

DAYNA LORENTZ

WAYWARD CREATURES

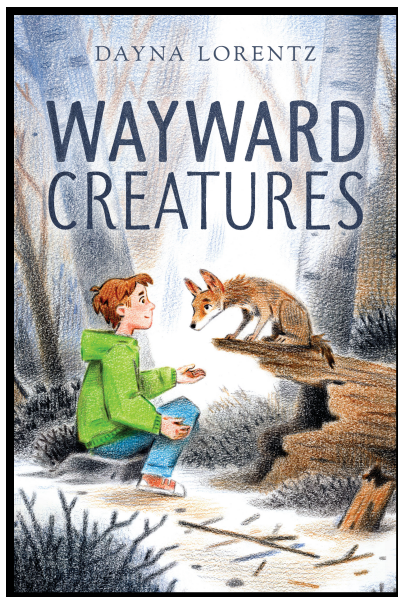


DISCUSSION
& TEACHING
GUIDE

DISCUSSION & TEACHING GUIDE

A NOTE TO THE EDUCATOR AND READER

Welcome to the relatable and meaningful adventure of reading *Wayward Creatures*. Whether you are a classroom teacher, student, or parent, you will find a variety of activities in this guide that will connect with the two main characters, Gabe and Rill. These two seemingly different characters have quite a bit in common and learn very important lessons along their journey. Although fiction, this story is based on historical information about the relationship between humans and coyotes and the current practice of restorative justice. For more information, see the Author's Note in the back of the book.



ABOUT THE BOOK

Twelve-year-old Gabe doesn't know where he belongs anymore. His family is caught up in their own lives, and his friends barely have time for him now that they're stars on the soccer team. In a desperate plea for attention to impress his friends after school, Gabe sets off fireworks in the woods near his house and causes a small forest fire that destroys several acres of land.

In the chaos of the destruction, a coyote named Rill—tired of her family and longing for adventure—finds herself far from home. Already on animal control's watch for wandering into a backyard and snapping at a child, Rill crawls into a cave, where she nurses her wounds alone.

Gabe and Rill's paths irrevocably cross when Gabe is tasked with cleaning up the forest through the court's restorative justice program. The damage to the land and both their lives is beyond what the two can imagine. But together, they discover that sometimes it only takes one friend to find the place where you belong.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dayna Lorentz loves to learn and gets to do lots of it in both her job as a staff attorney with the Vermont trial courts, helping to research and draft legal decisions for judges, and as an author of books for middle grade and young adult readers. Some of her favorite research has been into how animals experience their worlds differently from humans, which helped her write from different animals' points of view, including a dog's point of view in the *Dogs of the Drowned City* series, a great horned owl's in the acclaimed *Of a Feather*, and now a young coyote's in this book. The first book in her young adult trilogy, *No Safety in Numbers*, was selected as a Quick Pick for Reluctant Readers by the American Library Association.



Learn more about Dayna by visiting <https://daynalorentz.com>.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide leads teachers and young readers through the narratives of Gabe and Rill, the two main characters. As Gabe and Rill tell their stories, they invite teachers and young readers into a world that evokes thought. This guide helps young readers better understand their journeys by way of personal connections, critical thinking, and academic discourse. For teachers, it serves as a springboard for planning engaging activities and discussions.

This guide aligns with the [Common Core Standards](#) for 6th grade. Questions and activities can be applied for grades 4-7. Use [“Before Reading”](#) questions to build background knowledge, spark readers' thoughts, and engage them with characters and their relatable situations. Apply standards-based questions [“During Reading”](#) and throughout the guide to deepen readers' thinking about each character's unique journey in the chapters. Questions at the beginning of each section allow students to make connections to major events within the upcoming chapters; look for the ⌘ symbol. This guide also includes [“After Reading”](#) and [“Extension Activities”](#) with meaningful projects that give readers ideas about how they can become involved with restorative justice and animal protection.

