Vocabulary Matters: Keys to Unlocking Complex Texts



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Different Labels But the Same Concepts

English Learners

Example 1: "I'm going to catch a crab today," yelled Sailor Paul. Soon his nets were full and taut, and Paul hauled them up on the dock. "Gat away, silly squid," scolded Sailor Paul. "Don't sprawl on my yawl." (Sailor Paul and the Craits, Paulson, sooo)

CHAPTER 9

Example 2: The children are drawing pictures. Ann draws a green lawn. What's on the lawn? A little deer or a fawn is on the lawn. Ben draws a ple of yellow straw. What is in the straw? A fawn lies in the straw. (Drawing Pictures, Hebert, 2019)

In the United States as we approach a new decade—2020—about 10% of our students enter school speaking native languages other than English (McFarland et al., 2018). English learners (ELs) may not have English labels for concepts, but they do have labels for concepts in their native languages. In the usual materials and approaches of English/Language Arts, ELs are asked to learn to read words for which most young children do not have associated meanings in their native language, such as taur and yow! In Example 1. Instructional demands such as those represented by the first excerpted text can intensify the challenge for ELs. Example 2 tilustrates a text where students' knowledge of activities (e.g., drawing) and aspects of nature (e.g., animak, growing itings) are the foundation for learning new concepts such as faw and lawn.

Additionally, evidence points to strengths of ELs, such as their acuity in attending to the sounds of language, which often are not recognized in schools. This chapter develops a perspective in which strengths that ELs bring to language learning are the foundation for the design of learning experiences for those students and in which







BUT.....

• Students don't appear to be reading much.



Swanson, Wanzek, McCulley, Stillman-Spisask, Vaughn, Simmons, Fogarty, & Hairrell, 2015).



NEW PERSPECTIVES ABOUT WORDS, KNOWLEDGE, & TEXTS

WHAT MAKES A TEXT COMPLEX? DISCUSSION 1

- 1. What percentage of the vocabulary is the same across end-of-year texts across middle and high school grades?
- 2. How does the vocabulary complexity of literary passages compare to those of content areas?

Grade 8--STARR

I was 5 years old that summer afternoon when my brother and I set off on our daring adventure. Kenny was 3.

Our prairie schooner, our Pinta-Niña-Santa Maria, was our little gray wagon. It used to be a little red wagon, but it had gotten so scarred and dented after a couple of years of rough treatment running it into concrete-block back-porch steps will do that to a wagon—that we begged Daddy to paint it. He did one Saturday afternoon, but the only paint he had around the house was gray primer, which he swabbed on with a brush. So now our wagon was a dull, monochromatic gray.

English 1--STARR

Not to brag about it, but as a small local newspaper room. It looked like a supermarket with piles of apples surprisingly red, that there wasn't even a hint of green on

English 2--STARR

A polite no would have done the trick, no thanks, I'm and the heavy click of the latch, but I'd seen the lines of dirt in the black shoe creases, the worn down heels, the shine on the jacket sleeves, the glint of desperation in his eyes. All the more reason, I said on the small table next to the couch.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (Grade 12)

- "My aunt will be down presently, Mr. Nuttel," said a very selfpossessed young lady of fifteen; "in the meantime you must try and put up with me.
- Framton Nuttel endeavored to say the correct something which should duly flatter the niece of the moment without unduly discounting the aunt that was to come. Privately he doubted more than ever whether these formal visits on a succession of total strangers would do much towards helping the nerve cure which he was supposed to be undergoing.
- "I know how it will be," his sister had said when he was preparing to migrate to this rural retreat;

ACT

Clifford Jackson, or Abshu, as he preferred to be known in his talents as a playwright to broaden the horizons for the state level to bring them puppet shows with the message to actors rapping their way through Shakespeare's A

SAT

Akira came directly, breaking all tradition. Was that it? Had he followed form, had he asked his mother to speak to his father to approach a go-between, would Chie have been more receptive?

He came on a winter's eve. He pounded on the door while a cold rain beat on the shuttered veranda, so at first Chie thought him only the wind. The maid knew better. Chie heard her soft scuttling footsteps, the creak of the door. Then the maid brought a calling card to the drawing room for Chie.

Chie was reluctant to go to her guest; perhaps she was feeling too cozy.

SAT—Social Sciences

online and on foot-searching frantically for the perfect gift. Last year, Americans spent over \$30 billion at retail stores in the anniversaries, graduations, and baby showers. This frequent experience of gift-giving can engender ambivalent feelings in gift-givers. Many relish the opportunity to buy presents because one's closest peers. At the same time, many dread the thought rather than delight the intended recipients.

