

Considering Text Complexity

Appendix A

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DISCUSSION

After reading the text complexity section of Appendix A (pages 2-10) use the questions below to guide conversations and build a common understanding.

Part I: Why Text Complexity Matters (pages 2-4)

- Why do you think texts used in grades K-12 have become less demanding over the years?
- According to the ACT report called *Reading between the Lines*: “*what students could read, in terms of its complexity, was at least as important as what they could do with what they read.*”
How might this finding influence instruction?
- “*College instructors assign readings, not necessarily explicated in class, for which students might be held accountable through exams, papers, presentations, or class discussions. Students in high school, by contrast, are rarely held accountable for what they are able to read independently.*”
How might we attempt to close this gap while ensuring that students receive the scaffolding necessary to access the text?
- Discuss the following implication:
“*A turning away from complex texts is likely to lead to a general impoverishment of knowledge, which, because knowledge is intimately linked with reading comprehension ability, will accelerate the decline in the ability to comprehend complex texts and the decline in the richness of text itself. This bodes ill for the ability of Americans to meet the demands placed upon them by citizenship in a democratic republic and the challenges of a highly competitive global marketplace of goods, services, and ideas.*”

Part 2: The Standards’ Approach to Text Complexity (pages 4-8)

- The Standards’ model shows that each part (qualitative, quantitative, reader and task) is represented equally. Why do you think the model places an equal emphasis on each part?
- After considering the four qualitative factors (levels of meaning / purpose, structure, language conventionality and clarity, and knowledge demands), discuss the reasoning behind following explanation: “*These factors are presented as continua of difficulty rather than as a succession of discrete “stages” in text complexity.*”

- Describe some examples of different types of reading tasks an educator may consider when evaluating the Reader and Task section.
- Explain how the Readers and Task section provides some flexibility with different types of readers.
- Which of the described quantitative measures seems most useful at this point in time?

Part 3: Key Considerations in Implementing Text Complexity (pages 8-10)

- Why is it difficult to measure prose and dramatic texts using quantitative tools?
- Using the example of *Grapes of Wrath*, what are the consequences of only acknowledging the quantitative measures?
- Consider and comment on the following:
“Students’ ability to read complex text does not always develop in a linear fashion. Although the progression of Reading standard 10 defines required grade-by-grade growth in students’ ability to read complex text, the development of this ability in individual students is unlikely to occur at an unbroken pace.”
- Discuss ways to support students who struggle greatly to read texts within their text complexity grade band so that they are able to read at a grade-appropriate level of complexity.