BEFORE READING

1. Essential Question: When an individual has committed a harmful act, is it more important for that person to gain forgiveness from others or forgiveness within?
2. Research restorative justice to build your background knowledge. See the Author's Note in the back of the book or explore various media to find answers to these questions:
 - * What is restorative justice? What is the goal of it?
 - * What are the steps of the process?
 - * How does it aim to help people?
 - * How does it aim to help society?
3. Look at the picture on the cover of the book. Read the summary (in the ["About the Book"](#) section of this guide) Now, think about the title of the book.
 - * What does wayward mean?
 - * Give an example of "wayward" human behavior.
 - * List three animals you would consider "wayward." Explain why you chose each.



DURING READING

CHAPTERS 1-3

Major Connection: What is your greatest responsibility to your family? How does this responsibility help you and your family? ⌘

1. What is the most important thing an older sibling can do to help younger brothers or sisters? Explain. ⌘
2. In the first few chapters of the book, you find out that Rill is a coyote. What type of personality do you think a coyote would have? What is one word you would use to describe Rill? How does Rill's personality compare to how you imagine a coyote would behave? ([RL.6.3](#))
3. How well does Rill fulfill her role as an older sister? ([RL.6.3](#))
4. What expectations do Rill's parents have of her? Are her parents' expectations fair? Why or why not? ([RL.6.3](#))
5. How does Gabe feel about his parents? Why does he feel that way? ([RL.6.1](#), [RL.6.6](#))
6. How would you describe Gabe's relationship with his sister? Explain something that happens in Chapter Two that supports your description. ([RL.6.1](#), [RL.6.3](#))
7. How does Gabe get along with people his age? Are Gabe's interactions with his peers mostly influenced by his thoughts or the actions of his peers? What evidence from the story makes you think that? ([RL.6.1](#), [RL.6.3](#))



CHAPTERS 4-9

Major Connection: Think about a time when you or someone else you know did something just to fit in with your peers. What happened? How did the situation turn out? ⌘

1. How does Gabe feel about Taylor? What does Gabe think or say to show this? ([RL.6.3](#); [RL.6.4](#))
2. Summarize the major events in Chapter 4. What lesson can be learned from the chapter? ([RL.6.1](#), [RL.6.2](#))

3. Think of a time when you made a decision your parents were unhappy about. What did they say? How did what they said make you feel? ⌘
4. Who is mostly to blame for the forest fire—Taylor, Owen, Leo, or Gabe? Why? What is Gabe's perspective of how the forest fire happened? Do you agree with him? Why or why not? ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.6](#))
5. The state's attorney recommends a restorative justice program, but Gabe has to agree to participate. His parents cannot decide for him. Why do you think it is important for Gabe to decide this instead of his parents? What do you think will influence his decision about completing the program? ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.6](#))
6. Which words or phrases help the reader to understand Rill's desperation in Chapter 7? ([RL.6.4](#))
7. Gabe and Rill use the word "desperate." Are their reasons for being desperate similar or different? Use details from the story to explain your thinking ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.4](#)).
8. Are Gabe's perceptions about the responses of his family and the other kids at school to what happened accurate? What words and behaviors do you think he's understanding correctly? What is he misunderstanding or misinterpreting? ([RL.6.1](#), [RL.6.6](#))
9. Why do Gabe's feelings about the community justice program change from the beginning of Chapter Eight to the end? ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.6](#))
10. How is Rill's description of the fire's beginning different from Gabe's? What words or phrases emphasize that this is a wild animal's point of view instead of a human's? ([RL.6.4](#), [RL.6.6](#))



CHAPTERS 10-15

Major Connection: The words someone chooses to describe an event can influence how people respond to those facts. Find a news story headline about something going on in your town. How does the headline affect your thinking about the event before you read the story? Can you rewrite the headline to make someone think the opposite about the same facts? ⌘

1. Gabe writes "do something to fix the park." He said this idea was "vague enough to hide the truth."
 - * What "truth" was Gabe hiding?



*What do you think is something he could do to fix the park? How would it help?