SAT--Science

The chemical formula of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) is now backbone of which consists of a regular alternation of sugar and phosphate groups. To each sugar is attached a nitrogenous bases—adenine and guanine—are purines, and the other two—thymine and cytosine—are pyrimidines. So far as is monomer unit, consisting of phosphate, sugar and base, is known as a nucleotide. The first feature of our structure which

Word Patterns in Texts



Overall Distribution of Words in Texts



| Word Category | Highly Abstract | Average | Highly Concrete |
|---------------------|---|--|---|
| Highly | would, if, though, | example, said, last, | water, house, feet, |
| Frequent/Frequent | because, as | several, look | face, sun |
| Moderately Frequent | despite, seldom, normal, merely, ideal | current, invite, sick, technology, trial | turtle, tomatoes, stairs, sand, pillow |
| Relatively Rare | whatsoever, infinitely, ultimately, intangible, thereof | trance, pry, jumble, gossip, accumulate | walrus, vase, umbrella, tulip, tractor |
| Very Rare | abject, jeopardy, awry, pathogenic, deviate | inflammable, martyr juncture, psychedelic relinquished | oriole, smock, tattoo, rhubarb, thistle |

Rare Words Across Three Grade Levels



Quality Changes, Not Just Quantity

| | Gr. 2-3 | Gr. 6-8 | Gr. 11-CCR |
|--------------|------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Word Length | 6.2 | 7.6 | 8.1 |
| Concreteness | 3.5 | 3.4 | 2.3 |
| Examples | mascot cackle | replica secluded | pristine demeanor |

DO MOST STUDENTS HAVE CAPACITY TO READ COMPLEX TEXTS? Discussion

- 1. What proportion of students in your classes are unable to read the majority of the words in classroom texts?
- •2. What are struggling readers able to read?

NAEP



Crows are scavengers. The birds will eat almost anything, from vegetables and fruit, to nuts and seeds. They'll devour insects, frogs, lizards, mice, smaller birds, basically any animal they can fit into their mouths. And they'll happily pick at the flesh of carrion, which probably accounts for why ancient people associated crows with death

Crows are playful birds, very sociable with their own kind, and they live in large extended family groups. They frequently indulge in silly games, such as carrying a twig high into the air, dropping it, then quickly swooping down and catching it. They've also been observed executing acrobatic backflips in flight. When asked to read texts of this complexity aloud, here are the <u>accuracy</u> levels of eighth graders at different percentiles:

> 75th: 100% 50th : 99% 25th: 98% 10th: 96% 5th: 96% 2nd: 87-99% 1st: 82-86%

SAT--Literature

- Akira came directly, breaking all tradition. Was that it? Had he followed form, had he asked his mother to speak to his father to approach a go-between, would Chie have been more receptive?
- He came on a winter's eve. He pounded on the door while a cold rain beat on the shuttered veranda, so at first Chie thought him only the wind. The maid knew better. Chie heard her soft scuttling footsteps, the creak of the door. Then the maid brought a calling card to the drawing room for Chie. Chie was reluctant to go to her guest; perhaps she was feeling too cozy.

She and Naomi were reading at a low table set atop a charcoal brazier. A thick quilt spread over the sides of the table so their legs were tucked inside with the heat.

"Who is it at this hour, in this weather?" Chie questioned as she picked the name card off the maid's lacquer tray. "Shinoda, Akira. Kobe Dental College," she read. Naomi recognized the name. Chie heard a soft intake of air.

"I think you should go," said Naomi.

Akira was waiting in the entry. He was in his early twenties, slim and serious, wearing the black military style uniform of a student. As he bowed his hands hanging straight down, a black cap in one, a yellow oil paper umbrella in the other, Chie glanced beyond him. In the glistening surface of the courtyard's rain drenched paving stones, she saw his reflection like a dark double. "Madame," said Akira, "forgive my disruption, but I come with a matter of urgency."

His voice was soft, refined. He straightened and stole a deferential peek at her face.

In the dim light his eyes shone with sincerity.

Chie felt herself starting to like him.

"Come inside, get out of this nasty night. Surely your business can wait for a moment or two." "I don't want to trouble you. Normally I would approach you more properly but I've received word of a position. I've an opportunity to go to America, as dentist for Seattle's Japanese community."

"Congratulations," Chie said with amusement. "That is an opportunity, I'm sure. But how am I involved?"

Even noting Naomi's breathless reaction to the name card, Chie had no idea. Akira's message, delivered like a formal speech, filled her with maternal amusement. You know how children speak so earnestly, so hurriedly, so endearingly about things that have no importance in an adult's mind? That's how she viewed him, as a child. It was how she viewed Naomi. Even though Naomi was eighteen and training endlessly in the arts needed to make a good marriage, Chie had made no effort to find her a husband. Akira blushed.

