

**Module 2: Selecting High-Quality and Appropriately-
Complex Texts for Read Aloud**

[TAB PAGE]

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Objectives

- Understand measures of text complexity as a basis for analyzing and selecting read aloud texts in the early grades classroom
- Understand the importance of balancing text complexity measures when selecting texts
- Explore characteristics of high-quality and content-rich texts

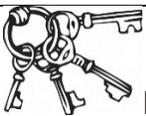
Link to Tennessee Academic Standards

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading
Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

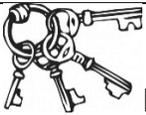
TEAM Alignment

- Teacher Content Knowledge
- Standards and Objectives
- Activities and Materials



Key Idea #1

All students need regular practice with high-quality, appropriately-complex texts that build knowledge and vocabulary. In the early grades, the primary method for engaging students with these kinds of texts is through read alouds.



Key Idea #3

The primary focus of reading comprehension instruction is for students to gain a deep understanding of texts, their content and structure, and their vocabulary, with the end goal of building knowledge about the world.

Research Supporting Read Alouds

Specifically, reading aloud builds oral language and vocabulary, listening comprehension - a precursor to reading comprehension - content knowledge, concepts about print and alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness. **Equally important, reading aloud is one way we enculturate young children into literacy - helping them acquire the language, values, practices and dispositions of the literate world.**

- Hoffman, Teal & Yodata, 2015

Activity

Create a list of books that you read aloud to students this past year and the reason(s) why you chose each particular text.

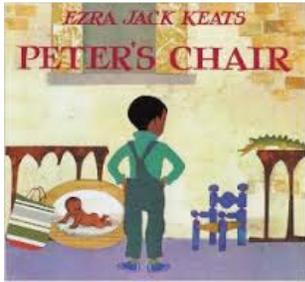
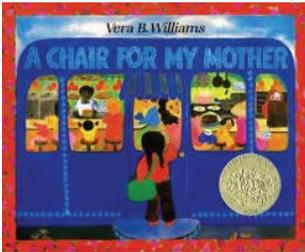
Read Aloud Book Title	Reason(s) for Selecting this Text

Selecting Texts with Purpose

Before analyzing the text, reflect on the following questions:

- **Does engagement with this text make sense given my current instructional aims?**
- **Is the content of this text appropriate for the age of my students?**

If you answer “no” to either of these questions, consider selecting a different text.

	<p>Does engagement with this text make sense given my current instructional aims? <i>Yes! We're really working on making inferences, and this text gives students many opportunities to make inferences about characters' feelings and actions and how and why they change throughout a story.</i></p> <p>Is the content of this text appropriate for the age of my students? <i>Yes! A handful of my students had younger siblings born recently, so they'll be able to relate to this plot.</i></p>
	<p>Does engagement with this text make sense given my current instructional aims? <i>While this story gives students many opportunities to make inferences, the real power is recognizing the symbolism of the chair. I think we need to scaffold up to this text – maybe in a few months, after lots of practice making inferences and interpreting author's implied meaning, my students will be ready to comprehend and analyze this text.</i></p> <p>Is the content of this text appropriate for the age of my students? <i>The themes of poverty, and even the event of having a house burn down, are pretty serious for young readers. Similar to the previous question, I think this is a wonderfully complex text and my students will be more ready to take it on a little later this school year when they're a bit more mature.</i></p>

Discuss

- Have you ever selected a text and, after review, decided to use it in a different setting or to not use it at all? If so, why?

Text Complexity and Why It Matters

Text complexity is a measure of how challenging a text is for a child at their particular grade level. One of the key shifts of the Tennessee Academic Standards for English Language Arts is that all students must be able to comprehend texts of steadily increasing complexity as they progress through grade levels. By the time they graduate, students must be able to read and comprehend independently and proficiently the kinds of complex texts commonly found in postsecondary and the workforce.

Activity

In a group of four, read the following excerpts about text complexity. Each group member should read one section. Highlight information that is personally impactful. Then, reflect on and discuss the following:

- What is text complexity and why does it matter?
- Why is exposing children to complex texts in early grades important?
- How can we expose children to complex texts in ways that are developmentally appropriate?

Section 1

Text Complexity Defined

What is meant by text complexity is a measurement of how challenging a particular text is to read. There are a myriad of different ways of explaining what makes text challenging to read, from the sophistication of the vocabulary employed to the length of its sentences to even measurements of how the text as a whole coheres. Research shows that no matter what combination of factors is considered when defining text complexity, the ability to read complex text is the single greatest predictor of success in college. This finding is true regardless of gender, race, or socio-economic status. The implication is that teaching that focused solely on critical thinking would be insufficient: it turns out that being able to proficiently read complex text is the critical factor in actually understanding complex text.

Yet that same research also shows that while the complexity of text in college and career has remained steady, the complexity of texts students are given in elementary and secondary school has diminished over time. The result is a significant gap between the reading ability of students and what will be expected of them upon graduation—a gap so large that less than 50% of high school graduates are able to read college and career ready complex text independently.

It is undeniable that the challenge of reading complex text is even more taxing for those students who arrive at school unable to read on grade level. Students whose families have less education are exposed less to complex text at home, and hence arrive at school with fewer reading skills than their classmates who have been encouraged to become independent readers. Yet being able to read complex text is critical for success in college and the workplace, and research shows that working with complex text is the only way to gain mature language skills. It is critical that all students develop the skill, concentration, and stamina to read complex texts. The ultimate goal of instruction therefore is to move students in the direction of independent reading at successive levels of text complexity, culminating in college and career ready reading proficiency.

- The Aspen Institute, 2012. Retrieved from files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED541442.pdf

Section 2

Text Complexity Matters

Being able to read complex text critically with understanding and insight is essential for high achievement in college and the workplace (Achieve, 2007, ACT, 2006). Moreover, if students cannot read challenging texts with understanding, they will read less in general, extending the societal effects the Reading at Risk report already documented. If students cannot read complex expository text, they will likely turn to sources such as tweets, videos, podcasts, and similar media for information. These sources, while not without value, cannot capture the nuances, subtlety, depth, or breadth of ideas developed through complex text. Consequently, these practices are likely to lead to a general impoverishment of knowledge, which in turn will accelerate the decline in ability to comprehend challenging texts, leading to still further declines. This pattern has additional serious implications for the ability of our citizens to meet the demands of participating wisely in a functional democracy within an increasingly complex world.

The ACT findings in relation to performance on the science test bear repeating. The need for scientific and technical literacy increases yearly. Numerous “STEM” (Science Technology Engineering Math) programs are beginning to dot the educational map. Yet only 5% of students who did not meet the ACT reading benchmark met the science benchmark. Science is a process, but it is also a body of knowledge. This body of knowledge is most efficiently accessed through its texts. This cannot be done without the ability to comprehend complex expository text. A final thought: the problems noted here are not “equal opportunity” in their impact. Students arriving at school from less-educated families are disproportionately represented in many of these statistics. The stakes are high regarding complex text for everyone, but they are even higher for students who are largely disenfranchised from text prior to arriving at the schoolhouse door.

- Retrieved from http://achievethecore.org/content/upload/Why_Text_Complexity_Matters.pdf

Section 3

The Importance of Read Alouds

Considerable diversity in children’s oral and written language experiences occurs in these [early] years (Hart & Risley 1995). In home and child care situations, children encounter many different resources and types and degrees of support for early reading and writing (McGill-Franzen & Lanford 1994). Some children may have ready access to a range of writing and reading materials, while others may not; some children will observe their parents writing and reading frequently, others only occasionally; some children receive direct instruction, while others receive much more casual, informal assistance.

What this means is that no one teaching method or approach is likely to be the most effective for all children (Strickland 1994). Rather, good teachers bring into play a variety of teaching strategies that can encompass the great diversity of children in schools. Excellent instruction builds on what children already know, and can do, and provides knowledge, skills, and dispositions for lifelong learning. Children need to learn not only the technical skills of reading and writing but also how to use these tools to better their thinking and reasoning (Neuman 1998).

The single most important activity for building these understandings and skills essential for reading success appears to be reading aloud to children (Wells 1985; Bus, Van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini 1995). High-quality book reading occurs when children feel emotionally secure (Bus & Van Ijzendoorn 1995; Bus et al. 1997) and are active participants in reading (Whitehurst et al. 1994). Asking predictive and analytic questions in small group settings appears to affect children’s vocabulary and comprehension of stories (Karweit & Wasik 1996). Children may talk about the pictures, retell the story, discuss their favorite actions, and request multiple re-readings. It is the talk that surrounds the storybook reading that gives it power, helping children to bridge what is in the story and their own lives (Dickinson & Smith 1994; Snow et al. 1995). Snow (1991) has described these types of conversations as “decontextualized language” in which teachers may induce higher-level thinking by moving experiences in stories from what the children may see in front of them to what they can imagine.

- Learning to Read and Write. A Joint Position Statement of IRA and NAEYC, 2008

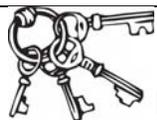
Section 4

Text Complexity and Classroom Read Alouds

Different approaches to reading aloud in early childhood classrooms have recently garnered increased attention in the United States because of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The standards call for all students to engage with complex texts that offer opportunities for higher-level thinking (for a discussion of complex text, see CCSS for English Language Arts, Appendix A [NGA & CCSSO 2010]). Because most children kindergarten through second grade have not yet developed foundational reading skills well enough to independently read complex picture books, read alouds offer the most robust opportunities for such interactions to occur (IRA 2012).

Read alouds that engage young children with complex texts rely on interactive discussions focused on interpretations of texts that may vary with the backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences of the children listening. In other words, discussing multiple interpretations of texts helps children realize that there are many possible responses to complex literature. Interactive read-aloud discussions focused on interpretations of complex texts promote basic comprehension and have the potential to extend from basic comprehension to analysis of text elements, integration of ideas to make connections, and critical evaluation of the texts themselves and the ideas in them.

- Hoffman, Teale & Yodota, *Young Children*, 2015



Key Idea #4

In the early grades, children must be exposed to complex texts in order to build strong foundations for high-level reading and writing. Because children's independent reading skills are still developing, interactive teacher read alouds create opportunities for children to engage with appropriately-complex texts.

Text Complexity Measures

Text complexity encompasses three interdependent measures: qualitative complexity, quantitative complexity, and reader and task demands.