2. How does Gabe see himself? How does he think others see him? Are they different? What words or phrases does he and others use to show this? ([RL.6.4](#), [RL.6.6](#))

3. Contrast Gabe's expectation of the panel with what actually happened at the panel. Did the panel experience change Gabe's perspective? Use details from the story to support your thinking. ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.6](#))

4. Do you think Gabe took the panel process seriously? What two details from the story make you think that? How does Gabe feel after his dad takes him to see the damaged park? Why do you think seeing it changed how he feels? ([RL.6.1](#))

5. After he repeatedly punches the stall door of the restroom in Chapter 12, Gabe says, "I am my throbbing fist." (pg. 88) What does he mean by this? How does this show Gabe's internal conflict? ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.4](#))

6. Of the things that Liz does to help in Chapter 12, which do you think will have the most positive impact on Gabe? Explain your thinking. ([RL.6.3](#))

7. What words or phrases do the rangers use in Chapter 12 to show how they feel about coyotes? ([RL.6.4](#), [RL.6.6](#))

8. What did Gabe's parents do to encourage him to take responsibility for causing the fire? What are two ways Gabe begins to take responsibility for causing the fire? How does Gabe go past the duty of following the community service contract? ([RL.6.3](#))

9. What is the difference between coyotes and dogs? How does Rill feel about the Teeth calling her a dog? Why might she feel this way? ([RL.6.4](#), [RL.6.6](#))

10. How is Zach's explanation of "the system" (on pg. 109) important to Gabe's understanding of the fire damage? ([RL.6.3](#))

11. Explain the two ways Owen apologizes to Gabe. Do you think his apology was sincere? Was Gabe's response fair? Why or why not? Who is your most trustworthy friend? What has this individual done to show that you can trust him or her? ☿



CHAPTERS 16-21

Major Connection: In Chapter 16 Gabe learns that there is nothing wrong with getting angry, but knowing how to handle anger is very important. What is one thing you (or someone you know) do that helps to deal with anger? ⌘

1. In Chapter 16 Gabe thinks, “I force my feet to run, but my chest feels like a sponge that it is just sucking up all the sad in the world, and it is so heavy.” (pg. 136) What does the simile reveal about Gabe’s feelings regarding his situation? How does this way of thinking affect Gabe’s actions? ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.4](#))
2. What is the “earthquake” inside of Gabe? Is his way of dealing with it good or bad? Explain. Gabe’s personal earthquake affects him and his peers. What does the “earthquake” symbolize? In nature, earthquakes are unpredictable and uncontrollable. Is this the case for Gabe’s earthquake? Why or why not? ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.4](#))
3. In Chapter 16, Gabe realizes that “problems need solutions” (pg. 146). How does this relate to the process he must go through with the community justice system? How does it relate to an important lesson he should learn from his situation? ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.2](#), [RL.6.5](#))
4. What does Teeth say to motivate Rill? How might this encourage Rill to change her current situation? ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.4](#))
5. What is the best activity you and your family frequently do together? Describe how it feels when your family comes together for this activity. ⌘
6. Describe the change Gabe notices in his family in Chapter 18. How does this change affect him? ([RL.6.3](#))
7. What is the greatest thing about being a member of your family? How is this benefit similar to Gabe or Rill’s familial experience in the story? ⌘
8. What event in Chapter 20 shows the greatest growth in Gabe’s character? Contrast Gabe’s thoughts or actions during this event with one of his previous thoughts or responses earlier in the story. How do they differ? What does Gabe’s growth show about the importance of self-reflection? ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.4](#), [RL.6.5](#))
9. Summarize the major events in Chapters 16-21. What do you think Gabe learned that leads to the positive shift in his character? ([RL.6.2](#), [RL.6.3](#))



CHAPTERS 22-29

Major Connection: Research an individual your age who has made a positive impact on your community, our country, or the world. Did this individual succeed in making this impact because of his or her positive attitude or determination? Explain. ☞

1. Based on Gabe's thoughts and interactions with Leo and Owen, do you think Gabe belongs as their friend? Why or why not? ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.4](#))
2. What is one word you would use to describe Rill in Chapter 23? Explain. ([RL.6.1](#), [RL.6.3](#))
3. The author develops Gabe's character and perspective on different issues he faces through his personal thoughts. For example, Gabe thinks, "I don't nod, don't do anything, because there's nothing to be done. My girl has already been tried and sentenced." (pg. 202). How do Gabe's thoughts in this instance reveal unfair perceptions of Rill? What does Gabe's silence show about him as a person? ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.6](#))
4. Why does receiving medical attention bring about sadness for Rill? What doesn't she understand that would be clear if she was a human being? ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.6](#))
5. How does Gabe begin to use his anger in a positive way? Why does the "earthquake" change into a "rumble"? ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.4](#))



