Building an understanding of the Common Core state standards and complex texts, while supporting upper elementary readers with complex text through shared reading

Joanna Mae Carlson
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Building an understanding of the Common Core state standards and complex texts, while supporting upper elementary readers with complex text through shared reading

Abstract
The Common Core State Standards have caused changes to happen within classrooms. Teachers are teaching using complex text, and students are expected to read and comprehend grade-level complex texts. In order to successfully teach with these types of texts, teachers must have an understanding of what makes a text complex and how text complexity is measured. Building an understanding of these ideas will help teachers support all students with comprehension. Shared reading is a teaching strategy that teachers can implement in their classrooms to support students with the reading of complex texts. In upper elementary classrooms, shared reading can be used to teach the areas of comprehension, vocabulary, text structures, and text features. Once teachers understand the connection between the Common Core State Standards and text complexity, they will be able to support students through the shared reading framework with the reading of complex texts.

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BUILDING AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS AND COMPLEX TEXTS, WHILE SUPPORTING UPPER ELEMENTARY READERS WITH COMPLEX TEXT THROUGH SHARED READING

An Abstract of a Project

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

Joanna Mae Carlson

University of Northern Iowa

May 2022
ABSTRACT

The Common Core State Standards have caused changes to happen within classrooms. Teachers are teaching using complex text, and students are expected to read and comprehend grade-level complex texts. In order to successfully teach with these types of texts, teachers must have an understanding of what makes a text complex and how text complexity is measured. Building an understanding of these ideas will help teachers support all students with comprehension. Shared reading is a teaching strategy that teachers can implement in their classrooms to support students with the reading of complex texts. In upper elementary classrooms, shared reading can be used to teach the areas of comprehension, vocabulary, text structures, and text features. Once teachers understand the connection between the Common Core State Standards and text complexity, they will be able to support students through the shared reading framework with the reading of complex texts.
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Joanna Mae Carlson
University of Northern Iowa
May 2022
This Project by: Joanna Mae Carlson

Titled: Building an Understanding of the Common Core State Standards and Complex Texts, While Supporting Upper Elementary Readers with Complex Text Through Shared Reading

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Paper approved on __05/24/2022___

Taraneh Matloob

First Reader Signature
DEDICATION

For Elizabeth,

Never stop learning. Shoot for the stars. Surround yourself with people who support you. Never give up. You can do hard things. Your dreams might seem out of reach, but you will never know what you are capable of until you try.

You won’t remember all the times you went to the park or the shop with Daddy, or all the times you had naptime with Grandma, so that I could work on my school work. It was all worth it. I have earned the title of Master Teacher. That was my dream. Now, I am all yours, all the time. Someday, I’ll be there to watch and help you chase your own dreams, but for now, let’s go to the park.

I love you! Mama Jo
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Completing my Master’s Degree would not have been possible without the support and guidance of some very special people.

Ben, You have supported me since the very beginning. This last year of classes has been extremely difficult and stressful, but you were there to support me every step of the way. There were days you did all the housework while I worked on my project. There were times you and Elizabeth left for an adventure, so I could have the house to myself to work. I appreciate it more than you’ll ever know. Now, I am excited for our future with less stress and more fun. I love you!

Mom, Thank you for helping so much with Elizabeth during this entire journey. The hundreds of naps she took with you helped me tremendously as I saw this my project to completion. You’ll always be number one on my list for proofreading. I appreciate all your help with editing this paper. I couldn’t have done it without you!

Dad, You always asked me if my paper was done. This persistence only kept me going in the right direction, so that I could finally say, “YES!”

Dr. Taraneh Matloob, I could not have asked for a better advisor. You have challenged me to make my work exceptional. You never hesitated to meet with me, and I felt encouraged every time I talked to you. I’ll never be able to thank you enough!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Introduction (Chapter 1)** ........................................................................................................ 10

- Rationale .............................................................................................................................. 11
- Statement of Purpose ........................................................................................................... 12
- Definition of Terms ............................................................................................................. 13
- Statement of the Problem .................................................................................................... 14
- The Project .......................................................................................................................... 15
- Significance of the Study ...................................................................................................... 16

**Literature Review (Chapter 2)** .......................................................................................... 17

- The Common Core State Standards Initiative ..................................................................... 17
- Measuring Text Complexity .................................................................................................. 23
- Rosenblatt’s Reader Response Theory .................................................................................. 30
- Previous Research in the Area of Text Complexity and Comprehension ......................... 33
- Supporting Comprehension ................................................................................................. 37
- Shared Reading ...................................................................................................................... 41
  - Close Reading for Comprehension .................................................................................... 46
  - Vocabulary ......................................................................................................................... 49
  - Text Structures .................................................................................................................. 52
  - Text Features ..................................................................................................................... 55

**Methodology (Chapter 3)** .................................................................................................. 58

**The Project Discussion (Chapter 4)** ................................................................................. 60

**Conclusion (Chapter 5)** ..................................................................................................... 133

**References** .......................................................................................................................... 135

**Appendices** ....................................................................................................................... 144
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative Measures used to Assess Text Complexity using the TextEvaluator Tool</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions to Consider when Qualitatively Analyzing Text Complexity</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Structure Signal Words and Phrases</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule for PLC Meetings</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction (Chapter 1)

The following discussion introduces the topic, provides background information regarding topic selection, as well as key terms used throughout the review of research paper and project. This section concludes with an overview of the professional development that was created based on the research reviewed.

Across the United States the implementation of the Common Core State Standards have caused a change in the types of texts students are required to read in the classroom. A goal of these standards is to prepare students for college and a career by graduation, which has led to students reading complex texts (The Aspen Institute, 2012). As students read complex text, they are expected to make meaning and comprehend, as “close readers, delving into texts in order to unearth evidence, construct knowledge, and broaden their understanding of the text and world” (The Aspen Institute, p. 1, 2012). Reading complex text requires stamina, background knowledge, and skill proficiency, therefore, students need to be exposed to this type of text in order to build the skills needed to comprehend complex texts (The Aspen Institute, 2012).

The change to complex texts has challenged teachers as they push students to make sense of these types of texts. The complexity of complex texts is divided into grade bands. As students enter a new grade band, they will need scaffolding to help them comprehend the text, but are expected to comprehend the text independently at the end of the grade band (NGO & CCSSO, 2010a). According to Robertson et al., (2014) teachers “must continue to meet all students where they are, but they also must
understand the types of teacher mediation that will bring complex texts and concepts within the range of every student—even those reading below grade-level expectations” (p. 548). It is critical that teachers are able to provide instruction that allows all students to access complex texts. If students are not provided access to grade level texts, then they will not acquire the vocabulary, general knowledge, and concepts that are foundational to future learning (Robertson et al., 2014).

In order to make complex text accessible to all students, teachers must have knowledge of instructional strategies that can be implemented to mediate this text with all students. “Complex texts require instruction. Raising expectations in reading does not mean that teachers should simply assign more difficult tests; rather, they should teach students how to read those texts” (Fisher & Frey, 2014b, p. 310-311). Teachers can demonstrate how to interact with text through teacher modeling (Taylor & Pearson, 2002). Shared reading is a form of teacher modeling that can be used during reading instruction (Fisher et al., 2008). Shared reading allows teachers to explicitly teach strategies that aid in comprehension (Stahl, 2012). As a result, this teacher support leads to more student success when reading the text later independently. Difficult text does not have to be frustrating for students. Utilizing shared reading can expand the types of texts students can read with success, while also advancing them developmentally.

**Rationale**

The topic I have chosen relates directly to struggles I am currently facing in my fifth grade reading classroom. My school district recently adopted a new reading curriculum that immerses students in highly complex texts and builds on the knowledge
students have from previous grades. As we began our units this year, I noticed my students are lacking background knowledge for content they would have learned in kindergarten through fourth grade. In my fifth grade reading class I have seven students; two students have an Individualized Education Plan, one is an English Language Learner, and one student is in the Talented and Gifted program. One student is African-American, one student is Hispanic, and five students are Caucasian. When students are struggling with comprehension because of lack of background knowledge they need teacher support to comprehend the complex text. However, contrary to this, one of our units this year has been about Native Americans, and even though students were not taught curriculum content in previous grades, they still had substantial background knowledge about this topic. Even though their background knowledge tremendously aided their comprehension, I found they still needed support to interact with the text and comprehend the text to the extent that is expected from our standards and benchmarks. Therefore, I decided to read literature from academic scholarly sources which discuss the use of complex text in the upper elementary grades in order to determine the best way to support and scaffold complex texts in my teaching.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of my project is to place an emphasis on complex texts and how to best support students in the upper elementary grades with comprehending complex texts. Complex text can be challenging to comprehend because it includes implicit meanings, figurative language, and requires literary, cultural, and content knowledge that aids in the comprehension of these texts (Tucker, 2013). The texts do have illustrations to support the reading and aid in comprehension, but with nonfiction texts
they often require an explanation. I want to focus on supporting all readers and provide teachers with strategies that can be used with their whole class. The questions guiding my project are:

1. What is complex text and what is its connection to the Common Core State Standards?
2. How can upper elementary teachers support students with comprehending complex texts?
3. What strategies can teachers implement in their classrooms to scaffold the learning of complex texts in the upper elementary grades?

**Definition of Terms**

Throughout the review of research and my project, several key terms will be used to discuss my findings. These terms are listed below and will provide background knowledge in understanding the educational review of research that follows.

- **Common Core State Standards (CCSS)** - a set of goals for kindergarten through 12th grade students that provides the expectation for what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade level, in order to be ready for college or career after high school (NGO & CCSSO, 2010b)
- **Complex Text** - text that uses unconventional structures, implicit meanings, and builds on life experiences the reader is expected to have had; the complexity of this type of text is measured quantitatively, qualitatively, and considers the reader and the task (Tucker, 2013)
Lexile - quantitative data that can be gathered using a computer in order to place readers in appropriate texts, which is done by assigning a text a Lexile number (Stenner et al., 2015)

Text Complexity - “determined in relation to other texts” (Strong et al., 2018) using characteristics such as word complexity and sentence length

Text Difficulty - identifies how challenging a text will be for a specific child (Strong et al., 2018)

Statement of the Problem

Teachers have seen an increase in what students are expected to read and comprehend because of the Common Core State Standards. These standards have added rigor and text complexity to the elementary grades. Elementary students are now expected to read, interact with, and comprehend complex texts. Educators are expected to teach and reach all students with this type of text. Often students struggle with comprehension and need support from the teacher. There are many strategies that can scaffold the learning, while students are still immersed in complex texts.

As I have implemented a new curriculum in my classroom this year, I have noticed the support all students need in order to comprehend, interact with, and utilize evidence with complex text. Especially in the upper grades, with students who are starting this curriculum at the end of their time in elementary school, extra support is needed to be successful with the increased complexity of the text. Focused research in the areas of complex text, the Common Core State Standards, and teacher support that leads to growth independently, will help me teach this curriculum to my fifth grade students. Gathering all of this information will also allow me to support the rest of the
teachers at my elementary school as they are implementing our new curriculum and supporting their students.

**The Project**

My school implements Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in order to focus on student learning, evidence of student learning, collaboration, and to share professional learning responsibilities. Our PLC time allows us the opportunity to work together collaboratively and work towards goals we set for our grade levels and students. As our PLC leader, I am responsible for facilitating our meetings and creating an agenda to guide us during our PLC meetings. During our meetings we follow the four guiding questions from DuFour et al. (2016) for PLC work:

1) What is it we want our students to know?
2) How will we know if each student has learned it?
3) How will we respond when some students do not learn it?
4) How will we extend the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency?

During our PLC time, our focus has been in the area of reading and moving our students forward with our new reading curriculum. As we use the guiding questions, we are supporting students in reading, comprehending, and interacting with complex texts. Our teachers are working together to build an understanding of what students should know, while using many types of assessments to determine if students have learned the skills expected. We are using interventions during the reading block and MTSS time to respond to students who are struggling with skills and content. Furthermore, we have
also been providing enrichment opportunities for students who have shown mastery with the content.

The project portion of the research reviewed will be developing four PLC presentations and agendas that can be used to support our teachers with implementing strategies in their classrooms to support all learners. The strategies will be practical teaching techniques that can be applied to any reading lesson in upper elementary. I want to give teachers confidence as they work with their students who are reading complex text. I want teachers to feel supported with our new curriculum by having the ability to successfully scaffold the learning when necessary, which will in turn move students closer to meeting the goals our PLC team has set.

**Significance of the Project**

Reading complex text is a critical component of the Common Core State Standards. Educators need to be able to provide students with the knowledge and tools necessary to become proficient readers because students are expected to be ready for college or a career by the time they graduate high school. There has been a great deal of research done in the areas of text complexity and supporting learners with comprehension. My goal through this literature review and project is to organize the research reviewed into a document teachers can use to understand why students need to read complex text and how they can support all learners with comprehending this text. Additionally, I will lead the teachers at my school through the professional development sessions I have created, so they will be able to implement this knowledge into their own classrooms.
Literature Review (Chapter 2)

The following chapter will discuss connections between the Common Core State Standards and the use of complex text in the classroom. Educators use complex text for instruction, therefore they must have an understanding of what makes a text complex. This chapter provides insights about supporting all students with complex text through the use of shared reading. Instructional strategies and specific recommendations are given to use during shared reading instruction. Furthermore, past research and theories connecting to the idea of shared reading support the use of this strategy in the classroom.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative

The implementation of The Common Core State Standards has led to many changes being made in classrooms across the country. The standards are based on student performance and assessment data, academic research, and surveys conducted with college professors and employers (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The Common Core State Standards provide clear expectations of what skills and knowledge are vital for success in college and with a career (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). The expectations laid out by the Common Core State Standards are ambitious, however, The U.S. Department of Education (2013) argues the bar needs to be set higher and students need to be taught to enable adult learners to meet the demands of post
secondary employment and training. The Common Core State Standards were
developed, and then the College and Career Readiness Standards were designed using
the most essential standards applicable to adult learners (U.S. Department of
Education, 2013). It is essential for high school students to graduate having been
adequately prepared for freshman college courses and to be ready for assessments
that assess skills identified by the Common Core State Standards. The Common Core
State Standards have caused shifts in classroom instruction in order to meet these
immense goals.

The Common Core State Standards have caused three main shifts to happen
with classroom instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The first shift is using
appropriate complex text with students in both instruction and assessment. Research
has shown that the highest indicator of success in college and careers is a student’s
ability to read complex text and understand the academic language used in these types
of texts. The second shift is using textual evidence across all areas of reading, writing,
and speaking and listening. Students need to be able to cite textual evidence in order to
defend claims, analyze text, and present clear information. The third shift is building a
body of knowledge in the areas of social studies, science, and technical subjects, as
well as in literacy. Being able to understand informational text is crucial because this is
the type of text students will most often read in college and in the workforce. The
Common Core State Standards were designed to prepare students for college and a
career by giving them abilities in literacy that will allow for them to be successful by the
time they graduate high school (NGO & CCSSO, 2010b).
The Common Core State Standards (NGO & CCSSO, 2010b) define what it takes to be a literate person in the 21st century:

Students who meet the Standards readily undertake the close, attentive reading that is at the heart of understanding and enjoying complex works of literature. They habitually perform the critical reading necessary to pick carefully through the staggering amount of information available today in print and digitally. They actively seek the wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high quality literary and informational texts that build knowledge, enlarges experience, and broadens worldviews…students who meet the Standards develop the skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening that are the foundation for any creative and purposeful expression in language. (p. 3)

In order to reach these expectations, the Common Core State Standards state that students are expected to meet each grade level standard and maintain previously mastered skills, while continuing to advance through the grade levels (NGO & CCSSO, 2010). As students continue through school they read increasingly more difficult texts in each grade level (Hiebert & Pearson, 2014). Hiebert & Pearson (2014) believe students that are exhibiting mastery in literary skills demonstrate the habits of a literate individual who is ready for college and a career. Students who display these skills can independently comprehend, evaluate, and determine the main points of a speaker, while using a broad vocabulary. Students utilize content knowledge that has been built through study and research. Students are actively engaged to comprehend, but also can question and critique the claims of an author or speaker. When students use
evidence to support their reasoning, they are able to cite examples from the text being used. Students utilize technology to enhance their reading and writing, and can incorporate their previous knowledge with new information gathered online. Students also have an appreciation and understanding of other cultures and perspectives. In order to achieve these skills, the Common Core State Standards push for students to read text that increases in text complexity as students advance through the grade levels.

