Module 2

Selecting High-Quality and Appropriately-Complex Texts for Read Aloud

[TAB PAGE]

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

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

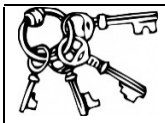
Link to Tennessee Academic Standards

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.

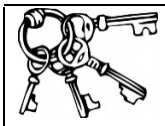
TEAM Alignment

- 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.

The Implications of Text Complexity

Text complexity is a measure of how challenging a text is for a child at their particular grade level.

"Vary the difficulty levels. Past claims about the instructional level made it sound like you would harm kids if you taught them in books that were "too easy" or "too hard" and so the notion was that all the productive reading work would be done at the instructional level. I suspect that learning to negotiate the complexities of text is probably more like learning to run faster or to swim farther. Athletes don't do all of their training at one level of difficulty or intensity. They vary routines to build strength and stamina, and I think we should do the same with reading. The texts we use to teach reading should vary in difficulty and length—with kids reading some hard texts, followed by easier ones, followed by even more difficult ones. Text difficulty levels should go up and down, but the average difficulty over time should climb. And don't be afraid to go beyond the level that your grade level is supposed to reach: if third-graders are supposed to learn to read 820 Lexiles, 820 is not the highest level text we should introduce. Be prepared to give more help when more help is needed."

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Retrieved from http://www.shanahanonliteracy.com/2016/03/six-pieces-of-advice-on-teaching-with.html

Text Complexity Matters

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 the elementary grades important?

- How can we expose children to complex texts in ways that are developmentally appropriate and accessible to all students, regardless of their reading level?

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 disproportionally 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 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 rereadings. 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

Read-Alouds and the Reading-Speaking-Listening Link

Generally, teachers will encourage children in the upper elementary grades to read texts independently and reflect on them in writing. However, children in the early grades—particularly kindergarten through grade 3—benefit from participating in rich, structured conversations with an adult in response to written texts that are read aloud, orally comparing and contrasting as well as analyzing and synthesizing (Bus, Van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Feitelstein, Goldstein, Iraqui, & Share, 1993; Feitelstein, Kita, & Goldstein, 1986; Whitehurst et al., 1988). The Standards acknowledge the importance of this aural dimension of early learning by including a robust set of K–3 Speaking and Listening standards and by offering in Appendix B an extensive number of read-aloud text exemplars appropriate for K–1 and for grades 2–3.

Because, as indicated above, children's listening comprehension likely outpaces reading comprehension until the middle school years, it is particularly important that students in the earliest grades build knowledge through being read to as well as through reading, with the balance gradually shifting to reading independently. By reading a story or nonfiction selection aloud, teachers allow children to experience written language without the burden of decoding, granting them access to content that they may not be able to read and understand by themselves. Children are then free to focus their mental energy on the words and ideas presented in the text, and they will eventually be better prepared to tackle rich written content on their own. Whereas most titles selected for kindergarten and grade 1 will need to be read aloud exclusively, some titles selected for grades 2–5 may be appropriate for read-alouds as well as for reading independently. Reading aloud to students in the upper grades should not, however, be used as a substitute for independent reading by students; read-alouds at this level should supplement and enrich what students are able to read by themselves.

- Appendix A: Research Supporting Key Elements of the Standards

"If we are always reading aloud something that is more difficult than children can read themselves then when they come to that book later, or books like that, they will be able to read them – which is why even a fifth grade teacher, even a tenth grade teacher, should still be reading to children aloud. There is always something that is too intractable for kids to read on their own."

– Mem Fox

Research Supporting Read Alouds

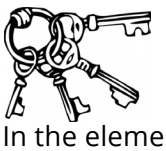
"Specifically, reading aloud builds oral language and vocabulary, listening comprehension - a precursor to reading comprehension - content knowledge, concepts about print and alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness. **Equally important, reading aloud is one way we enculturate young children into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

- Hoffman, Teal & Yodata, 2015

Activity:

Individually, list 3-5 books you read aloud to students this past year and the reason(s) why you chose each book, using the chart below. Then, in your group, use the lists each member created to generate a list of books. Write the titles of 3 - 5 books discussed and reasons for selecting them on chart paper. Be prepared to share.

Read Aloud Book Titles	Reason for Selecting



Key Idea #4

In the elementary 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 read alouds create opportunities for children to engage with complex texts that would otherwise be inaccessible.

Text Complexity Measures

Text complexity is measured by three interdependent dimensions: 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 quantitative and qualitative 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.