6. On pg. 236 Gabe realizes that "hope gives you way more energy than anger." Reflect on Gabe's change in character. When did he begin to have hope? How does having hope motivate him? ([RL.6.3](#))
7. After Gabe's attitude changed, other things, including his situation, changed for the better. Which series of events show this? ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.5](#))
8. Brainstorm major events in Chapter 28. Of those events, choose the one you think is most important. List who, what, when, where, and why for that event. Create a GIST statement of no more than 20 words to summarize the chapter. ([RL.6.2](#), [RL.6.3](#))



CHAPTERS 30-34

Major Connection: In response to Mr. Larkin's comment, "Problems need solutions," Gabe begins problem-solving for each issue that comes up. Despite any issue that arises, Gabe finds creative ways to achieve his goal. Describe a situation that required your creativity to problem solve. What was the outcome? What did you learn throughout the process? ☘

1. How does Gabe feel when Ms. Andrews calls and congratulates him on completing more than his forty hours and schedules the exit interview? Why does he feel that way? ([RL.6.3](#))
2. On pg. 255, Gabe says his parents were astonished and had looks on their faces as if he, "their ugly duckling, was a swan all along" (pg. 255). Why does Gabe make this comparison to the fairy tale? Do you agree that he was a swan the whole time? Why or why not? ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.4](#), [RL.6.6](#))
3. Summarize the Department's press release on pg. 266. Do you think any of Gabe's efforts influenced the outcome? What evidence in the press release makes you think that? ([RL.6.2](#), [RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.5](#))
4. In Chapter 32, Gabe responds to Ms. Andrews' email by writing, "Don't worry — I found a rope to hold on to in case things go south." (pg. 269). What is the rope a metaphor for? How does the metaphor show Gabe's growth as an individual? ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.4](#))
5. How has Rill's relationship with her family changed? Is it just Rill who's changed, or has Rill's family also changed? What clues in the text support your interpretation? ([RL.6.1](#), [RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.6](#))
6. Contrast Gabe's perception of the initial Community Justice Panel in Chapter 10 (pgs. 74-80) with his exit interview in Chapter 34 (pgs. 283-285). How does his perceived difference between the two events support the theme that a person begins to care when he is required to get personally involved? ([RL.6.1](#), [RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.5](#))
7. Why do you think some people choose not to forgive him? Which is more important for Gabe—gaining the forgiveness of the community or forgiving himself? Which would have more of an impact on Gabe's outlook? Explain. ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.6](#))
8. According to the pamphlets, the Community Justice Center's goal is "Restoring Communities and Repairing Harm versus Punishing Wrong" (pg. 54). Do you think the Community Restorative Justice program accomplished this goal with Gabe's case? Why

or why not? Which words, phrases, or events in Chapters 30-34 support your thinking?
([RL.6.1](#), [RL.6.3](#))