- *Quantitatively complex texts* provide experience with high-level vocabulary, sentence length, and word structure that build a foundation in the continuum towards postsecondary and workforce preparedness.
- *Qualitatively complex texts* present interactions with multiple levels of meaning, irregular text structures, unconventional language, and other stylistic features that provide a context for close reading and critical thinking.

In turn, as readers explore both quantitatively and qualitatively complex texts, speaking and writing skills are addressed as they discover multiple ways to express meaning.

A Three-Part Model for Measuring Text Complexity

As signaled by the graphic at right, the Standards' model of text complexity consists of three equally important parts.

1) Qualitative dimensions of text complexity.

In the Standards, qualitative dimensions and qualitative factors refer to those aspects of text complexity best measured or only measurable by an attentive human reader, such as levels of meaning or purpose, structure, language conventionality and clarity, and knowledge demands.

2) Quantitative dimensions of text complexity.

The terms quantitative dimensions and quantitative factors refer to those aspects of text complexity, such as word length or frequency, sentence length, and text cohesion, that are difficult if not impossible for a human reader to evaluate efficiently, especially in long texts, and are thus today typically measured by computer software.

3) Reader and task considerations. While the prior two elements of the model focus on the inherent complexity of text, variables specific to particular readers (such as motivation, knowledge, and experiences) and to particular tasks (such as purpose and the complexity of the task assigned and the questions posed) must also be considered when determining whether a text is appropriate for a given student. Such assessments are best made by teachers employing their professional judgement, experience, and knowledge of the subject.

English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects
Appendix A: Research Supporting Key Elements of the Standards

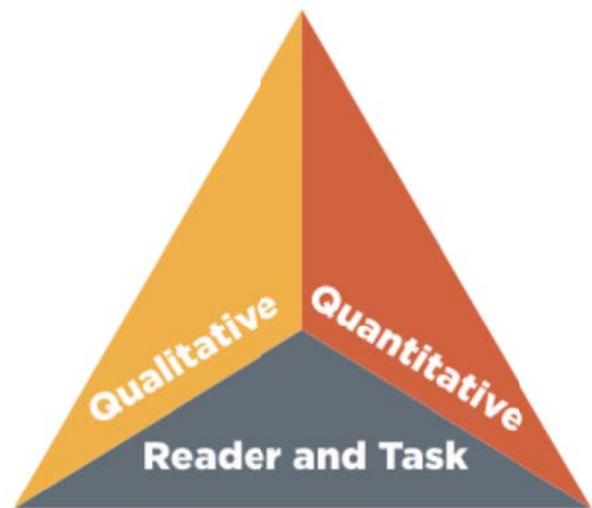
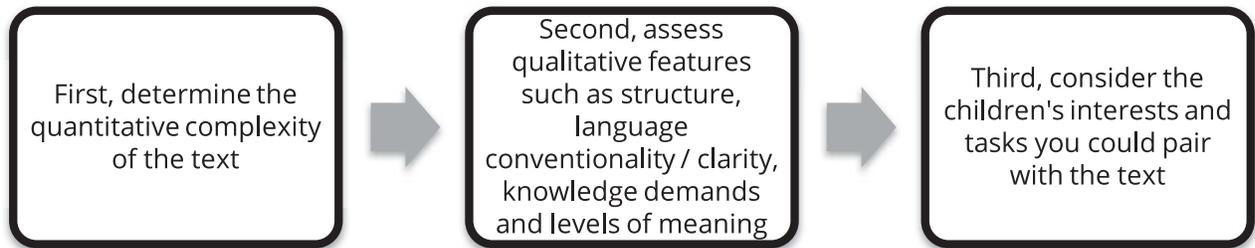


Figure 1: The Standards' Model of Text Complexity

Guidelines for Text Complexity Analysis



First, determine the quantitative measure to place a text in a grade-level band.

Quantitative complexity – such as word frequency, sentence length, and text cohesion – is best analyzed by a computer and is difficult for a human reader to evaluate. There are multiple tools for determining the quantitative complexity of a text (such as ATOS, Degrees of Reading Power, Flesch-Kincaid, The Lexile Framework, SourceRater).

For a read aloud to be quantitatively complex, its lexile should be 1-2 grade levels above students’ current grade level. In early grades classrooms, the lexile may be even more than two grade levels above.

Second, using your professional judgment, perform a qualitative analysis of text complexity to situate a text within a specific grade level.

Qualitative tools measure such features of text complexity as text structure, language clarity and conventions, knowledge demands, and levels of meaning and purpose that cannot be measured by computers and must be evaluated by educators.

Structure. Text structure refers to the ways authors organize information in a text. Structure can range from complex to simple.

Complex Structure	Simple Structure
Implicit and unconventional structure	Well marked, conventional structure
Use flashbacks, flash forwards, multiple points of view, and other manipulations of time and sequence	Sequenced in chronological order
Informational texts that conform to the norms and conventions of a specific discipline (such as an academic textbook or history book)	Informational texts that do not deviate from the conventions of common genres and subgenres

<p>Graphics are complex, provide an independent source of information, and are essential to understanding a text *</p>	<p>Graphics are simple and supplementary</p>
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** Note that many books for the youngest students rely heavily on graphics to convey meaning and are an exception to the above generalization.*

Language Conventionalty and Clarity. Texts that rely on literal, clear, contemporary, and conversational language tend to be easier to read than texts that rely on figurative, ironic, ambiguous, purposefully misleading, archaic, or otherwise unfamiliar language (such as general academic and domain-specific vocabulary).

Knowledge Demands. Texts that make few assumptions about the extent of readers’ life experiences and the depth of their cultural/literary and content/discipline knowledge are generally less complex than are texts that make many assumptions in one or more of those areas.

Levels of Meaning (literary texts) or Purpose (informational texts). Literary texts with a single level of meaning tend to be easier to read than literary texts with multiple levels of meaning (such as satires, in which the author’s literal message is intentionally at odds with his or her underlying message). Similarly, informational texts with an explicitly stated purpose are generally easier to comprehend than informational texts with an implicit, hidden, or obscure purpose.

Third, educators should evaluate the text in light of the students they plan to teach and the task they will assign.

Consider possible struggles students might face, as well as brainstorm potential scaffolding to support students in unpacking the most complex features of the text. Reader and Task Considerations enable the educator to “bring” the text into a realistic setting—their classroom.

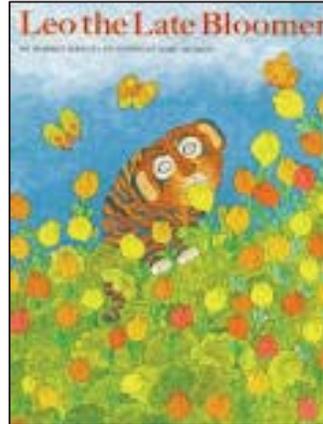
Some elementary texts contain features to aid early readers in learning to read that are difficult to assess using the quantitative tools alone. Educators must employ their professional judgment in the consideration of these texts for early readers.

- Retrieved and adapted from
www.ccsso.org/Navigating_Text_Complexity

Example: Qualitative Text Analysis

Leo the Late Bloomer by Robert Kraus

Lexile: 120L
Grade Level Band:
K-1st grade

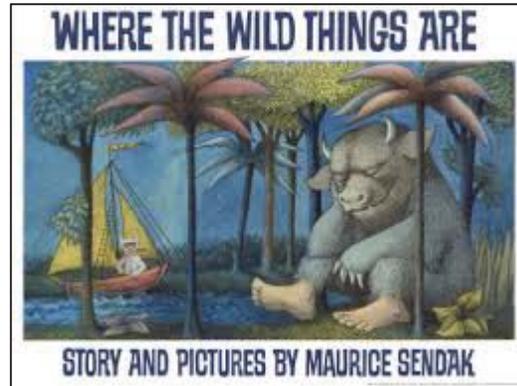


<p>Levels of Meaning/Purpose</p> <p>The levels of meaning in this text are moderately complex. Leo’s slow development is explicitly documented throughout the story, as is his parents’ feelings about it. However, the conclusion that everyone learns and grows at their own pace – and that we should all be patient and optimistic about this growth – must be inferred.</p>	<p>Structure</p> <p>The structure in this text is slightly complex. The story is written in a simple, chronological order and the illustrations are highly supportive of the text.</p>
<p>Language Conventinality/Clarity</p> <p>The language conventinality and clarity in this text is moderately complex. There are some sophisticated Tier II vocabulary words, such as <i>sloppy</i>, <i>patience</i>, and <i>neatly</i>. Most language complexity comes from the use of idioms, such as “better late than never” and “in his own good time”, as well as the overall understanding of what “late bloomer” means.</p>	<p>Theme and Knowledge Demands</p> <p>The theme and knowledge demands of this text are moderately complex. The themes of development readiness and parental expectations may be complex for some children. However, the specific knowledge demands are not complex: animal names are familiar, as are the actions of reading, drawing, eating, etc.</p>

Example: Qualitative Text Analysis

Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak

Lexile: AD740
Grade Level Band:
2nd-3rd grade



<p>Levels of Meaning/Purpose</p> <p>The levels of meaning in this text are very complex. The reader must infer what actually happens to Max, and theme is not explicitly stated.</p>	<p>Structure</p> <p>The structure in this text is very complex. There are multiple manipulations of time and place. Graphics are complex and are essential to understanding the text; the illustrations provide information that is not otherwise available in the text.</p>
<p>Language Conventinality/Clarity</p> <p>The language conventionality and clarity in this text is very complex. Many sophisticated Tier II vocabulary words are used, such as <i>rumpus</i>, <i>mischief</i>, <i>tumbled</i>, <i>private</i>, and <i>gnashed</i>. Dialog is used, and there is some ironic language, such as Max shouting that he'll eat his mother.</p>	<p>Theme and Knowledge Demands</p> <p>The theme and knowledge demands of this text are moderately complex. The theme of imagination may be complex for some children. However, the specific knowledge demands are much less complex: while Sendak creates a fictional world, no prior knowledge of this world is assumed.</p>