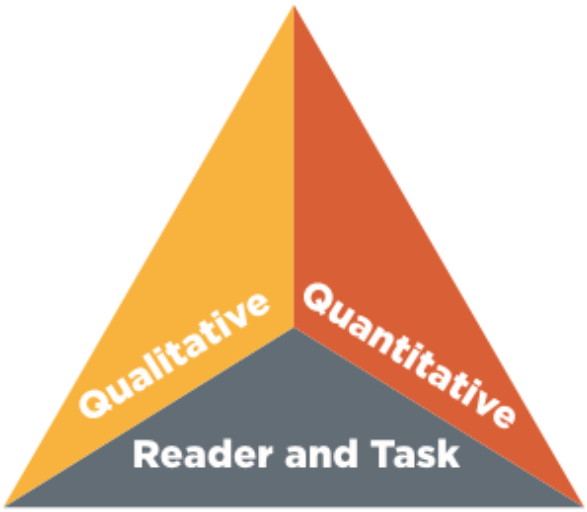
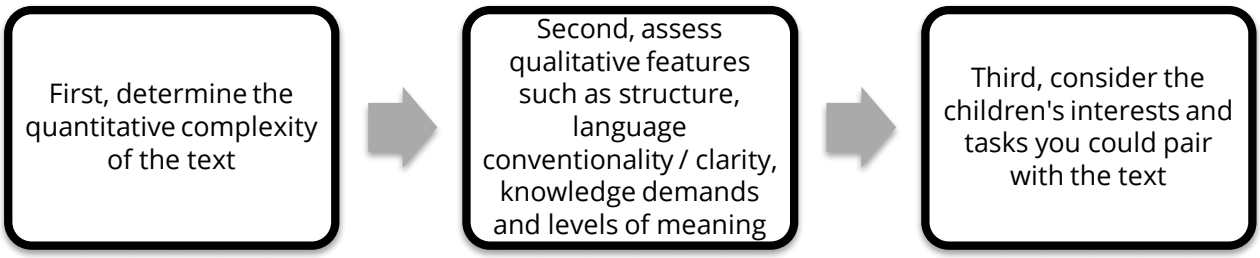


Figure 1: The Standards' Model of Text Complexity

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

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, and 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.

Updated Text Complexity Grade Bands and Associated Ranges from Multiple Measures[1]

Common Core Band	ATOS	Degrees of Reading Power®	Flesch-Kincaid[2]	The Lexile Framework®	Reading Maturity	Text Evaluator
2nd – 3rd	2.75 – 5.14	42 – 54	1.98 – 5.34	420 – 820	3.53 – 6.13	100 – 590
4th – 5th	4.97 – 7.03	52 – 60	4.51 – 7.73	740 – 1010	5.42 – 7.92	405 – 720
6th – 8th	7.00 – 9.98	57 – 67	6.51 – 10.34	925 – 1185	7.04 – 9.57	550 – 940
9th – 10th	9.67 – 12.01	62 – 72	8.32 – 12.12	1050 – 1335	8.41 – 10.81	750 – 1125
11th – CCR	11.20 – 14.10	67 – 74	10.34 – 14.2	1185 – 1385	9.57 – 12.00	890-1360

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

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
Graphics are complex, provide an independent source of information, and essential to understanding a text	Graphics are simple and supplementary

- ***Language Conventionality 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. You can use the *Questions for Reader and Task Considerations* to aid this process.

Some texts for pre-K, Kindergarten, and Grade 1 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.

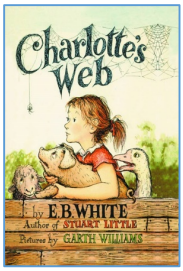
- Retrieved from www.ccsso.org/Navigating_Text_Complexity

Example: Text Complexity Analysis

***Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White**

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.



680L

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.

2-3 grade band	420-820L
4-5 grade band	740-1010L
6-8 grade band	925-1185L

Qualitative Measure

Meaning – Very Complex The big understanding of this text is how rich and satisfying friendship can be. Students will be able to access this main idea, one within the realm of their experience at some level. The challenge is the depth of how this message is communicated. There are many, many layers of meaning in this text, which is why it is loved by kids and adults.	**Text Structure – Slightly Complex** Straight-forward structure: chronological, separated into chapters by events. Chapter titles help in keeping track of events; they clearly identify main event/mood of each chapter. A few simple illustrations illuminate key events.
Language Features – Very Complex Significant vocabulary demands in this text. Some domain-specific words that describe life on the farm (trough) and spiders (spinnerets, egg sac) but predominantly rich Tier II vocabulary that will repeat across many texts (injustice, satisfying, progress, gratified).	**Knowledge Demands – Moderately Complex** Some knowledge of farm life helps in understanding the setting, but is not essential to have prior to reading the book. The text itself helps you build knowledge about life on a farm, spiders, and the seasons.

- Adapted from achievethecore.org

Text Complexity: Qualitative Measures Rubric[1]

