# Going Beyond Text Complexity: Considering Text-Task Scenarios in Understanding Comprehension

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Based on a paper by Valencia, Wixson, & Pearson (forthcoming). Putting text complexity in context: Refocusing on comprehension of complex text. Elementary School Journal.

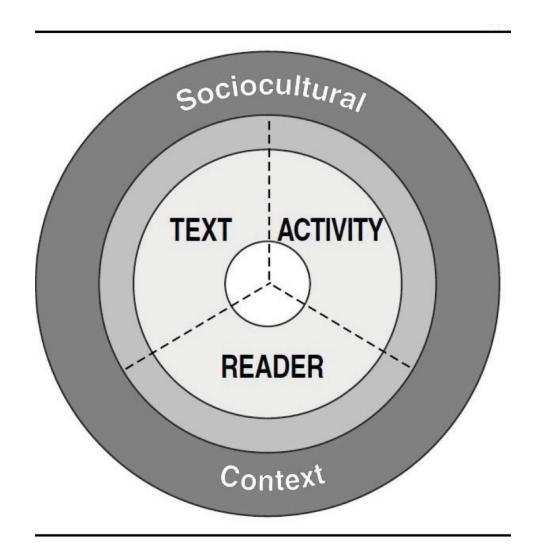
## Text complexity -

Text level/ difficulty





Comprehension of complex text



## Text Complexity—Appendix A

### Qualitative evaluation of the text

 Levels of meaning, structure, language conventionality and clarity, and knowledge demands

## Quantitative evaluation of the text

 Readability measures and other scores of text complexity

## Matching reader to text and task

 Reader variables (such as motivation, knowledge, and experiences) and task variables (such as purpose and the complexity generated by the task assigned and the questions posed)



#### A Three-Part Model for Measuring Text Complexity

As signaled by the graphic at right, the Standards' model of text complexity consists of three equally important parts.

- (1) Qualitative dimensions of text complexity. In the Standards, qualitative dimensions and qualitative factors refer to those aspects of to measured or only measurable by an attentive human reader, such as levels of meaning or purpose; structure; language conventionality a demands.
- (2) Quantitative dimensions of text complexity. The terms quantitative dimensions and quantitative factors refer to those aspects of text complexity, such as word length or frequency, sentence length, and text cohesion, that are difficult if not impossible for a human reader to evaluate efficiently, especially in long texts, and are thus today typically measured by computer software.
- (3) Reader and task considerations. While the prior two elements of the model focus on the inherent complexity of text, variables specific to particular readers (such as motivation, knowledge, and experiences) and to particular tasks (such as purpose and the complexity of the task assigned and the questions posed) must also be considered when determining whether a text is appropriate for a given student. Such assessments are best made by teachers employing their professional judgment, experience, and knowledge of their students and the subject.

Figure 1: The Standards' Model of Text Complexity



These [reader and task factor] are to be determined locally with reference to such variables as a students' motivation, knowledge, and experiences as well as purpose and the complexity of the task assigned and the questions posed (p. 12, 14, 16)

## Grade band 4-5 - Literary

- Students make connections between the visual presentation of John Tenniel's illustration in Lewis Carol's *Alice in Wonderland* and the text of the story to identify how the pictures of Alice reflect specific descriptions of her in the text [RL 4.7] (860L)
- Students compare and contrast coming-of-age stories by Christopher Paul Curtis (*Bud, Not Buddy*) and Louise Erdrich (*The Birchbark House*) by identifying similar themes and examining the stories' approach to the topic of growing up [RL 5.9] (950L, 930L)

### Grade band 6-8 Informational

- Students determine the point of view of John Adams in his Letter on Thomas Jefferson and analyze how he distinguishes his position from an alternative approach articulated by Thomas Jefferson [RI7.6] (1010L)
- http://www.constitution.org/primarysources/ pickering.html

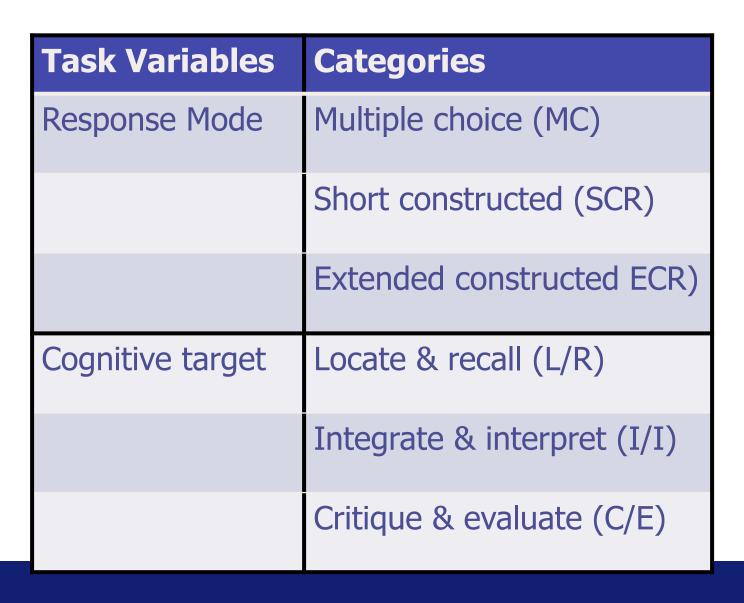
Particular tasks may also require students to read harder texts than they would normally be required to. Conversely, teachers who have had success using particular texts that are easier than those required for a given grade band should feel free to continue to use them so long as the general movement during a given school year is toward texts of higher levels of complexity.

