Session Description

The Common Core Standards require students to read texts that increase in complexity and sophistication. For beginning readers, teachers should match texts to students’ instructional needs, while also providing them with opportunities to acquire the vocabulary and structures of more complex texts through listening and speaking activities. Beyond first grade, students will be expected to read challenging texts that will require more teacher support. To accomplish these goals, professional development must provide teachers with a deep understanding of scaffolding theory. This session will examine these issues and implications for teaching K-3 struggling readers.

Topics

- Characteristics of Simple Versus Complex Texts in Reading Development
- Role of Literary Devices, Vocabulary, and Background Knowledge in Complex Texts
- Complex Texts and Degrees of Teacher Assistance
- Using Themed Sets to Build Connections and Density of Knowledge
- Design and Techniques for Scaffolding Readers Through Complex Texts

Three Things to Keep in Mind

- Students must be able to comprehend texts of steadily increasing complexity as they progress through school.
- The best understanding of what works in classrooms comes from the teachers who are in them.
- Standards establish what students need to learn, but they do not dictate how teachers should teach.

First, A Quick Look at the CCSS

Constructing and Integrating Knowledge on a Range of Texts and Complexity

Big Ideas (Anchor Standards)

- Standards 1-3: Main Idea & Details
  - focus on what the text says
- Standards 4-6: Craft & Structure
  - focus on how the author writes
- Standards 7-9: Integration of Knowledge & Ideas
  - focus on reasoning beyond and across texts
- Standard 10: Range of Reading Text & Complexity
  - focus on pulling it all together with increasing complexity
Culminating Activity: Assessing for Transfer

- Uses evidence from previous learning for creating something new.
- Integrates big ideas, themes, and key understandings from multiple sources.
- Demonstrates proficiency in written and oral communication for a specific audience.
- Utilizes research and technology in appropriate ways.

What are the Implications of Text Complexity for Beginning Readers?

IRA CCSS Committee Members. (2012). Literacy implementation guidance for the ELA Common Core State Standards. Newark, DE: IRA.

IRA Recommendations for the Use of Complex Texts

1. Do not increase levels of texts used in reading lessons in Kindergarten and Grade 1.
2. Instruction across the school year needs to involve students in the reading of texts written at a variety of levels.
3. Teachers need professional learning opportunities to be able to provide adequate scaffolding and support for students’ reading of complex texts in grades 2-12 and listening to complex texts in Kindergarten and Grade 1.

Understanding Text Complexity

Some Questions to Guide Our Discussion

- Why is text complexity important?
- What are the features of complex texts?
- What is the distinction between complex and challenging texts? And how do these distinctions relate to reading development?
- What is the role of background knowledge and vocabulary knowledge in reading complex texts?
- How can teachers scaffold students in reading complex texts?

Why Does Text Complexity Matter?

- Research from 2006 ACT report Reading Between the Lines found:
  - The major factor that distinguished higher performing students from lower performing students was the ability to answer questions related to the reading of complex texts.
  - The most important implication was that instruction which focused only on higher-ordered or critical thinking skills was insufficient.
  - In other words, what students could read, in terms of complexity, was at least as important as what they could do with what they read.
How is Text Complexity Defined?

• Qualitative evaluation of the text
  – Levels of meaning, structure, language conventionality and clarity, and knowledge demands
• Quantitative evaluation of the text
  – Readability measures, such as word length or frequency, sentence length, and text cohesion
• Matching reader to text and task
  – Reader variables (such as motivation, knowledge, and experiences) and task variables (such as purpose and the complexity generated by the task assigned and the questions posed)

First, Qualitative Measures

Best Measured by a Thoughtful and Attentive Reader

Understanding the Difference in Simple and Complex Texts in Reading Development

The Features of Each Type of Text

Qualitative Values

Levels of Meaning

Language Convention and Clarity

Knowledge Demands

Structure

• Genre
• Organization
• Narration
• Text Features
• Graphics

• Background
• Prior Knowledge
• Cultural
• Vocabulary

• Density and Complexity
• Figurative Language
• Purpose

• Standard English
• Variations
• Register

Qualitative Measures of Meaning

Simple Text

• Single level of meaning
• Explicit purpose

Complex Text

• Multiple levels of meaning
• Implicit, hidden, obscure purpose

Qualitative Measures of Structure

Simple Text

• Simple
• Explicit
• Conventional
• Events in chronological order
• Traits of a common genre or subgenre
• Simple graphics
• Graphics unnecessary or supplemental to understanding the text

