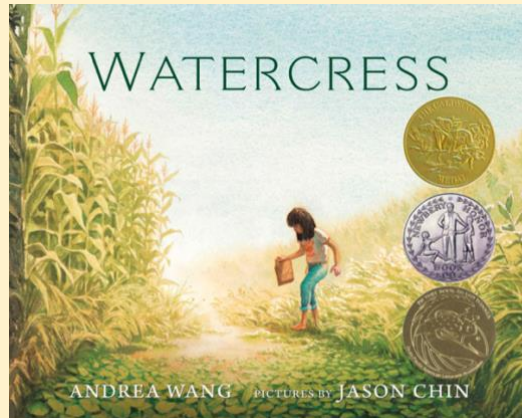


## Activities for Using *WATERCRESS* with Students Grades 3-8

### Based on the Common Core State Standards - CCSS

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#### Watercress

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*Watercress*, written by Andrea Wang and illustrated by Jason Chin, is a picture book based on a childhood memory of the author. It won both the 2022 Caldecott Medal as well as a Newbery Honor. Since Newbery titles are typically for older students, this book is a perfect example of a story that is appropriate for students of all ages. *Watercress* also won the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature in the picture book category making it an excellent book to connect to the social studies curriculum. Find details about *Watercress* at [Neal Porter Books, Holiday House Books for Young Readers](#).

Whether you are a proponent of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) or not, it is intriguing to see how picture books can meet learning objectives for older students. In the activities below, a specific literacy reading standard is described for grades 3-8 followed by an activity based on *Watercress* that supports that standard. To find activities related to Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) visit the Teacher Resources page on my website at <https://wordtravelliteracy.com/>

For a conversation about the difference between the terms *memoir*, *autobiography*, and *autobiographical*, see the post on [“Memoir Vs. Autobiography: All Our Stories Matter.”](#)

### WRITING PERSONAL STORIES

Several of the activities described for the various grade levels include applications for composing personal stories. In addition, *Watercress* may be used as inspiration for writing about real events

by using the prompts below. Refer to the [CCSS English Language Arts Standards – Writing](#) for specific writing expectations across grade levels for elementary and middle school students.

Writing Prompts:

- A. Recall a time when you were embarrassed. Describe what happened.
- B. Have you ever learned something unexpected about a friend or family member? What did you learn? How did you learn it? How did you feel about what you discovered?
- C. Have you ever heard an interesting story about a parent or grandparent? Where did you hear it? Write down as many details as you can recall about that story and who told the story.
- D. Consider how the eating of watercress reflects the cultural experiences of the author and her family? Describe a food that is important to your family. Write about an occasion when your family shared that food during a meal, holiday, or celebration.

### A NOTE ON WRITING STANDARDS

In fourth grade and up, the reading standards have a more direct correlation with the anchor writing standard CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9. A student is expected to apply the grade-level reading standards to draw evidence from a text to support a written analysis. Therefore, the activities for fourth grade and up for reading may also be used for writing.

**Grade 3 Standard:** [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.9](#) Students compare stories written by the same author, and/or stories on a similar subject written by different authors.

**Activity:** Compare and Contrast *Watercress* with *Magic Ramen: The Story of Momofuku Ando*, also written by Andrea Wang (illustrated by Kana Urbanowicz). *Watercress* centers on a personal experience of the author while *Magic Ramen* explores Momofuku Ando and his efforts to combat hunger in Japan after World War II. Discuss as a class how both books deal with hunger in very different ways. Have students write a paragraph describing a time when they were hungry.

**Grade 4 Standard:** [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.6](#) Students compare and contrast first- and third-person narration.

**Activity:** Read *Watercress* as well as *Thank You, Mr. Falker* written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco. Both stories are about the personal experiences of the author, but *Watercress* is written in the first person while Polacco's book is written in the third person. Discuss the two books and then write about how the different use of Point of View (POV) affects the narration.

For further exploration, share the picture book, *The Hundred Year Barn*, written by Patricia MacLachlan and illustrated by Kenard Pak. Although it is written in the first person and sounds

like a personal story, it is NOT autobiographical nor is it a memoir. Discuss with students how they can determine if a story is autobiographical by looking at the author's notes and online interviews.