"Depending on your response, I may stay in Japan. I've come to ask for Naomi's hand." Suddenly Chie felt the dampness of the night. "Does Naomi know anything of your ambitions?"

"We have an understanding. Please don't judge my candidacy by the unseemliness of this proposal. I ask directly because the use of a go-between takes much time. Either method comes down to the same thing: a matter of parental approval.

If you give your consent, I become Naomi's yoshi: We'll live in the House of Fuji. Without your consent, I must go to America, to secure a new home for my bride."

Eager to make his point, he'd been looking her full in the face. Abruptly, his voice turned gentle. I see I've startled you. My humble apologies. I'll take no more of your evening. My address is on my card. If you don't wish to contact me, I'll reapproach you in two weeks' time. Until then, good night."

He bowed and left. Taking her ease, with effortless grace, like a cat making off with a fish.

"Mother?" Chie heard Naomi's low voice and turned from the door. "He has asked you?"

- The sight of Naomi's dear eyes, her dark brows gave Chie strength. Maybe his hopes were preposterous.
- "Where did you meet such a fellow? Imagine! He thinks he can marry the Fuji heir and take her to America all in the snap of his fingers!"
- Chie waited for Naomi's ripe laughter.
- Naomi was silent. She stood a full half minute looking straight into Chie's eyes. Finally, she spoke. "I met him at my literary meeting."
- Naomi turned to go back into the house, then stopped.
- "Mother.'
- "Yes?
- "I mean to have him."

HOW CAN STUDENTS BE SUPPORTED WITH COMPLEX TEXTS? Discussion

- 1. What are some strategies that you have been using to support your students with complex texts?
- •2. Has the presentation to this point generated any ideas for small changes that might increase student capacity?

1. Share information about the system



SAT--Science

The chemical formula of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) is now backbone of which consists of a regular alternation of sugar and phosphate groups. To each sugar is attached a nitrogenous bases—adenine and guanine—are purines, and the other two-thymine and cytosine-are pyrimidines. So far as is monomer unit, consisting of phosphate, sugar and base, is known as a nucleotide. The first feature of our structure which
These two chains are both coiled around a common fiber axis. It has often been assumed that since there was only

in the structural unit. However, the density, taken with the Xray evidence, suggests very strongly that there are two.

The other biologically important feature is the manner in which the two chains are held together. This is done by hydrogen bonds between the bases. The bases are joined together in pairs, a single base from one chain being hydrogen bonded to a single base from the other. The bases are joined together in pairs, a single base from one chain being hydrogen bonded to a single base from the other. The important point is that only certain pairs of bases will fit into the structure. One member of a pair must be a *purine* and the other a *pyrimidine* in order to bridge between the two chains. If a pair consisted of two *purines,* for example, there would not be room for it.

We believe that the bases will be present almost entirely in their most probable forms. If this is true, the conditions for forming hydrogen bonds are more restrictive, and the only pairs of bases possible are: *adenine* with *thymine*, and *guanine* with *cytosine*. Adenine, for example, can occur on either chain; but when it does, its partner on the other chain must always be thymine. permutations are possible, and it therefore seems likely that the one chain is, as it were, the complement of the other, and it is this feature which suggests how the deoxyribonucleic acid molecule might duplicate itself.





Teach students to expect—and in some cases learn proper names

| First Names & Surnames—Author's Choices | Characters, Objects, Events | Experts & Their Affilations | Geographic Names |
|---|--------------------------------|---|------------------|
| Mr. Augsburger | Niña | John T. Caioppo, University of Chicago | Buddhist |
| Mr. & Mrs. Sandlin | Pinta | Jacqueline Olds & Richard S. Schwartz, Harvard | Brooklyn Bridge |
| Mr. Bates | Cultural Revolution | Robert D. Putnam | Sagarmatha |
| Thomases | Mao | Mei Lanfang | Shangri-La |
| Byford | Red Fushi | Bradley Morris & Shannon Zentall | Shanghai |
| Mrs. Andrews | Red Guard | Carol Dweck, Stanford | Sherpa |

2. Focus on Topically Connected Texts

What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?

The Zigzag Road to Rights

The Story of an Hour

Kate Chopin

from Democracy Is Not a Spectator Sport

Essay

Arthur Blaustein with Helen Matatov

...including daily opportunities for independent reading



as Bombs

Louis Menand



ida Tarbell

Housewife

3. Teach about the semantic and topical connections in the content/vocabulary

In the unit on Leaders & Visionaries, there are 3,419 different words. 2,540 of these words have high to moderate frequency in text & account for 91% of the total words in this unit.