Research completed within the last 15 years has shown that there needs to be an increase in text complexity. Tucker (2013) reports students are graduating from high school and are not prepared for the type of reading that will be presented to them in college and beyond. Over the past 100 years, the texts students read at the college level have stayed the same or have grown in difficulty, while at the same time, the texts students read in elementary school through high school graduation have decreased in complexity. Adams (2010) reports SAT scores began to decline in the 1960s and the literacy levels of secondary students have been diminishing because students are not reading what they should be reading in order to make adequate reading gains. Adams (2010) also shares that the United States is failing in comparison to other developed countries. A study completed during the 1990s showed young adults, 35 years and younger, scored in the bottom half of every literacy measure when compared to 19 other developed countries. A common practice that has been used in many classrooms could offer insights as to why students are not making the gains that are currently expected by the Common Core State Standards.
A common teaching practice that has been used in the past, and is still being used today, is the use of leveled readers in the classroom (Shanahan, 2020). With the use of leveled readers, students are placed in groups according to their reading level. Shanahan (2020) agrees that students have been learning to read with this common instructional strategy, but are students learning at the high levels that they could be? Most teachers even believe that this practice is supported by the standards provided by the states, but it is not. Betts (1946) as cited in Shanahan (2020) claims students have three reading levels: independent, instructional, and frustrational. The independent level is a text students can handle completely on their own without help from the teacher. Instructional texts are slightly more difficult, but students will be able to learn from these books with the help of a teacher. Frustrational texts would be very difficult for a student to read and learn from, even with support from a teacher. Studies have been completed using the ideas of leveled readers and Morgan et al. (2000) reports teaching at the instructional level has either provided students with no learning advantages or has actually done harm. One study showed students who were given books above their instructional level made significant progress compared to those students who were placed in books that were thought to be a better fit for their current reading level. Research by Lupo et al. (2019) revealed that limiting students to what teachers think they can read hinders their opportunity to learn. Not allowing students to read rich texts limits their exposure to sophisticated vocabulary, complex language, and content. Students placed in easier books did not learn as much as those placed in grade-level material. Skilled teachers are able to scaffold and support students in reading more difficult texts (Shanahan, 2020). Shanahan (2020) recommends students read very
demanding texts when the teacher is close by and able to help, and read less
demanding texts when reading independently. If the text is below the student’s
instructional level, the use of leveled readers as the primary text source may not align
with the Common Core State Standards. Therefore, teachers should adjust texts and
instruction appropriately to give students access to complex texts. The use of complex
texts is supported by the Common Core State Standards.

The Common Core State Standards were developed as an extension of the
College and Career Readiness Standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). These
standards set requirements students need to meet in order to be ready for literacy at the
college level. The Common Core State Standards reference the College and Career
Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading for kindergarten through fifth grade. These
anchor standards, call for students in kindergarten through fifth grade to be able to,
“read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and
proficiently” (NGO & CCSSO, 2010b, p. 10). The Common Core State Standards push
for students to read increasingly difficult texts as they accelerate through the grade
levels (NGO & CCSSO, 2010b). Text complexity is organized into grade bands in the
Common Core State Standards (NGO & CCSSO, 2010a). K-1 are part of the same
grade band, just like 2-3, 4-5, and 6-8 are a part of their own grade bands. This push for
text complexity and getting complex texts into the hands of students has caused a shift
in the types of text students are reading in the classroom. Students are being immersed
in complex text and teachers are supporting students with comprehending this type of
text. In order to meet the demands of the Common Core State Standards in the
classroom, teachers need to have an understanding of what strategies and changes
should be happening in their classrooms, which includes being familiar with how a text is determined to be complex. According to Strong et al. (2018) educators must be able to identify the possible difficulties that students will encounter when reading a text and what will make a text challenging for a specific student. A teacher can determine what makes a text difficult for his/her students by considering three aspects of text complexity.

**Measuring Text Complexity**

Text complexity indicates the difficulty of a specific text in relation to other texts, considering vocabulary used and the length of sentences (Strong et al., 2018). Complex texts are measured through three different aspects that assess text complexity (Tucker, 2013). These measures include analyzing the text quantitatively, qualitatively, and considering the reader and the task (Hiebert & Pearson, 2014; Strong et al., 2018; Tucker, 2013).

Quantitative measures of text complexity refer to data that is difficult for a human to evaluate, such as sentence length and word frequency (Tucker, 2013). This type of data can be gathered using a computer program (Hiebert & Pearson, 2014). The widely known Lexile Framework has the ability to score text using word frequency and sentence length (Tucker, 2013). After the semantics and syntax in the piece of text has been analyzed, a Lexile number is generated, which determines how difficult the text will be to read (Stenner et al., 2015). The Lexile number is used to match students with texts that are expected to be appropriate for their reading abilities, as a result, Strong (2018) argues it is assumed students need to read books within their appropriate Lexile level or their success in reading will be negatively affected. Lexile levels are not
measuring how difficult the piece of text will be to comprehend because that would require an understanding of the reader and how the reader will be able to interact with the text.

In classrooms it is worrisome when a text’s complexity is identified solely from the text’s Lexile score (Wixon and Valencia, 2014). Short (2018) argues global literature can often have a Lexile level that places the text in a lower grade level than developmentally appropriate. Even though some texts are given a Lexile level that is thought to be appropriate for a grade level, the content may address difficult issues that are more appropriate for older readers. Narrative poetry is often given a Lexile score that reflects high complexity because of the complex language, not the difficulty of the book. Graphic novels are challenging to measure with Lexile because much of the story is told through illustrations, dialogue, and panel arrangement. Narrative poetry and graphic novels invite “readers into global worlds but their text complexity cannot be measured by formulas” (Short, 2018, p. 2). Fiction books can be given a higher Lexile score because of these reasons, while nonfiction books can also be given an increased Lexile score because of the content included in these types of texts. Nonfiction texts use longer sentences and unfamiliar words, therefore they are often given a higher Lexile score. Lexile measures do not consider the use of illustrations, diagrams, and graphic organizers that support students in comprehending the content.

Often a text’s complexity is reliant upon the reader and their global knowledge of culture. Global literature will be easier to comprehend for students who bring cultural knowledge with them to a text. Having an understanding of a culture’s storytelling style and text structures is also helpful. To support students who are not familiar with global
literature, teachers can coordinate texts to be read in support of one another. Surrounding texts with other similar texts can provide students a wide range of experiences and deepen content knowledge. Students can read texts from multiple Lexile levels as they build strategies to help them engage with a wide range of texts.

Even though Lexile levels are used with most grade levels, they are not appropriate to use with early reading texts (Graesser, 2014). In kindergarten and first grade Lexiles are considered inappropriate for identifying text difficulty (Strong, 2018). In second and third grade the Lexile band is 420-820, fourth and fifth has a Lexile band of 740-1010, and sixth through eighth grade has a band of 925-1185 (Strong, 2018). Lexile levels are not the only score a text receives to determine quantitative text complexity, there are also other tools that can aid in determining complexity.

When using text complexity measures to assign appropriate text to students, it is essential that the measures align with the Common Core State Standards. The TextEvaluator is a system that aligns with the text complexity measures in the Common Core State Standards. This system helps teachers place students in text by providing a comprehensive grade-level score and giving a more detailed report in eight other areas of literacy (Sheehan et al., 2014). These eight areas of literacy identify how text variation and complexity can occur in multiple ways (see Table 1). Strong et al. (2018) urges teachers to use a tool like TextEvaluator to make judgments about the complexity of texts, with the caveat that more research is needed to make quantitative data more accessible to both publishers and teachers. Sheehan et al. (2014) support the idea that there is room for improvement with the TextEvaluator tool, however, it can assist educators in making informed decisions about what texts to use for instruction and
assessment. These eight aspects can provide educators with feedback regarding conditions of text variations (Sheehan et al., 2014).

**Table 1**

*Quantitative Measures used to Assess Text Complexity using the TextEvaluator Tool*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Literacy Assessed</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic vocabulary</td>
<td>identifies the frequency of academic words, word length, syllables, and words that contain more than eight characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic complexity</td>
<td>analyzes sentences for length, amount of dependent clauses, average words before the main verb, and the richness of vocabulary used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word concreteness</td>
<td>concrete words are able to be visualized and abstract words are not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word familiarity</td>
<td>determines the amount of rare words in a text and how many of the unfamiliar words are repeated more than once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive/conversational style</td>
<td>determines if the text was written with an interactive and conversational style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of narrativity</td>
<td>analyzes past tense verbs and pronouns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical cohesion</td>
<td>how well the clauses and sentences are connected to one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of argumentation</td>
<td>the amount of arguments and negotiations in a text</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


While quantitative data can be measured using computer software, qualitative measures can only be retrieved through the meticulous eye of a human reader (Strong et al., 2018). Analyzing a text qualitatively allows for a close examination of what
aspects of the text make it complex (Fisher & Frey, 2014b). When a text is scored qualitatively, the text is judged based on structure, language conventions and clarity, meaning and purpose, and the knowledge demands required by the reader (NGO & CCSSO, 2010a; Tucker, 2013). Structure has to do with the genre, organization of the text, type of narration, and the text graphics and features (Fisher & Frey, 2014b). Language conventions include how the speaker uses language and the clarity of the style of language. Meaning and purpose involves the use of figurative language, levels of meaning, and the purpose intended by the text. The knowledge demands needed by the reader include background, prior, cultural, and vocabulary knowledge. Table 2 describes questions that can be used to analyze the text using these qualitative guidelines. Fisher and Frey (2014b) note it is important for educators to be aware that these qualitative measures of text complexity can be subjective because they are individualized to each reader. The guidelines can be interpreted and used with variations based on an educator’s understanding of his/her students. Sheehan et al. (2014) points out that a text with five different unfamiliar words would be more difficult than a text that repeats the same unfamiliar word five times. According to Fisher and Frey (2014b) a teacher can use the characteristics of what makes a text complex when planning instruction for a specific group of learners. Strong et al. (2018) advocates additional research is needed to create more efficient qualitative measures for text analysis, however, the guidelines the Common Core State Standards provide can be a starting point for educators.

Table 2
**Questions to Consider when Qualitatively Analyzing Text Complexity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Meaning and Purpose</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many ideas are in the text?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the ideas clear or vague?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there figurative language? If so, is it appropriate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the author’s main idea or purpose clear or difficult to identify?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Structure</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What genre is the text? Are students familiar with this type of genre?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the organizational structure of this type of text?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is it narrated?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the text features and illustrations support understanding?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Language Conventions</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the text relate to the language the reader uses?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the language informal or formal?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Knowledge Demands</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the reader have background knowledge about the text’s topic?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the text allow for use of prior academic knowledge?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the text require the reader to be familiar with a specific culture?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do many words have multiple meanings? What kind of vocabulary knowledge is needed to comprehend this text?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


When using quantitative and qualitative text complexity measures, teachers need to be aware they can be helpful, but there is also the possibility of them being incorrect for a specific group of readers. For example, Fisher and Frey (2014b) share data from *The Old Man and the Sea* (Hemingway, 1994). Quantitative measures would place this text at a sixth grade level, however Fisher and Frey (2014b) argue most sixth grade students would have difficulty understanding the message of this book. Another example comes from the book, *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008). Using a quantitative measure, *The Hunger Games* is given a Lexile score appropriate for a fourth or fifth
grader, but when measured qualitatively, this book would likely be more appropriate for older students in middle or high school (Fisher and Frey 2014b). These two books are examples of how assigning a quantitative measure to a text can be meaningless unless this data is substantiated qualitatively (Hiebert & Pearson, 2014). The Common Core State Standards (NGO & CCSSO, 2010b) allow teachers to use their judgment in order to best meet the goals that are presented in the standards. This also needs to be recognized when measuring text complexity because it can vary greatly depending on the knowledge of the students. The last measure of text complexity is considering the reader and the task, which is the role of the reader and how the reader is engaged in the reading task (Pearson & Hiebert, 2014). According to the Common Core State Standards (NGO & CCSSO, 2010a) task considerations include student motivation, experience, and knowledge.

These variables are specific to each individual reader, and must be considered when determining if a text is appropriate for specific readers. The Common Core State Standards (NGO & CCSSO, 2010a) state considerations regarding students and the assigned task are “best made by teachers employing their professional judgment, experience, and knowledge of their students and the subject” (p. 4). Likewise, Valencia et al. (2014) argues teachers are able to identify if a task will be difficult for students, and then provide appropriate instructional strategies to support students. “Complex tasks can make comprehending a simple text more difficult, and simple tasks can make comprehending a complex text less difficult” (Strong et al., 2018, p. 205). Currently, there is insufficient research on reader and task considerations to measure text
complexity, therefore teachers are in charge of making sense of what seems appropriate for each individual group of students (Tucker, 2013).

Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards provides teachers with a brief explanation of readers and tasks. Valencia et al. (2014) argue the brief half page description devoted to this topic is not enough and makes it difficult for educators to understand how this measure of text complexity can be connected to comprehension. Fisher and Frey (2014a) believe the authors of the Common Core State Standards did not intend on having such a brief description in this area, however, it does pose a risk. The document in Appendix A dedicates over 2,100 words to discussing quantitative and qualitative factors, while only a little more than 700 words are devoted to reader and task factors, which shows a lack of consideration for the interaction a reader has with a text. There is a body of literacy research dedicated to understanding this interaction. Louise Rosenblatt, however, believed reading is a journey where the reader interacts with the emotions and history a text provides, and through this interaction, the reader constructs meaning from the text (Rosenblatt, 1995).

**Rosenblatt’s Reader Response Theory**

Louise Rosenblatt’s Reader Response Theory offers a valuable perspective into the interaction between a reader and a piece of text (Rosenblatt, 1960). This theory is significant because it argues how a reader uses personal experiences to make meaning from a text. As a piece of literature communicates with the reader and the reader is comprehending, the literature brings about new meanings. This is important to educators because the role of the reader can intentionally be supported by teachers who have the understanding that reading literature evokes a personal response from
the reader (Rosenblatt, 1960). Literature can be thought of as a type of communication that only happens in one direction: the author writing to communicate to the reader. Rosenblatt (1960) argues the reader brings previous experiences, from both life and literature, when reading a piece of text. This helps the reader make sense of the piece of literature.

All readers have different life experiences, and because of this we all experience literature differently. No one can experience or read a piece of text for us (Rosenblatt, 1960). If the reader has limited background knowledge about a piece of literature, the text might not be brought to life or have meaning for the reader. This does not mean, however, the piece of literature cannot be brought to life in the future. It means the reader is not yet ready for the piece of literature at this point in their life. “Without sufficient relevant experience, he can evoke nothing from the page. At best, he may be able to make the appropriate sounds and parrot the words, but there will not be an organization of meaning” (Rosenblatt, 1960, p. 305). Rosenblatt (1960) believes it is not solely an issue of vocabulary, rather an issue of having adequate background knowledge and personal experiences. As educators consider curriculum planning, it is imperative to recognize the abundance of great literature students could benefit from, while also considering what students can personally contribute to making sense of the literature.

As students progress through school, the difficulty of texts students are reading will continue to increase. Educators need to be in tune with the background knowledge and experiences students are bringing to a piece of literature because this plays a great role in their interaction with the text. On the other hand, Rosenblatt (1960) also argues
that if teachers focus exclusively on student interests, they may be limited to the types of literature they can enjoy and appreciate. When students become personally involved with a piece of literature, they will make substantial growth in their language. Once a connection has been established between the text and the student, the teacher can help the student have a balanced and complete experience with the text.

Rosenblatt (1960) argues some students will need support in order to comprehend and build meaning from works of literature:

We need to remember that always we seek to help particular students, at particular times and places, with their special past experiences and present concerns, to participate in literary works. Literature equals book plus reader. The danger is that we may neglect either one or the other factor in this equation. (p. 306)

Rosenblatt’s reader response theory is based on the idea that the reader and piece of literature are part of a mutual relationship (Rosenblatt, 1978). This transactional response can be supported by teachers as they guide students in experiencing texts. Teachers can also facilitate how texts are a pathway for interpretation and comprehension. Rosenblatt (1960) indicates the reader response theory can be applied to all language levels as students have interactions and build connections with text. The relationship between the reader and the text is at the forefront of the reader response theory. It is essential that teachers acknowledge this interaction as students are being immersed into complex text.
Teachers know their students well, and according to the Common Core State Standards teachers have the opportunity to use their personal judgment to provide their students with the best instruction to meet the goals provided by the standards (NGO & CCSSOb). The standards require teachers to use complex texts with their students. With the use of complex texts, teachers are also supporting their students with comprehending these texts. These types of texts can be challenging for students. Teachers show frustration when their students are showing frustration. It is difficult for teachers to witness their students struggling with difficult texts when in the past students have been instructed with texts that are aligned with their current reading level and ability (Strong et al., 2018). Teachers are no longer dividing students into leveled groups, however they are providing scaffolding that will allow all students to access the demanding vocabulary and content in complex texts (Shanahan, 2020). Because teachers are immersing all students into complex text, they need to have tools to help mediate these types of texts with their students.

Previous Research in the Area of Text Complexity and Comprehension

The most significant research related to the focus of this literature has been reviewed. Dissertations in the areas of comprehension, complex text, and scaffolding have been reviewed below.