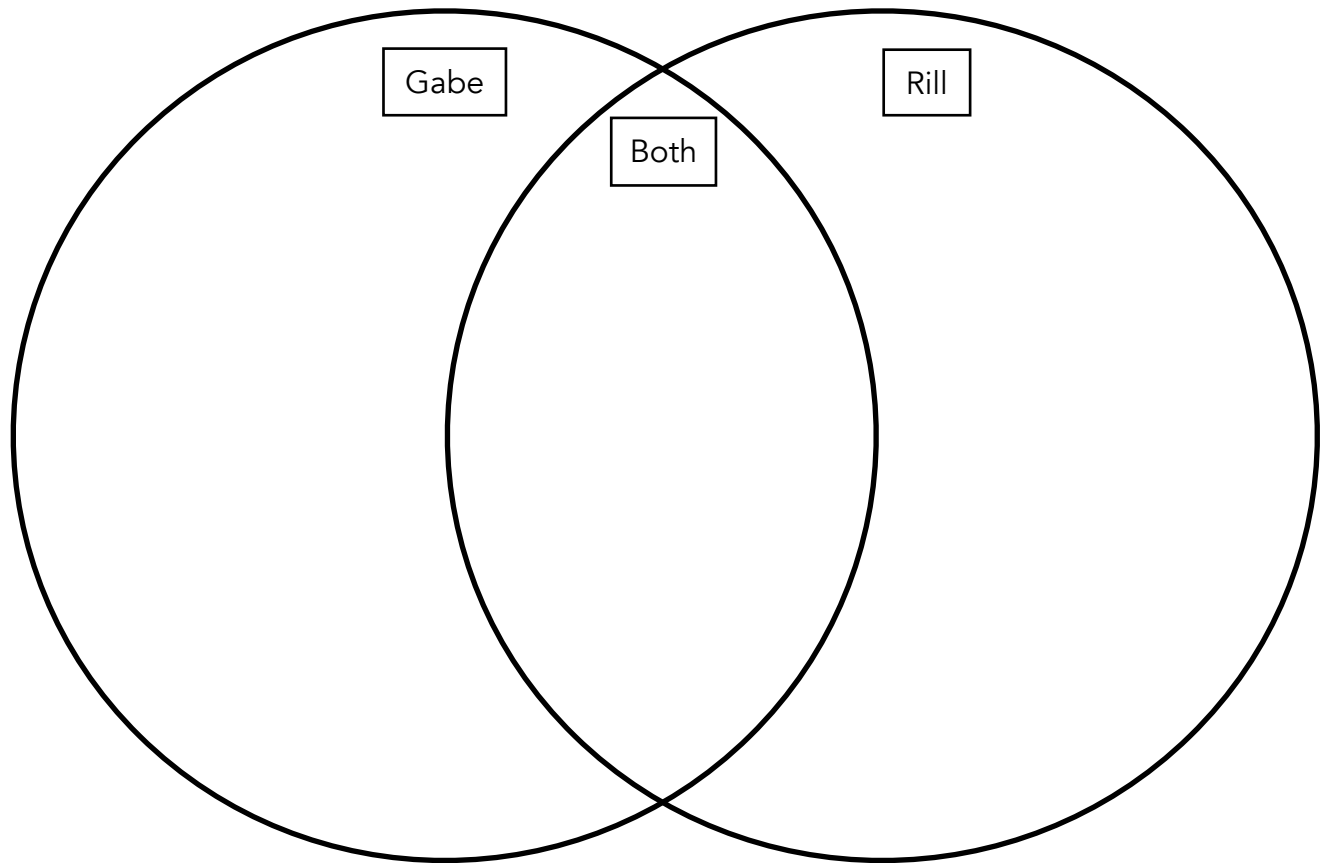


AFTER READING

1. Why are some individuals and animals like coyotes and opossums considered “wayward creatures”? How does the author show Gabe, Rill, and Teeth as “wayward” characters?
([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.6](#))
2. The author alternates between Gabe and Rill’s points of view. What does the alternating perspective between Gabe and Rill help the reader understand the most about each character? What if the book were told only from Gabe’s perspective? How might it affect the story? ([RL.6.6](#))
3. The author creates Rill’s point of view through the use of imagery. As a wild animal, Rill sees, hears, smells, and interacts with her surroundings different than Gabe. Reread Gabe’s description of the bathroom and his room on pgs. 7-9 of Chapter Two. Rewrite Gabe’s description from Rill’s point of view. Consider these questions to jumpstart your thinking:
 - * What in the bathroom and Gabe’s room might stand out to Rill?
 - * How would Rill feel about the fog in the bathroom?
 - * What would Rill think about the hamper of dirty clothes?



4. *Comparing Characters:* Based on the details included in *Wayward Creatures*, how are Gabe and Rill alike in their life experiences, their beliefs about themselves and their families and friends, and in the choices they make? How are they different? Use the Venn diagram below to help organize your ideas and examples from the text. ([RL.6.3](#), [RL.6.6](#))



5. Several themes are integrated throughout the story, including ones about family, belonging, responsibility, trust, and friendship. Choose one topic about which Gabe and Rill learned a lesson. Write a thematic statement for each character. ([RL.6.2](#))

6. Review your initial research about restorative justice for the [“Before Reading”](#) section and reflect on the restorative justice process for Gabe. Some people think restorative justice does not hold individuals accountable for their crimes. Do you agree or disagree? Use details from the story and your research to support your thinking.