Text Complexity: Qualitative Measures Rubric¹

LITERATURE

Text Title _____	Text Author _____		
Exceedingly Complex	Very Complex	Moderately Complex	Slightly Complex
<p>TEXT STRUCTURE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Organization: Is intricate with regard to such elements as point of view, time shifts, multiple characters, storylines and detail <input type="checkbox"/> Use of Graphics: If used, illustrations or graphics are essential for understanding the meaning of the text <input type="checkbox"/> Conventionalality: Dense and complex; contains abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary: Complex, generally unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic language; may be ambiguous or purposefully misleading <input type="checkbox"/> Sentence Structure: Mainly complex sentences with several subordinate clauses or phrases; sentences often contain multiple concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Organization: May include subplots, time shifts and more complex characters <input type="checkbox"/> Use of Graphics: If used, illustrations or graphics support or extend the meaning of the text <input type="checkbox"/> Conventionalality: Fairly complex; contains some abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary: Fairly complex language that is sometimes unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic <input type="checkbox"/> Sentence Structure: Many complex sentences with several subordinate phrases or clauses and transition words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Organization: May have two or more storylines and occasionally be difficult to predict <input type="checkbox"/> Use of Graphics: If used, a range of illustrations or graphics support selected parts of the text <input type="checkbox"/> Conventionalality: Largely explicit and easy to understand with some occasions for more complex meaning <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary: Mostly contemporary, familiar, conversational; rarely unfamiliar or overly academic <input type="checkbox"/> Sentence Structure: Primarily simple and compound sentences, with some complex constructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Organization: Is clear, chronological or easy to predict <input type="checkbox"/> Use of Graphics: If used, either illustrations directly support and assist in interpreting the text or are not necessary to understanding the meaning of the text <input type="checkbox"/> Conventionalality: Explicit, literal, straightforward, easy to understand <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary: Contemporary, familiar, conversational language <input type="checkbox"/> Sentence Structure: Mainly simple sentences
<p>LANGUAGE FEATURES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Meaning: Multiple competing levels of meaning that are difficult to identify, separate, and interpret; theme is implicit or subtle, often ambiguous and revealed over the entirety of the text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Meaning: Multiple levels of meaning that may be difficult to identify or separate; theme is implicit or subtle and may be revealed over the entirety of the text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Meaning: Multiple levels of meaning clearly distinguished from each other; theme is clear but may be conveyed with some subtlety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Meaning: One level of meaning; theme is obvious and revealed early in the text.
<p>KNOWLEDGE DEMANDS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Life Experiences: Explores complex, sophisticated or abstract themes; experiences portrayed are distinctly different from the common reader <input type="checkbox"/> Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge: Many references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Life Experiences: Explores themes of varying levels of complexity or abstraction; experiences portrayed are uncommon to most readers <input type="checkbox"/> Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge: Some references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Life Experiences: Explores several themes; experiences portrayed are common to many readers <input type="checkbox"/> Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge: Few references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Life Experiences: Explores a single theme; experiences portrayed are everyday and common to most readers <input type="checkbox"/> Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge: No references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements

¹ Adapted from Appendix A: Research Supporting Key Elements of the Standards, Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies and Science and Technical Subjects (2010).

Text Complexity: Qualitative Measures Rubric INFORMATIONAL TEXTS

Text Title _____	Text Author _____	Exceedingly Complex	Very Complex	Moderately Complex
TEXT STRUCTURE	TEXT STRUCTURE	TEXT STRUCTURE	TEXT STRUCTURE	TEXT STRUCTURE
<p>Organization: Connections between an extensive range of ideas, processes or events are deep, intricate and often ambiguous; organization is intricate or discipline-specific</p> <p>Text Features: If used, are essential in understanding content</p> <p>Use of Graphics: If used, intricate, extensive graphics, tables, charts, etc., are extensive are integral to making meaning of the text; may provide information not otherwise conveyed in the text</p>	<p>Organization: Connections between an expanded range of ideas, processes or events are often implicit or subtle; organization may contain multiple pathways or exhibit some discipline-specific traits</p> <p>Text Features: If used, directly enhance the reader's understanding of content</p> <p>Use of Graphics: If used, graphics, tables, charts, etc. support or are integral to understanding the text</p>	<p>Organization: Connections between some ideas or events are implicit or subtle; organization is evident and generally sequential or chronological</p> <p>Text Features: If used, enhance the reader's understanding of content</p> <p>Use of Graphics: If used, graphic, pictures, tables, and charts, etc. are mostly supplementary to understanding the text</p>	<p>Organization: Connections between ideas, processes or events are explicit and clear; organization of text is chronological, sequential or easy to predict</p> <p>Text Features: If used, help the reader navigate and understand content but are not essential to understanding content.</p> <p>Use of Graphics: If used, graphic, pictures, tables, and charts, etc. are simple and unnecessary to understanding the text but they may support and assist readers in understanding the written text</p>	<p>Conventionality: Dense and complex; contains considerable abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language</p> <p>Vocabulary: Complex, generally unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic language; may be ambiguous or purposefully misleading</p> <p>Sentence Structure: Mainly complex sentences with several subordinate clauses or phrases and transition words; sentences often contains multiple concepts</p>
<p>Conventionality: Fairly complex; contains some abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language</p> <p>Vocabulary: Fairly complex language that is sometimes unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic</p> <p>Sentence Structure: Many complex sentences with several subordinate phrases or clauses and transition words</p>	<p>Conventionality: Largely explicit and easy to understand with some occasions for more complex meaning</p> <p>Vocabulary: Mostly contemporary, familiar, conversational; rarely overly academic</p> <p>Sentence Structure: Primarily simple and compound sentences, with some complex constructions</p>	<p>Conventionality: Explicit; literal, straightforward, easy to understand</p> <p>Vocabulary: Contemporary, familiar, conversational language</p> <p>Sentence Structure: Mainly simple sentences</p>	<p>Purpose: Subtle and intricate, difficult to determine; includes many theoretical or abstract elements</p> <p>Subject Matter Knowledge: Relies on extensive levels of discipline-specific or theoretical knowledge; includes a range of challenging abstract concepts</p> <p>Intertextuality: Many references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.</p>	<p>Purpose: Implicit or subtle but fairly easy to infer; more theoretical or abstract than concrete</p> <p>Subject Matter Knowledge: Relies on moderate levels of discipline-specific or theoretical knowledge; includes a mix of recognizable ideas and challenging abstract concepts</p> <p>Intertextuality: Some references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.</p>
<p>Purpose: Subtle and intricate, difficult to determine; includes many theoretical or abstract elements</p> <p>Subject Matter Knowledge: Relies on extensive levels of discipline-specific or theoretical knowledge; includes a range of challenging abstract concepts</p> <p>Intertextuality: Many references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.</p>	<p>Purpose: Implicit but easy to identify based upon context or source</p> <p>Subject Matter Knowledge: Relies on common practical knowledge and some discipline-specific content knowledge; includes a mix of simple and more complicated, abstract ideas</p> <p>Intertextuality: Few references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.</p>	<p>Purpose: Explicitly stated, clear, concrete, narrowly focused</p> <p>Subject Matter Knowledge: Relies on everyday, practical knowledge; includes simple, concrete ideas</p> <p>Intertextuality: No references or allusions to other texts, or outside ideas, theories, etc.</p>	<p>Purpose: Subtle and intricate, difficult to determine; includes many theoretical or abstract elements</p> <p>Subject Matter Knowledge: Relies on extensive levels of discipline-specific or theoretical knowledge; includes a range of challenging abstract concepts</p> <p>Intertextuality: Many references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.</p>	<p>Purpose: Subtle and intricate, difficult to determine; includes many theoretical or abstract elements</p> <p>Subject Matter Knowledge: Relies on extensive levels of discipline-specific or theoretical knowledge; includes a range of challenging abstract concepts</p> <p>Intertextuality: Many references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.</p>

Reader and Task Considerations

After analyzing a text for complexity, consider

1. the needs and interests of the **reader (your students!)**, and
2. the type of **task** that will support students in comprehending the text's meaning(s).

Reader Considerations

- Will my students enjoy this text? Will they find it engaging?
- What will challenge my students most in this text? What supports can I provide?

Task Considerations

What do you want students to demonstrate after reading this text? (e.g. key text understanding, academic vocabulary, fluency, etc.?)

- Use the answer to identify which **Tennessee Academic Standards** will be the instructional focus of the text and the content of questions about the text.

Based on clear understanding of each child's reading ability, what aspects of the text will likely pose the most challenge for your children?

- Use the answer to guide the design of instructional **supports** so that all the children can access the text independently and proficiently through multiple readings of the text.

How is this text best presented to children and how can this text be used with other texts?

- Use the answer to determine how the text "fits" with a larger **unit** of instruction. Can the text serve as an "anchor" text? Does the text require background knowledge that could be learned by reading other texts?

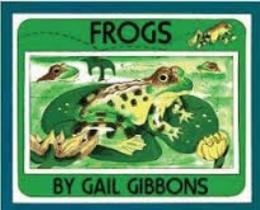
- Retrieved from www.ccsso.org/Navigating_Text_Complexity

Reader and Task Considerations – What is a Task?

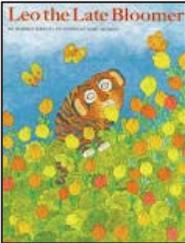
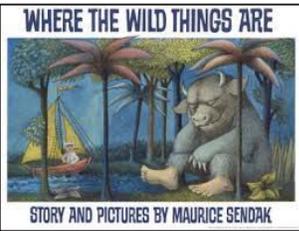
A task is an instructional activity that students complete after reading or listening to a text. An effective task should:

- Support students in comprehending the meaning(s) of the text
- Hinge on a thoughtful prompt that is based on Tennessee Academic Standards
- Provide opportunities to express comprehension through speaking, drawing, or writing
- Be appropriately complex

Example

Text	Possible Instructional Task
	<p>Draw a timeline that illustrates the sequence of the story. Then, add captions, using transition words to help the reader understand the different events that happened.</p>
	<p>Write a one-paragraph essay describing the life cycle of a frog. Your paragraph should include transition words that help the reader understand the difference phases in the life cycle. Then, draw and label an illustration that supports your paragraph.</p>

Practice

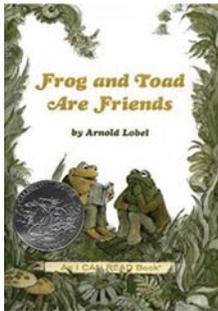
Text	Possible Instructional Task
	
	

Example: Evaluating Text Complexity

Frog and Toad are Friends by Arnold Lobel

1. Quantitative Measure

Go to <http://www.lexile.com/> and enter the title of your read aloud text in the Quick Book Search in the upper right corner of the home page. Most texts will have a Lexile measure in this database.