## ext complexity x task complexity x reader > comprehension of complex text

Text complexity x task complexity x reader→ comprehension of complex text

complexity x task complexity x reader→
comprehension of complex text

## **Text-Task Scenario**



## Grade 4E 890L 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> gr

Туре	Mode	Score	
L/R	MC	E	
L/R	MC	M	
I/I	MC	Е	
I/I	MC	Е	
I/I	MC	Е	
I/I	MC	Н	
I/I	SCR	Н	
C/E	SCR	Н	
C/E	SCR	M	
I/I	ECR	M	

## Grade 8E 1040L 11<sup>th</sup> -CCR

Туре	Mode	Score
L/R	MC	E
L/R	MC	M
L/R/	MC	Е
I/I	MC	E
I/I	MC	E
I/I	MC	M
L/R	SCR	E
I/I	SCR	M
C/E	SCR	M
C/E	ECR	Н

		Item Difficulty			
	Lexile	Easy	Medium	Hard	
	Grade Band				
Tough as a Daisy	360L	5	5	1	
	(below grade 2-3)				
Marion Anderson	890L	4	3	3	
	(grade 4-5)				
Daddy Day Care	1080L	6	4	0	
	(grade 6-8)				

NAEP, 2010 release passages

## Text-Task Scenarios in the Classroom: Implications for Instruction

## Examples of Qualities of Text x Task that Influence Comprehension of Complex Text

- Amount, quality, structure, & location of text needed to respond
- Inferential "leaps" distance and number
- Text search- organization, text features, genre
- Purpose
- Specificity
- Alignment of text and task

## 1994 NAEP Grade 8 Selection

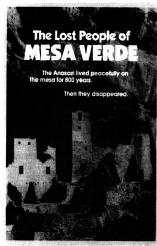
APPENDIX A

ENHANCING THE ASSESSMENT OF READING

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Section 23

Section 23



By Elsa Marston

In the dry land of southwestern Colorado a beautiful plateau rises. It has so many trees that early Spanish explorers called it Mesa Verde, which means "green table." For about eight hundred years Native Americans called the Anasazi lived on this mesa. And

Amasari lived on this mess. And then they left. Deer since the citiff houses were first discovered a hundred years ago, scientists and historians have wondered why.

Anasazi is a Navajo word meaning "the ancient ones." When they first settled there, around 500 A.D., the Anasazi lived in alcoves in the walls of the high canyons. Later they moved to the level land on top, where they built have the settled they have been seen to the level and not power they built have the settled they have been seen to be the settled that they have been seen they have been seen they have been seen to be the settled more claborate houses, like apartment buildings, with several families living close together.

The Anasazi made beautiful pottery, turquoise jewelry, fine

pottery, turquoise jewelry, fine sashes of woven hair, and baskets woven tightly enough to hold water. They lived by hunting and by growing corn and squash. Their way of life went on peace-

Then around 1200 A.D. something strange happened, for which the reasons are not quite clear. Most of the people moved from the level plateau back down into alcoves in the cliffs. The move must have made their lives difficult because they had to climback up to the plateau to do the farming. But it seems the Anaszari

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FIGURE A-1 Reading passage from the 1994 NAEP reading assessment for grade 8. Reprinted by permission.

alcoves with amazing cliff dwellings. "Cliff Palace," the most famous of these, had more than two hundred

For all the hard work that went into building these new homes, the Anasazi did not live in them long. By 1300
A.D. the cliff dwellings were empty. Mesa Verde was deserted and remained a ghost country for almost six hundred years. Were the people driven out of their homes by enemies? No sign of attack or fighting, or even the presence of other tribes, has been found.