Complex Text

• Complex
• Implicit
• Unconventional
• Frequent use of flashbacks and other manipulations of time and sequence
• Sophisticated graphics
• Graphics essential to understanding the text and may provide information not conveyed in the text
Qualitative Measures for Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple Text</th>
<th>Complex Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literal</td>
<td>Figurative or ironic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear</td>
<td>Ambiguous or purposefully misleading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary or</td>
<td>Archaic or otherwise unfamiliar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>familiar</td>
<td>General academic or domain-specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversational</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Knowledge Demands: Life Experiences (Literary Texts)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple Text</th>
<th>Complex Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple theme</td>
<td>Complex or sophisticated themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single theme</td>
<td>Multiple themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common, everyday</td>
<td>Experiences distinctly different from one’s own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experiences or clearly fantasy situation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single perspective</td>
<td>Multiple perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective like one’s own</td>
<td>Perspectives unlike or in opposition to one’s own</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second, Quantitative Measures

Typically Measured by Computer Software

Understanding Text Complexity

A text vocabulary and sentence length determines text difficulty. The Lexile scale is the basis of the CCSS/ELA’s staircase of text complexity. The Lexile scale uses a stretch band of texts across a grade span.

What are the implications of a stretch band in selecting texts for scaffolding student learning?

Staircase of Increasing Text Complexity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Current Lexile Band</th>
<th>Stretch Lexile Band</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K–1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>2–3</td>
<td>450L–725L</td>
<td>450L–790L</td>
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<tr>
<td>4–5</td>
<td>645L–845L</td>
<td>770L–980L</td>
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<td>6–8</td>
<td>860L–1010L</td>
<td>955L–1155L</td>
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<td>9–10</td>
<td>960L–1115L</td>
<td>1080L–1305L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–CCR</td>
<td>1070L–1220L</td>
<td>1215L–1355L</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Common Core Standards advocate a ‘staircase’ of increasing text complexity, beginning in grade 2, so that students can develop their reading skills and apply them to more difficult texts.

Readability Measures

- Most readability measures make their predictions on the basis of sentence and word difficulty.
  - Average sentence length
  - Number of different hard words
  - Number of personal pronouns
  - Number of unique words
  - Number of prepositional phrases
- They are indicators of difficulty, but they do not identify why texts may be challenging.
Word-Level Analysis

- Overall length of word suggests the degree to which a reader must decode the word, with single-syllable words considered to be easier than multisyllabic words.
- Frequency with which the word appears in a language supports its familiarity to the reader.
  – Dale and O’Rourke’s 4000 words (Living Word Vocabulary) and Biemiller’s Words Worth Knowing

Sentence-Level Analysis

- Words alone cannot determine text difficulty.
- Long sentences (full of common words) can require the reader to hold chains of text information and concepts in working memory while constructing meaning for the text.
- Short sentences (full of common words) can also be cognitively demanding, requiring the reader to fill in the text with background knowledge and inferences.

Long Sentences and Working Memory

Florida and Dallas had only been in the holler a few weeks, and although they had run up and down its hills and shouted across its streams and thrown mud at each other and scrambled over bushes and up trees and spit in a hundred places and dug up worms near the damp creek bank, they did not have a very good sense of direction once they were out of sight of the cabin.

660 L/2-3 Grade Band/Realistic Fiction

Short Sentences That Require Background Knowledge and Inferences

The sky was darker now. My ears rang with crickets, and my eyes stung from staring too long. I blinked hard as I watched them—Fireflies!

Blinking on, blinking off, dipping low, soaring high above my head, making white patterns in the dark.

Lexile Level 630L/2-3 Grade Band/Realistic Fiction; GRL K

Picture Books and Text Complexity

Picture books usually get an AD (Adult Directed) code in Lexile levels. These books are usually read aloud to children. Picture books may have a high Lexile level because they are full of figurative language and unusual vocabulary. These books can be too challenging for independent reading. A teaching goal would be to read the book aloud first, then later (when appropriate) reread the book during reading group lessons or include the book in the classroom library for choice reading.

Let’s look at a couple of examples

These texts are full of complex vocabulary, figurative language, and symbolism that will require lots of teacher assistance to scaffold students’ understanding.