400L

The texts that we read aloud should be more complex than what students can read independently. It is recommended that read alouds be **1-2 grade levels above** students' current grade.

2nd -3rd Band 420-820L
 4th -5th Band 740-1010L

2. Qualitative Features

Consider the four dimensions of qualitative text complexity below. For each measure, note examples from the text that make it more or less complex.

<p>Levels of Meaning/Purpose</p> <p>Moderately complex. The stories in this book are all about friendships.</p>	<p>Structure</p> <p>Moderately complex. The structure is simple, however point of view shifts from the frog to the toad throughout the story.</p>
<p>Language Conventionalty/Clarity</p> <p>Slightly Complex. The language demands are simple with a few possible new vocabulary words.</p>	<p>Theme and Knowledge Demands</p> <p>Slightly Complex. The genre of the text is fantasy; students are likely familiar with this genre and the human-like traits of frog and toad make them easy to identify with. Personification is used throughout the text. There are occasional references to themes such as "a person feeling small" that would be more difficult for students.</p>

3. Reader and Task Considerations

Will my students enjoy this text? Will they find it engaging?

Yes, I believe my students will enjoy this text and they will be engaged while listening to or reading it on their own.

What will challenge my students most in this text? What supports can I provide?

My students will find it challenging to follow the shifts in point of view throughout the stories. I can adjust my voice while reading it and teach how the form of writing changes based on the point of view.

How will this text help my students build knowledge about the world?

These stories are about friendships and students can immediately connect with this topic and learn how to solve problems that arise when they work together. Students may also begin to understand that it is beneficial to form relationships with those who are different than themselves.

How can I connect this text to other texts we've read or will read?

Connect to informational texts about frogs and toads and pair the texts together.

Considering the quantitative measures of complexity, what kinds of tasks would be rigorous and appropriate for my students?

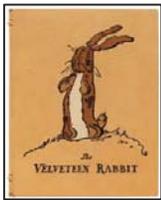
Draw a detailed picture from the first two stories in Frog and Toad Together, illustrating the friendship between the two characters. Write or dictate 1-2 sentences about how friendship is shown in the story of Frog and Toad.

Practice: Evaluating Text Complexity

Read Chapter 1 from *The Velveteen Rabbit*. Complete the text complexity analysis template below.

1. Quantitative Measure

Go to <http://www.lexile.com/> and enter the title of your read aloud text in the Quick Book Search in the upper right corner of the home page. Most texts will have a Lexile measure in this database.



AD820L*

The texts that we read aloud should be more complex than what students can read independently. It is recommended that read alouds be **1-2 grade levels above** students' current grade.

2nd -3rd Band 420-820L
 4th -5th Band 740-1010L

* Many picture books are considered AD, or Adult Directed, meaning they are most accessible to children when read aloud.

2. Qualitative Features

Consider the four dimensions of text complexity below. For each dimension, note some examples from the text that make it more or less complex.

<p>Levels of Meaning/Purpose</p>	<p>Structure</p>
<p>Language Conventinality/Clarity</p>	<p>Theme and Knowledge Demands</p>

3. Reader and Task Considerations

Will my students enjoy this text? Will they find it engaging?

What will challenge my students most in this text? What supports can I provide?

How will this text help my students build knowledge about the world?

How can I connect this text to other texts we've read or will read?

Considering the quantitative measures of complexity, what kinds of tasks would be rigorous and appropriate for my students?

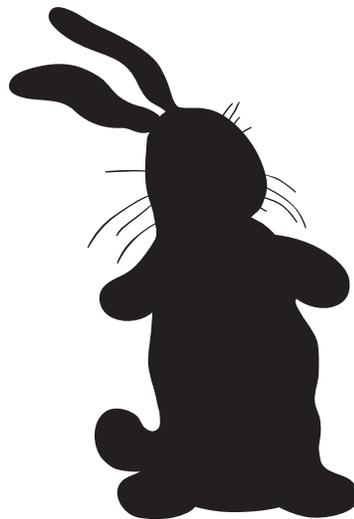
THE VELVETEEN RABBIT

OR

HOW TOYS BECOME REAL

BY MARGERY WILLIAMS BIANCO

Edited, with an introduction, notes and
comprehension questions,
by Ralph Mason



Books for Learning

Chapter 1

Christmas Morning



There was once a velveteen¹ rabbit, and in the beginning he was really splendid². He was fat and buncy, as a rabbit should be; his coat was spotted brown and white, he had real thread whiskers, and his ears were lined with pink sateen³. On Christmas morning, when he sat wedged in the top of the Boy's stocking, with a sprig of holly⁴ between his paws, the effect was charming.

There were other things in the stocking, nuts and oranges and a toy engine⁵, and chocolate almonds and a clockwork mouse, but the Rabbit was quite the best of all. For at least two hours the Boy loved him, and then Aunts and Uncles came to dinner, and there was a great rustling of tissue paper and unwrapping of parcels⁶, and in the excitement of looking at all the new presents the Velveteen Rabbit was forgotten.

For a long time he lived in the toy cupboard or on the nursery floor, and no one thought very much about him. He was naturally shy, and being only made of velveteen, some of the more expensive toys quite snubbed⁷ him.

¹ *velveteen*—a material made of cotton that feels like velvet. (Velvet is a very soft material that feels like fur.)

² *splendid*—fine and beautiful.

³ *sateen*—a smooth, shiny material like satin.

⁴ *sprig of holly*—holly is a plant with spiky leaves and red berries that is used in Christmas decorations. A 'sprig' is a twig or little bit of branch with leaves on it.

⁵ *toy engine*—a toy train.

⁶ *parcels*—presents.

⁷ *snubbed*—ignored or made fun of.

The mechanical toys¹ were very superior, and looked down upon every one else; they were full of modern ideas, and pretended they were real. The model boat, who had lived through two seasons and lost most of his paint, caught the tone² from them and never missed an opportunity of referring to his rigging³ in technical terms⁴. The Rabbit could not claim to be a model of anything, for he didn't know that real rabbits existed; he thought they were all stuffed with sawdust like himself, and he understood that sawdust was quite out-of-date and should never be mentioned in modern circles⁵. Even Timothy, the jointed wooden lion, who was made by the disabled soldiers, and should have had broader views⁶, put on airs⁷ and pretended he was connected with Government. Between them all the poor little Rabbit was made to feel himself very insignificant and commonplace, and the only person who was kind to him at all was the Skin Horse⁸.

The Skin Horse had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others. He was so old that his brown coat was bald in patches and showed the seams underneath, and most of the hairs in his tail had been pulled out to string bead necklaces. He was wise, for he had seen a long succession⁹ of mechanical toys arrive to boast and swagger, and by-and-by break their mainsprings and pass away, and he knew that they were only toys, and would never turn into anything else. For nursery magic is very strange and wonderful, and only those playthings that are old and wise and experienced like the Skin Horse understand all about it.

1 *mechanical toys*—toys that have moving parts. 'Mechanical' sounds like 'mek-an-ic-al'.

2 *tone*—way of talking.

3 *rigging*—strings that hold up his mast and sails.

4 *technical terms*—fancy language or big words.

5 *in modern circles*—around people who like to be trendy or 'up-to-date'.

6 *broader views*—better sense, or a more open mind.

7 *put on airs*—got puffed up.

8 *Skin Horse*—a toy horse on wheels, which can be sat on or pulled along. It is called a 'skin' horse because it has a stitched covering—as if it had real skin.

9 *succession*—line or series. This means that the Skin Horse has seen lots of toys come and go since he has been in the nursery. 'Succession' sounds like 'suck-sesh-un'.

‘What is REAL?’ asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender¹, before Nana² came to tidy the room. ‘Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?’

‘Real isn’t how you are made,’ said the Skin Horse. ‘It’s a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real.’

‘Does it hurt?’ asked the Rabbit.

‘Sometimes,’ said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. ‘When you are Real you don’t mind being hurt.’

‘Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,’ he asked, ‘or bit by bit?’

‘It doesn’t happen all at once,’ said the Skin Horse. ‘You become. It takes a long time. That’s why it doesn’t happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are Real you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand.’

‘I suppose *you* are real?’ said the Rabbit. And then he wished he had not said it, for he thought the Skin Horse might be sensitive. But the Skin Horse only smiled.

‘The Boy’s Uncle made me Real,’ he said. ‘That was a great many years ago; but once you are Real you can’t become unreal again. It lasts for always.’

The Rabbit sighed. He thought it would be a long time before this magic called Real happened to him. He longed to become Real, to know what it felt like; and yet the idea of growing shabby and losing his eyes and whiskers was rather sad. He wished that he could become it without these uncomfortable things happening to him.

¹ *fender*—a little fence in front of the fireplace.

² *Nana*—the maid who looks after the Boy.

Balancing Measures of Text Complexity

Exposure to appropriately-complex texts is critical for children to develop strong literacy foundations and to build knowledge and vocabulary. However, that doesn't mean that we should just give students hard texts. Texts and tasks must be appropriately complex.

Teachers should be mindful of balancing the three measures of text complexity in a way that is developmentally appropriate and scaffolds expectations for children. For example,

- A teacher may choose a text with **lower quantitative complexity if the qualitative measure is especially complex**, such as a text that addresses complex themes like grief or prejudice, as in *The Story Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles.
- A teacher may choose a text with **lower qualitative complexity in theme and knowledge if the language is especially complex**, such as a text with sophisticated vocabulary, syntax, or word play, as in *Skippyjon Jones* by Judy Schachnar.
- A teacher may choose a text with **lower qualitative or quantitative complexity if the demand of the task is especially rigorous**, such as analyzing the characters' inferred motivations, writing a parody of the story using the same structure as a mentor text, or comparing and contrasting a series of texts.
- A teacher may choose a **less rigorous task if the quantitative or qualitative measures of the text are especially complex**. For example, a teacher reading *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* by Eleanor Coerr might choose to focus time on building background knowledge so children understand the setting of post-WWII Japan, a time and place children are unlikely to be familiar with.