A rchaeologists who have studied the place now believe there are other reasons. Meas Verde, the beautiful green table, was no longer a good place to live. years ago? The Ansazz built For one thing, in the second many low dams across the belief of the histerath persure. For one thing, in the second many tow dams across the half of the thirteenth century smaller valleys on the mesa there were long periods of to slow down rain runoff. cold, and very little rain Even so, good soil washed were worn down by the grit tists know this from exam. As the forests dwindled, ining the wood used in the the animals, already over-cliff dwellings. The growth hunted, left the mesa for bad growing seasons. But the people had survived more trees.

been another reason. had to be farmed in order to people's health by studying for beautiful freed the people. That meant the bones and teeth found in In the end the Anasaz that trees had to be cut to burials. The mesa dwellers must have given up hope clear the land and also to use had arthritis, and their teeth that things would get better





for houses and fuel. Without

fell—or else it came at the away, and the people could in corn meal, a main part of wrong time of year. Scien- no longer raise enough food. rings in trees show good and mountainous areas with had growing seasons. But





As food became scarce, people grew weaker. Not many lived beyond their young, and few babies surbad growing seasons. But the people had survived drought and bad weather before, so there must have been another reason.

The proper seasons and the before so the survived Living so close to the before, so there must have been another reason.

The proper seasons and the before so the proper seasons are the proper seasons and the before so the proper seasons. been another reason.

As the population grew, were not healthy. Scientists must have suffered from more land on the mesa top can learn a lot about ancient emotional strain. They

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## Revising Existing Tasks: Building Text-Task Scenarios

- Existing task: No purpose for reading is given so students don't know how to focus their reading.
- Possible revision/s
  - Global Purpose: This informational article is like one that you might read when doing a research report
  - Specific Purpose: Read this informational article to understand the theories about what happened to one ancient civilization—the Anasazi

## Sample Task & Revisions

 Existing task: The three moves made by the Anasazi are listed below. Explain the possible reasons that were suggested in the article for each move. (Extended Response)

 Possible Revision: The article suggests several theories about why the Anasazi left the mesa. List the theories and provide evidence from the article to support each theory.

## Sample Task & Revisions

- Existing task—The title and photograph on the first page of the article are probably meant to make the disappearance of the Anasazi seem to be:
  - A. A personal tragedy
  - B. A terrible mistake
  - C. An unsolved mystery
  - D. An important political event
- Possible Revision—The task should reflect the fact that the best use of the title and photo is to help students anticipate the content of the piece and set purpose

## RCC Evidence-Based Selected-Response – Gr 3

#### Part B

What is one main idea of "How Armals Live?"

a.There are many types of animals on the planet.

imals need water to live.

ere are many ways to sort

different animals.\*

Animals begin their life cycles of the cycle

Which sentence from the article best supports the answer to Part A?

a. "Animals get oxygen from air or water."

b."Animals can be grouped by their traits."\*

c."Worms are invertebrates."

d."All animals grow and change over time."

e."Almost all animals need water,

food, oxygen, and shelter to live."

## SBAC PERFORMANCE TASK: STIMULI & RESEARCH QUESTIONS (Grade 4)

- Students have 35 minutes to:
  - read an article and watch a video about what animals themselves from danger (stimuli)
  - take notes (note-taking "grid" provided)



- answer 3 CR questions about the sources
  - What does the article "Animal Roll-Ups" tell you about why some animals curl up? Use details from article to support your answer.
  - Think about the armadillo and the hedgehog described in the article. In what way are their defenses similar or different. Explain your answer using details from the article.
  - In the video "Animal Defenses" the puffer fish and the crab were both successful in protecting themselves from sea otters. Do they have the same type of defense? Explain your answer using details from the video.

### **PARCC NARRATIVE TASK: Gr 6**

Following EBSR and TECR questions about *Julie of the Wolves:* 

In the passage, the author developed a strong character named Miyax. Think about Miyax and the details the author used to create that character. The passage ends with Miyax waiting for the black wolf to look at her.

Write an original story to continue where the passage ended. In your story, be sure to use what you have learned about the character Miyax as you tell what



### Texts:

- "Biography of Amelia Earhart"
- "Earhart's Final Resting Place Believed Found"
- "Amelia Earhart's Life and Disappearance"



You have read three texts describing Amelia Earhart. All three include the claim that Earhart was a brave, courageous person.

Consider the argument each author uses to demonstrate Earhart's bravery.

Write an essay that analyzes the strength of the arguments about Earhart's bravery in at least two of the texts. Remember to use textual evidence to support your ideas.

## A Different Way to Think About Strategies

- How does the reader adapt to meet a range of text x task scenarios?
- Under what conditions (what types of texts tied to what types of tasks) is the reader able to read with depth and to learn from the text?
- How can instruction help students to become thoughtfully-adaptive readers?

## FINAL THOUGHT

We must never think about text complexity in isolation from the reading task, the reader, and the context. Exhorting students to try harder or to read more closely as they encounter the new, more challenging texts is unlikely to improve comprehension.

Instruction must take into account the various ways in which the text, the task, and the reader come together. Teachers can address all of these factors during instruction and they can facilitate learning by manipulating text-task scenarios to accommodate students' needs.



## Time for questions!