Research Supporting Questioning Related to Comprehension

Struggling readers can benefit from curriculum modifications that allow for rigorous instruction through questioning, while still meeting the standards provided in the Common Core State Standards (Buffen, 2019). Research completed by Buffen (2019) highlights the shifts with complex texts happening in grades K-12, the emphasis
that has been placed on close reading, students needing to use evidence to support explanations, and the prominence of nonfiction texts and the connection to student background knowledge. Students all have unique conditions which allow them to learn, and in order to recognize these differences the Common Core State Standards has room for improvements (Buffen, 2019). Issues with reading can occur because of lack of background and vocabulary knowledge, as well as culture and identity. Rose and Meyer (2002) as cited in Buffen (2019) suggest using a Universal Design Framework. Universal Design allows for a curriculum to be flexible, which allows for flexibility with methods, instructional goals, materials, and assessments. Universal Design offers multiple ways to represent information, flexible options with evaluation measures, and a variety of ways to engage students in the curriculum. This framework allows the curriculum to accommodate students with lack of background knowledge, and with students’ culture and identity. Using the idea of Universal Design, a study conducted by Buffen (2019) focused on urban California high school special education students as they read complex content area text closely. The researchers’ questions were focused on vulnerable readers, why a text could be difficult to understand, and how to facilitate engaging instruction with vulnerable readers using complex texts. Buffen (2019) found that teacher routines, such as asking open-ended questions, building background knowledge, differentiating instruction, and evidence based writing activities supported students’ ability to comprehend complex text. Differentiated instruction, such as additional time, modified skill work, and varied assessments were shown to promote student learning. When students were asked to respond to questions, background knowledge and looking for text evidence supported students in answering
comprehension questions. Open-ended questions allowed for more than one answer and supported students’ close reading. Overall, teachers can adjust instructional practices to support vulnerable readers with reading and comprehending complex text, which in turn can allow students to view themselves as having a successful academic identity (Buffen, 2019; Catterson & Pearson 2017; NGO & CCSSO, 2010b).

**Research Supporting the Scaffolding of Complex Texts**

Supporting students with complex text can be challenging, especially when the Common Core State Standards provides little guidance with scaffolding these complex texts. Reynolds (2017) addresses the need for scaffolding complex texts at the high school level. Reynolds (2017) argues the implementation of scaffolding interventions is crucial to the success of high school students who are reading below grade level, and will need support in order to read and comprehend complex grade level texts. However, rarely any study has been performed that explores research in the area of high school scaffolding, whereas there is substantial research at the primary and elementary levels. The study Reynolds (2017) conducted began by analyzing interactional and planned scaffolding. Interactional scaffolding is support provided by an expert to a novice learner, while planned scaffolding is determined before the student begins learning. When identifying research questions, Reynolds (2017) considered areas where more substantial research could be completed. The research questions included combining the areas of scaffolding, complex texts, and interventions. The study by Reynolds (2017) included 153 eleventh graders who were assigned to tutors with a range of experience levels who provided interactional scaffolding to support the comprehension of complex texts. As the study concluded, Reynolds (2017) found a positive correlation
between the intervention provided and reading comprehension growth in the 11th grade students. This study provides support for high school teachers who need to provide their students with scaffolding interventions in order to make sense of complex text.

**Research supporting the Use of Read Alouds to Support Comprehension**

Read-alouds can provide elementary students scaffolding with complex texts (Rozas, 2018). Read-alouds can also give students opportunities to practice critical thinking skills through discussions prompted by teacher questions. Rozas (2018) explored how teachers can support their students through script supported information read-alouds. Her first research question was based on this idea, while she also analyzed low-level, high-level, and rhetorical type read-aloud questions. The Common Core State Standards places an emphasis on students interacting with information texts, however Rozas (2018) found that instructional time was predominantly focused on narrative type text structures. Reading informational texts as read-alouds allows students to engage further than reading independently. It was discovered by Rozas (2018) that most research had been completed in the area of narrative read-alouds, not informational read-alouds. Informational texts require a substantial amount of content specific background knowledge to support comprehension, and often informational texts are about ideas that are not a part of children’s daily lives. Because students are not exposed as much to this type of content, reading these texts out loud can provide students with a rich opportunity to build content knowledge through teacher-led discussions. Rozas (2018) brings attention to the idea that students need to have specific content knowledge in order to interact with texts they will read in the future. Addressing this in the elementary years will support their comprehension of texts in
middle and high school. The study conducted by Rozas (2018) included a total of 824 students from a total of 37 classrooms and teachers were provided scripted materials for reading comprehension lessons. The teachers were recorded teaching one narrative and one informational lesson. Then, the lessons were transcribed and the comprehension questions teachers asked were organized into categories. As the questions were analyzed, it was discovered that teachers asked more low-level spontaneous questions than high-level questions. With this information in mind, Rozas (2018) concluded that pre-planned comprehension questions provide teachers a starting point during read-alouds to ensure questions are being asked for a wide range of cognitive levels. However, teachers play a critical role during interactive read-alouds that cannot be scripted. When teachers ask spontaneous high-level and low-level questions along with planned questions, students can be supported with engagement and student discussion happening in the moment. The spontaneous instructional decisions which are made by teachers in the moment support learner needs as they arise. Questions teachers ask that are not planned can help build content knowledge, while supporting critical thinking and engagement. Teachers have the opportunity to make choices during instruction, and the choices the teacher makes can affect the quality of discussion and student talk, engagement, student thinking, and the extent of which students are being challenged in the classroom.

Supporting Comprehension

The Common Core State Standards hold all students to the same high standards (Robertson et al., 2014). The Common Core State Standards expect teachers to use complex texts with students, but often it does not feel right to give students harder texts
Strong et al. (2018) has recognized the disconnect between students' reading abilities and what the Common Core State Standards expects students to read. Therefore, teachers must find the sweet spot where students are able to interact with complex texts and the content and concepts included in this type of text (Robertson et al., 2014). Teachers know their students well, and according to the Common Core State Standards teachers have the opportunity to use their personal judgment to provide their students with the best instruction in order to meet the goals provided by the standards (NGO & CCSSO, 2010b). The standards require teachers to use complex texts with their students. With the use of complex texts, teachers are also supporting their students with comprehending these texts. These types of texts can be challenging for students. Many teachers show frustration when their students are showing frustration. It is difficult for teachers to witness their students struggling with difficult texts when in the past students have been instructed with texts that are aligned with their current reading level and ability (Strong et al., 2018).

When teachers are preparing to immerse students in complex text, they should be prepared for carefully progressing and sequencing the text students will encounter (Strong et al., 2018). First, teachers can prepare students for comprehending difficult text by building vocabulary knowledge about the topic prior to reading. This can be done through a read-aloud and class discussion using a more difficult text (Stahl, 2012). According to Trelease (2006) reading aloud builds background knowledge and enhances vocabulary knowledge. It is important to understand that children have a reading level and a listening level. A student might be reading independently on a fourth grade level, but can listen to stories on a sixth grade level. Trelease (2006) believes that
students need to experience reading as being pleasurable. Therefore, if a text is too
difficult for a child, the text can become pleasurable when a teacher is there to support
the student. Children who choose not to read as much cannot get better, so teachers
need to support and encourage reading by modeling read-alouds. Teachers are
immersing all students into complex text, and they need to have tools to help mediate
these types of texts with their students.

A reading practice many teachers have used in their classrooms is the use of
leveled readers. Robertson et al. (2014) argues the use of leveled readers builds
certainty and fluency, but a fourth grader reading second grade level texts will always
lag behind his/her peers. Teachers are no longer dividing students into leveled groups,
however they are providing scaffolding that will allow all students to access the
demanding vocabulary and content in complex texts (Shanahan, 2020). Literacy
instruction that will move these students toward showing growth must be developed,
because reading below grade level text is no longer an acceptable practice. Robertson
et al. (2014) agrees students should not be reading text that is too hard, however all
students can read complex text that is appropriately mediated to ensure the text is not
too difficult for students. As students progress through the grades, teachers will provide
scaffolding to ensure students are reading appropriate complex text. Scaffolding leads
to students independently reading and comprehending the text independently by the
end of the year (“Sharing complex text and the CCSS,” 2012). Students can be given
accessible complex text, while still being challenged with the reading skills they are
utilizing with the text. In turn, when students encounter text that is difficult, they are likely
to be more motivated to engage and interact with the text, which will lead to better comprehension (Stutz, et al., 2016).

In any classroom there are students who need greater support than others. What causes some students to comprehend complex texts better than others? There are several factors that have an effect on this. Research has shown multiple times that having knowledge of a specific field or content area is a strong predictor of a student’s ability to comprehend complex texts. (Adams, 2010). The process of comprehending is an interaction between the reader, the text, and the task the reader is engaging with (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). Text complexity is the characteristics of a text, without considering the reader or the task (Strong et al., 2018). Text complexity is measured by comparing a text to other texts, on the other hand, text difficulty determines how easy or challenging a text is for the individual reader. Like stated above, a student with background knowledge of a subject will have an easier time comprehending a text about that content, than a student with no prior knowledge on the subject. Along with background knowledge, experiences and motivation do play a factor in how difficult a text is to comprehend (Strong et al., 2018).

In an article written by Strong et al. (2018) that summarized the findings from 26 research studies, the relationship between text difficulty, reading comprehension, and fluency was analyzed. Students’ reading fluency decreased as the level of text difficulty increased. Text difficulty also led to decreased accuracy, rate, and prosody in oral reading. In the studies reviewed, some found no relation between text difficulty and comprehension, however no studies found a positive correlation between text difficulty and comprehension (Strong et al., 2018).
From the overall findings of these 26 studies, Strong et al. (2018) was able to draw three main conclusions to support teachers in using complex text in their classrooms. First, teachers should be aware that there is an ideal level of difficulty with complex text that will support students’ comprehension. Addendum et al. (2016) argues students will struggle when the text is too difficult, although Topping et al. (2008) contends some challenges might be better than none at all. Students might also need to be able to read with a certain level of fluency in order to comprehend complex texts (Samuels, 2013). Second, teachers need to be aware of readers' skill levels and consider this when placing students with difficult text (Strong et al., 2018). For students who are less skilled readers, reading accuracy, rate, and comprehension decreased (Hiebert & Fisher, 2007). On the other hand, for readers with increased literacy skills, as text difficulty increased prosody increased (Benjamin & Schwanenflugel, 2010). Teachers need to use discretion when placing less skilled readers with difficult texts that may be more appropriate for readers who are more advanced (Hiebert & Mesmer, 2013). In addition to these findings, Cheatham et al. (2014) argues that as readers become more proficient with difficult text, the relationship students have with complex text can change over time. Third, teachers need to consider the amount of support students will need for assigned instructional tasks (Strong et al., 2018). When students are supported with appropriate scaffolds, it is possible for the negative relationship between text difficulty and comprehension to disappear (O’Connor et al., 2010). Strong et al. (2018) concludes these research findings by stating more research is needed to determine the specific scaffolds that should be given to students, and how they might offer support in the area of comprehension. Even though more research is needed,
there are instructional strategies teachers can implement into their classrooms to support all students with the reading of complex texts.

**Shared Reading**

A student’s instructional level can vary depending on the amount of instructional support provided by the teacher (Stahl, 2012). This idea is supported by Vygotsky (1978) and his research regarding the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). ZPD is the difference between what a learner can do independently and what he or she can accomplish with encouragement and guidance from a skilled friend or teacher. Vygotsky (1978) found that students can work independently when tasks present a low level of difficulty, while students can still be successful with high levels of difficulty if they are provided adequate scaffolding and support. “The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In order to make progress within the ZPD teachers need to focus on three areas to help support the learning process. First, guidance is needed from someone who is more knowledgeable than the learner and has skills above the learners ZPD. Second, the student should interact socially and engage in discussions with the skilled instructor. Third, the support provided should be gradually decreased as the student gains competence to complete the skill independently. The research Vygotsky (1978) completed aligns with the shared reading strategy, which can be implemented in classrooms to help support students in their current ZPD.
Shared reading is an instructional strategy teachers can implement to mediate complex texts (Stahl, 2012). According to Stahl (2012) shared reading is the practice of teachers sharing a text with their students. For example, a shared reading experience would take place if the text is above the ZPD for most students in the classroom. Texts being used during this time would be slightly above the students’ reading level, therefore the teacher would offer more support when reading these texts. As students work through a text with the teacher, they are practicing the literacy strategies needed in order to be successful reading the text independently after the shared reading experience (Stahl, 2012). Furthermore, as students reread the text independently, they may also be provided opportunities to reread with a partner. Even though the student is working through the text with the teacher, each student is responsible for following along with the text and participating in the activities that take place during the shared reading instructional time (Holdaway, 1982). Using the shared reading instructional strategy aligns with research completed by Pearson and Gallagher (1983) regarding the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model of instruction. This model suggests skills taught in the classroom should be modeled by the teacher, then become the work of the teacher and student together, and finally be released to the student as independent work. The shared reading framework allows for teachers to model and support students through skills that are currently too difficult for them to complete independently.

According to (Stahl, 2012) shared reading instruction varies depending on the grade level and needs of the students. In the primary grades, teachers and students use big books to interact with text together during shared reading time (Holdaway, 1982). During this time lower elementary students focus on high frequency words, repeated
parts of the text, vocabulary, and concepts of print, such as punctuation, capital letters, and the message of the text. By the end of first grade, students should be following along with their own copy of the text (Stahl, 2012). Books with a rich vocabulary that include a variety of words about a meaningful grade level topic would be appropriate for building vocabulary, fluency and automaticity. This type of instruction would be suitable until students reach the beginning of third grade. Once students have reached third grade, and the demands of content area text increases, students can be supported with comprehension and vocabulary strategies through shared reading instruction (Stahl, 2012). By third grade, students begin reading for meaning, whereas in the younger grades they were also practicing word recognition skills (Stahl, 2012). Shared reading using complex texts can support students with comprehension, critical literacy and thinking skills, building background knowledge with new content, and vocabulary. According to Stahl (2012), as students watch the teacher model reading strategies and receive support in an encouraging environment, they are more likely to apply these skills and strategies independently.

A research study conducted by Fisher et al. (2008) included 25 third through eighth grade expert teachers with experience with shared reading. The researchers observed three shared reading lessons taught by each of these teachers and collected field notes in order to identify the components of a shared reading lesson. Following the lessons, the researchers conducted an interview with six of the teachers to discuss the components that were witnessed during the lessons. The components included the frequency of shared reading, selecting a lesson focus, and the areas of instruction the observers were able to witness in the lessons. Fisher et al. (2012) was able to identify
four major areas of instruction, which were “comprehension, vocabulary, text structures, and text features” (p. 549). During the 75 observed lessons a variety of common instructional strategies were used. During each of these observations, each student was able to see the text the teacher was using. To share the text teachers used a set of books, photocopies, or a projection using an overhead projector or document camera. The 25 teachers modeled their own thinking, instead of asking students individual comprehension questions. “The focus clearly was on modeling thinking and not on asking students comprehension questions about the texts being read” (Fisher et al., 2008, p. 550). On the other hand, this does not mean students were silently watching the teacher, according to Fisher et al. (2008) students were interacting with the text through partner talk, reflection writing, questioning, and brief responses, such as thumbs up or down. Shared reading experiences can be applied to a variety of types of texts in order to help scaffold students into more difficult texts.

When engaging with complex texts, students need the extra support shared reading can offer. To engage completely with these texts students need to have their eyes on the text (Stahl, 2012). This can be their own copy of the text, a PowerPoint slide, overhead transparencies, or projecting the text onto an interactive classroom board. While students are following along with the text, the teacher should be modeling thinking strategies, encouraging students to ask their own questions, engaging students to discuss with a partner, and allowing students to practice written responses to the text. Modeling thinking strategies allows the teacher to demonstrate a variety of strategies that can be beneficial when making meaning from the text. Additionally, shared reading allows students to hear the teacher model fluent oral reading (Waters, 2014).
“Comprehension, vocab, text structures, and text features were commonly addressed by expert teachers during shared reading” (Stahl, 2012, p. 50). When there are difficult vocabulary words in complex text, the teacher can model how to determine the meaning of these words. Teachers who model using text features and text structure while reading, give their students practice using these cues that aid in making meaning and comprehension.

**Close Reading for Comprehension**

Students need high quality instruction in the area of comprehension, and close reading can provide students with the opportunity to apply what has been learned to complex texts (Fisher & Frey, 2015). During the close reading instructional routine students examine a text through repeated readings (Fisher & Frey, 2012). Fisher and Frey (2012) emphasize two main purposes during close reading instruction. First, students should be given the opportunity to connect new information to their prior knowledge and experiences, while also expanding their schema as they make connections to previous experiences. Second, students should build habits that are required of readers, such as persistence and stamina for reading complex texts. Paul and Elder (2003) argue that considering one’s background knowledge when a teacher is not prompting can be difficult. Therefore, students should practice identifying a purpose for reading and also the author’s purpose. Students also need practice activating their own prior knowledge, and preparing for content specific language used in text.