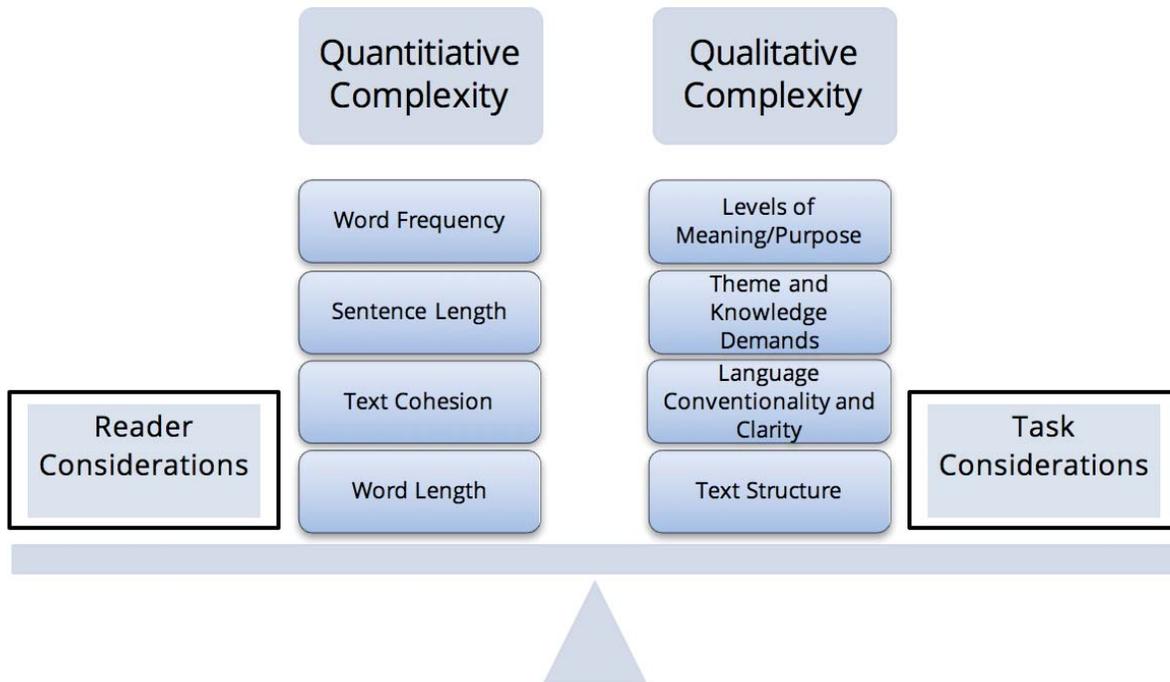
Likewise, teachers must be intentional in selecting read aloud texts that diversify reader experience *within* each measure of complexity. Because it is impossible for a single text to meet every complexity measure, teachers must knowingly select a range of texts in order to provide opportunities for children to engage with various types of text complexities across the year.

Discussion

- What does it mean for texts to be appropriately complex?

- Can you think of a text that represents each of the four examples listed above?

Balancing Measures of Text Complexity



Layering Texts to Balance Complexity

It is important to consider a variety of text genres and complexities in read aloud experiences with children. By creating **text sets**, teachers can ensure that children are intentionally exposed to a variety of interesting and complex literary and informational texts.

What is a Text Set?

A text set is a collection of related texts organized around a topic, theme, or line of inquiry. Text sets are related texts from different genres and media, such as books, charts, maps, informational pamphlets, poetry, videos, etc.

The purpose of study for a given text set is determined by an anchor text. An anchor text is a complex read aloud text that introduces the themes and major concepts that will be explored through the text set. The anchor text is often read aloud to students more than once.

The number of texts in a set can vary depending on purpose and resource availability. What is important is that the texts in the set are connected meaningfully to each other, build knowledge and vocabulary of a specific topic, and that themes and concepts are sufficiently developed in a way that promotes sustained interest for students and the deep examination of content.

Features of Strong Text Sets

Strong Text Sets	Weak Text Sets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds student knowledge around a topic • Meaningful connections to the anchor text • Authentic, rich texts worthy of study • Range of text types (literary and informational) and formats • Supports student achievement through text complexity • Includes texts that represent various forms of complexity • Includes visual media, such as videos, images, maps, timelines, and other graphics or text features. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superficial connection or no connection across texts in the set • Only commissioned texts or textbook passages • Focused on one genre or format (unless that set is a genre study) • Text complexity levels are not appropriate for students (too low or too high) • Text set does not represent diverse types of texts or diverse measures of complexity

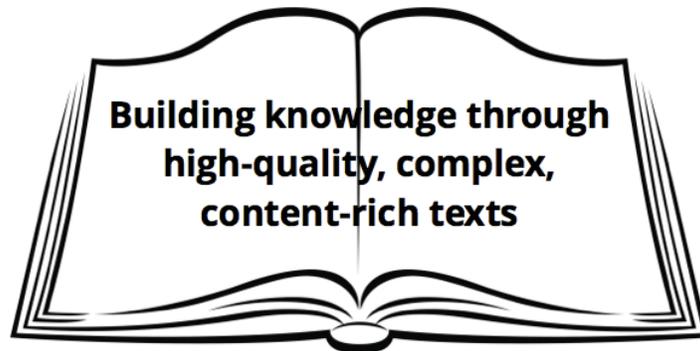
- Borrowed and adapted from *Guide to Creating Text Sets*, retrieved from www.ccsso.org

Activity: Exploring Text Sets

Review the various text sets that are located in the appendix section of this manual. As a group, discuss the question below.

- How do these different text sets layer resources to create a balance of text types and complexities?

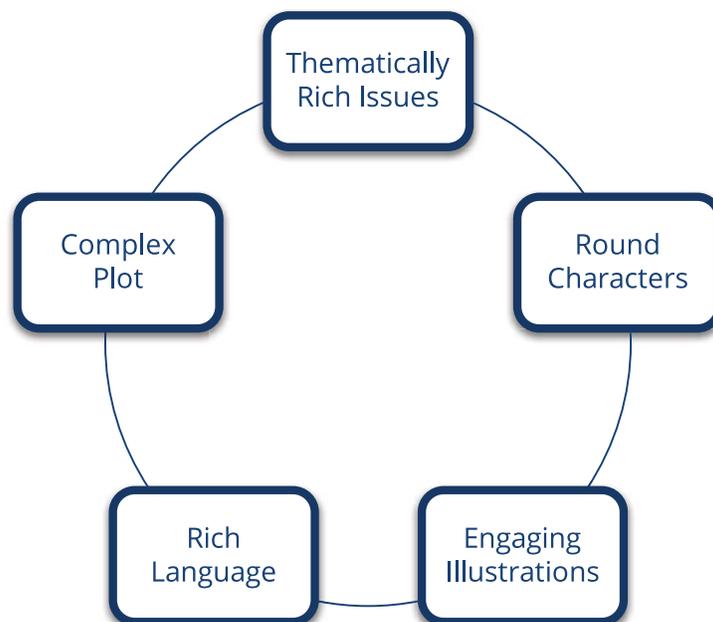
High-Quality Texts



Read an excerpt from the article *The Book Matters! Choosing Complex Narrative Texts to Support Literacy Discussion*. Specifically, read the section titled “Characteristics of literature that support complex processing in read-aloud discussions” (annotated with a star).

As you read, consider the following questions:

- What does it mean for a text to be high-quality?
- How do these characteristics of high-quality literature help children build knowledge and become better readers?



It's Elementary! Supporting Literacy in the Primary Grades

Jessica L.
Hoffman, William
H. Teale, and
Junko Yokota



Kindergarten Through Grade 2

The Book Matters! Choosing Complex Narrative Texts to Support Literary Discussion

VIRTUALLY ALL TEACHERS IN THE early grades value reading aloud as an essential classroom literacy practice. Decades of research document that reading aloud to kindergartners through second-graders promotes development of early literacy skills and establishes a foundation for positive attitudes toward literacy (Van Kleeck, Stahl, & Bauer 2003; Trelease 2013).

Specifically, reading aloud builds oral language and vocabulary (e.g., Hargrave & Sénéchal 2000; Wasik & Bond 2001; Blewitt et al. 2009), listening comprehension—a precursor to reading comprehension (e.g., Brabham & Lynch-Brown 2002; Zucker et al. 2010)—content

knowledge (Pappas & Varelas 2004; Hoffman, Collins, & Schickedanz 2015), concepts of print (Piastra et al. 2012), and alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness (Aram 2006; Brabham, Murray, & Bowden 2006). Equally important, reading aloud is one way we enculturate young children into literacy—helping them acquire the language, values, practices, and dispositions of the literate world (Heath 1983).

Interacting with complex texts through read-aloud discussions

Not all read-alouds are created equal, however. Different approaches to reading aloud in early childhood classrooms have recently garnered increased attention in the United States because

of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The standards call for all students to engage with complex texts that offer opportunities for higher-level thinking (for a discussion of complex text, see CCSS for English Language Arts, Appendix A [NGA & CCSSO 2010]). Because most children kindergarten through second grade have not yet developed foundational reading skills well enough to independently read complex picture books, read-alouds offer the most robust opportunities for such interactions to occur (IRA 2012) (see “Literacy Instruction With Complex Literature Aligned With Common Core State Standards”).

Read-alouds that engage young children with complex texts rely on interactive discussions focused on interpretations of texts that may vary with the backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences of the children listening. In other words, discussing multiple interpretations of texts helps children realize that there are many possible responses to complex literature. Interactive read-aloud discussions focused on interpretations of complex texts promote basic comprehension and have the potential to extend from basic comprehension to analysis of text elements, integration of ideas to make connections, and critical evaluation of the texts themselves and the ideas in them.

Read-aloud discussions that include complex processing of texts by young children have been considered in terms of children’s literary understanding (Sipe 2000, 2007; Pantaleo 2007; Hoffman 2011), and in studies of children’s development of critical literacies (Vasquez 2010) and multiliteracies (Crafton, Brennan, & Silvers 2007).

Literacy Instruction With Complex Literature Aligned With Common Core State Standards

Below are two examples, using books discussed in this article, of ways teachers can incorporate strategies for choosing and sharing complex literature with young children in instruction, as specified in the K–5 College and Career Readiness anchor standards corresponding with CCSS (NGA & CCSSO 2010).

