56% nonwhite (New York State Education Department, 2017). The authors of color included in the Regents Exams are, as a group, more well-known and more focused on issues of race than white authors. This narrow way of representing diversity is cause for concern, as a limited "multicultural canon" may constrain teachers from expanding their curriculum (Au, 2010) and constrain student readers who want to look beyond

f31-57-Aug19-RTE.indd 50 8/13/19 7:52 PM

the worlds of Hughes, Brooks, or, more recently, Walter Dean Myers or Sandra Cisneros (Garcia, 2013).

Future research on the Regents data set, and similar data sets, might include further analysis of the content of exam passages by authors of color, as well as of the language of accompanying questions, to understand how the exams framed the experiences of people of color, and the kinds of schemata that exams asked students to invoke. For example, a 2007 Regents Exam included the poem "Lineage," by African American poet Margaret Walker. The poem begins, "My grandmothers were strong / They followed plows and bent to toil." The first MC question asks:

> The narrator implies that the strength of grandmothers results from their (1) cheery songs (2) long lives (3) large bodies **(4) hard work**

At least two of these MC options arguably draw upon stereotypes of African American women. Items like these raise questions about how exam questions frame and represent people of color.

### The Role of Informational Nonfiction

In the middle of the century, about 15% of exam texts were informational non-fiction, accompanied mostly by literal comprehension questions such as this one from 1958:

> The author indicates that (1) typhoons cannot be forecast (2) the Southern Hemisphere is free from hurricanes (3) typhoons are more destructive than hurricanes (4) **tornadoes occur around a low-pressure center**

The exams of the 2000s and 2010s, including CCSSI-aligned exams, used informational nonfiction texts quite differently, using them as the basis for students to develop policy arguments. The implications of this shift are beyond the scope of this study, and are addressed in other ELA research (e.g., Polleck & Jeffery, 2017). Nonetheless, it is worth emphasizing this dramatic shift in the Regents' vision of the kinds of texts high school students should read, and how they should read them. These new questions communicate a vision of students as analytic thinkers who draw on sources (some primary, most secondary) to develop opinions and bases for action on real-world issues.

In many ways, this vision may be a productive and engaging guide for ELA teachers, with a few important caveats: First, the number and length of passages will inevitably hinder many students from thoughtful consideration of their arguments. Second, as of this writing, the Regents Exams did not ask students to consider potential biases of nonfiction passages. For example, a 2003 exam included an excerpt from the autobiography of Sam Walton, owner of Walmart, with this accompanying MC question:

> The speaker's use of the expression "satisfaction guaranteed" reflects his concern for his **(1) customers** (2) employees (3) suppliers (4) investors

f31-57-Aug19-RTE.indd 51 8/13/19 7:52 PM

Such a question does not allow for the possibility that Walton may be an unreliable narrator when it comes to describing his motives and concerns. Given the need to teach students not to believe everything they read—especially in this age of "fake news"—communicating such an assumption is a serious misstep.

Questions like these, coupled with the Regents' limited attention to critical lenses overall, call for future research on the role of critical lenses in other high-stakes ELA testing, as well as advocacy in that area. Test-makers must include attention to implicit or explicit ideologies in their vision of reading, just as teachers must (and already do) in the classroom.

### *The Regents' Visions of Sense-Making*

The changing point values of the literal and interpretive questions in the exams' first decades suggest that Regents test-makers were experimenting with ways to respond to, define, and instantiate the emerging discipline of high school English. In the future more fine-grained analysis can take up the cognitive demands in different levels of questioning, as outlined in Hillocks and Ludlow's taxonomy of questions about literature (1984), and shed light on test-makers' specific visions and their alignment with broader ideas about the purposes of literary reading.

### Multiple Choice Questions

This analysis allowed for some empirical insight into the validity of MC questions as a vehicle for assessing interpretation. Some have cited MC questions' role in limiting higher-order thinking (e.g., Berliner, 2009) or confusing students (e.g., Santman, 2002). Others have studied MC questions' role as a triangulating measure of student knowledge (Bennett & Ward, 2012). My study of the Regents Exams suggests that ELA, MC questions are by nature incompatible with the processes and goals of literary interpretation. Even written with the best of intentions, MC questions promote a narrow, conservative vision of interpretation that requires students to interpret test-makers' interpretations, ultimately leading students on a meta-level guessing game.