During the study completed by Fisher et al. (2008) the observers witnessed teachers using comprehension strategies such as activating background knowledge, summarizing, inferencing, predicting, visualizing, monitoring, clarifying questioning,
connecting, and evaluating during shared reading lessons. The instructional strategy of close reading focuses on students applying foundational skills, such as utilizing academic vocabulary and decoding to concentrate on the deeper meaning of the text (Waters, 2014). A teacher who participated in the Fisher et al. (2008) study reflected upon her own experience with comprehension. She described when teachers read we don’t focus on one comprehension strategy at a time, so we should not teach students this way. The shared reading experience should be authentic, and close reading can help students apply comprehension strategies to a small section of complex text.

In order to determine how close reading could be used as an instructional routine with elementary students, Fisher and Frey (2012) sought out effective teachers to collaborate with in order to explore the closed reading instructional routine. Fisher and Frey (2012) identified 14 kindergarten through sixth grade experienced teachers who agreed to participate in the study. The researchers wanted to investigate the features of close reading that could be identified as effective practices. After observations, Fisher and Frey (2012) identified six instructional components that needed to be included when teaching using close reading in elementary classrooms.

The instructional components that need to be included when teaching close reading include using complex text, short passages, limited frontloading, repeated readings, text-dependent questions, and annotation. Complex texts should be used because Fisher and Frey (2012) argue these texts are often above the instructional level of most students, therefore the shared reading instructional routine can be used to teach complex texts using these instructional components. Shared reading can help bridge the gap and mediate complex text, making these texts accessible to all students.
Students should be reading short passages that range from three paragraphs to two pages in length. When interacting with the text with a teacher, shorter pieces allow students to uncover the deeper meaning and interact with the text. Fisher and Frey (2015) provide additional insights about using short passages. One of the purposes of close reading is to zoom in on a longer passage that is worthy of discussing and examining. Text complexity is also a factor when using complex texts, therefore reading a brief excerpt allows the teacher to offer support when practicing comprehension skills.

During the observations, teachers did limited pre-teaching and spent little time activating background knowledge (Fisher & Frey 2012). Teachers discussed the purpose for reading, however, they did not spend much time discussing the meaning of the text or what students should expect. Repeated readings are also essential and students should reread a text several times. With each additional reading, students are given a new purpose or question that will direct and influence the rereading (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Fisher & Frey, 2015). During the Fisher and Frey (2012) observations, one teacher noted students are able to use background knowledge acquired from the first reading in subsequent readings. Teacher guidance during additional readings is critical because students need to be collaborating with one another in order to make further connections and build comprehension.

Questioning is a crucial part of close reading, more specifically asking text-dependent questions (Fisher & Frey, 2012). The questions teachers ask during close reading need to be based on text evidence, therefore students need to be able to explain where in the text they found their answer. A highlight of close reading is the intentional discussion students are able to have with one another (Fisher and Frey,
Being a participant in these discussions can unlock the text for students who are having difficulty with comprehension. The questions a teacher uses to intentionally guide discussion, can make the text more meaningful for students. Questions should be literal-level, structural-level, and inferential-level questions. Literal-level questions focus on what the text says, structural-level questions help students understand how the text works, and inferential-level questions help students identify what the text means. Finally, close reading requires students to annotate or take notes within the text (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Fisher & Frey, 2015). During the close reading observations Fisher and Frey (2012) saw students underline, circle, and write in the text’s margins, on bookmarks or on sticky notes. One teacher shared that students were able to quickly identify text evidence because of the notes that were taken during the reading of the text. As suggested by Addler and Doren (1940/1972) students can underline the main, central, or key ideas, circle confusing words and phrases, and summarize information in the margins of the text.

As students practice these components of close reading with shared reading experiences, Fisher and Frey (2015) acknowledge students will have practice with a wide range of texts. These foundational reading skills will strengthen their comprehension. Teacher modeling of these strategies will help students practice these skills with teacher support. When appropriate, students will be able to begin this work independently with complex texts.

**Vocabulary**

Being able to make sense of word meanings is an integral part of understanding a text. Students being able to acquire a varied and rich vocabulary cannot be over
emphasized (NGO & CCSSO, 2010a). When Fisher et al. (2008) observed teachers implementing the shared reading instructional strategy, teachers never explicitly told students the meaning of an unknown word. Instead, teachers modeled how to identify the meaning of unknown words using context clues, word parts, and external sources. A teacher who participated in the study described the importance of students having both “inside” and “outside” word strategies. Students should be able to go outside the word to use context clues, while also staying inside the word to use word parts to make sense of difficult words.

Identifying context clues is a valuable strategy to employ when making sense of difficult words, and a teacher can model this during shared reading. As students come to a word they do not know, they can use context clues by reading the sentence around the word and looking for clues to the meaning of the word (Baumann, et al. 2007). Students can be directed to look for context clues before and after the difficult word. Often the context clue is close to the word, but sometimes the context clue can be in another sentence or several sentences away from the word. During the Fisher et al. (2008) study, teachers helped students identify context clues by focussing on definitions embedded in the text, synonyms, antonyms, contrasts and comparisons, descriptions, and examples. Baumann et al. (2007) agree on the importance of context clues and identify five strategies students can be taught to identify context clues First, the definition may be present and the author explains the meaning of the word right in the text. Second, a synonym may be in the text where the author uses a word that has a similar meaning to the word. Third, an antonym might be used to give the opposite meaning of the word. Fourth, the author might share an example of the word. For
instance, the author might use the word *canine* followed by wolves, beagles, collies, foxes, coyotes, which are all examples of canines. Fifth, the author may follow the word with general words or statements that give clues to the meaning of the unknown word. For example, if the word *sultry* is used, the author might use the words hot, humid, sweat, drink a lot of water, etc. in the sentences that follow. Each of these strategies can be modeled during shared reading to give students more tools for unlocking words independently.

“Morphology refers to the study of the structure of words, particularly the smallest units of meaning in words: morphemes,” Kieffer & Lesaux (2007, p. 137). As students learn academic vocabulary, developing mastery of word structure can provide students with the needed knowledge to identify unknown words. Kieffer & Lesaux (2007) argue that students with a deep understanding of morphology are more fluent in learning new vocabulary and even comprehending the text they read. According to teachers who were part of the Fisher et al. (2008) study, using word parts is an “inside the word strategy” because teachers are modeling how to use suffixes, prefixes, roots and base words, word families, and cognates. Bauman et al. (2007) suggests students learn roots, prefixes, and suffixes. A root is the base of a word, a prefix is a word part added to the beginning of a word, and a suffix is added to the end of the word. Word families and cognates can be taught by teaching students Latin and Greek roots. A word wall could display the prefixes and suffixes to reinforce shared reading lessons. Teachers can also teach students how one word can take many forms when word parts are added to a given root. As students gain the skill of identifying roots, prefixes, and suffixes, they will in turn be able to more easily understand new vocabulary.
If students are struggling to use context clues and morphology to identify the meaning of unknown words, using other resources such as dictionaries, the internet, or another person could be helpful. Looking up words in the dictionary can be a valuable tool if the definition is child friendly. Gallagher & Anderson (2016) argue too often though “dictionary definitions can be convoluted and difficult for students to understand” (p. 277). To use the dictionary, students can look up the word, read all the definitions, and decide which definition fits the context of the text (Graves et al., 2017). Gallagher & Anderson (2016) suggest using the website, Word Central. This is an online dictionary for kids from Merriam-Webster, and can be helpful for finding student friendly definitions. The vocabulary acquired and the skills needed to learn new words will allow students to become independent word learners, which can be modeled further using a shared reading framework. A teacher who participated in the Fisher et al. (2008) study described how vocabulary instruction is addressed during shared reading lessons:

I do a lot of vocabulary instruction–direct instruction–during the day. I think it’s critical for learning specific words and the families of those words. But that’s not getting them to figure out words while they’re reading. That’s what I have to do during shared reading. I have to set an example and show them how to solve words in addition to knowing a lot of words (p. 553).

Pardo (2004) argues if there are too many words a reader does not know, then comprehension will be negatively affected. Making sense of unknown words can be modeled during shared reading lessons, which will help students gain the skills to make
sense of vocabulary independently, which will also increase the comprehension of complex texts.

**Text Structures**

As students are reading a text, they are organizing the information to make sense of the message being shared with them (Meyer & Rice, 1984). Fisher et al. (2008) observed in their study how students organize information by being attentive to the text structures the author uses. Informational texts are most often organized into compare and contrast, cause and effect, problem and solution, chronological and sequential, and description text structures. The structure of a text helps the reader comprehend, while also making connections between ideas (Meyer & Rice, 1984). Authors use text structures to arrange and connect ideas, and students who understand and know how to analyze text structures are more likely to comprehend what they are reading (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002).

Instruction focused on text structure has had a positive effect on students’ reading comprehension (Bogaerds-Hazenberg et al., 2020). A meta-analysis of research conducted by Bogaerds-Hazenberg et al. (2020) showed that text structure instruction improved student performance in the areas of summarizing, recall, and answering comprehension questions. In the study completed by Fisher et al. (2008) a teacher observed students noticing the sequential structure of an informational text discussing blood circulating in the body. Students were able to connect this text to learning about the water cycle, which is also a sequential process. Studies examined by Strong (2022) suggest text structure awareness is related to reading ability, differs for
each type of informational text structure, and can be acquired and improved through text structure instruction.

In order to teach informational text structures Tompkins (1998) suggests teachers follow a three step process. First, teachers should introduce the organizational pattern, which includes the signal words and phrases (see Table 3) that help identify each text structure. Students should be provided a graphic organizer to help with this process. Second, students should be given opportunities to work with text and analyze the text structures in text. Third, students need to be given the opportunity to write using each of the text structures. Tompkins (1998) proposes students choose a topic and use a graphic organizer to plan the paragraphs. Then, students write a paragraph following their organizational pattern using appropriate signal words and phrases for the specific text structure. The writing activity can be started as a whole-group activity, and then students work in small groups, partners, and individually as they move through the five types of text structures.

Prior to teaching informational text structures, Akhondi et al. (2011) suggest teachers have a deep understanding of text structure and are prepared to model the use of signal words and graphic organizers. This modeling can be done by the teacher using the shared reading instructional strategy. Akhondi et al. (2011) recommends introducing one text structure at a time, working on this one text structure for three to four lessons, and then moving on to the next. The texts students use should be about one paragraph long. This will allow students to analyze several passages during one lesson. During the shared reading activity, the teacher will model how to locate signal words and will support students in understanding how these words help organize each
text structure. As students find signal words, they can work in small groups, with a partner, or independently. After students have an understanding of signal words and phrases, they can use graphic organizers to organize their thinking about each text structure. The teacher can model using graphic organizers in a shared reading lesson and model how the text structure is represented using a graphic organizer. As students

Table 3

*Text Structure Signal Words and Phrases*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Structure</th>
<th>Signal Words and Phrases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compare and Contrast</td>
<td>but, similarly, although, different, alike, in the same way, likewise, in comparison, yet, whereas, however, on the other hand, also, in contrast, same as, just like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause and Effect</td>
<td>reasons why, therefore, consequently, so that, hence, thus, if-then, as a result, because, since, for, due to, this led to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem and Solution</td>
<td>problem is, if-then, so that, puzzle is solved, dilemma is, because, question/answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronological and Sequential</td>
<td>later, next, before, then, finally, first, second, third, after, later, since, when, previously, now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>characteristics, such as, including, for example, for instance, is like, to illustrate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


become more familiar with representing the text structure using graphic organizers, they can begin completing this work more independently. As students become more
experienced readers, they will be able to recognize the different text structures and identify how this information aids in comprehension of each text.

**Text Features**

When reading informational text, it can be difficult to determine the importance of information (Bluestein, 2010). Text features help readers determine importance and meaning during reading (Fisher et al., 2008). Understanding text features can help students filter information to determine what is important and what is unnecessary. Text features are the components of a reading that are not the main body of a text (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2010). During the study completed by Fisher et al. (2008) it was determined students use text features such as captions, headings, illustrations, graphs, boldface words, diagrams, and glossaries to make meaning from text. Additionally, Jones et al. (2016) adds table of contents, title, sidebars, introduction and conclusion statement, and graphical features, such as photographs and charts to the list. The title quickly tells students the topic of the information they will be reading (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2010). The table of contents gives students a preview of concepts included in the text, while also activating background knowledge (Bluestein, 2010). The table of contents can also give a preview of the structure and organization of the text, and the page numbers guide students to the location of information. Headings and subheadings give students clues about what is to come in a reading. As students read chapter or section titles, the headings can give important clues about the text within each of the sections, therefore students can also evaluate what sections of information are most important for their current reading purpose. Pictures and captions share important illustrations and ideas from the text (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2010).
Headings help the reader determine the main idea for a specific section of text. Charts and graphs provide data on a topic that elaborates or adds to the main idea of the text. Sidebars are found apart from the main text, but add additional information that is helpful to understand the main idea. The glossary helps students identify important vocabulary words and provides their definitions. Bold words are often critical to understanding the content of the reading (Bluestein, 2010). These words can likely be found in the glossary in the back of the text. Much like an introduction and conclusion statement, summary statements can be found at the beginning of textbook chapters. These summaries help students identify the big idea of a chapter and activate background knowledge for what information is to come. Determining the importance of these text features will help all students develop a deeper understanding with nonfiction complex texts.

Students who are reading complex text can benefit from instruction focused on text features in order to concentrate on the comprehension of the text (Bluestein, 2010). Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2010) suggest using text feature walks as an instructional strategy to help students navigate expository texts and enhance comprehension. A text feature walk can be used during a shared reading lesson with students. Students identify each text feature in the order it appears in the text and discuss what they think they will be learning based on the text feature (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2010). If students do not have much background knowledge on the topic, then a text feature walk will give students a preview of vocabulary and the content that will be discussed in the text. The text feature walk is an engaging experience that builds student interest in the topic and helps facilitate students making meaning of the text. During the shared
reading text feature walk, teachers should model making predictions and connecting to the main idea of the text. Students can continue to share text features until all from the text have been discussed. The text feature walk should be done before students read the text. As Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2010) analyzed the use of this instructional strategy, they found the texts had more value when the features were discussed. Students learned the important role text features play in information text, which lead to high-quality predictions and an improved comprehension of the content being studied.

**Methodology (Chapter 3)**

This chapter of the research review and project discusses the methods used for collecting, analyzing, and organizing all of the scholarly research that was gathered.

During the course of my research review, my topic has changed directions and has become more defined in order to help in a specific area of need at my school. At the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year, I knew I needed to advance my knowledge in the area of complex texts in the classroom. I found myself pondering this topic as I witnessed my students struggle to comprehend complex texts independently. I knew I needed to provide appropriate teacher support to aid in their comprehension. As I was facing this challenge, I saw my topic of complex text begin to narrow and become more defined to help me meet the needs of my students. This idea is what led to the direction of my research review and project.

The University of Northern Iowa’s Rod Library was a valuable resource during my research review and project. A librarian helped me identify more specific search criteria, reviewed tips for narrowing my search, and helped me practice using various search engines through UNI’s Rod Library. Utilizing the Rod Library's resources have been
instrumental in helping me narrow and filter my searches to get content that is best suited to my research review topic and project focus.

As I have continued to review research, I have used the Rod Library website for the entirety of the research I reviewed. I have found Google Scholar, ERIC (EBSCO), and ERIC (Institute of Education Sciences) to be the most helpful in locating relevant and peer reviewed research articles. First, I started by building an understanding of complex texts, next I began identifying teaching strategies that allow students to access complex text with teacher support, and then I found empirical studies to support the strategies I was reviewing. Search terms that were helpful to me were complex text, Common Core State Standards, text complexity, upper elementary, differentiation, shared reading, read alouds, instructional strategies, teaching strategies, comprehension, vocabulary, text features, and text structures. As I continued reading, I found more search terms and identified synonyms for those words, as well. Along with articles, I also used published books in the area of my topic. I used UNI ScholarWorks and Google Scholar to locate dissertations and research that had previously been completed by other students in my area of study.

I stayed organized by putting articles in a binder and categorizing articles as I read them. I highlighted information that was especially pertinent to my research review and project topic. I also made notes in the margins about connections I was finding to other articles and the teaching strategies that were discussed in the articles. I kept a notebook to record ideas I had about organizing my paper and creating my professional development. One of the strategies that showed itself to be most beneficial was looking at the reference sections of the articles I was reading. This strategy allowed me to
broaden my search while staying within the bounds of my topic. Many of the articles I read stated the need for more research in the area of complex texts in the classroom. The students in my school need support when comprehending complex text, therefore, my review of research will provide teachers with more knowledge to scaffold complex text for all learners.