LITERATURE

Text Title_____ Text Author_____

	Exceedingly Complex	Very Complex	Moderately Complex	Slightly Complex
TEXT STRUCTURE	○ **Organization:** Is intricate with regard to such elements as point of view, time shifts, multiple characters, storylines and detail ○ **Use of Graphics:** If used, illustrations or graphics are essential for understanding the meaning of the text	○ **Organization:** May include subplots, time shifts and more complex characters ○ **Use of Graphics:** If used, illustrations or graphics support or extend the meaning of the text	○ **Organization:** May have two or more storylines and occasionally be difficult to predict ○ **Use of Graphics:** If used, a range of illustrations or graphics support selected parts of the text	○ **Organization:** Is clear, chronological or easy to predict ○ **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
LANGUAGE FEATURES	○ **Conventionality:** Dense and complex; contains abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language ○ **Vocabulary:** Complex, generally unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic language; may be ambiguous or purposefully misleading ○ **Sentence Structure:** Mainly complex sentences with several subordinate clauses or phrases; sentences often contain multiple concepts	○ **Conventionality:** Fairly complex; contains some abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language ○ **Vocabulary:** Fairly complex language that is sometimes unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic ○ **Sentence Structure:** Many complex sentences with several subordinate phrases or clauses and transition words	○ **Conventionality:** Largely explicit and easy to understand with some occasions for more complex meaning ○ **Vocabulary:** Mostly contemporary, familiar, conversational; rarely unfamiliar or overly academic ○ **Sentence Structure:** Primarily simple and compound sentences, with some complex constructions	○ **Conventionality:** Explicit, literal, straightforward, easy to understand ○ **Vocabulary:** Contemporary, familiar, conversational language ○ **Sentence Structure:** Mainly simple sentences
MEANING	○ **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	○ **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	○ **Meaning:** Multiple levels of meaning clearly distinguished from each other; theme is clear but may be conveyed with some subtlety	○ **Meaning:** One level of meaning; theme is obvious and revealed early in the text.
KNOWLEDGE DEMANDS	○ **Life Experiences:** Explores complex, sophisticated or abstract themes; experiences portrayed are distinctly different from the common reader ○ **Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge:** Many references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements	○ **Life Experiences:** Explores themes of varying levels of complexity or abstraction; experiences portrayed are uncommon to most readers ○ **Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge:** Some references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements	○ **Life Experiences:** Explores several themes; experiences portrayed are common to many readers ○ **Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge:** Few references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements	○ **Life Experiences:** Explores a single theme; experiences portrayed are everyday and common to most readers ○ **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	Slightly Complex
TEXT STRUCTURE	○ **Organization:** Connections between an extensive range of ideas, processes or events are deep, intricate and often ambiguous; organization is intricate or discipline-specific ○ **Text Features**: If used, are essential in understanding content ○ **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	○ **Organization:** Connections between an expanded range ideas, processes or events are often implicit or subtle; organization may contain multiple pathways or exhibit some discipline-specific traits ○ **Text Features**: If used, directly enhance the reader's understanding of content ○ **Use of Graphics:** If used, graphics, tables, charts, etc. support or are integral to understanding the text	○ **Organization:** Connections between some ideas or events are implicit or subtle; organization is evident and generally sequential or chronological ○ **Text Features**: If used, enhance the reader's understanding of content ○ **Use of Graphics:** If used, graphic, pictures, tables, and charts, etc. are mostly supplementary to understanding the text	○ **Organization:** Connections between ideas, processes or events are explicit and clear; organization of text is chronological, sequential or easy to predict ○ **Text Features**: If used, help the reader navigate and understand content but are not essential to understanding content. ○ **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
LANGUAGE FEATURES	○ **Conventionality**: Dense and complex; contains considerable abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language ○ **Vocabulary:** Complex, generally unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic language; may be ambiguous or purposefully misleading ○ **Sentence Structure:** Mainly complex sentences with several subordinate clauses or phrases and transition words; sentences often contains multiple concepts	○ **Conventionality**: Fairly complex; contains some abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language ○ **Vocabulary:** Fairly complex language that is sometimes unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic ○ **Sentence Structure:** Many complex sentences with several subordinate phrases or clauses and transition words	○ **Conventionality**: Largely explicit and easy to understand with some occasions for more complex meaning ○ **Vocabulary:** Mostly contemporary, familiar, conversational; rarely overly academic ○ **Sentence Structure:** Primarily simple and compound sentences, with some complex constructions	○ **Conventionality**: Explicit, literal, straightforward, easy to understand ○ **Vocabulary:** Contemporary, familiar, conversational language ○ **Sentence Structure:** Mainly simple sentences
PURPOSE	○ **Purpose:** Subtle and intricate, difficult to determine; includes many theoretical or abstract elements	○ **Purpose:** Implicit or subtle but fairly easy to infer; more theoretical or abstract than concrete	○ **Purpose:** Implied but easy to identify based upon context or source	○ **Purpose:** Explicitly stated, clear, concrete, narrowly focused
KNOWLEDGE DEMANDS	○ **Subject Matter Knowledge:** Relies on extensive levels of discipline-specific or theoretical knowledge; includes a range of challenging abstract concepts ○ **Intertextuality:** Many references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.	○ **Subject Matter Knowledge:** Relies on moderate levels of discipline-specific or theoretical knowledge; includes a mix of recognizable ideas and challenging abstract concepts ○ **Intertextuality:** Some references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.	○ **Subject Matter Knowledge:** Relies on common practical knowledge and some discipline-specific content knowledge; includes a mix of simple and more complicated, abstract ideas ○ **Intertextuality:** Few references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc	○ **Subject Matter Knowledge:** Relies on everyday, practical knowledge; includes simple, concrete ideas ○ **Intertextuality:** No references or allusions to other texts, or outside ideas, theories, etc.

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 TN 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 mulitple 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?