Reading Standards for Literature 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

In Bob Graham’s *April and Esme, Tooth Fairies*, the story is conveyed in ways that clearly communicate the sense of awe felt by the young tooth fairies on their first assignment without their parents, and the anxiety felt by the parents when they allow their children to go out on their own for the first time. Teachers can help students consider these differing points of view. During the first read-aloud of the book, support basic comprehension of the language, visuals, and plot. Follow up a day or two later with a second reading in which students are asked at different places in the text to consider whose point of view is represented and how it impacts the story—for instance, “How do April and Esme’s parents feel about them collecting a tooth alone?,” “How do April and Esme feel about going out without their parents?” Students should also consider how the story might be different if it was told from only one point of view (the viewpoint of the girls or that of the parents). Teachers might even guide students to interactively rewrite part of the story from a single point of view to see how it differs from the original. Questions similar to these will guide students’ consideration of differences in points of view of characters. With continued experience, children will build toward interpretation of how point of view contributes to the content and style of texts.

Reading Standards for Literature 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are* strongly demonstrates the way visuals and text work collaboratively to convey a story. To guide children’s interpretations of the relationship between visuals and text, teachers can ask children to first examine the illustrations without reading the text and tell the story as they see it. Encourage them to go beyond the plot to consider mood, setting, and theme. Then, read the text to children without showing them the illustrations. Discuss what roles the text and illustrations separately have in contributing to understanding the whole story. For example, consider instances where the text and image are conflicting, such as when the image of friendly-looking Wild Things is paired with the text “roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth.” Examine how the illustration becomes increasingly prominent and dominates the pages as the story develops, but then quickly diminishes after the climax and words alone remain at the story’s resolution. Discussions like these will support children’s evaluation of text, a complex literacy skill.

About the Authors

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Why the Book Matters for Literary Discussion in the Early Grades

To illustrate how children and teachers might interact in literary read-alouds, we present a portion of a read-aloud discussion about *Jamela's Dress* that was observed in Ms. Maddox's kindergarten classroom. Anticipating that her students may not readily relate to the situations in the text, Ms. Maddox scaffolded the children's learning by linking an experience the children understand with the experience and emotions of Jamela's mother. The resulting connection to Jamela's mother was crucial to the children's ability to interpret the broader implications of Jamela's actions and thus supported their attempts to interpret the complex meanings throughout the reading.

A look at a read-aloud discussion of complex text

Ms. Maddox: The story opens with Jamela and her mother shopping for fabric. (Ms. Maddox reads.) "Mama was very pleased with the new material she'd found. She had worked hard to earn the money for it." (Ms. Maddox pauses.)

Ms. Maddox: Have any of you ever worked hard or done something around the house so you could earn something?

Hannah: I did it. I did it.

Ms. Maddox: What have you done, Hannah?

Hannah: I cleaned the refrigerator.

Ms. Maddox: So when you clean the refrigerator, do you earn something?

Hannah nods yes.

Ms. Maddox: What do you earn?

Hannah: A dollar.

Ms. Maddox: You earn a dollar. So, have you ever, when you clean the refrigerator and you earn all these dollars, do you ever go out and buy yourself anything special?

Hannah: Yes.

Ms. Maddox: What's something special that you bought before?

Hannah: Um, clothes for my toys.

Ms. Maddox: Clothes for her toys, which I'm guessing is probably one of your dolls. So, Hannah can relate to this. She said she worked really hard at home cleaning out the refrigerator, and she earns money for it, and when she earns money for it, she goes out and she buys herself something special which is clothes for her dolls.

Ms. Maddox continues reading the story. She and her class discuss other characters and events. Toward the climax of the story, just as Jamela's mother is about to discover that Jamela has ruined her material, Ms. Maddox pauses again to prompt students' connections to the character of Jamela's mother.

Ms. Maddox: Hannah, let's go back to you. Do you remember how you said you worked hard cleaning out the refrigerator to get dollars, and you take those dollars and you buy clothes for your doll? . . . How would you feel if [your sister] came in your room and took those doll clothes that you worked so hard for and destroyed them?

Hannah: I would be mad.

Ms. Maddox: You would be mad? (to the whole group) How do you think Jamela's mama's going to feel?

Children: Mad, happy, mean, sad (many talking at once).

Ms. Maddox: Mean. Sad. Happy.

James: I think she feel like this (pretends to faint).

Dion: Yeah, he's right. I agree.

Ms. Maddox: I think she's gonna be, not mean, but probably a little bit upset.

Through the discussion in this example, the teacher's questioning developed her students' connection to a character, prompting them to relate a student's experience to the character's emotions at significant points in the text where skilled readers make such connections.

These studies reveal how teachers and 5- to 8-year-old children can work collaboratively to construct multilayered interpretations of texts in read-alouds (see “Why the Book Matters for Literary Discussion in the Early Grades”).



Characteristics of literature that support complex processing in read-aloud discussions

Although *how* to read is a frequent topic of studies in the read-aloud literature, much less often researched is the issue of *what* to read—how the quality of literature impacts the quality of the read-aloud discussion (Teale, Yokota, & Martinez 2008). Essentially, some children’s books provide

more to think and talk about than others. To help children process complex texts in read-aloud discussions, it is important for teachers to first choose texts that can support complex interpretations. Although this article focuses on choosing high-quality narrative literature or stories, similar principles apply to selecting informational books. Appropriate narratives for young children contain accounts of connected events that typically surround a central problem and lead to a resolution.

The following sections outline characteristics of high-quality narrative children’s literature to guide teachers’ selections of texts. For each characteristic, we begin with a definition and explanation, followed by an exemplar text.

Resources for Locating Complex Children’s Literature

Associations and centers book lists	
American Library Association—Recommended Reading www.ala.org/tools/libfactsheets/alalibraryfactsheet23#children	American Library Association—Notable Books www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/notalists/ncb
International Literary Association—Choice Books List www.reading.org/resources/tools/choices.html	Barahona Center for the Study of Books in Spanish for Children and Adolescents https://chicanolitbib.wordpress.com/2007/12/02/barahona-center/
Children’s literature review journals, best/notable lists, blogs, and reviews	
<i>HornBook</i> www.hbook.com/category/choosing-books/reviews/#_	<i>Kirkus Reviews</i> www.kirkusreviews.com/
<i>Booklist</i> www.booklistonline.com/book-reviews	<i>Publishers Weekly</i> www.publishersweekly.com/pw/reviews/
<i>School Library Journal</i> www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6703692.html	
Newspapers— children’s book reviews	
<i>The New York Times</i> www.nytimes.com/column/childrens-books	<i>The Washington Post</i> www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/
Book enthusiast social media sites	
Goodreads www.goodreads.com	Shelfari www.shelfari.com
LibraryThing www.librarything.com	
School libraries’ collection development/selection tool	
Titlewave: Collection Development by Follett www.titlewave.com	
Children’s literature databases	
See public or school libraries for access information	
Children’s Literature Comprehensive Database www.clcd.com/#/welcome	NoveList www.ebscohost.com/novelist



The exemplar texts include all of the characteristics of quality narrative literature. In the interest of space, we use each book selection to illustrate a single characteristic. We also present online and print resources to help teachers find and select complex children’s literature (see “Resources for Locating Complex Children’s Literature”).

Thematically rich issues

Theme is a broad, overarching idea in a text that is usually communicated implicitly through multiple features of the narrative, including plot, character, character actions, dialogue, and setting. Theme is considered a central literary element of narrative, and thus discussion of theme is important in building young readers’ capacity to understand narratives as more than sequences of events. In some cases, the theme may be expressed as a moral, but many books appropriate for children kindergarten through second grade express themes in more subtle and multifaceted ways, much like literature for older children and adults. Because theme is abstract and implicit, readers must engage deeply with a book to consider theme and will often interpret different themes within the same text.

One book with rich thematic possibilities implied through character and plot is *The Empty Pot*, by Demi (1990). In this book, the aging emperor of China announces that the next emperor will be the child who grows a seed in a year’s time. Children from all over China come to receive their seed from the emperor. A year later, they return with their flowering plants—all except Ping, who, despite his best efforts, has been unable to grow anything at all. It turns out the emperor had cooked all the seeds before distributing them. Ping, the only honest child to come before the emperor, is rewarded with an appointment as the next emperor.

The following are examples of themes in this story:

- **Sense of self.** Ping experiences both shame and pride when he goes before the emperor.
- **Doing one’s best.** Though Ping appears to be unsuccessful at fulfilling the emperor’s task, he does not give up.
- **Honesty.** Despite feeling incompetent, Ping brings his empty pot before the emperor amidst a sea of children with beautiful flowering plants.

Round characters

High-quality narratives include round characters—characters who are dynamic, changing, and malleable. In contrast, flat (stock) characters are stable, fixed, and unresponsive to differences in particular events or characters. In other words, round characters are like real people—they act, think, and speak differently depending on the immediate context.

Discussion of theme is important in building young readers’ capacity to understand narratives as more than sequences of events.

Kevin Henkes is a master of character development in children’s books. In his book *Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse* (1996), readers are introduced to a girl-mouse character with a new purse who is quite self-absorbed. Lilly cannot wait to show the other children at school the purple purse, but when she shares it with them at an inopportune time, her teacher takes the purse away and says he will keep it until the end of the day. Lilly grows despondent at having her prized possession confiscated and then becomes increasingly enraged at being put in time-out. By the end of the day she is furious with her teacher, even drawing a picture depicting him as a monstrous figure. However, when her teacher hands her the purse as she leaves for the day, Lilly finds a note and treats from the teacher inside it and suddenly realizes how “small” she feels. Thus, Lilly is depicted as a round character who exhibits a range of emotions and also grows through her experience. As she becomes less self-centered, she learns to temper her emotions and behavior more appropriately for the social situation.

Engaging, complex illustrations

Narrative picture books are a unique form of narrative literature in that they construct meaning through the interaction between text and illustrations. High-quality narrative picture books involve an artful, synergistic blending of text and illustration in which the meaning from the text and the illustrations are interconnected so that the

whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This complex relationship between text and illustration is known as transmediation, and it demands constant construction and reconstruction of meaning from text to image and back (Sipe 1998). Research on children's use of illustrations to construct meaning in picture books during teacher read-alouds has demonstrated that even young children are quite capable of transmediating text and image, especially when supported by the teacher (Sipe & Bauer 2001; Sipe 2007).

High-quality narrative literature includes rich and mature language—words and phrases that develop complex meaning and imagery for the reader.