The Project Discussion (Chapter 4)

The professional development project that was developed with my review of existing research will guide the work of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) at my school as we work towards meeting the goal we have set for the 2022-2023 school year. The project includes goals, professional development presentations, professional resources, teacher reflections, and individual grade level standards and formative assessments. The project will be used during the months of October, November, December, January, and February (See Table 4). During each of these months the PLC team will meet two times. The first meeting of each month will be new learning, which will include a presentation, professional resources, and individual grade level standards formative assessments. At the end of each of these meetings, each teacher will complete a Google Form in order to give feedback and reflections. The second meeting of the month will be a follow up meeting, which will include teacher reflections, connections, and discussions related to how the learning is connected to their classrooms.

The professional development I created is designed around the principles Kinnucan-Welsch (2006) recommends for literacy professional developments. First, the
professional learning teachers participate in needs to be directly connected to student learning goals. Second, professional development includes active learning for teachers. Teachers need to share their experiences before, participate in activities during the learning, and discuss new insights after the new learning has happened. Third, professional development should be part of the work teachers are currently doing in their classrooms. This allows teachers to focus on the teaching that best supports the learning of their students. Fourth, professional learning is ongoing and continuously supports the work teachers are doing over an extended period of time. Fifth, learning needs to be inquiry based, allowing teachers to focus on student learning, good instructional practices, and self reflection. Sixth, professional development needs to be consistent as teachers are applying the new learning to their classrooms. The changes teachers are making to their classrooms should become evident as these changes turn into positive outcomes with student learning. All these principles will allow teachers to participate in a professional development opportunity that will positively impact their planning and instructional practices.

**Table 4**

*Schedule for PLC Team Meetings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1: October</td>
<td>Common Core State Standards, Complex Text, and Measuring Text Complexity Quantitatively and Qualitatively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 2: November</td>
<td>Measuring Text Complexity Considering the Reader and the Task and Connections to Rosenblatt’s Reader Response Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 3: December</td>
<td>Supporting Comprehension Using Shared</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Context:

Twin Rivers Elementary PLC Professional Development Plan

Created by Joanna Carlson, PLC Leader and fifth grade reading teacher

Twin Rivers PLC Team Participants: Kindergarten Teacher, First Grade Teacher (also Title I Teacher), Second Grade Teacher, Third Grade Teacher (also Literacy Coach), Fourth Grade Teacher, Fifth Grade Teacher (PLC Leader and Talented and Gifted Teacher), Guide Counselor (also Multi-Tiered System of Supports [MTSS] and Technology Coach), Principal, Special Education Teacher

Targeted Need: Increasing comprehension of grade level complex texts

Description of School: Twin Rivers Elementary School is a building with combined grade kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms. Kindergarten and first grade are together in one classroom, just as second grade and third grade are together, and fourth and fifth grade share a classroom. During math and reading instruction, students receive their own grade level instruction. Each grade level receives 120 minutes of reading and writing instruction each morning. In the afternoon students receive 45 minutes of targeted MTSS intervention time. During MTSS intervention time, classroom teachers, literacy coach, Title I teacher, Talented and Gifted teacher, and special education teacher all provide students with appropriate skill instruction.

Goals for the PLC Professional Development
1. Demonstrate an understanding of complex texts and the connection to the Common Core State Standards.

2. Interpret the guidelines for measuring text complexity and apply quantitative, qualitative, and reader and task measures to complex texts used in grade level instruction.

3. Determine and discuss why some students perform below grade level standards in the area of comprehension.

4. Describe how the shared reading instructional strategy can help mediate complex texts for all students.

5. Prepare lessons using the shared reading instructional strategy to teach comprehension, vocabulary, text structures, and text features.

6. Utilize formative assessments within the Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) reading curriculum to assess student progress.

7. Support all members of the PLC team, have a willingness to accept feedback, hold each other accountable, and be willing to grow.

8. Empower students with a climate of respect, positivity, and encouragement.

Current Reading, Language Arts, Writing Curriculum

Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA)

Professional Resources

Core Knowledge Language Arts Reading Curriculum

Common Core State Standards

Description of Each PLC Professional Development

First Session: Understanding the Use of Complex Texts in the Classroom (October)
This session will be focused on the connection between complex texts and the Common Core State Standards. Teachers at my school are familiar with using these standards, but they need to build an understanding of how the standards are requiring students to read complex text.

Objectives for this session:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of complex texts and the connection to the Common Core State Standards.
2. Interpret the guidelines for measuring text complexity and apply quantitative, qualitative, and reader and task measures to complex texts used in grade level instruction.

Teachers will begin by creating a T-Chart on scratch paper at their table. This chart will serve as a pre-assessment to determine what teachers know about complex texts and what they know about the Common Core State Standards. We will take time to share, and then continue with learning what makes a text complex. Complex texts must be used in the classroom because of the connection between the Common Core State Standards and the College and Career Readiness Standards. Teachers are teaching children who will grow up to join college and the workforce, therefore, this is essential learning. Teachers will then continue with a discussion that provides information regarding the three major shifts that have happened in classrooms because of the Common Core State Standards and the College and Career Readiness Standards. These standards have defined what it means to be literate. As teachers, our goal is for our students to be literate and successful with reading in the classroom and beyond. In order to achieve this, there are a number of ways students are expected to
interact with and experience texts. Teachers must be aware of these specific ideas because they will be implementing them in their classrooms. We will look at the Common Core State Standards because each standard is directly connected to the College and Career Readiness Standards. Students across the United States are not ready for the types of texts that await them in college and their careers (Tucker, 2013). We will discuss the importance of this work, along with sharing statistics which prove students in the United States have been falling behind other developed countries (Adams, 2010).

I know many teachers have strategies they use regarding how to place students into appropriate texts for their skill level. However, when using complex texts, all students must be reading texts that are their grade level skills and standards. To address this issue, teachers will individually create a list of ways they place readers into texts, and then we will share responses together. Then, previous scholarly research will be presented about the use of leveled readers and Lexile levels to place students into texts. Instead of these placement tools, we will learn why it is essential for students to be reading texts beyond their instructional level (Appendix A). When students are reading these texts, they will be reading within the text complexity bands provided by the Common Core State Standards (Appendix A) (NGO & CCSSO, 2010a). Texts may still be difficult for students, therefore, teachers will be provided with support to know why a text might be difficult for a student. We will learn quantitative and qualitative measures that are used to determine text complexity.

To wrap up our learning for this session, teachers will spend time identifying the literacy standards in upcoming lessons and determine how those standards are affected
by the College and Career Readiness standards. Teachers will also be asked to look at
quantitative and qualitative text measures in the reader their class is currently reading.
Analyzing the text quantitatively and qualitatively will help determine why this text might
be difficult for students.
Understanding the Use of Complex Texts in the Classroom

Mrs. Joanna Carlson

Objectives

1. Demonstrate an understanding of complex texts and the connection to the Common Core State Standards.
2. Interpret the guidelines for measuring text complexity and apply quantitative, qualitative, and reader and task measures to complex texts used in grade level instruction.
Use the scratch paper at your table to make a T-Chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do you know about complex texts?</th>
<th>What do you know about the Common Core State Standards?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

What makes a text complex?

- contains implicit meanings and figurative language
- requires literary, cultural, and content knowledge that aids in comprehension

(Tucker, 2013)
The Common Core and College and Career Readiness

- Many shifts have happened in classrooms since the implementation of the CCSS.
- The standards are based on student performance and assessment data, academic research, and surveys conducted with college professors and employers.
- The standards are ambitious, however, the bar needs to be set higher to meet the demands of postsecondary employment, education, and training.
- The College and Career Readiness Standards are applicable to adult learners and are designed based off of the essential standards from the CCSS.

(U.S. Department of Education, 2013)

The College and Career Readiness Standards have caused many shifts in classrooms. On the following slides, can you guess the shift that has occurred?

(U.S. Department of Education, 2013)
Research has shown that the highest indicator of success in college and a career is a student's ability to read complex text and understand academic language.

Which has led to?

Using appropriate complex texts with students during both instruction and assessment.

(U.S. Department of Education, 2013)

Students need to be able to cite textual evidence to defend claims, analyze text, and present clear information.

Which has led to?

Using textual evidence across all areas of speaking and listening, writing, and reading.

(U.S. Department of Education, 2013)
Understanding informational text is crucial because this is the type of text students will most often read in college and the workforce.

which has led to?

Building a body of knowledge in the areas of social studies, science, technical subjects, and literacy.

(U.S. Department of Education, 2013)

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Why?

Students must be prepared for college or a career beyond high school by giving them abilities in literacy that will allow them to be successful.

(NGO & CCSSO, 2010b)
The Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010b) defines what it takes to be a literate person in the 21st century:

"Students who meet the Standards readily undertake the close, attentive reading that is at the heart of understanding and enjoying complex works of literature. They habitually perform the critical reading necessary to pick carefully through the staggering amount of information available today in print and digitally. They actively seek the wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high quality literary and informational texts that build knowledge, enlarges experience, and broadens worldviews...students who meet the Standards develop the skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening that are the foundation for any creative and purposeful expression in language." (p. 3)
These are two examples from the app (NGO & CCSSO, 2010b).

How do you think the U.S. has been performing academically?

Secondary students are not reading what they should be. SAT scores have been decreasing since the 1960s (Adams, 2010).

High school graduates are not prepared for the types of text that will be presented to them in college and beyond (Tucker, 2013).

The United States is failing when compared to other developed countries (Adams, 2010).
Use the post-its at your table to list the ways you place readers into texts. How do you determine what text to give each student? Put one idea on each post-it. Then, bring your responses to the board and we will look at responses.

What does the research say?

Leveled Readers

- Placing students in groups according to reading level does not allow students to read at the high levels (Shanahan, 2020).
- Teaching students at their instructional level gives students no learning advantages or is actually harmful. Studies have shown students given books above their instructional level made more progress than students given texts at their current instructional level (Morgan et al., 2000).
What does the research say?

**Lexile**

- Matches students to texts that are expected to be appropriate for their reading abilities (Stenner et al., 2015).
- It is assumed students need to read books within their Lexile level or their success in reading will be negatively affected (Strong, 2018).
- Think about this: Lexile does not measure how difficult the piece of text is for a specific reader. This would require having an understanding of the reader and how the reader will interact with the text (Strong, 2018).

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**Beyond Their Instructional Level**

Students need to read classical texts of fiction and also nonfiction to build a wealth of background knowledge (Hirsch, 2008).

Limiting students to what teachers think they can read hinders their opportunity to learn (Lupo et al., 2019).

Reading a variety of books teaches students about the world and its people, culture, and history (Hirsch, 2008).
Text Complexity Bands

K/1  2/3  4/5

As students move through the grade levels, they are expected to read increasingly difficult text. Students are expected to be independent with the grade level text at the end of each grade band (NGO & CCSSO, 2010a). (See handout)

Students are being immersed in complex text and teachers are supporting students with this type of text. Teachers must be able to determine what makes a text difficult for his/her students. Determining text complexity can help.
Text Complexity

How difficult is a text in relation to other texts? Three measures for analyzing text complexity:

1) Quantitative Measures
2) Qualitative Measures
3) Reader and the Task

This session will focus on quantitative and qualitative, while the next session will discuss reader and the task.

Text Complexity
Quantitative Measures

- Data, such as sentence length and word frequency that can be gathered using a computer program (Hiebert & Pearson, 2014; Tucker, 2013).
- The Lexile Framework—After the text has been analyzed, a Lexile number is given to texts (Stenner et al., 2015). (See handout)
- Students could read from a variety of Lexile levels as they practice reading strategies and build content knowledge.
- Global literature can be placed in a lower grade level than developmentally appropriate because the content may be more appropriate for older readers (Short, 2018).
Text Complexity
Quantitative Measures

• The TextEvaluator Tool aligns with the Common Core State Standards, provides a grade level score, and a detailed report in eight areas of literacy (Sheehan et al., 2014). (See handout)
• The TextEvaluator Tool can help educators make informed decisions about placing students in texts for instruction and assessment (Sheehan et al., 2014).
• It is essential to remember quantitative data does not consider the readers’ background knowledge about a topic.

Text Complexity
Qualitative Measures

• Data, such as text structure, language conventions and clarity, meaning and purpose, and the knowledge demands required by the reader (NGO & CCSSO, 2010; Tucker, 2013). (See handout)
• This type of data can only be gathered through the meticulous eye of a human reader (Strong et al., 2018).
• These measures are also subjective because they vary greatly based on the knowledge of the reader (Fisher and Frey, 2014).
Text Complexity

Use Caution...

- The Hunger Games (Collins, 2008) has a Lexile score (quantitative) appropriate for a 4th or 5th grader, however the qualitative score would place this text at the middle and high school levels (Fisher & Frey, 2014).

You each brought a text you are currently using in your classroom. Using the learning from today, and the information in the handout, determine what might be challenging regarding quantitative and qualitative measures.
References


Children’s Literature


Exit Ticket

Please answer the following questions after the presentation.

What is one thing you learned today you did not know?

Long answer text

After today's presentation, what is one question you have?

Long answer text
Second Session: Measuring Text Complexity Considering the Reader and Task

(November)

This session will be focused on how individual students bring different experiences and knowledge to the texts they read. This learning is essential for teachers to know because not all students have the same experiences and background knowledge for comprehending the texts being used in the classroom.

Objectives for this session:

1. Interpret the guidelines for measuring text complexity and apply quantitative, qualitative, and reader task measures to complex texts used in grade level instruction.

Teachers will begin this session by reviewing the quantitative and qualitative text complexity measures. We will continue to the reader and the task measure of text complexity. We will discuss variables for the reader and the task, along with the specific role of the teacher when considering this area of text complexity.

During this session, teachers will have the opportunity to analyze an upcoming text from our reading curriculum that is a part of their grade level materials. Teachers will determine how accessible this text will be for students. I want teachers to think in terms of the reader and the tasks students will be given using this text. We will continue by connecting these ideas to complex texts. Complex texts can make a simple text more difficult, while simple tasks can make complex text less difficult (Strong et al., 2018). The Common Core State Standards give a brief overview of the reader and the task, however, Louise Rosenblatt and her Reader Response Theory (1995) give more details about how a reader interacts with a text. Teachers must have a comprehensive
understanding of how readers interact with what they are reading because this
tremendously affects comprehension. We will watch a video illustrating Rosenblatt's
theory before talking about the connection between the reader, personal experiences,
and making meaning from the text.

Readers bring background knowledge and experiences with them in order to
make sense of what they are reading. In order to experience this, the teachers will be
instructed to read and summarize a quote taken from an article about a cardiovascular
study. After reading this quote, teachers will read and summarize a quote about the
positive effects for students when they read a variety of texts. The teachers should be
able to identify that their background knowledge heavily supported their understanding
of the second quote. To finish this session, teachers will gain a larger understanding of
Rosenblatt's theory, and determine ways to help build student background knowledge.
Supporting background knowledge will allow students to more effectively comprehend
what they are reading. Finally, teachers will read a powerful quote from Rosenblatt's
work, which will further build their understanding regarding why we need to bring
literature to life for students. Before ending this session, teachers will discuss major
takeaways they are adding to their repertoire of teaching knowledge.
Mrs. Joanna Carlson

Measuring Text Complexity Considering the Reader and Task

Objectives

1. Interpret the guidelines for measuring text complexity and apply quantitative, qualitative, and reader and task measures to complex texts used in grade level instruction.
Let's Review...

Measures of Text Complexity:
What are quantitative measures? Sentence length and word frequency (Tucker, 2013)
What are qualitative measures? Text structure, language conventions and clarity, meaning and purpose, and knowledge demands (NGO & CCSSO, 2010; Tucker, 2013)

Third Measure of Text Complexity: 
Reader and the Task

The role of the reader and how the reader is engaged in the reading task (Pearson & Hiebert, 2014).
Reader and Task Definition According to the Common Core State Standards

Variables for the reader: motivation, knowledge, and experiences. Variables for tasks: purpose, questions asked, and difficulty of the task.
(NGO & CCSSO, 2010)

The Role of the Teacher
Considerations regarding students and the assigned task are "best made by teachers employing their professional judgment, experience, and knowledge of their students and the subject" (NGO & CCSSO, 2010, p. 4).
Let's Dig In...

You each brought a text from our reading curriculum within your grade level. Have a discussion with someone who is not at your table. How accessible was this text to students? Think in terms of the reader and a task students were given using this text. Take 10 minutes and we will come back together to share.

"Complex tasks can make comprehending a simple text more difficult, and simple tasks can make comprehending a complex text less difficult" (Strong et al., 2018, p. 205)
Views Regarding Reader and Task

Common Core State Standards

The Standards give a brief overview of reader and the task. Much more is given about quantitative and qualitative text complexity. This makes it difficult for educators to understand the connection to comprehension (Valencia et al., 2014).