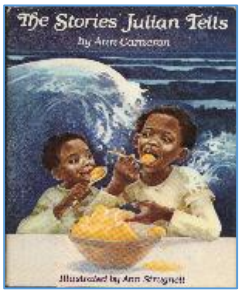
- Retrieved from www.ccsso.org/Navigating_Text_Complexity

Example: Text Complexity Analysis

***The Stories Julian Tells* by Ann Cameron**

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 of home page. Most texts will have a Lexile measure in this database.



520L

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6-8 grade band	925-1185L

2. Qualitative Features

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

Levels of Meaning/Purpose – Moderately Complex The text is a collection of stories, each tying back to the theme in a slightly different way. Some of the stories are more surface level and about how Julian gets in and out of trouble, while others have more layered meaning about growing up and the importance of family. The sophisticated layers emerge as the story progresses.	**Structure – Very Complex** The narrative structure of the text is familiar to students. However, each story provides its own plot and information about Julian, whose character develops over the course of the text. Each story must be synthesized to determine the various plots and come to an overall conclusion about Julian and his family.
Language Conventionality/Clarity – Very Complex Figurative language is used throughout the stories. Understanding the use of figurative language may be difficult for some students. Some academic vocabulary is used, but mostly it is conversational. The sentences are varied but not overly complex.	**Theme and Knowledge Demands – Slightly Complex** Getting in trouble and recognizing the importance of maintaining a positive relationship with family are common to most readers. The context of this text (the daily life of a child) requires little special background.

3. Reader and Task Considerations

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

My students will enjoy reading about a boy, close to their age, who gets in and out of trouble.

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

The use of figurative language will challenge some of my students. The narrative structure of the text will be familiar, but some students may have trouble with the notion of a collection of stories, all tying back to a main theme but in slightly different ways. Also, it may be difficult for some students to separate Julian's imagination from Julian's reality (i.e., determining when he is embellishing).

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

My students will learn about figurative language and how it can be used to enhance storytelling. The sophisticated layers of meaning in the text center on the trials and excitement of growing up and the need of a supportive family, which will help students grapple with their identity and place in their family.

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

My class will complete this text at the beginning of the school year. I will pull in other texts that show how books are important for learning about ourselves and others. We will also discuss how storytelling can be a way to learn about other cultures, pass on family history and traditions, and build a strong identity.

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

Students should identify the central message of each chapter, make connections across the chapters to the theme of the text, and map these connections as we read. Also, because Julian is such a strong central character in the story, students will create a character map to illustrate his actions and determine how they help the reader identify his character's traits. This text will be great for discussing the structure of narrative writing. Students could write their own story in the style of Julian pulling inspiration from another text in the set.

- Retrieved and adapted from http://www.ccsso.org/Navigating_Text_Complexity/Get_the_Skinny.html

Practice: Evaluating Text Complexity

Read Chapters 1 and 2 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
6th-8th Band	925-1185L

** 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.

Levels of Meaning/Purpose	**Structure**
Language Conventionality/Clarity	**Theme and Knowledge Demands**

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

- Template modified from What Makes This Read Aloud Complex?
Retrieved from achievethecore.org

The Velveteen Rabbit

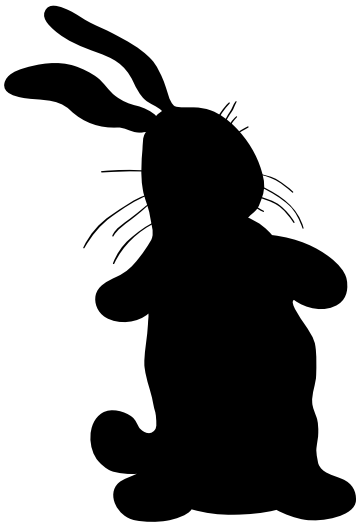
or

How Toys Become Real

---

by Margery Williams Bianco

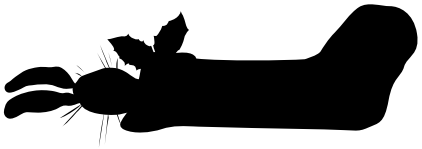
Edited, with an introduction, notes and
comprehension questions,
by Ralph Mason



Books *for* Learning

Chapter 1

Christmas Morning



There was once a velveteen[1] rabbit, and in the beginning he was really splendid[2]. He was fat and bunchy, as a rabbit should be; his coat was spotted brown and white, he had real thread whiskers, and his ears were lined with pink sateen[3]. On Christmas morning, when he sat wedged in the top of the Boy's stocking, with a sprig of holly[4] between his paws, the effect was charming.

There were other things in the stocking, nuts and oranges and a toy engine[5], 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 parcels[6], 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 snubbed[7] 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 toys[1] 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 tone[2] from them and never missed an opportunity of referring to his rigging[3] in technical terms[4]. 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 circles[5]. Even Timothy, the jointed wooden lion, who was made by the disabled soldiers, and should have had broader views[6], put on airs[7] 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 Horse[8].

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 succession[9] 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 fender[1], before Nana[2] 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.

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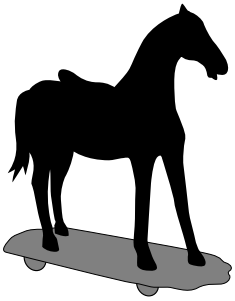
1 *fender*—a little fence in front of the fireplace.