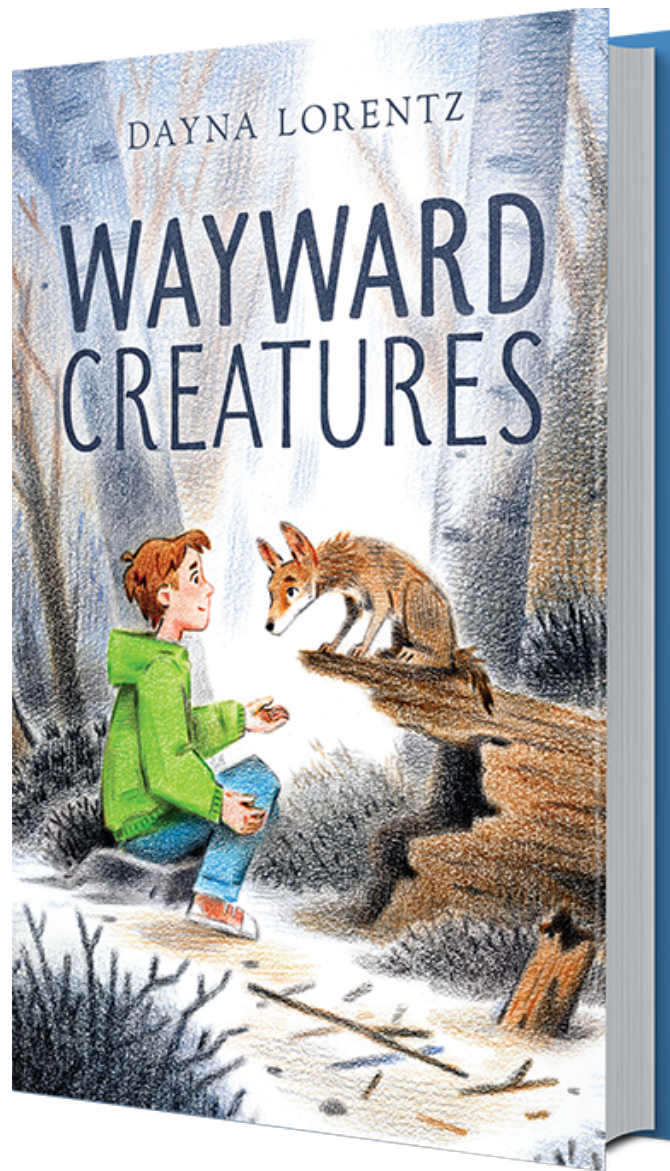
EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Wild Animals: Perception and Protection

1. Throughout the story, Rill was largely misunderstood by the public. Make a list of wild animals that are common in your area. Of that list, which one do you think is wrongly perceived? Create a social media post (blog, vlog, podcast, etc.) to raise awareness about this animal.
2. Gabe mistakenly upset the wild animals' homes. The fire damaged the forest and displaced Rill's family. What is one way society upsets the natural habitat for wild animals? What are the effects? What happens to animals and their families? What does the local government or country do to help animals recover? Is it enough? Why or why not?

Restorative Justice in Action

3. Does a restorative justice program exist in your school? If it does, evaluate its effectiveness and make suggestions for how it can be improved. If one is not in place, write arguments for or against starting a program at school. Then create a class proposal for starting a program.
4. Revisit your classroom rules. Collaborate with your classmates to revise the rules with restorative justice in mind. Consider these questions:
 - * How can restorative justice principles be added to the class rules?
 - * What restorative justice principles can be used for future rule infractions or conflicts that happen in the classroom?



Learn more at
www.daynalorentz.com

Published by Clarion Books, an imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers

Jacket illustration © 2022 Junyi Wu ∞ Jacket design by Kaitlin Yang

This guide was prepared by Shannicka Johnson, Ed.D.
LIGHT in Education, LLC
And was prepared to align with Common Core Standards