Lexile Level 650L/2-3 Grade Band/Realistic Fiction; GRL K
The Sounds of Complex Language

Palmetto bugs, like shiny brown leaves, weave in and out of the grass. They pass spiderwebs spun out across resurrection ferns that the first soft rains have startled into life.

AD (Adult Directed) Lexile 1030L. Used for Read Aloud

One dark and windy autumn night when the sun had long gone down, Mama asked my sister and me to take the road to the end of the town to get a bucket of milk.

Oooo…
I dreaded to go…
I dreaded the tree…

Why does Mama always choose me
When the night is so dark
And the mind runs free?

NP – Non Prose rating (plays, poems, songs, and texts with nonstandard or absent punctuation) – Used for Interactive Read Aloud

Let’s shift down to look at sentence structures in beginning texts

These texts are organized to accommodate beginning readers’ knowledge of language structures and print conventions that gradually increase in complexity as students develop greater control of structure and visual information.

What language structures do children need to control at each guided reading level A-K?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>Prep</th>
<th>Conj</th>
<th>Pro</th>
<th>Adv</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

SS = Simple Sentence, Prep = Prepositions, Conj = Conjunctions, Pro = Relative Pronoun, Adv = Adverb, Neg = Negative, Ques = Question, Comm = Command, Excl = Exclamations

Simple Sentence with Prepositional Phrase

We go to the aquarium.

Two Phrases, Clauses, or Statements Linked by a Conjunction

We eat the seeds of some plants. Pecans are seeds. and they grow inside nuts.
Two Phrases or Clause Statements Linked by Relative Pronoun

Two Phrase or Clause Statements Linked by an Adverb

Third, Matching Texts to Readers

Best Measured by Teacher Professional Judgment, Experience, and Knowledge of Students and Subject

Success Will Depend Upon Three Sets of Knowledge

1. Knowledge of the books we select
2. Knowledge of the child
3. Knowledge of scaffolding theory

Emergent Comprehension Versus Deep and Analytical Comprehension

Using Background Knowledge and Text Knowledge to Make Meaning “Does it Make Sense?”

Matching Text to Reader: An Example with an Emergent Reader
Emergent Example: Tiger, Tiger

Author’s Message (in the text) | Reader’s Questions (in the head)
--- | ---
• Tiger is asleep. | • What is a tiger? Does the tiger have anything to do with the monkeys? Where is Baby Monkey going? Where is the tiger? Can tigers climb trees?
• Mother Monkey is asleep. | • Baby Monkey is asleep. Baby Monkey wakes up. • Here comes Baby Monkey.

As the suspense builds, the reader has more questions for the writer

Author’s Message (in the text) | Reader’s Questions (in the head)
--- | ---
• Baby Monkey is hungry. | • Will Baby Monkey go find something to eat? Will Tiger wake up? Will Mother Monkey wake up? What will happen to Baby Monkey if Tiger comes along? Does Baby Monkey know that tigers are dangerous?

The reader continues to ask questions

Author’s Message (in the text) | Reader’s Questions (in the head)
--- | ---
• Tiger wakes up. | • Uh, oh, what will happen? Will Tiger eat Baby Monkey? Will Mother Monkey wake up? Why is Mother Monkey calling Baby Monkey? Why doesn’t she just run down the tree to get him?
• Tiger is hungry. | • Mother Monkey wakes up. “Baby Monkey!” Come up here! Come up here!”

And more questions arise as the plot thickens

Author’s Message (in the text) | Reader’s Questions (in the head)
--- | ---
• Here comes Tiger! | • Does Tiger know that Baby Monkey is nearby? Will he chase Baby Monkey up the tree? Will he eat Baby Monkey?
• Baby Monkey is up the tree. | • How does Baby Monkey feel? Did Tiger ever see Baby Monkey? Will Baby Monkey get anything to eat? What did Baby Monkey learn?
• Baby Monkey is safe. | •

The Role of a Book Orientation for Scaffolding the Early Reader

The teacher must understand the theme (big idea) of the book and be able to scaffold the reader in using his/her background knowledge to construct new learning. As the student looks through the pages, the teacher exposes the child to new vocabulary, while simultaneously prompting the child to use known words for crosschecking language and visual information.

An Example for an Emergent Text

Introduce the theme and expose the student to new and interesting vocabulary before the reading. Then as the student turns the pages, the teacher weaves in the known and important words from the text into the book conversation.