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

Chapter 2

Spring Time



There was a person called Nana who ruled the nursery. Sometimes she took no notice of the playthings lying about, and sometimes, for no reason whatever, she went swooping about like a great wind and hustled[1] them away in cupboards. She called this 'tidying up,' and the playthings all hated it, especially the tin ones. The Rabbit didn't mind it so much, for wherever he was thrown he came down soft.

One evening, when the Boy was going to bed, he couldn't find the china dog that always slept with him. Nana was in a hurry, and it was too much trouble to hunt for china dogs at bedtime, so she simply looked about her, and seeing that the toy cupboard door stood open, she made a swoop.

'Here,' she said, 'take your old Bunny! He'll do to sleep with you!' And she dragged the Rabbit out by one ear, and put him into the Boy's arms.

That night, and for many nights after, the Velveteen Rabbit slept in the Boy's bed. At first he found it rather uncomfortable, for the Boy hugged him very tight, and sometimes he rolled over on him, and sometimes he pushed him so far under the pillow that the Rabbit could scarcely breathe. And he missed, too, those long moonlight hours in the nursery, when all the house was silent, and his talks with the Skin Horse. But very soon he grew to like it, for the Boy used to talk to him, and made nice tunnels for him under the bedclothes that he said were like the burrows the real rabbits lived in. And they had splendid games together, in whispers, when Nana had gone away to

1 *hustled*—quickly put.

her supper and left the night-light burning on the mantelpiece[1]. And when the Boy dropped off to sleep, the Rabbit would snuggle down close under his little warm chin and dream, with the Boy's hands clasped close round him all night long.

And so time went on, and the little Rabbit was very happy—so happy that he never noticed how his beautiful velveteen fur was getting shabbier and shabbier, and his tail becoming unsewn, and all the pink rubbed off his nose where the Boy had kissed him.

Spring came, and they had long days in the garden, for wherever the Boy went the Rabbit went too. He had rides in the wheelbarrow, and picnics on the grass, and lovely fairy huts built for him under the raspberry canes[2] behind the flower border. And once, when the Boy was called away suddenly to go out to tea, the Rabbit was left out on the lawn until long after dusk, and Nana had to come and look for him with the candle because the Boy couldn't go to sleep unless he was there. He was wet through with the dew and quite earthy from diving into the burrows the Boy had made for him in the flower bed, and Nana grumbled as she rubbed him off with a corner of her apron.

'You must have your old Bunny!' she said. 'Fancy all that fuss for a toy!'

The Boy sat up in bed and stretched out his hands.

'Give me my Bunny!' he said. 'You mustn't say that. He isn't a toy. He's REAL!'

When the little Rabbit heard that he was happy, for he knew that what the Skin Horse had said was true at last. The nursery magic had happened to him, and he was a toy no longer. He was Real. The Boy himself had said it.

That night he was almost too happy to sleep, and so much love stirred in his little sawdust heart that it almost burst. And into his boot-button eyes, that had long ago lost their polish, there came a look of wisdom and beauty, so that even Nana noticed it next morning when she picked him up, and said, 'I declare if that old Bunny hasn't got quite a knowing expression[3]!'

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1 *mantelpiece*—a little shelf over the fireplace.
2 *raspberry canes*—the stems of the raspberry plants.
3 *expression*—look in his face.

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.

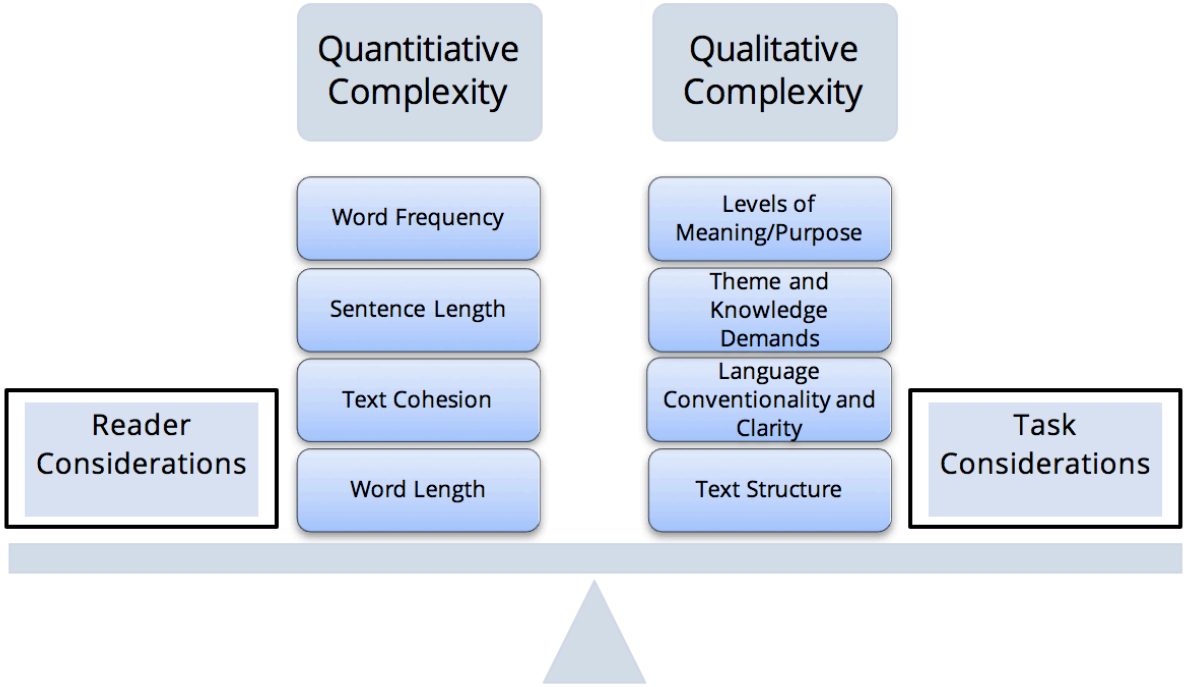
Likewise, teachers must be intentional in selecting read aloud texts that diversify reader experience *within* each measure of complexity. Because it is impossible for a single text to meet every complexity measure, teachers must knowingly select a range of texts in order to provide opportunities for 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
• 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.	• 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?

