Text Complexity Assignment: An article for pre-teaching

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EDU 742 - Study Skills & Content Area Literacy Instruction for All

The Rubric: Text Complexity Analysis of “Ancient Greece”

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|  | Qualitative Measures |
| Levels Of Meaning/Purpose: | Middle low. The purpose is not stated outright, but the fact that all of the information provided is about specific periods of time, in an ongoing progression, about Greek culture and government makes it very easy to realize that the purpose is to inform the reader about Greek culture. There is no need to interpret or analyze the text in order to discover the purpose.  |
| Structure: | Middle low. The text is not date-specifically chronological, but it *is* chronological and even sub-sectioned according to the chronological progression of the text. There are no graphics or text features such as dividers or thought boxes that increase the reader’s understanding of information, but the sub-headings make up for the lack of other text features.  |
| Language Conventionality and Clarity: | Middle high. The language is mostly juvenile-academic, but the text is also packed with subject specific vocabulary and proper nouns which students are unfamiliar with and which may cause a great deal of confusion. However, the reinforcement of capitalization rules and brief re-teaching of proper nouns should annul any confusion. (Examples: Archaic period, Herodtus, Aristotle, etc) |
| Knowledge Demands: | Middle high. The text is packed with subject specific vocabulary and proper nouns which students are unfamiliar with and which may cause a great deal of confusion. There a are few references to other works as examples of Greek works produced in each time period. (Example: “…Herodotus called ‘the same stock and the same speech, our shared temples of the gods and religious rituals, our similar customs,’”) |
|  | Quantitative Measures |
| Lexile Level: | A score of 1080L places this book in the 9-10 text complexity grade band. |
| ATOS Level: | A score of 11.6 places this book in the 11+ text complexity grade band. Words like monopolized, archaic, aristocracy, and monumental could be partially to blame for the high level in conjunction with lengthy sentences like, “Some tyrants turned out to be just as autocratic as the oligarchs they replaced, while others proved to be enlightened leaders. (Pheidon of Argos established an orderly system of weights and measures, for instance, while Theagenes of Megara brought running water to his city.)” |
|  | Reader-Task Considerations |
| Cognitive Capabilities: | Although this text contains quite a bit of subject specific vocabulary that students may be unfamiliar with, the brevity and straight forward nature of the text requires very little attention to complete the reading and involves enough simple facts to be memorable. For instance, the text is less than 1000 words and discusses warring city states and mythological gods. Students need only limited critical thinking skills (recognizing proper nouns and Greek roots) at all to read this text as it does not ask for reader interaction in any way. The text is most useful as a pre-teaching/background knowledge building appetizer for a larger more in-depth text. The text even contains a sort of summarizing sentence at the end: “The economic, political, technological and artistic developments of the Archaic period readied the Greek city-states for the monumental changes of the next few centuries.” |
| Reading Skills: | The need for inferring in this text is mostly non-existent. The text is very explicit in all of its points and asks for no analysis-unless the use of examples causes the reader to think about the connections between the text and other works being quoted. For instance, Aristotle is quoted to provide an example of how Greeks were treated during this time period. However, the example is not figurative or esoteric in any way. Most inferring take place when trying to decode the meaning of a very few advanced level words like “aristocracy” and “monumental.” The descriptive nature of the text is basic enough that most readers at an intermediate level should be able to visualize the information being presented. The text is most useful, in terms of reading skills, as a lesson in proper noun usage and the possible outcomes of disregarding or misinterpreting capitalized words. |
| Motivation and Engagement with Task and Text: | The fact that the information in the text does not very or range in any way, shows that it is appropriate for 6th grade students as well as older students. In conjunction with the unit on mythology and the history of the gods and creatures therein, the interest of most 6th grade students will be excited and maintained for sustained periods of time-especially as this specific text is quite short. 6th grade students are old enough to provide a sufficient level of self-efficacy to read this text with no fear of failure-length is a major component of this. The style of writing in this text is very basic, yet descriptive. However, a large amount of imagery and high energy descriptions are not to be found. 6th grade students may find that unappealing. But the mention of hoplite soldiers and warring city states may recapture their attention.  |
| Prior Knowledge and Experience: | 6th grade students should have a basic amount of background knowledge (BK) on Greek culture and mythology-as this text leads into that- which should be enough to get them through the text. There is not explicit link between what is learned in this text and what is learned in other classes except the fact that literary, mathematical, and scientific advances were made in Greece during this period of time. Again, vocabulary could be an issue, but a mini-lesson on capitalization and the use of proper nouns should clear up most of the issues right away. |
| Content and/or Theme Concerns: | There is no content in the text that could be deemed inappropriate or risqué for 6th graders or that could make a teacher uncomfortable when teaching it to 6th graders.  |
| Complexity of Associated Tasks: | Some tasks that could be associated with this text are: research on more in-depth qualities of Greek life, summarization, comparisons to other cultures that students know about, and organizers that show the progression of Greek governmental changes. Each of these tasks are at an appropriate level of complexity for a 6th grade student. The specific task in mind when this text was chosen, was the listening to, the reading of, and the eventual re-telling of Greek myths. This text was chosen as a pre-teaching device to set up BK on mythological figures and stories.  |
| Recommended Placement |
| The text “Ancient Greece” is not a book or an in-depth study by any means. It is however, the type of basic informational text that is common in the classroom as a bridge text that connects units, themes, or even content areas by pre-teaching specific subject area knowledge in brief yet academically engaging ways. This specific text from *The History Channel Topics Archive* contains quite a bit of subject sensitive language combined with a variety of general vocabulary that ranges from basic to advanced in educational value. Although the Lexile quantitative measurement places the article at a 9-10 grade complexity band and the ATOS quantitative measurement places the text at an 11+ grade complexity band, but the straightforward nature of the article and its lack of any required analytical and critical thinking skills place its appropriate grade level band in the 6-8 range. It may be most appropriate for 8th grade students based on its sentence structures and use of advanced vocabulary, but with support and thematic teaching, this text can be used easily with 6th grade students.  |