Frogs live dangerous lives. They are always having to be aware of their surroundings to make sure that something is not going to attack and eat them! Let’s look in this book and see if the frog encounters danger, and if he does, what does he do to protect himself.
T: What can the frog see?
C: He can see the flowers.
T: Are flowers dangerous?
C: No.
T: Can you find the word see?
C: (finds word)
T: Let’s read this page together.
T&C: I can see the flowers.

Building on the theme of danger, while using known words within a simple language pattern to crosscheck structure and visual information.

T: What can the frog see?
C: A bug.
T: That’s a dragonfly. It is like a bug, but it is called dragonfly. Can you say dragonfly?
C: Dragonfly.
T: Do you think a dragonfly would be dangerous to a frog?
C: No!

Exposure to new vocabulary word (dragonfly), while also using known words within simple pattern to crosscheck structure and visual sources.

First sign of danger appears in top corner of page. Frog is unaware of danger. Child reads the pattern, and teacher directs the child’s attention to the danger.

T: Yes, the frog can see the fish. But let me ask you something really important. Are fish dangerous to a frog?
C: No.
T: Well, take a close look up here (points to the page). What do you see?
C: Something with long legs. And it’s looking at the frog.
T: Does the frog see it?
C: No, he’s looking at the fish.
T: That is a big bird called a crane. A crane has a long sharp beak. Could that be dangerous to a frog?
C: Yes!
T: Well, what do you think the frog will do on the next page?
C: Jump in the water!
T: Turn the page and see if you are right.

Child confirms prediction. Teacher reinforces the theme of the story, and exposes child to vocabulary (PLIP, dangerous).

C: I was right! He jumped in the water. T: And just in time, because it looks like the crane was ready to get him! C: Yeah! He was probably scared.
T: This new word is called PLIP. It means “to make a big sound when dropping in the water.” Can you say PLIP?
C: PLIP.
T: Let’s say it loudly—like a big noise when something falls in the water.
T&C: PLIP!
T: So do you think the frog learned a lesson? Will he pay more attention to things that are dangerous in his environment?
C: Yeah, because a big bird might eat him!

Matching Text Characteristics to Readers

Building an Early Processing System Through Texts of Gradient Difficulty
Emergent Text Characteristics

- Focus on a single idea
- Simple story line
- Direct correspondence between text/pictures
- Relate topics to own personal experience
- Text language supports/duplicates oral language
- Includes naturally occurring syntactic structures
- Format is consistent
- Layout is supportive
- Print is regular, clear and easy to see
- Range of punctuation is present (capitalization, period, question, exclamation)
- 1-3 lines of text

A Continuum of Early Text Characteristics

- Simple story lines with interesting and/or humorous endings to slightly more complex episodes
- Familiar concepts
- Likeable characters; concrete actions
- Supportive illustrations
- Dialogue
- Varied punctuation
- Longer sentences
- High occurrence of common words
- New syntactic structures (e.g., prepositional phrases, adverbs)
- Known vocabulary includes inflectional ending
- Two to six lines of print
Transitional Text Characteristics

- Text setup
- Texts are more complex as students progress through the grades
- The impact of literacy devices, background knowledge, and vocabulary on text complexity
- Paragraphs and text complexity increase
- Chapter leads and complexity of story elements
- Concept of'Transitional Text Characteristics'

Greater Number of Episodes or Events
- Story Promotes Inferences
- More Complex Structures (adverbial clauses; compound sentences)
- Varied Punctuation
- Varied sentence lengths

Character Development
- Vocabulary Development (verb + ing, ed)
- Dialogue

Vocabulary Development- Idiom
- Underscored words
- Thought processes

Example: "The Lonely Giant"

Unfamiliar Language
- Varied Sentences
- Multiple Episodes

Genre Structure
- Multiple Characters

Chapter Lead
- Consultants' work
- Book lead

Blur and Vocabulary
- Leads
- Lead continuation

Multiple Characters
- Paragraph continues

Chapter Title
- "Chapter One"

Texts Become More Complex as Students Progress Through the Grades

The Lonely Giant

Rigby - I
Lexile 370; GL 2.8

Poppleton Rylant – Scholastic - J
Lexile 360L

Junie B. Jones – Barbara Park - Random House - M
Lexile 500L
### Features of Complex Text

- Subtle and/or frequent transitions
- Multiple and/or subtle themes and purposes
- Density of information
- Lack of repetition, overlap or similarity in words and sentences
- Complex sentences
- Uncommon vocabulary
- Lack of words, sentences or paragraphs that review or pull things together for the student
- Longer paragraphs
- Any text structure which is less narrative and/or mixes structures
- Use of passive voice