Third Grade Text Set: The Stories Julian Tells

Unit Focus: Students learn that stories and books are important for learning about themselves and others. This unit allows students to learn how storytelling can be a way to learn about other cultures, pass on family history and traditions, and build a strong identity. Putting the same character in different situations can teach readers about how motivations, feelings, and a person's actions affect events and other people. Students will also learn that sharing stories can build relationships and connect them to others.

Literary Texts

1. The Stories Julian Tells, Ann Cameron 520L
2. The Bee Tree, Patricia Polacco AD680L
3. The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore, William Joyce AD650L
4. "I Learn Firefighting" from More Stories Julian Tells, Ann Cameron 520L

Informational Text

5. "A Page is a Door," Remy Charlip
6. My Librarian is a Camel: How Books Are Brought to Children Around the World, Margariet Ruurs 980L

Nonprint Texts

7. The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris [video]
8. The Red Book, Barbara Lehman

Topics, Themes, and Text Use:

The topics covered in this text set are reading and storytelling. The themes addressed are the joy of reading and the importance of storytelling and reading to learn lessons and make connections. Text use is determining central idea or message, theme development through characters and setting, vocabulary and distinguishing between literal and nonliteral language, and comparison of points of view.

from Louisiana Department of Education: Louisiana Believes

Fourth/Fifth Grade Text Set: Earth's Precious Resource

Topic/Subject: What can we learn about the world's water supply?

Books

1. A Drop Around the World, Barbara Shaw McKinney 820L
2. Hydrology: The Study of Water, Christine Taylor-Butler 790L

Articles

3. "For The World's Poor, Drinking Water Can Kill," Addie Moorfoot 760L
4. "Researchers Discover Huge Underground Water Reserve in Africa," Meera Dolasia1070L
5. "Water, Water, Everywhere!" 1010L

Other Media

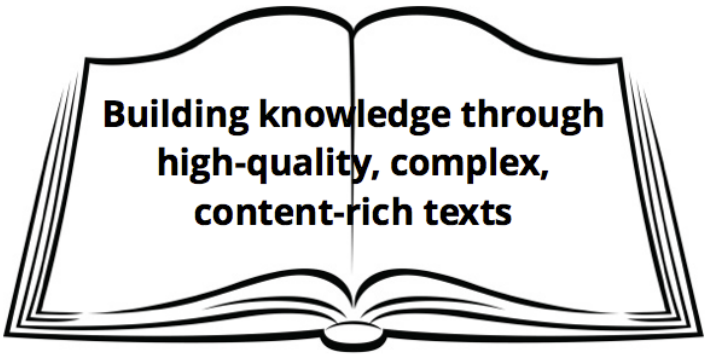
6. "The Water Cycle" [video]
7. Millions Lack Fresh Water [infographic]
8. What is Your Water Footprint? [interactive calculator]

Rationale and suggested sequence for reading

In the first article, "For the World's Poor, Drinking Water Can Kill," students are introduced to the impact that lack of clean drinking water has on people all around the world. The next resource, "Millions Lack Safe Water," is an interactive infographic that provides recent facts and data about the world's current water shortage. Students then watch the animated video, "The Water Cycle," which simply explains the basic process of the water cycle. At this point students may wonder how, with a never-ending water cycle, we still have a shortage of water for so many people. The next three resources (one article and two books) expose students to the many sources of usable and unusable water all over the world. Students then begin to explore solutions by reading the most complex article in the set, "Researchers Discover Huge Underground Water Reserve in Africa." The expert pack culminates with an interactive website from National Geographic, which engages students in considering their own impact on solving the worlds' water shortage.

