The Thompson TDA Model

Selecting Complex Texts for Text Dependent Analysis (TDA)

The purpose of this resource is to assist educators with selecting appropriately complex text for use with a TDA prompt. The text and prompt can be used as part of a close reading lesson or as a classroom-based text dependent analysis assessment. Either way, it is important for educators to recognize that not every text can be used for the purposes of a text dependent analysis prompt and response.

Quantitative Measures

Educators often think about a Lexile measure when they hear text complexity. Quantitative measures of complexity, including Lexile scores, measure surface features of a text, such as word length, word frequency, number of syllables, and sentence length. Quantitative measures do not provide information about the content or the way in which the ideas are coherent within the text. The table below identifies different grade spans and the Lexile Framework.

Table 1. Text Complexity Grade Bands and Lexile Ranges

Text Complexity Grade Band	Suggested Lexile Range
Grades 2-3	450 L – 790 L
Grades 4-5	770 L – 980 L
Grades 6-8	955 L – 1155 L

Although a text with a Lexile of 1100 is more complex than one with a Lexile of 750, a Lexile measure is not enough information to determine the full complexity of the text as it does not indicate the nature of complexity. For example, John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* has a Lexile score of 630 which would indicate that it would be appropriately complex for students in grades 2-3. However, this text is **not** one that should be used with students in this grade span due to the knowledge demands (migrant workers during the Great Depression) and the themes (innocence, race, age, gender, disabilities, money) that are inherent in this novel. This text has simple vocabulary and short, simple sentences but is complex due to the subtle ideas that are expressed. On the other hand, *Chicken Sunday* by Patricia Polacco, has a Lexile measure of 650 indicating that it is appropriate for students in grades 2-3 which is accurate given the story's message related to trust, love and acceptance.

For these reasons, a quantitative level is is not the only factor that should be used to determine whether a text is appropriate for use with a TDA lesson and prompt. When we refer to text complexity, there are two other factors that must be considered: *qualitative measures* and the *reader and task*.

Qualitative Measures

The qualitative measure provides valuable information about the complexity of the text and whether it is appropriate for use with the grade level students. Longer texts may be more complex than shorter texts, but the challenge may be due to the following features.

1) **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 texts that make many assumptions in one or more of the knowledge demand areas.

2) **Meaning or purpose**
   Literary texts with a single level of meaning tend to be easier to read than those with multiple levels of meaning. Similarly, informational texts with an explicitly stated purpose are generally easier to comprehend than informational texts with an implicit, hidden, or obscure purpose.

3) **Text structure**
   Texts of low complexity tend to have simple, well-marked, and conventional structures, whereas texts of high complexity tend to have complex, implicit, and (in literary texts) unconventional structures. Simple literary texts tend to relate events in chronological order, while complex literary texts make more frequent use of flashbacks, flash-forwards, multiple points of view and other manipulations of time and sequence.

4) **Language features** (including the vocabulary used and sentence structure)
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).

5) **Visual supports**
Visual supports and layout factor into complexity. Illustrations and visual features such as maps, graphs, charts and diagrams can support the reader's understanding, *but* sophisticated visual components may also increase the text's complexity.

The qualitative measure factors must be considered in order for the teacher to make an informed judgment on the difficulty of the text. To determine the qualitative complexity of a text, the teacher should read the text noting the degree to which the above features would impact comprehension for any student reading the text. ~~several~~ qualitative analysis worksheets ~~are~~ available for use when considering a text.

Aspen Institute-text complexity analysis worksheet

Achieve the Core-text complexity rubric for literature

Achieve the Core- text-complexity rubric for informational text

PARCC-text complexity analysis worksheet for literary text

The following excerpt from *Eleven* by Sandra Cisneros has a Lexile measure of 960 and has been analyzed for its qualitative features.