### Open-Ended Questions

On the other hand, some of the open-ended questions on the Regents Exams represent expansive visions of literary sense-making, as in this reader-response question from 1985, which gives students the option of considering how the world of a text and/or its author's craft connect to their own experiences as readers and humans:

> We often reread works of literature that have taught us something about ourselves. Choose two texts that you would like to reread because they helped you to understand more about yourself. Explain, with specific references to characters or events, how each work increased your understanding of yourself.

Or consider this question from 1978, which values the student's connection to the world outside the classroom, and could encourage a consideration of audience and textual effect:

> Some people are upset about television shows that they consider an obvious waste of time but which remain on the air year after year. Select such a program. Write a letter of 250–300 words to a network official explaining why you feel the program should be cancelled.

Future research should mine the Regents Exams for such questions as possible models for classroom instruction and framing of literary reading.

### *The Regents' Visions of Literary Lenses*

The introduction to this study outlined a chronology of four key literary movements, beginning with a biographical approach, moving to formalist and reader-response approaches, and then to critical lenses. Significantly, the Regents' evolving visions of sense-making, as instantiated by exam questions, did not always align with the ebb and flow of these literary movements. Biographical questions did decline over the first half of the twentieth century, along with the decline of that movement. However, the Regents' reader-response questions reached their height in the 1940s, even though the reader-response movement did not gain widespread popularity until the 1970s and 1980s.

The exam also asked structurally oriented questions before New Criticism came to prominence, and even before Russian formalism was well known. Future work could take a closer look at the alignment, or lack thereof, between the emergence of literary movements and standardized test questions.

One might also examine other lenses that the Regents have asked students to apply to their reading, and the degree to which those lenses reflected broader historical theoretical, or pedagogical movements. For example, exam questions written during both World Wars asked students to write about literature and democracy, discussing, for example, texts that "help one to understand the democratic principles of our country and the American way of life" (1944 exam). At the same time, with publications such as "Teaching English in Wartime," NCTE was encouraging teachers to use literature to "stimulate devotion . . . to democratic ideals" (Cross, 1943). Over the history of significant events in the United States, what other roles have the Regents assigned to literary reading?

Questions like these, accompanied by historically grounded content analyses of data sets like the Regents Exams, allow us to continue to explore the visions and expectations of the various powers-that-be who influence and reflect what and how our students read.

## REFERENCES

APPLEBEE, A. N. (1974). *Tradition and reform in the teaching of English: A history*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

APPLEBEE, A. N. (1990). *Book-length works taught in high school English courses* (ERIC Document No. ED318035). Retrieved from https://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9214/book.htm

APPLEBEE, A. N. (1992). Stability and change in the high-school canon. *English Journal*, *81*(5), 27–32.

Applebee, A. N. (1993). *Literature in the secondary school: Studies of curriculum and instruction in the United States.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Applebee, A. N., & Langer, J. A. (2011). A snapshot of writing instruction in middle schools and high schools. *English Journal, 100*(6), 14–27.

Applebee, A. N., Langer, J. A., Nystrand, M., & Gamoran, A. (2003). Discussion-based approaches to developing understanding: Classroom instruction and student performance in middle and high school English. *American Educational Research Journal, 40,* 685–730.

Au, W. (2010). The idiocy of policy: The anti-democratic curriculum of high-stakes testing. *Critical Education, 1*(1). Retrieved from http://ices.library.ubc.ca/index.php/criticaled/article/view/182239

Au, W. (2011). Teaching under the new Taylorism: High-stakes testing and the standardization of the 21st century curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 43,* 25–45.

Beadie, N. (1999). From student markets to credential markets: The creation of the Regents examination system in New York State, 1864–1890. *History of Education Quarterly, 39,* 1–30.

Bennett, R. E., & Ward, W. C. (Eds.). (2012). *Construction versus choice in cognitive measurement: Issues in constructed response, performance testing, and portfolio assessment.* New York: Routledge.