Write a compare and contrast essay including point of view. Have students write an account of a personal experience in the first person. Then write the same account in the third person. Ask them to explain which version they prefer and explain why.

**Grade 5 Standard:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.9 By the end of fifth grade, students should be able to compare stories in the *same* genre specifically in regard to looking at how different authors handle similar subjects.

**Activity:** As in the fourth-grade activity, *Watercress* could be compared to the picture book, *Thank You, Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco. Both are picture books, and both are autobiographical, but *Watercress* focuses on one day in the life of the author, while Polacco's book covers several years. Expand the conversation about point of view and discuss why each author may have decided to write the story in the time frame they chose. Have students write an account of a personal experience that takes place in the course of one day. Then write about a series of related experiences that take place over several days, weeks, or even years.

**Grade 6 Standard:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.9 By the end of sixth grade, students should be able to compare similar subjects explored across *different* genres.

**Activity:** Compare *Watercress* to *Brown Girl Dreaming*, told in verse, by Jacqueline Woodson. Her book won the National Book Award and was also a Newbery Honor in 2015. It is written as a series of poems starting with her birth, highlighting her young years moving from Greenville, SC to New York City, and ending with her resolve to become a writer with the encouragement of her fifth-grade teacher. It is recommended for grades 5-6.

For further exploration, compare both books to the chapter book, *26 Fairmont Avenue* written and illustrated by Tomie DePaola. It is a 2000 Newbery Honor Book for grades 2-5.

Discuss how a picture book, a chapter book, and an autobiography told in verse all written about personal author experiences all became Newbery Honors. Write an essay comparing the similarities and differences between the three books.

**Grade 7 Standard:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.5 Students analyze how a story's form affects its meaning.

**Activity:** Andrea Wang, the author of *Watercress* first wrote the story as an essay for adults. Building on the sixth-grade activity described above, discuss whether or not *Watercress* could have been written as a poem, a song, a film, a graphic novel, or a chapter in a longer memoir. Would additional information be required? How would the various forms have affected the story's impact? For a writing activity, have students use *Watercress* as inspiration and write

about a day in their life. Then ask them to rewrite what they have written as a picture book, a poem, a page from a graphic novel, a scene from a play, or a short chapter. Discuss why they chose the form they ultimately picked.

**Grade 8 Standard:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.5 By the end of eighth grade, students should be able to analyze multiple texts, discuss the different structures of each one, compare and contrast the texts, and discuss how the different structures affect the meaning and/or style.

**Activity:** All books listed below are about the personal experiences of popular children’s authors that were written by the author.

Option A: Choose two or three books from the selections previously mentioned or the additional listings below and write a compare/contrast essay focusing on the structure of each book.

Option B: Choose one of the books from the list below and then choose a work of fiction by the same author. Write an essay discussing how the author’s personal experiences may have affected their fiction. Also, discuss how the structure of their personal story differs from the structure of the fictional title selected.

## **TITLES**

*Watercress* written by Andrea Wang and illustrated by Jason Chin

*Thank You, Mr. Falker* written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco

*Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jacqueline Woodson.

*26 Fairmont Avenue* written and illustrated by Tomie DePaola.

### **You may also want to add these additional titles:**

*Boy: Tales of Childhood* by Roald Dahl

*My Own Two Feet: A Memoir* by Beverly Cleary

*The Tarantula in My Purse and 172 Wild Pets: True-Life Stories to Read Aloud* by Jean Craighead George

*Woodsong* by Gary Paulsen

*But I’ll be Back Again* by Cynthia Rylant

### **For teens consider adding:**

*Hole in My Life* by Jack Gantos

*Ordinary Hazards: A Memoir* by Nikki Grimes

*Stop Pretending: What Happened When My Big Sister Went Crazy* by Sonya Sones

**Reference:** National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). Common Core State Standards (English-Language Arts). Washington DC: Author retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org/>

For additional narrative intervention strategies, activities, and lesson plans see [\*Story Frames for Teaching Literacy: Enhancing Student Learning Through the Power of Storytelling\*](#) by Carolee Dean.