Louise Rosenblatt

Rosenblatt (1995) believed reading is a journey where the reader interacts with the emotions in a text, and through this interaction, the reader constructs meaning from the text.
Read and Summarize the Passage

"CHF is a complicated syndrome caused by functional and structural disturbances that impact the heart function in supplying oxygen to tissues [31]. Changes in miRNA level are related to the dysfunctional gene expression profiling in the nosogenesis of HF [32]. As an indicator, BDNF exerts a relatively high predictive value for HF [33]. This study investigated the clinical value of miR-182-5p and BDNF in CHF patients" (Fang et al., 2022, p. 7).

Was this simple or challenging? Why?
Here's Another...Read and Summarize the Passage

"Encouraging wide reading, or reading a wide variety of texts at an appropriate level of challenge, is one of the most effective ways teachers can support their students' vocabulary development because it provides opportunities for students to learn new vocabulary incidentally" (Nagy et al., 1985 as cited in Gallagher & Anderson, 2016, p. 274).

Was this simple or challenging? Why?

Louise Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory

The role of the reader can intentionally be supported by teachers who have the understanding that reading literature evokes a personal response from the reader (Rosenblatt, 1960).

With a partner, make a list of ways we can build student background knowledge for those who are limited in this area.
More About Reader Response Theory

- No one can experience a text for us.
- Sometimes a reader is not quite ready for a certain text.
- Students cannot make meaning without sufficient relevant experiences.
- Teachers can build background knowledge and support their personal experiences.

(Rosenblatt, 1960)

More About Reader Response Theory

- Focusing on student interests will limit the literature students can enjoy and appreciate.
- The reader and the piece of literature are part of a mutual relationship.
- Texts are a pathway for interpretation and comprehension.

(Rosenblatt, 1960)
ROSENBLATT (1960) URGES TEACHERS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS IN ORDER TO COMPREHEND AND BUILD MEANING FROM WORKS OF LITERATURE:
"WE NEED TO REMEMBER THAT ALWAYS WE SEEK TO HELP PARTICULAR STUDENTS, AT PARTICULAR TIMES AND PLACES, WITH THEIR SPECIAL PAST EXPERIENCES AND PRESENT CONCERNS, TO PARTICIPATE IN LITERARY WORKS. LITERATURE EQUALS BOOK PLUS READER. THE DANGER IS THAT WE MAY NEGLECT EITHER ONE OR THE OTHER FACTOR IN THIS EQUATION." (P. 306)

How can we bring literature to life for students?

On a post-it, write down two takeaways that you are adding to your repertoire of teaching knowledge.
Exit Ticket

Please answer the following questions after the presentation.

A connection I made is...
Long answer text

One thing I want to know more about is...
Long answer text
This session will be focused on how teachers can support comprehension for all students in their classroom. This is important because all students need support with comprehension at one time or another, while some students need mediation for every text they read. The ideas shared during this session will help teachers understand the struggles students have with complex texts.

Objectives for this session:

1. Determine and discuss why some students perform below grade level standards in the area of comprehension.

2. Describe how the shared reading instructional strategy can help mediate complex texts for all students.

This session begins by offering support to teachers who are teaching using challenging complex texts. It can be hard to watch our students struggle, however, complex texts are what the Common Core State Standards expect us to use with our students. Teachers will learn about the power of read-alouds through the beliefs and research completed by Trelease (2012). Knowing the impact read-alouds can have on students is essential because read-alouds can easily be added into any classroom schedule.

Teachers will continue by reviewing some ideas regarding leveled readers from the previous sessions. Leveled readers are not ideal for instruction because we want students to be immersed in texts of higher complexity. Complex texts can be scaffolded in order to give students the confidence and tools to read this challenging text independently. Teachers will learn the difference between text difficulty and complexity.
Just because a complex text is difficult to read, does not mean it will be difficult for each student.

This session will conclude with teachers activating their own prior knowledge of reading strategies they use in their classrooms. At each table group, teachers will create a list of strategies, and then we will all take time to share out. Following this sharing activity, we will watch a video that illustrates shared reading. The participants will not know this is a video of shared reading. I want them to watch for strategies that are being used during the reading lesson and interactions. After a discussion on this, we will watch another video highlighting what shared reading looks like in the classroom.

Shared reading is supported by Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development is the difference between what a learner can do independently and what he or she can accomplish with the help from a teacher or another skilled reader (Vygotsky, 1978). I want teachers to acknowledge that just because something might be difficult, does not mean it is out of reach for students. I want teachers to leave this session knowing they can support their students through the shared reading framework. Finally, teachers will look at an upcoming lesson and determine how specific skills and texts can be taught using the shared reading instructional strategy.
SUPPORTING COMPREHENSION

Mrs. Joanna Carlson

OBJECTIVES

1. Determine and discuss why some students perform below grade level standards in the area of comprehension.
2. Describe how the shared reading instructional strategy can help mediate complex texts for all students.
WHO WANTS STUDENTS TO SUCCEED?

- The Common Core State Standards expect teachers to use complex texts, but it often does not feel right to give students harder texts (Strong et al., 2018).
- Therefore, teachers must support students with comprehending these texts (Robertson et al., 2014).
- Teachers need to carefully sequence texts students will encounter (Strong et al., 2018).

THE POWER OF READ-ALOUDS

(Trelease, 2012)

Reading aloud...

- builds background knowledge and vocabulary
- supports and encourages children to read
- allows students to learn from a text that is higher than their current reading abilities
- allows students to experience reading as a pleasurable activity
LEVELED READERS

THIS WAS A TOPIC WE TALKED ABOUT LAST SESSION. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ISSUES WITH LEVELED READERS?

• Keep this in mind: As an example, a fourth grader always reading text two grades behind his peers, will always lag behind his peers (Robertson et al., 2014).
• We must provide scaffolding that will allow students to access the demanding vocabulary and content in complex texts (Shanahan, 2020).

MEDIATING TEXTS

• Students should not be reading text that is too hard, but students can successfully read complex text with appropriate scaffolds (Robertson, et al., 2014).
• Scaffolding will lead to students reading independently, while still being challenged with the reading skills they are acquiring ("Sharing complex text and the CCSS," 2012).
**What's the difference?**

**TEXT COMPLEXITY**
Measured by comparing a text to other texts.

**TEXT DIFFICULTY**
Determines how easy or challenging a text is for an individual reader.

Strong et al., 2018)

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**JUST KNOW...**

There is an ideal level of difficulty with complex texts. Students may struggle, but challenges will be better than none at all (Topping et al. 2008).

Teachers need to be aware of readers' skill levels and consider this when placing students in difficult text (Strong et al., 2018).

Remember to consider the amount of time students will need for instructional tasks (Strong et al., 2018).
READING STRATEGIES

Using the chart paper at your table, make a list of instructional strategies you use and have used to teach reading. Then, we will take time to share.

Be ready to talk about what you see happening in this video.
**SHARED READING**

When teachers share a text with their students, they model literacy skills and strategies (Stahl, 2012).

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**SUPPORTED BY VYGOTSKY'S ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT**

The Zone of Proximal Development is the difference between what a learner can do independently and what he or she can accomplish with the help of a teacher or skilled reader.

Teachers need to focus on three areas:

1. Provide guidance to students from someone who is more knowledgeable.
2. Allow students to interact and have discussions with the skilled teacher.
3. Gradually decrease support as the student gains competence.

(Vygotsky, 1978)
HOW TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH SHARED READING

- Use texts slightly above student reading levels (Stahl, 2012).
- Utilize partner work before releasing students independently.
- Students are responsible for following along. Think about how students will see the text. Will they have their own copy or see the text displayed on a SmartBoard or overhead (Holdaway, 1982).
- In the primary grades, use big books to practice high frequency words, repetition, vocabulary, and concepts of print.
- For upper elementary, choose complex texts with content variety and rich vocabulary.

APPLYING SHARED READING

We will look at specific skills that can be taught using shared reading, but now look at an upcoming lesson and plan using the concept of shared reading.
Exit Ticket

Please answer the following questions after the presentation.

How could you utilize read alouds in your classroom?

Long answer text

Where do you see shared reading fitting into your instruction?

Long answer text

What is one question you have?

Long answer text
Fourth Session: Close Reading for Comprehension and Vocabulary (December)

This session will be focused on how teachers can use the shared reading framework to teach close reading for comprehension and vocabulary. Close reading is a skill that allows students to analyze a small piece of text and look for the deeper meaning of that text (Waters, 2014). Vocabulary instruction is essential because students must be able to make sense of unknown words in order to fully comprehend what they are reading. This session will give teachers an understanding of both of these skills, and become prepared to utilize them in an upcoming lesson.

Objectives for this session:

1. Build an understanding for close reading and vocabulary components.

2. Prepare lessons using the shared reading instructional strategy to teach comprehension and vocabulary.

This session begins with a discussion about comprehension. We all need to have the same understanding that comprehension is making meaning and understanding the text you are reading, so we can focus on comprehending through close reading. The close reading strategy allows students to focus on a text through repeated readings (Fisher & Frey, 2012). Teachers need to understand that when they implement this strategy in their classrooms students will be building connections to their prior knowledge, while building persistence and stamina.

To further understand what close reading looks like in the classroom, teachers will learn about the components of close reading. The components that will be taught during this session include: using complex text, short passages, limiting front-loading before reading, using repeated readings, text-dependent questions, and annotations.
while reading. Using one of the most informational articles from my research, the participants will practice close reading the first two pages of the article, while using the annotation component of close reading (Appendix B). Following this activity, we will have time for reflection and discussion about their annotations and the article.

The second part of this session will teach three strategies students can use for finding the meaning of unknown words. These strategies include: context clues, word parts, and external sources (Fisher et al., 2008). These strategies can be used during shared reading and modeled by the teacher. As the teacher models using context clues, word parts, and external sources, the students are learning the skills they need to become independent word learners. I am anticipating a new resource to be the online dictionary for kids from Merriam and Webster. If students are reading a dictionary definition, it must make sense to them. This resource will help teachers provide child friendly definitions to their students.

Teachers will use the end of this session to do some upcoming curriculum planning. Participants will use the strategies discussed during this professional development in their upcoming reading lessons. After some planning time, we will take time to discuss what they are planning to implement and what they will do differently related to close reading and vocabulary instruction.
Close Reading for Comprehension and Vocabulary
Mrs. Joanna Carlson

Objectives

1. Build an understanding for close reading and vocabulary instruction components.
2. Prepare lessons using the shared reading instructional strategy to teach comprehension and vocabulary.
What is comprehension?

Making meaning and understanding the text you are reading.

Close Reading

Students will examine a text through repeated readings (Fisher & Frey, 2012), while applying foundational skills to concentrate on the deeper meaning of the text (Waters, 2014).

Two purposes:
1. Connect new information to their prior knowledge and experiences.
2. Build reading habits, such as persistence and stamina.
Supporting Comprehension

Fisher et al. (2008), conducted a study with expert teachers as they used the shared reading instructional strategy. One teacher reflected upon how we, as adults, comprehend. We don’t focus on one comprehension strategy at a time, so we should not teach students this way. Shared reading is an authentic experience that allows students to apply comprehension strategies to a small section of text.

Close Reading Components

1. Complex text
2. Short passages
3. Limited front-loading
4. Repeated readings
5. Text-dependent questions
6. Annotation

(Fisher & Frey, 2012)
**Complex Texts**

- Texts need to be above students' instructional level.
- Shared reading can bridge the gap and make these texts accessible to all students.

*(Fisher & Frey, 2012)*

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**Short Passages**

- Passages should be three paragraphs to two pages in length.
- This allows teachers to uncover the deeper meaning, which leads to students interacting with the text.
- Teachers can offer more support with a brief passage when text complexity is increased.

*(Fisher & Frey, 2012)*
Limited Front-loading

- Teachers refrain from talking about the text before reading.
- Students can still activate their background knowledge.
- Discuss the purpose for reading, but do not overwhelm students with pre-teaching.

(Fisher & Frey, 2012)

Repeated Readings

- Additional readings give students a new purpose.
- Students use background knowledge gained from the first reading in subsequent readings.
- The teacher guides students as they collaborate to build more connections and comprehend.

(Fisher & Frey, 2012)
Text-Dependent Questions

- Ask questions based on text evidence.
- Students need to explain where they found their answer.
- The teacher asks intentional questions.
- Discussions unlock the text for students who are struggling with comprehension.

(Fisher & Frey, 2012)

Text-Dependent Questions Teachers Should Ask

- Literal-level questions focus on what the text says.
- Structural-level questions help students understand how the text works.
- Inferential-level questions help students identify what the text means.

(Fisher & Frey, 2012)
Annotation

- Underline
- Circle
- Write in the margins, or on bookmarks and sticky notes

(Fisher & Frey, 2012)

Annotation

- Underline the main, central, or key ideas.
- Circle confusing words and phrases.
- Summarize information in the margins.

(Addler & Doren, 1940/1972)
Let's Practice!

We are going to practice annotating an article called, *Supporting Elementary Students’ Reading of Difficult Texts* (Strong et al., 2008). Use the strategies we talked about, along with some of your own. Read through the first two pages, and then we will have some discussion (see handout).

Vocabulary

Students should determine the meaning of unknown words using context clues, word parts, and external sources (Fisher et al., 2008). These can all be modeled during shared reading. Vocabulary knowledge increases comprehension of texts.

"Inside" word strategies: use word parts
"Outside" word strategies: context clues
Context Clues

- Direct students to read the sentence around the word to look for meaning clues.
- The meaning might even be in another sentence or several sentences away from the word.

(Baumann, et al., 2007)

Context Clues

Look for:
- Definitions embedded in the text
- Synonyms
- Antonyms
- Comparing and contrasting
- Descriptions
- Examples

(Fisher et al., 2008)
Word Parts

"Morphology refers to the study of the structure of words, particularly the smallest units of meaning in words: morphemes," (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007, p. 137).

Developing mastery of word structure can give students the knowledge needed to identify unknown words.

Word Parts: Looking Inside the Word

Teachers can teach and model:
- Suffixes
- Prefixes
- Roots
- Base words
- Word families
- Cognates

These tools will allow students to independently make sense of new vocabulary.

(Baumann, et al., 2007)
The vocabulary acquired and the skills needed to learn new words will allow students to become independent word learners. A teacher during the Fisher et al. (2008) study described how vocabulary instruction is addressed during shared reading lessons: "I do a lot of vocabulary instruction—direct instruction—during the day. I think it’s critical for learning specific words and the families of those words. But that’s not getting them to figure out words while they’re reading. That’s what I have to do during shared reading. I have to set an example and show them how to solve words in addition to knowing a lot of words," (p. 553).
Applying This to Our Teaching

Let's use the rest of our time for planning. How can you embed the strategies of close reading and vocabulary instruction into your upcoming reading lessons? What will you do differently after today's learning?

References
Exit Ticket

Please answer the following questions after the presentation.

Name two ideas you are ready to try during your instructional time?

Long answer text

Name one interesting fact you learned from today's presentation.

Long answer text

What is one question you still have?

Long answer text
Fifth Session: Teaching Text Structures and Text Features (January)

This session will be focused on how teachers can support comprehension for all students in their classroom. This is important because all students need support with comprehension at one time or another, while some students need mediation for each text they read. The ideas shared during this session will help teachers understand the struggles students have with complex texts.

Objectives for this session:

1. Build an understanding for text structure and text feature instruction.

2. Prepare lessons using the shared reading instructional strategy to teach text structure and text features.

This session begins with giving teachers an understanding of text structure. Text structure has to do with how the text is organized because this is directly related to how readers organize the information to comprehend (Fisher et al., 2008). I will provide an example of text structure organization because the way students organize information about the water cycle would be similar to how the blood flows. Both of these processes are sequential (Fisher et al., 2008).

In order to help students comprehend using text structure, teachers need to know the three step process to teaching text structure (Appendix C). Next, teachers will learn about utilizing graphic organizers to teach text structure. This can help students organize information as they create their own examples of each text structure. The teacher can model locating the appropriate signal words and phrases (Appendix C) using shared reading, and then students will be able to start locating these signal words and phrases independently. Using the article provided (Appendix B), teachers will look
for signal words and phrases on the first two pages in order to identify text structures in a piece of text. Teachers will get the opportunity to share out the text structures and clues they located.

The second half of this session will focus on building an understanding of teaching text features to promote comprehension. Text features are other components that aid in understanding, but are not part of the main body of text (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2010). After going through all the main text features students may encounter, teachers will learn how to take a text feature walk (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2010) with students. This allows students to preview the text features in a text prior to reading. Once teachers have learned how to implement this strategy, they will get the opportunity to look for text features in the article we have been referencing (Appendix B). Participants will end this session looking for text features in this article and discussing their importance to comprehension.
Teaching Text Structures and Text Features

Mrs. Joanna Carlson

Objectives

1. Build an understanding for text structure and text feature instruction.
2. Prepare lessons using the shared reading instructional strategy to teach text structure and text features.
Text Structures

- Students organize information by being attentive to the text structures an author uses in his/her writing (Fisher et al., 2008).
- Informational texts are organized into compare and contrast, cause and effect, problem and solution, chronological and sequential, and description text structures.
- Text structure helps the reader comprehend, while making connections between ideas (Meyer & Rice, 1984).