Berliner, D. C. (2009). MCLB (much curriculum left behind): A U.S. calamity in the making. *Educational Forum, 73*(4), 284–296.

Bertaux, N., & Washington, M. (2005). The "colored schools" of Cincinnati and African American community in nineteenth-century Cincinnati, 1849–1890. *The Journal of Negro Education, 74,* 43–52.

Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom, 6*(3), ix–xi.

Bleich, D. (1975). *Readings and feelings: An introduction to subjective criticism.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED103832

Bloom, B. S., Hastings, J., & Madaus, G. F. (1971). *Handbook on formative and summative evaluation of student learning.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Brody, P., DeMilo, C., & Purves, A. C. (1989). *The current state of assessment in literature* (Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature Report Series 3.1). Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED315763

Brooks, C. (1947). *The well wrought urn: Studies in the structure of poetry.* Orlando, FL: Harcourt.

Burris, C., & Murphy, J. (2014). A disturbing look at Common Core tests in New York. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2014/06/27/a-disturbing-look-at-common-core-tests-in-new-york/

Crocco, M. S., & Costigan, A. T. (2007). The narrowing of curriculum and pedagogy in the age of accountability: Urban educators speak out. *Urban Education, 42,* 512–535.

Cross, N. (1943). *Teaching English in wartime.* Retrieved from https://archives.library.illinois.edu/ncte/about/march.php

Ellmann, M. (1968). *Thinking about women.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Evans, L., & Davies, K. (2000). No sissy boys here: A content analysis of the representation of masculinity in elementary school reading textbooks. *Sex Roles, 42,* 255–270.

Executive Committee of the New York State Association of Teachers of English. (1912). An open letter to teachers of English. In *Pamphlets in philology and the humanities* (Vol. 22). New York State Association of Teachers of English. Retrieved from https://books.google.com.

Faust, M., & Dressman, M. (2009). The other tradition: Populist perspectives on teaching

poetry, as published in "English Journal," 1912–2005. *English Education, 41,* 114–134.

Folts, J. D. (1996). History of the University of the State of New York and the State Education Department 1784–1996. Retrieved from New York State Education Department website: http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/edocs/education/sedhist.htm

Garcia, A. (2013). *Critical foundations in young adult literature: Challenging genres.* Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Gates, H. L. (1988). *The signifying monkey: A theory of African-American literary criticism.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Genovese, J. E. C. (2002). Cognitive skills valued by educators: Historical content analysis of testing in Ohio. *The Journal of Educational Research, 96,* 101–114.

Giouroukakis, V., & Honigsfeld, A. (2010). High-stakes testing and English language learners: Using culturally and linguistically responsive literacy practices in the high school English classroom. *TESOL Journal, 1,* 470–499.

Gorlewski, J. A., & Gorlewski, D. A. (2013). De-grading literacy: How New York State tests knowledge, culture, and critical thinking. *Counterpoints, 451,* 63–77.

Graff, G. (2008). *Professing literature: An institutional history* (20th anniversary ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hill, S., Briggs, L., & Hurlbut, B. (1896). *Twenty years of school and college English.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.

Hillocks, G. (2002). *The testing trap: How state writing assessments control learning.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Hillocks, G., & Ludlow, L. H. (1984). A taxonomy of skills in reading and interpreting fiction. *American Educational Research Journal, 21,* 7–24.

Hirsch, E. D. (1988). *Cultural literacy: What every American needs to know.* New York: Vintage Books.

Holyoak, K. J. (1982). An analogical framework for literary interpretation. *Poetics, 11,* 105–126.

Hook, J. N. (1979). *A long way together: A personal view of NCTE's first sixty-seven years.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Hughes, L. (1926). The Negro artist and the racial mountain. *The Nation.* Retrieved from http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/hughes/mountain.htm

Hursh, D. (2013). Raising the stakes: High-stakes testing and the attack on public education in New York. *Journal of Education Policy, 28,* 574–588.

Johnson, C. S. (2009). *History of New York State Regents exams.* Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED507649

Kane-Mainier, S. (2015). *How the genre and work of poetry are represented by tenth grade literature anthologies* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from University of Pittsburgh website: http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/25865/

Kang, R. L. (2015). *Assessment matters: Negotiating the New York State English Regents exam* (Doctoral dissertation). Columbia University, New York.