### Literary Techniques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literary Technique</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flashback</td>
<td>When a writer presents past events during current events in order to provide background for the current narration. For example: dream sequences, memories and narration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreshadowing</td>
<td>Where future events in a story, or perhaps the outcome, are suggested (but not explicitly revealed) by the author before they happen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figurative Language</td>
<td>Whenever you describe something by comparing it with something else, you are using figurative language. The most common figures of speech are simile, metaphor, and alliteration.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Literary Techniques (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literary Technique</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simile</td>
<td>A comparison between two otherwise unalike objects or ideas. Commonly contains “like” or “as” to connect the unrelated objects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphor</td>
<td>A statement that says one thing is something else but, literally, it is not. Compares without using words such as “like” or “as.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personification</td>
<td>When inanimate objects or abstract concepts are seemingly endowed with human traits or represented as a person.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Literary Techniques (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literary Technique</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imagery</td>
<td>Language which describes something in detail, using words to substitute for and create sensory stimulation, including visual imagery and sound imagery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolism</td>
<td>A person, place or object which has a meaning in itself but suggests other meanings as well. Anything that suggests a meaning beyond the obvious. For example: bright sunshine symbolizes goodness and water symbolizes cleanliness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The Impact of Literary Devices on Comprehension

What would children need to know to comprehend the deeper meanings?
Four Things to Keep in Mind

1. Thoughtful and Close Reading
2. Knowledge of Text Structure
3. Writing About Reading
4. Role of Strategies

Flashback

Back in school, before Camp, I was shortest and smallest than the rest of the kids. I was always the last to be picked for any team when we played games. Then, a few months ago, I got even worse. The kids started to call me names and nobody talked to me, even though I didn't do anything bad. One day, I was sitting in the corner of the room, reading a book when a boy walked up to me and asked if I wanted to play. I said yes, and we started playing. I was happy to have a friend and felt good about myself.

AD 550L – Lexile

Figurative Language: Simile

It was late one winter night, things got very quiet. Then, the snow started to fall. The cats woke up and went outside, then back in again. The moon rose and shone, casting a serene glow on the world. The trees rustled in the wind. It was a peaceful and calm night.

Lexile 630L

Figurative Language: Symbolism

A black and white picture of a wolf looking at a moon.

Lexile 660L

Foreshadowing

A page from a book showing a dog with its tongue out.

Lexile 910L

Thoughtful and Close Reading

- Understand the purpose for reading.
- Understand the author’s purpose for writing.
- Understand the relationship between big ideas within the text.
- Look for and understand layers of meaning.
- Engage with the text while reading.
- Formulate questions and seek answers to those questions while reading.
Knowledge of Text Structures

• When students know story grammar, the basic text structures for narrative text, they recall more of the information representing the major relationships between story elements.
• Informational text is the most complicated type of nonfiction because the purposes are so varied. The purpose of informational text dictates the structure. Not all informational texts have the same structure. Teaching students to recognize text structures can increase reading comprehension.

More on Text Structures

• Organizational patterns in reading and writing
  – Description
  – Sequence
  – Problem and Solution
  – Cause and Effect
  – Comparison and Contrast

Teaching students to recognize common text structures can help students to monitor their own comprehension.

Writing About Reading

• Students’ comprehension is improved when they write about what they read.
• Specific types of writing for increasing reading comprehension are:
  – Responding to text in writing
  – Writing summaries of a text
  – Writing notes about a text
  – Answering questions about a text in writing or creating and answering written questions about a text

Writing About Reading

Writing about reading requires students to demonstrate the interrelated literacy processes of reading, gathering evidence about what is read, and analyzing and presenting that evidence in writing.

The Role of Strategy Development in Comprehension

Distinction between general and discipline-specific strategy development

Comprehension Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Reading Strategies</th>
<th>Discipline-Specific Strategies</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monitor comprehension</td>
<td>Build prior knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-read</td>
<td>Build specialized vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set goals</td>
<td>Deconstruct complex sentences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Think about what one</td>
<td>Use knowledge of text structures and genres to predict main and subordinate ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>already knows</td>
<td>Use graphic organizers to represent concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask questions</td>
<td>Pose discipline relevant questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test predictions against text</td>
<td>Compare claims and proposals across texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-read</td>
<td>Make claims and provide evidence to evaluate claims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarize</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Carnegie Report, 2010
What are the behaviors of skilled readers?