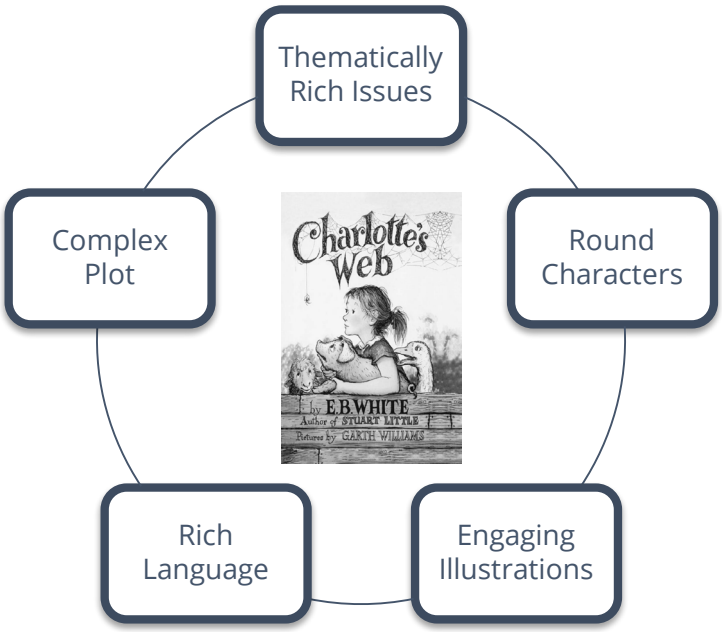
- Retrieved from Achieve the Core text sets

High-Quality Texts



"Essentially, some children's books provide more to think and talk about than others. To help children process complex text in read aloud discussions, it is important for teachers to first choose texts that can support complex interpretations."

- Hoffman, Teale and Yodota, 2015



1. Thematically Rich Issues

- A text theme is broad and encompasses plot, character, dialogue, and setting. Themes are sometimes presented as a moral, but most often are subtle and abstract, leaving much room for reader interpretation and engagement.

In Charlotte's Web, the surface story is about Wilbur, a farm pig who is befriended by a Spider, Charlotte. But, underlying that surface story are the timeless lessons of friendship, love, courage, and change.

2. Round Characters

- Characters that are dynamic and changing. They think, act, feel, and speak in response to the story context.

The characters in Charlotte's Web present powerful opportunities for readers to speculate about how others might feel. Ex: Templeton's unusual relationship with Wilbur allows Charlotte to manipulate him into helping her. Also, the characters in the book, especially Wilbur and Fern, change and grow with their experiences.

3. Engaging Illustrations

- High quality picture books weave illustrations and text so that they are interdependent. Transmediation is the relationship between text and illustrations and it requires readers to construct and reconstruct meaning from text to image and back.

In Charlotte's Web, complex illustrations are intermingled with the text to create a visual image of Wilbur's world.

4. Rich Language

- High quality literature uses rich, mature, and figurative language.

"Nobody, of the hundreds of people that had visited the Fair, knew that a grey spider had played the most important part of all. No one was with her when she died."

"Wilbur often thought of Charlotte. A few strands of her old web still hung in the doorway. Every day Wilbur would stand and look at the torn, empty web, and a lump would come to his throat. No one had ever had such a friend—so affectionate, so loyal, and so skillful."

5. Complex Plot

- Plot is defined as the series of events that occur in the narrative. A complex plot inspires readers to find out what will happen next.

The plot in Charlotte's Web is sequential in order, however, underlying the main plot of saving Wilbur's life, there are subplots around Charlotte as she ages and prepares to die, Fern as she grows up, and the friendship that develops overtime between Charlotte and Wilbur.

Additional Considerations for High-Quality Literature

Theme	High-quality texts center on themes that children enjoy or that are important for students to think about or learn. For example: • *Darcy and Gran Don't Like Babies* by Jane Cutler – helps students adjust to life with new siblings • *Officer Buckle and Gloria* by Peggy Rathmann – teaches the importance of friendship • *Hooway for Wodney Wat* by Helen Lester – reminds students that our unique differences are special and powerful • _____ • _____ • _____
Characters	High-quality texts include protagonists who are inspiring, model positive traits, are dynamic and interesting, and remind students of themselves. For example: • *Wilma Unlimited* by Kathleen Krull – the inspiring story of Wilma Rudolph, who overcame crippling polio to win three gold medals at the Olympics • *Akiko on the Planet Smoo* by Mark Criley – a science fiction thriller for young readers, where Akiko transforms dynamically from an ordinary girl into an intergalactic hero • *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman – young girls and African American students can be inspired by Grace's perseverance and her desire to break stereotypes • _____ • _____ • _____
Plot	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. • *Doctor De Soto* by William Steig – readers are on edge wondering if mouse-dentist Doctor De Soto should trust his fox patient • *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* by Chris Van Allsburg – fourteen black-and-white pictures accompanied by a title and caption invite children to make up their own stories • _____ • _____ • _____

Setting	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. • *The Legend of the Bluebonnet* by Tomie DePaola – a folktale about the Comanche tribe and the history of the bluebonnet flower • *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll – a fantastical world of interesting creatures • _____ • _____
Language	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. • *Skippyjon Jones* by Judy Schachner – includes many Tier II words, such as *scolded, bounce, exclaimed*, and *junk*, as well as a playful rhyme scheme, monolog, and dialog. • *The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams Bianco – text introduces children to language from a different time period; includes Tier II vocabulary such as *splendid, rustling*, and *snubbed*; and includes interesting sentences and phrasing, such as "*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*." • _____ • _____
Illustrations	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.) • *The Polar Express* by Chris Van Allsburg • *Mirette on the High Wire* by Emily Arnold McCully • _____ • _____

Key Idea #5

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

High-Quality Texts

Synopsis:

"This book of five stories began the ten-book series about Julian Bates, his little brother Huey, and his best friend Gloria.