Of the remaining 879 words, 41% should be known to high schoolers (e.g., short words like beg, concrete words like umbrella). Another 17% are proper names and 1% are abbreviations.

endeavored aristocrati strategie twitte t conform cklash hassle hyphens assertion twixt discern fla grille dilemma fowls federated fettered erved feuds fact eloquently docket kilter diversity negotiation natriots subtle construing vindictive bondsman whitewall ultr seduced decorum second corresponding aggrieved cons tuted reproach registration scrubland tra savages sarcasm shameless slaveholder serialized unwittingly scanty staggering nockery tumultuously rudimentary ^{ow} intrusion haracteristically odometer excursion paralyzed latchkey intimidation wail vidence penetrating ploughing expenditures biography attentive Ph aspirations accidental mournful divine exams helium disposed attr lash allegia balcony admission abolitionists mockingbir

The 360 remaining words are vetted for their relevance to the theme of leaders and visionaries working on social justice causes.



THE CHOSEN WORDS REPRESENT THE KEY CONCEPTS IN THE TEXTS



4. Don't succumb to dumbed-down texts

The Walden Experiment— Original 1300 25.88 3.54 207

On Independence Day, 1845, a few days before his twenty-eighth birthday, Henry Thoreau left his town of Concord, Massachusetts, and went to live alone in the woods, on the shores of Walden Pond, a mile from any neighbor. There he built himself a modest cabin and for two years and two months earned a simple living by the labor of his own hands. He also wrote, among other things, his autobiographical masterpiece, Walden (subtitled, Life in the Woods), which gives an account of his two-year stay. This is, with little doubt, the greatest statement ever made on the living strategy variously known as 'voluntary simplicity,' 'simple living,' or 'downshifting.' The Walden Experiment— Modified 900 14.33 3.58 215

On Independence Day, 1845, Henry Thoreau left his town of Concord, Massachusetts just a few days before his 28th birthday. He went to live alone in the woods, on the shores of Walden Pond, a mile from any neighbor. There he built himself a modest cabin. For the next two years and two months, he earned a simple living by the labor of his own hands. He also wrote, among other things, his autobiographical masterpiece, Walden (subtitled, Life in the Woods), which gives an account of his two-year stay. This is, with little doubt, the greatest statement ever made on the living strategy variously known as 'voluntary simplicity,' 'simple living,' or 'downshifting.'

Easy

New Delhi, India - In 1870 scientist T.C. Jerdon found two strange frogs in India. He brought them back to London. No more of the frogs were found. Scientists thought they must have all died out.

Then in 2007 scientists got a big surprise. The frogs were found again. They were living deep in an Indian forest.

The frogs were found by an Indian scientist. His name is Sathyabhama Das Biju. People all over India know Biju. He is nicknamed "The Frog Man." Biju carefully studied the frogs he found. He has just put out a report. It has some big surprises in it.

NEWSELA

Medium

New Delhi, India—The bodies of two mysterious tree frogs are stored in London's Natural History Museum. They have been there for more than 100 years.

The frogs were collected by a British scientist named T.C. Jerdon. He found them in India in 1870. For many years scientists believed frogs of this kind had died out. They were sure the two dead frogs in London were the only ones humans would ever see. All that changed in 2007. The mystery frogs were rediscovered deep in an Indian jungle. They were found by a team led by Indian scientist Sathyabhama Das Biju. Biju is well known in India.

Hard

New Delhi, India - For more than a century, two mysterious tree frog specimens have been housed at London's Natural History Museum. Collected by a British scientist in 1870, the frogs were long assumed to be part of a vanished species. In 2007 that all changed. A group of scientists, led by renowned Indian biologist Sathyabhama Das Biju, rediscovered the frogs deep in the jungles of northeast India. Biju and his team have been carefully studying the rediscovered tree frogs since 2007. On Wednesday they released a report containing some surprising findings. Biju says his studies prove the frogs should be considered part of a new genus,

Lexiles of Newsela Texts



Original text: 920 15.84 3.75 392

It was the first day of September in 1986, and the morning rain had given way to bright sunshine. A successful advertising executive made her way across 56th street toward Broadway, on the west side of Manhattan. A young boy, all of eleven years old and dressed in scruffy clothes, asked for some change for something to eat. Laura Schroff lowered her head and walked on; Manhattan was full of panhandlers. She hardly even noticed them any more. But something drew Laura back to the boy.

Adapted text: 720 11.40 3.74 375

It was the first day of September in 1986. The morning rain had given way to bright sunshine. A successful advertising executive made her way across 56th Street toward Broadway. She was on the west side of Manhattan. An eleven-yearold boy dressed in scruffy clothes asked for some change for something to eat. Laura Schroff lowered her head and walked on. Manhattan was full of panhandlers. She hardly even noticed them any more. But something drew Laura back to the boy.



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