The book *April and Esme, Tooth Fairies*, by Bob Graham (2010), is a sophisticated example of how an author artfully combines words and illustrations to create a rich, sophisticated narrative. This fantasy book depicts the first time two young tooth fairies exchange a lost tooth for a coin. Graham's story begins before the title page, as 7-year-old tooth fairy April is shown on her cell phone. The text, which provides her side of the conversation, indicates

a request to pay a tooth fairy visit to the caller's grandson, Daniel. April, thrilled beyond belief to be asked, convinces her (ponytailed) father and her (tattooed) mother that she and her younger sister Esme are up to the task. After a number of tense moments on the mission to collect Daniel's tooth and deliver the coin, the sisters prevail and return home, travelling across a dangerous highway, to excited and proud parents.

Throughout the book Graham creates a subtle interplay between text and illustration. Good examples of this are the three double-page spreads in the book depicting the formidable highway, with its constant string of huge, fast-moving 18-wheelers, contrasted with the tiny tooth fairy cottage and the almost minuscule tooth fairies. In one illustration the parents are shown in the lower left corner of the page while April and Esme hover in the upper right corner, framed by the white moon, "lift(ing) off into the night." Large trucks loom between these two images. The visual contrast effectively conveys the scale and danger of April and Esme's mission.

Rich language

High-quality narrative literature includes rich and mature language—words and phrases that develop complex meaning and imagery for the reader. Such text introduces

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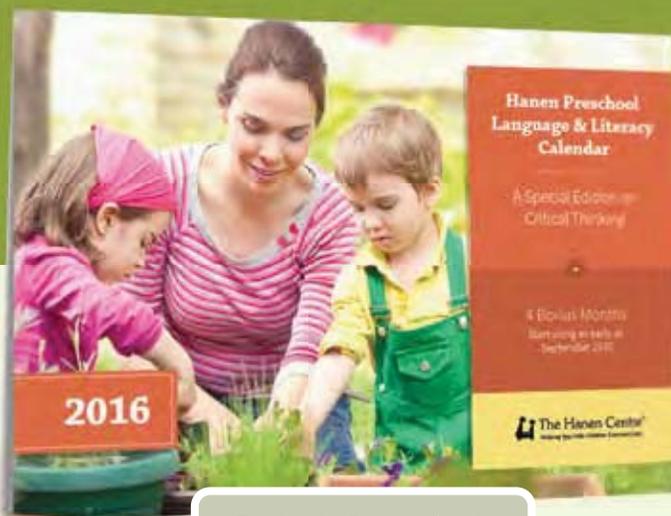
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young readers to words that may be new or somewhat unknown as well as to familiar words used in new ways (e.g., figurative language). Rich language is not flowery or longwinded; rather, it is carefully crafted by the author, who chooses each word and structures each sentence to create an original, artistic, and tightly constructed text.

Jamela's Dress, by Niki Daly (1999), is the story of a young girl in South Africa who unintentionally destroys fabric that her mother was going to use to make a new dress, when she gets wrapped up (literally) in her own desire to dress up. Daly carefully constructs his language to create imagery for the reader through word meanings and sound quality. For example, in a close reading of the sentence, "Dreamily, Jamela swayed between the folds of material as they flapped and wrapped around her into a dress," readers feel the breeze blowing through the material, long and slow at first, "swayed between the folds of material," followed by two short, quick snaps of wind that "flapped and wrapped" the material around Jamela, seemingly through no fault of her own. In other places, Daly fluidly infuses imagery through simile—"Down the road went Jamela, proud as a peacock." At other times, it is the simplicity of language that contributes to the meaning, such as the dawning dread readers experience when Jamela's mother calls to check on her but "there was no answer." Words and language are Daly's artistic tools to create rich images for his readers.

Engaging, complex plot

Plot is the series of events in a story and the relationships among the events, particularly how they relate to the narrative's problem and resolution. An engaging, complex plot interests readers and drives their desire to know what happens next, especially in relation to a story's resolution. Although older, more sophisticated readers can engage with problems far removed from their life experiences, younger children typically engage best with plots that relate to their more limited experiences and perspectives (Schickedanz & Collins 2012).

In Maurice Sendak's classic *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), Max misbehaves and is sent to bed without his supper. His room transforms into a forest, and soon he sails into the land of the Wild Things, who name him King and honor him with a Wild Rumpus.

But Max becomes homesick and returns to his house to find his supper waiting for him, still hot.

This plot essentially revolves around disobedience, frustration with parents, thoughts and dreams, and perhaps even real instances of running away—all issues that resonate in young children's lives. Sendak's text and illustrations work together in a seamless exploration of plot paralleled with character—Max's journey is both a dream of a physical journey (the plot) and an instance of an emotional journey (character). Sendak's plot prompts children to consider issues central to childhood.

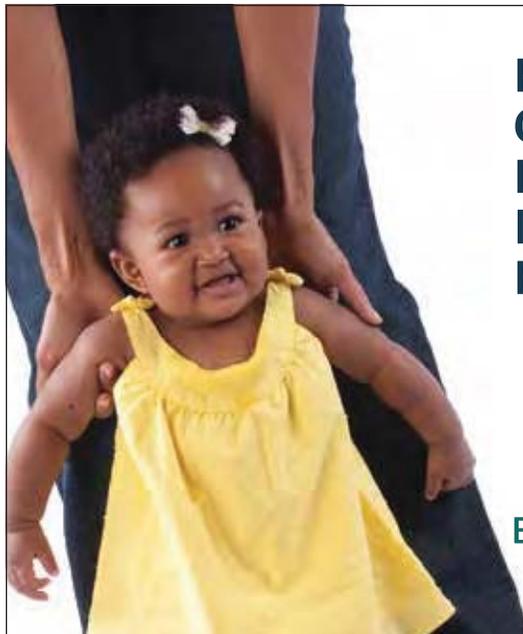
Conclusion

In this article, we have provided examples of features of high-quality narrative literature that can support complex processing of texts in read-aloud discussions. The texts are not meant to be used as a short reading list for teachers, but rather as exemplars of the wide body of high quality children's literature available. Children's literature that is carefully crafted with the characteristics we discussed can support read-aloud experiences through which teachers apprentice children into complex processing of texts. Frequent opportunities to collaboratively process complex texts in the early grades help children learn how to approach such texts both as emergent readers and, later, as independent ones, thus contributing to their lifelong development as skilled readers.

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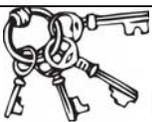
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Additional Considerations for High-Quality Literature

<p style="text-align: center;">Theme</p>	<p>High-quality texts center on themes that children enjoy or that are important for students to think about or learn. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Darcy and Gran Don't Like Babies</i> by Jane Cutler – helps students adjust to life with new siblings • <i>Officer Buckle and Gloria</i> by Peggy Rathmann – teaches the importance of friendship • <i>Hooway for Wodney Wat</i> by Helen Lester – reminds students that our unique differences are special and powerful • _____ • _____ • _____
<p style="text-align: center;">Characters</p>	<p>High-quality texts include protagonists who are inspiring, model positive traits, are dynamic and interesting, and remind students of themselves. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Wilma Unlimited</i> by Kathleen Krull – the inspiring story of Wilma Rudolph, who overcame crippling polio to win three gold medals at the Olympics • <i>Akiko on the Planet Smoo</i> by Mark Criley – a science fiction thriller for young readers, where Akiko transforms dynamically from an ordinary girl into an intergalactic hero • <i>Amazing Grace</i> by Mary Hoffman – young girls and African American students can be inspired by Grace’s perseverance and her desire to break stereotypes • _____ • _____ • _____
<p style="text-align: center;">Plot</p>	<p>High-quality texts contain plots that are engaging, surprising, and new. They make students want to keep reading, or spark conversations about the book outside of the classroom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Doctor De Soto</i> by William Steig – readers are on edge wondering if mouse-dentist Doctor De Soto should trust his fox patient • <i>The Mysteries of Harris Burdick</i> by Chris Van Allsburg – fourteen black-and-white pictures accompanied by a title and caption invite children to make up their own stories • _____ • _____ • _____

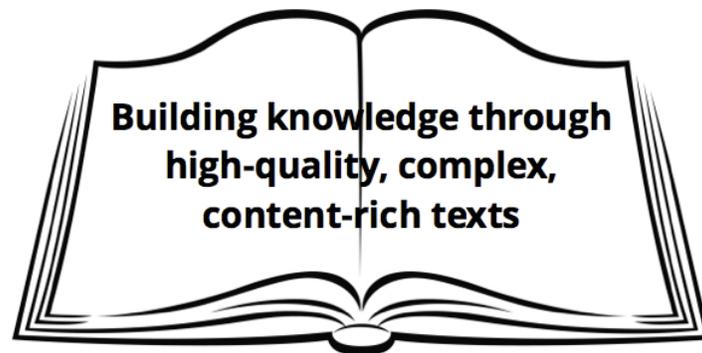
<p>Setting</p>	<p>High-quality texts contain settings that are interesting and that teach students about different places and time periods. High-quality fictional settings capture students’ imagination and encourage creative thinking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Legend of the Bluebonnet</i> by Tomie DePaola – a folktale about the Comanche tribe and the history of the bluebonnet flower • <i>Alice in Wonderland</i> by Lewis Carroll – a fantastical world of interesting creatures • _____ • _____
<p>Language</p>	<p>High-quality texts contain rich language that promote the acquisition of Tier II vocabulary, as well as knowledge of figurative and idiomatic language. High-quality texts utilize various language structures to convey meaning and information, including descriptions, dialog, and characters’ internal monologs. High-quality texts also use rhythm and rhyme and build students’ phonological awareness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Skippyjon Jones</i> by Judy Schachner – includes many Tier II words, such as <i>scolded</i>, <i>bounce</i>, <i>exclaimed</i>, and <i>junk</i>, as well as a playful rhyme scheme, monolog, and dialog. • <i>The Velveteen Rabbit</i> by Margery Williams Bianco – text introduces children to language from a different time period; includes Tier II vocabulary such as <i>splendid</i>, <i>rustling</i>, and <i>snubbed</i>; and includes interesting sentences and phrasing, such as “<i>On Christmas morning, when he sat wedged in the top of the Boy’s stocking, with a sprig of holly between his paws, the effect was charming.</i>” • _____ • _____
<p>Illustrations</p>	<p>High-quality texts include illustrations that are accurate to the plot, characters, and setting and that are also interesting and beautiful to look at. They utilize various media – drawing, collage, photography – and teach students about artistic and visual elements such as line, color, shape, and texture. (The Caldecott Medal is awarded annually to the artist who created the most distinguished picture book for children, and is a helpful reference for finding high-quality illustrated literature.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Polar Express</i> by Chris Van Allsburg • <i>Mirette on the High Wire</i> by Emily Arnold McCully • _____ • _____



Key Idea #5

Engaging students with high-quality texts makes reading enjoyable and fosters a love of reading.