The first story tells of a very special pudding that Julian's and Huey's father made for their mother. The father promises, "It will taste like a whole raft of lemons, it will taste like a night on the sea." But when it's ready, the boys mustn't eat it, he warns—they must wait till their mother comes home. Then dad goes to take a nap, and the boys guard the pudding from harm.

But the pudding looks so good that they just can't wait—and a little taste turns to a little bigger taste and another, until the pudding is decimated, and the scared boys run to hide under the bed. How their father teaches the boys a lesson—the lesson that mistakes can be repaired—has made this a favorite of children the world over.

Other stories in the book are about catalog cats—cat that, Julian claims, jump out of seed catalogs; a fig tree Julian steals leaves from in the hope of growing strong; a baby tooth that won't fall out; and Julian's happiness in making a new friend—only a little embarrassed that she's a girl.

I always thought of Julian as Everychild, having experiences that belong to children the world over. This book has a richness of language that children love, and its black-and-white drawings are some of the most beautiful I've seen in a children's book."

- Retrieved from http://www.anncameronbooks.com/prize-winners/the-stories-julian-tells.html

Thematically Rich Issues:

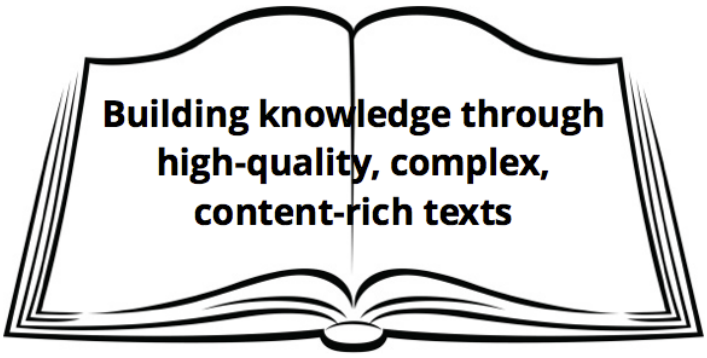
Round Characters:

Engaging Illustrations:

Rich Language:

Complex Plot:

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.

- 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.

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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

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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.

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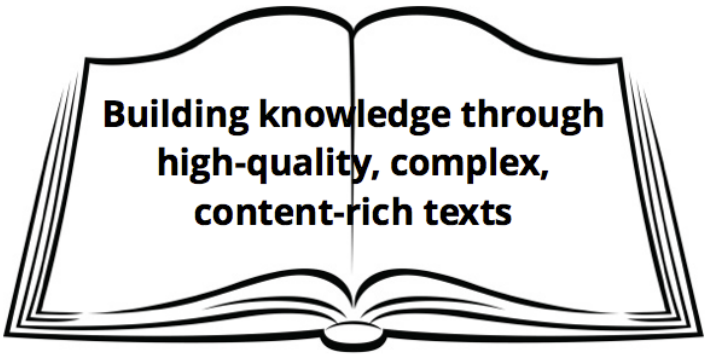
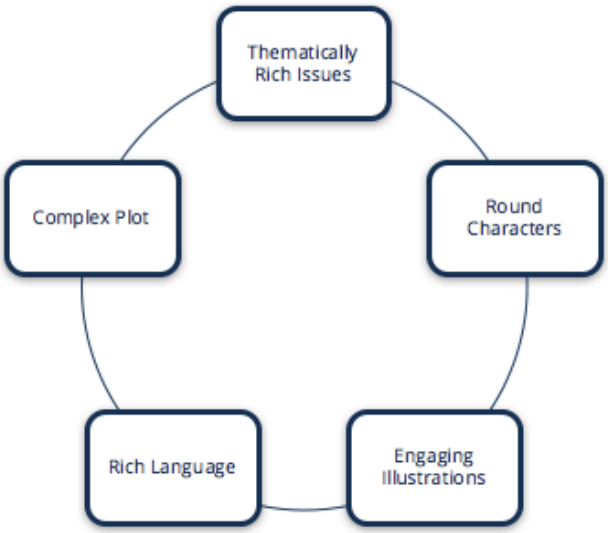
High-Quality and Content-Rich Texts



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?
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- 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**?

Text Selection: Putting It All Together

Discussion

Think about the following key ideas:

- All students need regular practice with high-quality, appropriately-complex texts. In the early grades, the primary method for engaging students with these kinds of texts is through read alouds.
- In the elementary 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 read alouds create opportunities for children to engage with complex texts that would otherwise be inaccessible.
- Engaging students with high-quality texts makes reading enjoyable and fosters a love of reading.
- Engaging students with content-rich texts builds knowledge and invites students to pursue interests and questions.

How would you explain to another teacher why it's important to select high-quality, content-rich, complex text for interactive read alouds in the elementary classroom today?

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.