Marshall, J. D. (2000). Research on response to literature. In M. L. Kamil, P. D. Pearson, R. Barr, & P. B. Mosenthal (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. 3). New York: Routledge.

Mihalakis, V. (2010, September 20). *An analysis of the conceptual coherence and opportunities for interpretation in tenth grade literature textbooks* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/8437/

National Center for Education Statistics. (1993). *120 years of American education: A statistical portrait.* Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs93/93442.pdf

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common Core State*

*Standards for English language arts & literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects*. Washington, DC: Authors.

New York State Education Department. (2017). NY State public school enrollment (2016–17). Retrieved August 30, 2018, from https://data.nysed.gov/enrollment.php?year=2017&state=yes

Office of State Assessment. (1987). *High school general information*. Retrieved from New York State Education Department website: http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/hsgen/home.html

Polleck, J. N., & Jeffery, J. V. (2017). Common Core standards and their impact on standardized test design: A New York case study. *High School Journal*, *101,* 1–26.

Probst, R. E. (1986). Three relationships in the teaching of literature. *English Journal*, *75*(1), 60–68.

Ransom, J. C. (1941). *The new criticism*. New York: New Directions.

Riede, P. (2013). New York's private and parochial schools struggled on new state tests, just like the public schools. Retrieved from http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2013/09/new_yorks_private_and_parochial_schools_also_struggled_on_state_tests.html

Rosenblatt, L. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Said, E. (1983). *The world, the text, and the critic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Santman, D. (2002). Teaching to the test? Test preparation in the reading workshop. *Language Arts*, *79*, 203–211.

Sewell, W. C. (2008). Entrenched pedagogy: A history of stasis in the English language arts curriculum in United States secondary schools. *Changing English: Studies in Culture and Education*, *15,* 87–100.

Smagorinsky, P., & Whiting, M. E. (1995). *How English teachers get taught: Methods of teaching the methods course*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Smith, D. V. (1939). Implications of the New York Regents' inquiry for the teaching of English. *English Journal*, *28*(3), 177–192.

Smolkin, L. B., & Young, C. A. (2011). Missing mirrors, missing windows: Children's literature textbooks and LGBT topics. *Language Arts*, *88,* 217–225.

Stallworth, B. J., Gibbons, L., & Fauber, L. (2006). It's not on the list: An exploration of teachers' perspectives on using multicultural literature. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *49,* 478–489.

Stotsky, S. (1991, April). *Does a literary canon exist in our secondary schools?* Paper presented at the American Education Research Association 1991 Spring Conference, Chicago. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED331057

Stotsky, S. (with Traffas, J., & Woodworth, J.). (2010). *Forum: A publication of the association of literary scholars, critics, and writers: No. 4. Literary study in grades 9, 10, and 11: A national survey*. Retrieved from http://alscw.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/forum_4.pdf

Stotsky, S., Goering, C., & Jolliffe, D. (2010). *Literary study in grades 9, 10, and 11 in Arkansas*. Retrieved from University of Arkansas website: https://cied.uark.edu/_resources/pdf/literary-study-czg.pdf

Tanner, G. W. (1907). Report of the committee appointed by the English conference to inquire into the teaching of English in the high schools of the Middle West. *The School Review*, *15*(1), 32–45.

Taylor, K. (2015). English class in Common Core era: 'Tom Sawyer' and court opinions. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/20/nyregion/english-class-in-common-core-era-nonfiction-joins-the-classics.html

f31-57-Aug19-RTE.indd 56 8/13/19 7:52 PM

UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK. (1890). *Annual report of the Regents of the University, to the legislature of the State of New-York.* Albany: Author.

WILLINSKY, J. (1991). *The triumph of literature/the fate of literacy: Teaching English in the high school.* New York: Teachers College Press.

WOODSON, C. G. (2016). *The mis-education of the Negro.* Ocean Shores, WA: Watchmaker. (Original work published 1933)

**Sarah Levine** is an assistant professor at Stanford University's Graduate School of Education.