> *What they don't understand about birthdays and what they never tell you is that when you're eleven, you're also ten, and nine, and eight, and seven, and six, and five, and four, and three, and two, and one. And when you wake up on your eleventh birthday you expect to feel eleven, but you don't. You open your eyes and everything's just like yesterday, only it's today. And you don't feel eleven at all. You feel like you're still ten. And you are --underneath the year that makes you eleven.*
>
> *Like some days you might say something stupid, and that's the part of you that's still ten. Or maybe some days you might need to sit on your mama's lap because you're scared, and that's the part of you that's five. And maybe one day when you're all grown up maybe you will need to cry like if you're three, and that's okay. That's what I tell Mama when she's sad and needs to cry. Maybe she's feeling three.*

Because the way you grow old is kind of like an onion or like the rings inside a tree trunk or like my little wooden dolls that fit one inside the other, each year inside the next one. That's how being eleven years old is. You don't feel eleven. Not right away. It takes a few days, weeks even, sometimes even months before you say Eleven when they ask you. And you don't feel smart eleven, not until you're almost twelve. That's the way it is.

Only today I wish I didn't have only eleven years rattling inside me like pennies in a tin Band-Aid box. Today I wish I was one hundred and two instead of eleven because if I was one hundred and two I'd have known what to say when Mrs. Price put the red sweater on my desk. I would've known how to tell her it wasn't mine instead of just sitting there with that look on my face and nothing coming out of my mouth.

Qualitative Features

Knowledge Demands: relatively low complexity
The subject matter deals with common experiences of adolescents caught between being a young and older child. Students should have some experience with point of view and theme.

Meaning/Purpose: medium-high complexity
The most prevalent theme that can be drawn from this text is related to the topic of *Coming of Age*. While Rachel is dealing with a trial or hardship, she deals with the journey of growing up. In this text, the theme is developed by illustrating that the child inside never leaves. There are, however, multiple layers of meaning, focused primarily on the actions and words of a young girl, who is struggling to find her voice.

Text Structure: relatively low complexity
The organization of the text is relatively explicit and generally sequential relaying the events of the classroom situation but also Rachel's subtle thoughts about her birthday. The short story is conveyed through Rachel's perspective.

Language Features: medium-low complexity
Multiple-meaning words, similes, and repetition are included within the text. The sentence structure is not always straightforward.

This text would be appropriate for students in grade 6-8 for either a close reading lesson or a classroom assessment with a TDA prompt, such as:

> *Authors can use characters to reveal a story's theme. Write an essay analyzing how Rachel reveals the theme of Eleven by her reactions to the events in the story. Be sure to use evidence from the text to support your response.*

This prompt expects students to demonstrate the interrelationship between the character and a medium-high complex feature of the text, **meaning/purpose.**

Reader and Task

The final measure of complexity requires teachers to consider what their students bring to the text as readers, knowledge of the complexity of the text (quantitative and qualitative complexity), as well as the task that is being assigned. The more complex the text, the more supports and scaffolds students will need. Text dependent analysis is a complex task by itself. When selecting a complex **text** for use with a complex **task**, such as text dependent analysis, teachers will want to consider many factors associated with this measure. Some specific factors associated with using complex text for a text dependent analysis includes the time of year the text is being used, the number of opportunities students have had with learning the specific reading elements to be analyzed (e.g., types of figurative language, different text structures or genres, author's craft), and the number of opportunities students have had with responding to a text dependent analysis prompt.

Struggling Readers and Complex Texts

Students reading below grade level can still analyze text and demonstrate the underlying components of a text dependent analysis prompt using complex text (text that has the qualitative features that allow for analysis). Although we want students to read grade-level complex text, it is not always appropriate. One place to begin is to select a below grade-level text complex enough for students to read independently and analyze. If struggling students are engaged in a close reading lesson with supports and scaffolds, they will have access to the text. The text identified above, *Eleven*, is an appropriate text for students in grade 6. However, a struggling 7th or 8th grade student would be able to access the text. The themes are strong enough to motivate an older student.

Text Complexity for Analysis Matters

1) Texts that are low in complexity leave little for the reader to infer due to the explicit nature of the information, and consequently, students are unable to analyze the text;
2) Matching readers to texts within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) provides opportunities for students to think and reason at the deepest levels and to gain knowledge of the world around them;
3) Teaching students to read and comprehend complex texts prepares students to be college ready (ACT, 2006. *Reading Between the Lines:* What the ACT reveals about college readiness in reading, p.1).

For more information on the different aspects of text dependent analysis, refer to the series of Text Dependent Analysis Resources by Dr. Jeri Thompson, Center for Assessment.

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