Content-Rich Texts



Providing balanced book collections at all grade levels is vital to engagement during both reading instruction and self-selection. This work suggests that a balanced collection includes lots of informational titles and a variety of print materials. Pappas (1993) found that children as young as kindergarten showed a preference for informational text and Mohr (2006) noted that nonfiction books were the overwhelming choice of first grade students. In addition, Marinak and Gambrell (2007) found that third grade boys and girls valued reading newspapers and magazines as well as books.

- Reading Motivation: What the Research Says, retrieved from www.readingrockets.org

Considerations for Content-Rich Texts

- Does the text contain **new information** that students likely don't already know?
- Does the text **build background knowledge** that will help students comprehend later texts and experiences?
- Does the text contain information that is **useful** in the real world?
- Does the text contain information that is **relevant** to students' needs or interests? Does it help them **answer questions** or **solve problems**?
- Does the text contain information that helps students **connect** their own experiences and situations to others and to the broader world?
- Is the content of the text **authentic** and does it lend itself to **further research, exploration, and inquiry**?

- List borrowed and modified from two sources: *The importance of content rich texts to learners and students*, retrieved from Oxford University Press English Language Teaching Global Blog; and *Informational Text and Young Children: When, Why, What, Where, and How* by Dr. Nell K. Duke

Practice: Content-Rich Texts

Form a group of three, with each group member choosing one of the three informational articles:

- *Public Spaces*
- *New Animal Species*
- *Save the World: A little change can make a big difference*

Read your article and reflect on the characteristics of content-rich text. Discuss the content of the article and share your reflections with your group.

Note: All three articles are in the grades 3-4 lexile band and could be used as read aloud material in a lower elementary classroom.

- Does the text contain **new** information that students likely don't already know?
- Does the text **build background knowledge** that will help students comprehend later texts and experiences?
- Does the text contain information that is **useful** in the real world?
- Does the text contain information that is **relevant** to students' needs or interests? Does it help them **answer questions** or **solve problems**?
- Does the text contain information that helps students **connect** their own experiences and situations to others and to the broader world?
- Is the content of the text **authentic** and does it lend itself to **further research, exploration, and inquiry**?
- Could you use this article in your classroom? If so, how?



Key Idea #6

Engaging students with content-rich texts builds knowledge and invites students to pursue interests and questions.



Public Spaces



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You and your friends race across the park to the swings. You pass people playing basketball, skateboarding, and jogging. You walk home on the sidewalk, and you visit the library on the way.

What do these places have in common? In addition to being fun, they're all public spaces. Public spaces are areas that are open to everyone: that's what public means.

If you go to a public school, a skateboarding park, or a hiking trail, you visit public spaces.

While public spaces are open to everyone, it takes a lot of time and money to keep them clean and growing. Towns, counties, states, and the federal government work together to clean and rebuild public spaces. Governments also redesign public spaces to create new attractions, such as new jogging trails and playgrounds. These tasks provide jobs for thousands of people.

Money collected through taxes allows governments to maintain public spaces. All workers pay taxes to

federal, state, and local governments. You pay taxes, too, when you buy some things.

Tax money is used to build and repair roads, schools, and libraries. It is used to fund police and fire departments and national parks. It is also used to rebuild beaches, hiking trails, and other public spaces that are damaged by hurricanes, tornadoes, and other storms. Your taxes help keep public spaces clean and safe.

Although you don't have to pay to visit most public spaces, some spaces charge admission fees. Admission fees help pay the expenses of redesigning and maintaining the land and buildings in public spaces. Many people also donate their money and time to organizations that fund public spaces. Their donations help to keep these areas open to everyone.

Millions of Americans visit public spaces every

day. They like to go to many different places to meet friends or to explore. They also like to see that their taxes keep their country beautiful and open to everyone.



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New Animal Species



We share the earth with millions of animal species. Some are huge, like elephants. Some are so small you can only see them with a microscope, like organisms that live in the ocean. However, although the earth has thousands of animal species, many are endangered. Scientists are trying to save endangered animals, but surprisingly, they are also finding new species.

In a South American rainforest, 60 new species of animals were found in 2012. Scientists say the reason so many new kinds of animals were found there is that this rainforest was almost untouched by humans.

Six new species of frogs were discovered at this time. This is particularly important because frogs around the world are becoming extinct. Scientists named one new frog the cocoa frog because of the color of its skin. The cocoa frog lives in the tall trees in this rainforest.

New kinds of animals are also being found in the oceans. A new shark was discovered in the Atlantic

Ocean, off the coast of South Carolina. The new shark, called the Carolina hammerhead, looks like a hammerhead shark, but it has fewer bones. A new kind of small ocean creature was also discovered in underwater caves in the Pacific Ocean, off the coast near California. The creature looks like a see-through shrimp, and it is only 3.3 millimeters long.

In Turkey, a country in the Middle East, scientists have found a new species of wood scorpion. Scorpions are poisonous animals that usually live in dry environments. The new scorpion, though, lives in humid environments and hides under rocks and in garden walls. It is small and mostly harmless to humans.

When so many animal species are in danger of becoming extinct, finding new ones is exciting. However, scientists continue to try to save endangered

animals. Many animals—both known and unknown—may contribute to the earth in ways science doesn't even understand yet.



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Save the World

A little change can make a big difference.

That chocolate pudding you had for dessert was delicious! You lick the lid, and you're ready to throw out the container—along with the plastic spoon. Stop right there! You can recycle that spoon!

Recycling is the practice of using items or materials again. That cuts down on the amount of waste on the planet. Americans recycle much of their garbage. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the United States recycles more than 30 percent of its waste.

In 1999, recycling kept more than 64 tons of material from ending up in landfills. But there is still more that can be done.

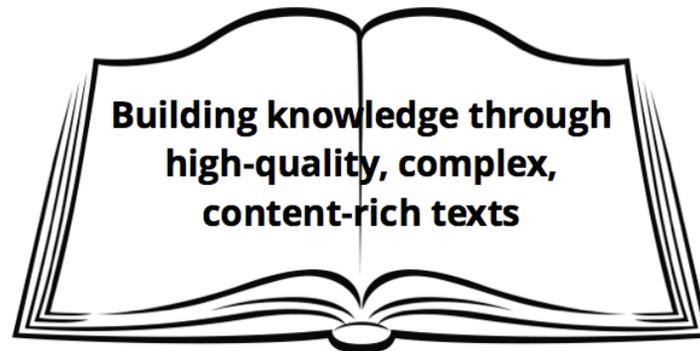
There are several ways to recycle around the home. If your community has a curbside pickup program, you can leave recyclable materials outside. The materials are then collected and brought to recycling centers. Another option is to take recyclable items to a refund center. For example, you can take many types of cans to can-return machines at supermarkets. Drop in the cans and you receive a small amount of money for each one.

It is easy to separate recyclable items from other trash. Paper, plastic bottles, and aluminum cans can usually be recycled. To make it easy, keep separate recycling bins in various places in your home. If you are writing in your room and have scrap paper, you can toss it into a recycling bin instead of throwing it out.

Five Easy Ways to Go Green

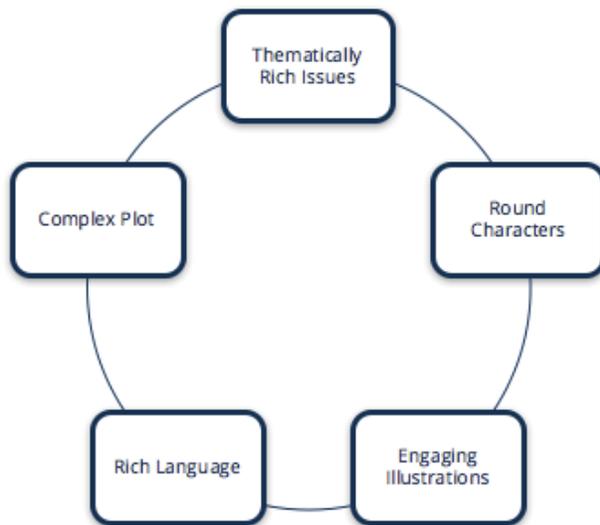
- **Plant a tree.** You can gather seeds, or you can buy a tree to plant. Trees help give us oxygen, which we need in order to live. Visit arborday.org for more information.
- **Reuse plasticware.** If you use plastic forks, knives, or spoons during meals, wash them and then use them again the next day. You will have less garbage, and you won't need to spend as much money on utensils.
- **Turn off the lights when you leave a room.** If no one is in a room, why keep it lit? Turn off lights, televisions, and other power-using devices when you don't need them. You will save energy.
- **Donate old clothes.** When clothing doesn't fit anymore, don't just throw it out. Donate the clothing to someone who needs it. Visit salvationarmyusa.org. You will not only cut down on waste but also help someone who might be unable to afford clothes.
- **Return cell phone batteries.** Cell phone batteries contain chemicals that can pollute air and water. Find out whether the phone store has a recycling program; if not, ask the employees whether they know of a program that collects the batteries. Visit recyclewirelessphones.com for more information.

High-Quality and Content-Rich Texts



Discuss

Which characteristics are the same for both literary and informational text?



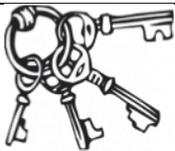
- Does the text contain **new** information that students likely don't already know?
- Does the text **build background knowledge** that will help students comprehend later texts and experiences?
- Does the text contain information that is **useful** in the real world?
- Does the text contain information that is **relevant** to students' needs or interests? Does it help them **answer questions** or **solve problems**?
- Does the text contain information that helps students **connect** their own experiences and situations to others and to the broader world?
- Is the content of the text **authentic** and does it lend itself to **further research, exploration, and inquiry**?

Reflection

Revisit the list of read aloud texts you generated at the beginning of the module. Then, answer the questions below.

- Considering the information on text complexity and quality, would you still choose those same texts in the future?

- How will this information on text complexity and quality impact the way you select texts for future read alouds?



Key Idea #7

Early grades teachers should purposefully select read aloud texts that are complex, high-quality, and content-rich. These kinds of texts support complex interactions with text, develop a love for and interest in reading, and build students' knowledge and vocabulary.