- Read closely to determine what the text says.
- Determine central ideas or themes; summarize.
- Analyze where, when, why, and how . . .
- Interpret words and phrases.
- Analyze the structure of texts (sentences, paragraphs, sections)
- Assess point of view of purpose
- Synthesize and apply information
- Delineate and evaluate reasoning and rhetoric
- Read complex texts independently and fluently

What Makes a Text Complex?

Features That Contribute to Complexity

- Genre/Forms
- Text Structure
- Content
- Themes and Ideas
- Language and Literary Features
- Sentence Complexity
- Figurative and Academic Vocabulary
- Uncommon words
- Illustrations
- Book and Print Features

Understanding the Difference in Complex and Challenging Texts

Keep in mind that a text can be challenging (or difficult), but not complex. Let’s take a look at features of complex texts.

Complex Text and Vocabulary Demands

The level of vocabulary in many picture books for young children is at approximately the same level as speech between college graduates.

Staircase of Core Vocabulary

At the foundational level, texts contain a high percentage of familiar words with consistent and common phonological and orthographic patterns and root words.

As texts become more complex, vocabulary is used in figurative, idiomatic, and unusual ways, which require the reader to understand the multiple meanings of words in order to comprehend the deeper meaning within the text.
Some Facts to Know

• Vocabulary as assessed in first grade predicts more than 30% of grade 11 reading comprehension, much more than reading mechanics as assessed in first grade (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997).
• Large vocabulary differences are present by the end of grade 2. If teachers can find ways of supporting more rapid vocabulary growth in lower grades, more children will be able to comprehend complex texts in the upper grades (Biemiller, 1999; 2002).

More Thoughts on Vocabulary

• Texts can be hard because of unfamiliar vocabulary (difference between academic vocabulary and key vocabulary in a text)
• Less widely known words tend to be harder than known words
• Sometimes known words are used in different ways as well
• Metaphorical and figurative language
• Carefully analyze text for the challenging and important vocabulary

Text Complexity and Struggling Readers

Scaffolds should enable students to experience the text through more teacher assistance, rather than avoid the complexity of text.

An Apprenticeship Process: Scaffolding Readers Within A Stretch Band Of Complexity

A Scale of Help for Scaffolding Success on Complex Texts

Using Themed Text Sets With Degrees of Complexity to Scaffold Language and Literacy Learning

Using a Stretch Band of Complexity (Hard to Easy) Within a Text Set

Themed Texts Within a Range of Complexities

• Texts can be hard because students lack sufficient background knowledge.
• If students have multiple texts on the same topic at different levels of complexity,
  – the easier “apprentice” texts can help students build background knowledge for the more difficult ones.
  – the overlap in important concepts can help students notice the information in different contexts.
  – the multiple exposures to vocabulary can help students develop deeper meanings.
  – the familiarity of information in different contexts can help students make connections and think in abstracting.
Schools need a design for scaffolding student learning and promoting transfer across a range of texts of varied complexity.

What would this design look like? How does it support the integration of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language? How does it promote transfer and generalizable knowledge?

Integrated Design to Build Content Knowledge, Vocabulary Density, and Deeper Comprehension

To build conceptual knowledge, students must be able to integrate information and transfer concepts across multiple contexts in order to solve problems and to construct new knowledge.

Teachers provide explicit instruction and scaffolding to build bridges.


Implications for Teaching Struggling Readers

- Build vocabulary and content knowledge through interactive read aloud.
- Explain new and important vocabulary words during text reading.
- Use text sets when appropriate.
- Introduce the theme of the text up front and revisit it throughout the reading.
- Focus on relationships within and across texts.
- Use important words from texts in writing about the reading.
- Extend writing on same topic over several days.

Implications for Teacher Professional Development

What do teachers need to know to scaffold students’ abilities to read and comprehend complex texts?

Three Theories to Know

- Theory of complexity
  - What are the features of complex texts?
  - What is the role of background knowledge, vocabulary, and structure in understanding complex texts?
- Theory of scaffolding
  - What is the difference between instructing and scaffolding?
  - How is scaffolding adjusted to accommodate changes in student learning?
- Theory of transfer
  - What student behaviors indicate transfer has occurred?
  - How can the changes in the context promote transfer?