Example

The text structure of an informational text about the water cycle would be similar to a text describing how blood flows throughout the body. Both are a sequential process (Fisher et al., 2008).
Three Step Process to Teaching Informational Text Structures

1. Introduce the organizational pattern with a graphic organizer. This includes the signal words and phrases (see handout).

2. Give students time to practice the with the text and text structure.

3. Allow students to write using the text structure.

(Tompkins, 1998)

Practice, Practice, and More Practice

1. Provide students with a graphic organizer that outlines the text structure you are teaching.
2. Direct students to write a paragraph using the graphic organizer as a guide.
3. Students should use appropriate signal words and phrases.
4. Introduce one text structure at a time, spending three to four lessons before moving on.

Start this activity whole group using the shared reading framework. Then, move to small groups, partners, and individual work. The goal is to write with all five text structures.

(Akhondi et al., 2011; Tompkins, 2008)
Reading to Identify Text Structures

- The teacher should model locating signal words and phrases
- Students practice finding signal words and phrases with a small group, partner, and eventually independently

As the teacher models this using shared reading, students will become able to locate the text structure clues on their own, and will be able to represent the text structures on a graphic organizer.

(Akhondi et al., 2011)

Let’s Practice

Using the article we used last session, what text structures do you see on pages one and two? How do you know?

(Strong et al., 2018)
Text Features

Text features help students determine important information and focus on comprehension (Fisher et al., 2008). Text features are not a part of the main body of a text, but are other components that help understand the meaning (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2010).

Types of Text Features

- Captions
- Headings
- Illustrations
- Graphs
- Boldface words
- Diagrams
- Glossaries

(Fisher et al. 2008)
Types of Text Features

- Table of Contents
- Title
- Sidebars
- Introduction and conclusion
  (Fisher et al. 2008)

Why is the table of contents important? It gives a preview of the text structure and content.
Why are sidebars important? They give additional information that is helpful in understanding the main idea.
  (Fisher et al. 2008)
Text Feature Walks

Similar to a picture walk, but a text feature walk! Helps students navigate expository texts and enhance comprehension before the text is read. Texts have more value when the features are discussed.

(Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2010)

Taking a Text Feature Walk

1. Students identify the texts features in order and determine what they think they will be learning.

2. Engages students in vocabulary, background knowledge, and builds interest in the topic.

3. The teacher models making predictions and connecting to the main idea of the text using shared reading.

(Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2010)
Let's Practice

Using the article we used last session, what text features do you see? How do they help us understand the article?

(Strong et al., 2018)

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Work Time

- How will you implement these ideas into your reading instruction?
- Can you find graphic organizers to incorporate text structure instruction into your lessons?
- Can you do a text feature walk in an upcoming lesson? Do you need to teach text features first?
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**Exit Ticket**

Please answer the following questions after the presentation.

**Name two ideas you are ready to try during your instructional time?**

Long answer text

**Name one interesting fact you learned from today’s presentation.**

Long answer text

**What is one question you still have?**

Long answer text
Professional Development References


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**Children’s Literature**

Conclusion (Chapter 5)

The purpose of this project and the review of literature was to identify specific teaching strategies beneficial to meeting the requirements of the Common Core State Standards. Strong et al. (2018) argues students need scaffolding when reading difficult texts because their comprehension can be negatively affected without the additional teacher support. The strategies explained in this project make complex texts accessible to all students, while also increasing student confidence to interact with the texts independently (Stahl, 2012). Difficult texts do not have to be frustrating, and implementing strategies in the classroom can help students read complex texts with success.

This review of research includes the specific strategy of shared reading and how shared reading can scaffold student learning in the areas of comprehension, vocabulary, text structures, and text features. Shared reading allows teachers to explain and model thinking, which leads to students having the opportunity to apply and practice the skills modeled by the teacher (Fisher et al., 2008). The strategy of shared reading allows teachers to use teacher modeling for a specific purpose. Using shared reading as an integral part of whole group instruction allows teachers to focus on the needs of the class and the grade level standards.

A review of research regarding the Common Core State Standards and complex texts was necessary for this project because pushing students into complex texts counteracts common teacher practice (Strong et al., 2018). It is difficult for teachers to witness their students struggling with text, however the Common Core State Standards provide the learning targets students need to meet in order to leave high school ready to
live a productive life (Adams, 2010). Effective teacher instruction should lead to student action and success (Fisher & Frey, 2015). The strategies implemented through shared reading should inspire students to extend their learning in a variety of ways. Scaffolding and shared reading can make complex text accessible for all students. When students are inspired through teacher modeling, they will gain the experience and skills needed to become proficient and skilled readers of complex text independently.
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Children’s Literature


Appendices

Appendix A

Session #1

Understanding Text Complexity

Grade Bands and Lexile Ranges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Complexity Grade Band in the Standards</th>
<th>Old Lexile Ranges</th>
<th>Lexile Ranges Aligned to CCR expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>450-725</td>
<td>450-790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>645-845</td>
<td>770-980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>860-1010</td>
<td>955-1155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>960-1115</td>
<td>1080-1305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-CCR</td>
<td>1070-1220</td>
<td>1215-1355</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(NGO & CCSSO, 2010)

Quantitative Measures used to Assess Text Complexity using the TextEvaluator Tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Literacy Assessed</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic vocabulary</td>
<td>identifies the frequency of academic words, word length, syllables, and words that contain more than eight characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic complexity</td>
<td>analyzes sentences for length, amount of dependent clauses, average words before the main verb, and the richness of vocabulary used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word concreteness</td>
<td>concrete words are able to be visualized and abstract words are not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word familiarity</td>
<td>determines the amount of rare words in a text and how many of the unfamiliar words are repeated more than once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive/conversational style</td>
<td>determines if the text was written with an interactive and conversational style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of narrativity</td>
<td>analyzes past tense verbs and pronouns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical cohesion</td>
<td>how well the clauses and sentences are connected to one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of argumentation</td>
<td>the amount of arguments and negotiations in a text</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


MRS. JOANNA CARLSON
Questions to Consider when Qualitatively Analyzing Text Complexity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning and Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many ideas is the text about?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the ideas clear or vague?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there figurative language? If so, is it appropriate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the author's main idea or purpose clear or difficult to identify?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What genre is the text? Are students familiar with this type of genre?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the organizational structure of this type of text?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is it narrated?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the text features and illustrations support understanding?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Conventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the text relate to the language the reader uses?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the language informal or formal?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge Demands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the reader have background knowledge about the text's topic?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the text allow for use of prior academic knowledge?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the text require the reader to be familiar with a specific culture?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do many words have multiple meanings? What kind of vocabulary knowledge is needed to comprehend this text?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notes:
Supporting Elementary Students’ Reading of Difficult Texts

John Z. Strong, Steven J. Amendum, Kristin Conradi Smith

We present practical recommendations for teachers to analyze text difficulty, select texts for their students, and provide supports for students when reading difficult texts.

The idea of having students read difficult texts might run counter to what many of us feel comfortable doing as teachers. In fact, many teachers were trained to match readers to texts at their instructional level (e.g., Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Leslie & Caldwell, 2011), and teachers have long been told to avoid giving students frustration-level texts (Bettis, 1946) with which they were told, students were bound to struggle. So, what are teachers supposed to do? Newer standards in most states are pushing for the use of more complex and difficult texts, but this seems to run counter to common practices. Furthermore, there is not a clear, strong research base. As former teachers, we initially struggled with the new Common Core State Standards for those very reasons. Frankly, it did not feel right to push our students into harder texts.

This same sentiment has permeated our discussions with teachers and reading specialists over the past several years. We have encountered numerous teachers who expressed their frustration with the disconnect between the requirements for text complexity required by state standards and students’ reading abilities. Teachers often ask us how students should be expected to read texts that are well above their reading levels. Initially, we agreed that the use of difficult texts was problematic and, at minimum, needed to be investigated further.

Yet, over time, we were convinced of the potential benefits of increasing text difficulty (e.g., Fisher & Frey, 2014a). Part of our journey involved a shift in our thinking: A student’s instructional level is not necessarily a fixed state; rather, it is something we should consider “elastic depending on the degree of instructional support provided” (K.A.D. Stahl, 2012, pp. 47–48). That is to say, the students we work with are not required to only read texts at a certain level, regardless of the support we provide. Instead, the support we provide can shift the level of text the students can handle. Our understanding was further advanced by the notion that there is a direct relation between more challenge and increased motivation. When readers encounter something that is difficult, they are often more motivated to engage with it; this, in turn, facilitates text comprehension (e.g., Stutz, Schaffner, & Schiefele, 2016).

As we came to accept the possibility that an increase in text difficulty was not necessarily detrimental to students, we shifted our focus to how we can support teachers in this area. What we decided is that support will need to vary according to factors such as students’ developmental stage of reading, the characteristics of the text itself, and the context of the instructional task or activity (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). In this article, we present a framework for using difficult texts with students. We address instructional considerations and consolidate ideas from previous research to help teachers select texts for elementary students and then plan supportive small group instruction.

Previous Work
As is likely the case for many readers of this article, the call for increased text complexity runs counter to what we learned in our teacher preparation programs.

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When we first heard of the new standards, we agreed that increasing rigor was important, but we were concerned that there was not enough evidence about what this would look like in a classroom, particularly at the elementary level. These concerns, along with calls for additional research (e.g., Cunningham, 2013; Mesmer, Cunningham, & Hiebert, 2012), prompted us to dig into the evidence base. These efforts produced an integrative literature review in which we addressed the relations between text difficulty and students’ reading achievement at the elementary level (for a descriptive overview of each of the studies and overall findings, see Amend, Conradi, & Hiebert, 2018).

In this section, we describe the major findings and conclusions related to the relation between text difficulty and reading outcomes, specifically in terms of fluency and comprehension. Then, we draw on additional literature to provide recommendations for how to determine text difficulty, how to select texts for readers, and how to support elementary students’ reading of difficult texts.

When we conducted our integrative review, we examined 26 research studies that investigated the relation between text difficulty and elementary students’ fluency and comprehension. We found that, overall, students’ reading fluency tended to decrease as the level of text difficulty increased, with a stronger negative relation for less skilled and beginning readers. More specifically, increased text difficulty level was related to decreased accuracy and rate and sometimes decreased prosody. The relation between text difficulty and reading comprehension was similar. On average, text difficulty level was negatively related to reading comprehension, especially for beginning and less skilled readers. It is important to note that although some studies found no relation between text difficulty and comprehension, no studies demonstrated an overall positive relation between text difficulty and comprehension. A full accounting of results is available in the review (Amend et al., 2018).

Given our findings, we made three main conclusions for using difficult texts in the elementary classroom. First, teachers should consider the degree of text difficulty, recognizing that there may be an optimal level of difficulty for promoting comprehension. Although, on average, students struggled when text was too difficult (e.g., Amend, Conradi, & Liebfried, 2016), some challenge may be better than none (Topping, Samuels, & Paul, 2008). It may be that students need to be able to read a text with a certain level of fluency to comprehend more difficult texts (Samuels, 2013).

Second, teachers ought to consider the skill level of readers. As the level of text difficulty increased, students’ reading accuracy, rate, and comprehension tended to decrease, especially for less skilled readers (Hiebert & Fisher, 2007). In contrast, however, for some more skilled readers, prosody improved as text difficulty increased (Benjamin & Schwabenflugel, 2010). Teachers should exercise more caution in matching younger readers and less skilled readers with difficult texts (Hiebert & Mesmer, 2013) than they use for older or more advanced readers. It may be that relations between texts and readers change over time as readers become more proficient (Cheatham, Allor, & Roberts, 2014; O’Connor et al., 2002).

Third, teachers should consider the level of support provided to students for the instructional task assigned. Students may be able to read more difficult texts when provided with support. When tasks are appropriately scaffolded, it is possible that the negative relation between text difficulty and comprehension disappears (e.g., Morgan, Wilcox, & Eldredge, 2000; O’Connor et al., 2002; O’Connor, Swanson, & Geraghty, 2010). Previous work has suggested benefits of reading difficult texts in supportive instructional contexts (S.A. Stahl & Heubach, 2005) that include fluency support from peers (e.g., Morgan et al., 2000) or the teacher (e.g., O’Connor et al., 2002, 2010) in a small-group setting. More research is needed to determine types of scaffolds that can be provided to students and how they might support comprehension.

**Recommendations**

The three conclusions previously described led us to develop three guiding questions for teachers to consider when providing difficult texts for their students:

1. What makes one text more difficult than another?
2. How can teachers select texts for readers?
3. How can teachers support students’ reading of difficult texts?
In developing these questions, our goal was to create a workable framework that teachers could use when providing small-group reading instruction. In Figure 1, we present an overview of the considerations needed to implement the framework with groups of students in a classroom setting. This framework marks a shift away from grouping students by their reading levels; instead, our goal is to provide instruction for students in difficult grade-level texts, grouping them according to the types of support they will need to be successful.

**What Makes One Text More Difficult Than Another?**

Some of the uncertainty about text difficulty has to do with the terms used to discuss the topic. We agree with others who distinguish between two important concepts: text complexity and text difficulty (Mesmer et al., 2012). Text complexity refers to characteristics of individual texts, such as sentence length and word complexity, regardless of readers or tasks. Therefore, a text’s complexity is determined in relation to other texts. For example, using these criteria, a book from Cynthia Rylant’s Henry and Mudge series is much less complex than Natalie Babbit’s *Tuck Everlasting*.

Text difficulty, in contrast, refers to how easy or hard a given text is for an individual reader. A text that is difficult for some readers may not be difficult for others; for example, a student with background knowledge about baseball might recall more information from a text about baseball than a student with low baseball knowledge (e.g., Recht & Leslie, 1988). Because our ultimate focus is on supporting readers’ comprehension, we pay more attention to text difficulty than text complexity.

It is important to understand what makes texts difficult and to have a reliable method for determining the potential comprehension difficulties a given text presents. The comprehension process is often considered an interaction between reader, text, and activity, surrounded by the sociocultural context (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). The possible difficulties that a text presents are a result of the quantitative and qualitative aspects of text complexity, as well as characteristics of the reader and the associated tasks. For a teacher to determine what makes a text difficult for his or her students, all three aspects must be considered. We discuss measures of each of these aspects of text difficulty next.

**Quantitative Measures of Text Complexity.** The Lexile Framework (MetaMetrics, n.d.) is one of the most widely employed quantitative measures of text complexity (Cunningham & Mesmer, 2014). We echo the concerns of others that, in practice, text complexity is often determined solely by a text’s Lexile score (e.g., Wixson & Valencia, 2014). It is important to consider the limitations of unidimensional readability metrics, such as Lexile, which assign an overall score to texts based on sentence length and word frequency (Græsser et al., 2014). Such measures may accurately predict the difficulty of texts in the upper elementary and middle grades (Græsser et al., 2014) but often are not accurate for early reading texts (Hiebert & Pearson, 2010). In addition, they tend to overestimate the difficulty of informational texts and underestimate the difficulty of narrative texts (Hiebert, 2011).

Other readability metrics for determining text complexity are available but remain relatively unused in practice. Multidimensional readability metrics, such as TextEase (Sheehan, Kostin, Napolitano, & Flor, 2014) and Coh-Metrix:TEA (Text Easeability Assessor; Græsser et al., 2014), are better than unidimensional metrics at assessing the difficulty of narrative texts. Coh-Metrix:TEA (http://tea.cohmetrix.com) provides scores in five dimensions:

**Figure 1**

**Considerations for Supporting Readers in Difficult Texts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consider readers</th>
<th>Consider texts</th>
<th>Consider tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assess reading strengths and needs of students</td>
<td>Check quantitative measures of difficulty</td>
<td>Group students by supports needed to complete task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine instructional goals based on standards</td>
<td>Analyze qualitative factors of difficulty</td>
<td>Provide supports before, during, and after reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
narrativity, syntactic simplicity, word concreteness, referential cohesion, and deep cohesion (Graesser et al., 2014). TextEvaluator (https://textevaluator.ets.org/TextEvaluator/) provides an overall grade-level score, as well as scores in eight dimensions: academic vocabulary, syntactic complexity, concreteness, word unfamiliarity, interactive/conversational style, degree of narrativity, cohesion, and argumentation (Sheehan et al., 2014).

