LITERACY LIFESAVER

A Cross-Curricular Resource for Literacy-Rich Instruction

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COMPLEX TEXT: IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

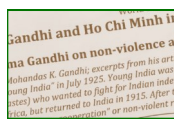### WHAT WOULD TEXT COMPLEXITY LOOK LIKE IN YOUR CLASSROOM?

← Complex text in physics class

Jigsaw with complex text →

←Fishbowl with complex text

Choosing Primary Sources →

HOW CAN STUDENTS MAKE MEANING OF COMPLEX TEXT?

A Different Kind of Study Guide:
Three-Tiered Reading Guide

Straight to the Meaning:
Moving from Knowledge to Evaluation Using Complex Text

Creating the Environment for Meaning-Making

39 Strategies to Get You Started.

Train students to internalize these practices by gradually   removing scaffolds throughout the semester.

TRAIN STUDENTS IN HABITS OF MIND

Students used to multitasking and hopping from link to link will have difficulty tackling complex texts.Train them in these Habits of Mind. Read more
- A willingness to probe
- The capacity for uninterrupted thinking
- A receptivity to deep thinking
- The patience for slow reading

Timothy Shanahan talks about the shifts in thinking that teachers make when they use complex text

Teachers Ask:

Seriously, Is This Important?

Teachers have many demands on their time— everything from learning new digital platforms to managing behaviors. Most of us work under the mantra, *If it ain't broke, don't fix it.* So… the skeptics among us ask: Do I *really* need to take the time to change my lessons to include student reading of complex text?

Short answer: **YES!** And here's **The Researched Why:**
- High-school graduates who enter the workforce now need the same reading skills that graduates who enter college do. (American Diploma Project, 2004)
- Students lose ground in their reading skills during grades 9-10. Grade 8 students are more "on track" for success on the ACT Reading Test than they are in grade 10. (ACT Research, 2005)
- Over the past few decades, reading levels of high school texts have gotten progressively easier while reading levels for college reading assignments have increased (College Board research report, 2005).
- Language (i.e., literacy) probably developed primarily as a means of thinking. While this may be a simplification of Noam Chomsky's body of research, it's not a great leap to the point that literacy skills are crucial for learning.

In the past decade or more, career and college reading has constituted a very limited portion of what students encounter in preparatory coursework. Our students are **cognitively ill-prepared** to learn by reading. They are **blindsided** when they can't make meaning of the ACT, the SAT, or postsecondary reading tasks. Losing confidence in their abilities, will these young adults turn to easy-to-read resources, such as tweets, that can never capture nuance or subtlety of idea?

Will we then create a cultural poverty of thought that stems from an inability to comprehend complex text?

Literacy is a right, not a privilege. Teaching with complex text may well be a **moral decision.**

> The demands that college, careers, and citizenship place on readers have increased over the past fifty years, while that in K-12 texts have decreased.
> (CCSS, Appendix A)

COMMON CORE STANDARDS FOR LITERACY
STANDARD 10

By the end of grade 12, students will read and comprehend literature, literary nonfiction, social studies texts, scientific texts, and technical subjects texts in the grades 11-CCR [college and career readiness] text complexity band independently and proficiently .

What Makes Text "Complex"?

- **Qualitative Factors** How confusing is the text to read because of the way it is written? Does it have references to people or ideas that aren't explained in the text? Does it have multiple levels of meaning? Is the structure unconventional? Is there dialect or other unusual wordings or spellings? Does it expect a particular level of life experience to appreciate or understand it? More to come next month...

- **Reader and Task Factors** How complex is the learning task that students are doing related to the text? How prepared are students for the complexity of the topic, the vocabulary, the structure, and the format of the text? How prepared are students for the quantitative level of the text? (Stay tuned for upcoming Literacy Lifesaver on this topic.)

- **Quantitative Factors** What is the average syllable count for words? What is the average sentence length? How many sentences are there per x words? **Worry not!** There are formulas developed by multiple researchers for this. The higher the score, the harder the text. These formulas typically assign the scores to US grade levels. See "grade band" in Common Core Standard 10
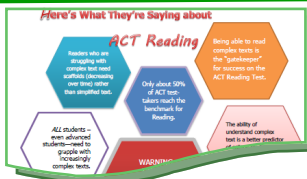
http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf

It's So Easy!
Find the Grade Band for a Text

1. Pull up a digital copy of the primary-source article, op-ed essay, or argument you want to use.
2. Go to https://readability-score.com/
3. Copy and paste the text of the article into the big box (on the left).
4. Look under Grade Levels (on the right).
5. Check the Grade Band. Note: There are 5 different options for formulas. Flesch-Kincaid is very reliable.
6. Too low? Too high? Just right? Make decisions about how best to use this text.

Here's What They Are Saying about Complex Text for ACT Success

Cross-curricula Site of the Month

View it being used to check students' own writing levels.

Find Flesch-Kincaid scores through Microsoft Word