Table 1 compares the quantitative measures produced by each of these metrics for an excerpt from Lois Lowry’s (1989) Number the Stars, a chapter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text component</th>
<th>Lexile Analyzer</th>
<th>Coh-Metrix-TEA</th>
<th>TextEvaluator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text formatting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word total</td>
<td>900</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence total</td>
<td></td>
<td>79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean words per sentence</td>
<td>11.25</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph total</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean words per paragraph</td>
<td></td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quoted words total</td>
<td></td>
<td>321</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence structure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic complexity</td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic simplicity</td>
<td></td>
<td>76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary difficulty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word unfamiliarity</td>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word concreteness</td>
<td></td>
<td>69</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean log word frequency</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections across ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical cohesion</td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive/conversational style</td>
<td></td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of argumentization</td>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep cohesion</td>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referential cohesion</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of narrativity</td>
<td></td>
<td>82</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall text complexity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TextEvaluator complexity score</td>
<td></td>
<td>670</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexile measure</td>
<td>670L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Core grade band</td>
<td>2–3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch–Kincaid grade level</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target grade computed</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Higher values indicate higher complexity. *Lower values indicate higher complexity.
book commonly used in upper elementary grades. The components of text complexity produced by each measure vary, as do the scales with which they are reported. Coh-Metrix-TEA produces percentiles for each of the five attributes it measures and the text’s Flesch–Kincaid grade level. TextEvaluator reports all component scores on a scale ranging from 1 to 100 and computes an overall complexity score on a scale ranging from 100 to 2,000, as well as a target grade. Similarly, Lexile Analyzer produces a Lexile measure that corresponds with the text complexity grade band in Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA Center] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010). As shown in Table 1, the grade-level estimate produced by each metric is different because the overall text complexity score considers different text features.

The use of multiple measures may result in a better idea of the level of challenge the text will present to students (Hiebert, 2011). Although much work remains to be done to make these measures more accessible to teachers and publishers, additional quantitative measures such as Coh-Metrix-TEA and TextEvaluator can be used to make a judgment about the complexity of texts when unidimensional measures, such as Lexile, may fall short.

**Qualitative Measures of Text Complexity.** Whether the quantitative measure is unidimensional or multidimensional, many researchers recommend supplementing the measure with considerations of qualitative complexity; that is, aspects of text complexity that can only be judged by an attentive human reader (e.g., Fisher & Frey, 2014c; Hiebert & Pearson, 2014). Four qualitative factors that make texts easier or more complex are (1) levels of meaning (e.g., single or multiple) or purpose (e.g., explicit or implicit), (2) structure (e.g., simple or complex), (3) language conventionality and clarity (e.g., literal or figurative), and (4) knowledge demands (e.g., few or many assumptions about readers’ knowledge; NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010).

Teachers and researchers have used these four factors to develop rubrics for evaluating a text’s qualitative complexity (e.g., Glaus, 2014; Witte, 2016). For example, Fisher and Frey (2014c) created a rubric that teachers can use to help them make instructional decisions about text selection. Figure 2 shows a sample text complexity analysis for *Number the Stars* based on Fisher and Frey’s rubric. As is evident, attention to qualitative aspects of text complexity highlights areas in Lowry’s work (e.g., expectations of background knowledge and figurative language) that a quantitative measure alone would fail to address.

Text mapping is another process by which teachers examine the ideas and structure of narrative and informational texts to identify features that are likely to pose challenges to readers (Pearson & Hiebert, 2014). Narrative text maps include a summary of the story’s theme(s), plot (problem, conflict, and resolution), setting, characters/traits, major events, and author’s craft. Informational text maps include a summary of the central idea(s), main ideas and supporting details according to the text’s organization (i.e., structure), text features, and author’s craft. A side-by-side comparison of narrative and informational text maps is displayed in Figure 3.

This level of qualitative analysis can serve as an important check on quantitative measures (Pearson & Hiebert, 2014), but the task can be time consuming and may be daunting for individual teachers (Graesser et al., 2014; Pearson & Hiebert, 2014). We recommend that teachers begin by analyzing the major texts they use in a school year with their grade-level team. Although additional work is needed to create more practical measures for qualitative analysis of text difficulty, we hope the examples provided here are useful first steps.

**Reader–Task Measures.** The complexity of the task that readers are engaged with also plays a role in text difficulty (Pearson & Hiebert, 2014). Guidance about reader and task considerations tends to be vague, however, with brief notes in Appendix A of the Common Core (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010) about both reader factors (e.g., students’ motivation, knowledge, and experiences) and task factors (e.g., the purpose or complexity of the assigned task and the questions posed; Hiebert & Pearson, 2014).

Text-task scenarios (Valencia, Wilson, & Pearson, 2014) provide more guidance for thinking about the difficulty posed by the relation between text and task complexity. Put simply, complex tasks can make comprehending a simple text more difficult, and simple tasks can make comprehending a complex text less difficult. How we structure the tasks we give students has a direct effect on difficulty. Decisions about two task-related variables, response mode (e.g., multiple choice, short constructed response, extended constructed response) and cognitive tar-
Figure 2
Text Complexity Analysis for Number the Stars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text: Number the Stars by Lois Lowry (1989)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of meaning and purpose</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density and complexity: How many ideas are presented?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are they literal or ambiguous?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figurative language: Are the imagery, metaphors, symbolism, and personification appropriate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose: Is the author's purpose or main idea straightforward?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre: Is the genre familiar and consistent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization: Is the organization straightforward and consistent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narration: How is it narrated?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text features and graphics: Do features support understanding?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language conventionality and clarity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard English and variations: Does the text depart significantly from the reader's way with words?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Register: How formal is the language?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge demand</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background knowledge: Does the text align with the reader's background knowledge?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior academic knowledge: Is the text consistent with what has been previously taught?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural knowledge: Does the text require familiarity with an aspect of culture that might be new for some readers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary knowledge: Are there words with multiple meanings?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

get (e.g., locate and recall, integrate and interpret, critique and evaluate), can make comprehending a complex text less or more difficult (Valencia et al., 2014). Because inferential questions pose more difficult cognitive targets than literal-level questions, asking text-dependent questions that move from literal to inferential levels of meaning might make reading complex texts less difficult for students (Fisher & Frey, 2014c).

Figure 4 shows an example of text-dependent questions about Number the Stars that interact with response modes to vary the task complexity for each
Figure 3
Narrative and Informational Text Maps: Planning Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>叙事文本图谱</th>
<th>信息文本图谱</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>文本:</td>
<td>文本:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>主题(s):</td>
<td>核心观点(s):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>情节:</td>
<td>文本结构(如何组织观点):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>问题</td>
<td>冲突</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>冲突</td>
<td>解决</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>环境(以及它与主题的联系):</td>
<td>文本特征(以及它们与思想的关系):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>人物(性格特征):</td>
<td>主要观点和细节:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>主要活动:</td>
<td>主要观点</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>支持观点</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>作者的创作(e.g., 调子, 风格, 语法):</td>
<td>作者的创作(e.g., 修辞手段):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4
Text-Dependent Questions About Number the Stars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>认知目标</th>
<th>问题</th>
<th>响应模式</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>定位和回忆</td>
<td>哪些物品被分配? 为什么? (Chapter 3)</td>
<td>短文式响应</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>关键细节</td>
<td>当女孩们被士兵们阻止时, 为什么Kirsti害怕? (Chapter 1)</td>
<td>短文式响应</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>整合和解释</td>
<td>“他的德文很糟糕。三年来, Annemarie带着轻蔑。三年来他们一直在我们的国家生活, 他们甚至不会说我们语言”(Chapter 1, p. 3). 从Annemarie的回复, 你认为轻蔑意味着什么? (Chapter 1)</td>
<td>多项选择: a. 赞同 b. 轻蔑 c. 尊重 d. 傲慢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>作者目的</td>
<td>Lois Lowry为什么使用年幼儿童来讲述这个故事?</td>
<td>扩展式响应</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>推断</td>
<td>Great-Aunt Birte的葬礼有什么意义? (after Chapter 11)</td>
<td>短文式响应</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>评估和评价</td>
<td>你认为Annemarie的父母有理由将她置于危险情况下吗? 支持你的论点与书中的证据。</td>
<td>扩展式响应</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>观点和论点</td>
<td>这个故事如何与Marie McSwigan的Snow Treasure比较?</td>
<td>短文式响应</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

cognitive target. With instructional goals in mind, teachers can identify the task factors that are likely to be more difficult for students and instructional strategies to support them (Valencia et al., 2014).

How Can Teachers Select Texts for Readers?
Finding a good match between texts and readers can be challenging (Goldman & Lee, 2014). Instead of re-
lying solely on a single quantitative measure such as Lexile, teachers must also consider qualitative and task features to responsibly select texts for readers (Hiebert, 2011). Teachers should probably likewise consider the familiar framework of independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels (Bets, 1946). Proponents of reading levels suggest sticking to texts that can be read with 95% oral reading accuracy, or at a student’s instructional level (e.g., Allington, McCusker, & Billen, 2015). Critics, however, have argued that there is not enough research to support the reading level framework (Shanahan, 2017) and that students can be motivated by difficult texts depending on interest, prior knowledge, and social context (Halladay, 2012).

In contrast to these approaches, we believe that selecting texts for groups of readers should be a multistep process that begins with a consideration of the instructional context before other aspects of text complexity (Wixon & Valencia, 2014). We propose a modified version of the Text Complexity Multi-Index (Hiebert, 2013) as a four-step process for selecting texts for readers: (1) designing instructional tasks based on students’ grade level, instructional needs, and standards; (2) selecting a difficult text using one or more familiar sources, such as Lexile or guided reading level; (3) comparing the overall text complexity score or associated grade level with another quantitative measure of text complexity, such as Coh-Metrix-TEA (Graesser et al., 2014) or TextEvaluator (Sheehan et al., 2014); and (4) analyzing the qualitative dimensions of text complexity using a rubric (e.g., Fisher & Frey, 2014c), which allows teachers to identify aspects of the text that might require additional scaffolding (Pearson & Hiebert, 2014).

How Can Teachers Support Students’ Reading of Difficult Texts?

An ideal way to support students’ reading of difficult texts would involve a careful sequencing of the texts they encounter. First, students begin to learn about a topic with shorter and simpler texts; then, after exposure to key vocabulary and concepts, students would progress to more difficult texts on the same topic (Adams, 2010; Lapp, Moss, Grant, & Johnson, 2014). We recommend selecting a topic or theme, having students read less difficult texts first, and then gradually introducing more difficult texts. In addition, teachers might promote comprehension and build vocabulary knowledge about the topic or theme by leading with an interactive read-aloud and discussion of a more difficult text (K.A.D. Stahl, 2016).

Still, teachers need to be mindful of the types of supports that they provide for students in each text that they encounter. The supports needed will depend on students’ developmental stage (e.g., early primary, intermediate) and instructional needs (e.g., fluency or comprehension). Because some readers might require different supports than others, we propose grouping students by strengths and areas of need in word recognition and/or comprehension (Halladay, 2012) and then engaging all students with reading difficult texts in teacher-led small groups (Fisher & Frey, 2014b; Hiebert, 2013).

Spear-Swerling (2016) consolidated six profiles of struggling readers (Riddle, Buly, & Valencia, 2002) into three common patterns: specific word-reading difficulties, specific reading comprehension difficulties, and mixed reading difficulties. We suggest using classroom-based assessments of decoding, fluency, and comprehension to place students in one of these three groups based on their instructional needs: (1) fluency support for students with specific word-reading difficulties, (2) comprehension support for students with specific reading comprehension difficulties, or (3) both fluency and comprehension support for students with mixed reading difficulties. In addition, students without reading difficulties might be grouped with students with specific reading comprehension difficulties for convenience, and students with reading disabilities might need additional support outside the classroom, particularly to address decoding difficulties.

In Figure 5, we present a lesson-planning template for scaffolding reading instruction for each of our three groups. It follows a simple procedure based on recommendations in research: Establish a purpose for reading, teach vocabulary, provide opportunities for repeated reading to build fluency or monitored silent reading, and have a follow-up discussion about the meaning of the text (Hiebert, 2013; Shanahan, Fisher, & Frey, 2012). In addition, we conclude the lesson procedure with an opportunity for students to respond in writing (Fisher & Frey, 2015a). In each part of the lesson, teachers make scaffolding decisions before, during, and after reading based on the instructional needs of each group (e.g., comprehension and/or fluency supports). Teachers may select fluency supports for groups that receive only fluency support or groups that receive both fluency and comprehension support. Likewise, teachers should plan comprehension supports for groups...
that receive only comprehension support or fluency and comprehension support.

Before students read difficult texts, we recommend limiting the amount of time spent on front-loading (Fisher & Frey, 2014c). Borrowing from the Directed Reading Activity, teachers should directly build background knowledge and preteach vocabulary before reading (K.A.D. Stahl, 2012). Teachers will already have a good idea about vocabulary and background knowledge demands that the text presents based on a qualitative text complexity analysis. In our lesson-planning template, teachers identify the keywords and concepts to briefly teach before reading for each group.

During reading, students should engage in repeated reading, which builds fluency and improves comprehension (Samuels, 1979/1997). In our planning template, we display options for fluency supports from which teachers can select for groups that need fluency support. In early primary grades, teachers should provide fluency support through echo reading or choral reading (K.A.D. Stahl, 2012), or they might model fluent reading with a teacher read-aloud for the first reading (K.A.D. Stahl, 2016; Witte, 2016). For the second reading, students should engage in choral or partner rereading to build fluency, depending on how much support is necessary. In intermediate grades, teachers might consider initial choral reading and then partner rereading (Walpole, McKenna, Amendum, Pasquarella, & Strong, 2017). Alternatively, an initial echo reading provides more support, whereas independent rereading provides
less support for groups with stronger or weaker fluency, respectively.

In the intermediate grades, the second reading should focus on close reading to support comprehension (Fisher & Frey, 2012). In close reading, students might revisit and annotate the text using a three-step strategy of underlining main ideas, circling confusing words, and taking notes or summarizing in the margin (Fisher & Frey, 2015a). We include space in our planning template for teachers to identify main ideas and confusing words and make notes about the text to help support students’ close reading and annotation.

In addition, the teacher should provide support for comprehension through modeling and thinking aloud during the initial reading (Fisher & Frey, 2014b). We provide space in our planning template for teachers to plan a think-aloud for groups that need comprehension support. The focus of teacher modeling will also depend on students’ developmental stage. In early primary grades, the teacher might focus on concepts of print and/or high-frequency words in addition to modeling comprehension strategies. In the intermediate grades, teacher modeling should address comprehension strategies, using context clues to determine the meaning of unknown words, text structure, and text features in a wide range of fiction and informational texts (Fisher & Frey, 2015b; K.A.D. Stahl, 2012). For example, teaching students how to identify common text structures such as description, compare/contrast, sequence, cause/effect, and problem/solution helps promote comprehension of informational text (Hebert, Bohaty, Nelson, & Brown, 2016; Pyle et al., 2017).

After reading, students should engage in discussion and/or text-based writing (K.A.D. Stahl, 2012). In our planning template, we included Fisher and Frey’s (2012) sequence of text-dependent questions that move from literal to structural to inferential levels of questioning (Fisher & Frey, 2015a). We provide space for teachers to write down questions and identify the response mode (e.g., discussion, written response) for each cognitive target. We expect that teachers can provide ongoing support for comprehension of difficult texts by carefully mixing questions for collaborative discussion and written responses about the meaning of the text for each cognitive target over time.

**Conclusion**

We believe that teachers can implement these scaffolds to support their students when reading diffi-

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**TAKE ACTION!**

1. Assess students’ reading strengths and areas of need using classroom-based assessments.
2. Determine instructional tasks based on students’ needs and grade-level standards.
3. Make an initial text selection using a familiar scale, such as Lexile measure or guided reading level.
4. Verify the text’s complexity with other sources, such as CoH-Metric, TEA or TextEvaluator.
5. Analyze qualitative aspects of text complexity using a rubric or text mapping.
6. Confirm your text selection or select a different text (repeat steps 3–5) to address the instructional task.
7. Group students by instructional support needs (e.g., fluency support, comprehension support, or both) for small-group instruction.
8. Support reading of difficult texts by addressing vocabulary and knowledge demands before reading, providing fluency and/or comprehension supports during reading, and engaging students in text-based discussion and/or written responses after reading.

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**REFERENCES**


LITERATURE CITED

MORE TO EXPLORE
- “Promote Deep Thinking! How to Choose a Complex Text,” a ReadWriteThink.org strategy guide by Jennifer Bekel: http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/promote-deep-thinking-choose-31023.html
## Session #5

### Text Structure Signal Words and Phrases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Structure</th>
<th>Signal Words and Phrases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compare and Contrast</td>
<td>but, similarly, although, different, alike, in the same way, likewise, in comparison,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yet, whereas, however, on the other hand, also, in contrast, same as, just like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause and Effect</td>
<td>reasons why, therefore, consequently, so that, hence, thus, if-then, as a result,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>because, since, for, due to, this led to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem and Solution</td>
<td>problem is, if-then, so that, puzzle is solved, dilemma is, because, question/answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronological and Sequential</td>
<td>later, next, before, then, finally, first, second, third, after, later, since, when,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>previously, now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>characteristics, such as, including, for example, for instance, is like, to illustrate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>