[[1]](#footnote-1)

Reflection

 This project seemed most daunting to me when I began. It took me several hours to decide what text to analyze because I didn’t want to use a book that has been analyzed or a text that would not be beneficial to my students. So I thought, “what can I use that will be beneficial to me as a learner and to my students in my English class?” I thought about the fact that I was about to start a new unit on mythology and the heroes journey. Then I thought about the fact that I always like to tie non-fiction texts to fictional texts as a way to show that good readers improve background knowledge by reading non-fiction texts. I had already chosen this text as a pre-teaching text that would be used in my class this coming week. Why not find out if it is indeed appropriate for my students based on the rubric and new learning I acquired this week?

 I learned that this text, although at an appropriate level for my sixth grade students when read in a supported setting, could pose problems when it comes to vocabulary and confusion about proper noun usage. Many Greek names and words, although commonplace at some point in life, are “all Greek” to sixth grade students because they have yet to hear about them. I realized that this article has actually come in handy for two reasons after completing this analysis: it has given me an appropriate segue for a mini-lesson on the appropriate use of capitalization and proper nouns, and it serves as a basis for background knowledge for the entire unit on mythology and the hero’s journey. I have also learned that just because this text is short, does not mean that it is low level. I did assume that short ≠ simple before, but this experience has solidified that for me.

 The most interesting thing that I have learned about the process of text complexity analysis is that texts are not easy to lump into a certain age/grade range. Quantitative analysis tools are amazing for discovering the level of the vocabulary and sentence structures in the text, but based on what I have seen, the result from the quantitative analysis almost never proves where the text should lie in the grade band spectrum. I believe that the sole purpose of the quantitative analysis portion of the complexity analysis is to allow teachers to check for vocabulary that may need to be pre-taught. The most important factor in the analysis is the qualitative analysis, which focuses on the depth, abstractness, and structure of the text rather than the concrete (either I know it or I don’t) factors like vocabulary.

 The most useful and important part of this project, in my opinion, is the part about reader and task considerations. When teachers choose texts for the classroom, they often choose texts that they think will be good for the class based on their own experiences or preferences and often have little more support for their choices than that. With the use of these tools, I can “become more purposeful in text selection” and “be confident in my content knowledge and read and analyze texts before I teach it” (Pimentel et. al. 2012, p. 48). I think that this practice will help me weed out the texts that will not benefit my students and find appropriately challenging texts that will add depth to my class instead of just lengthen it. It is crucial that students read appropriate texts in order to avoid the frustration zone that so often results in anger and resentment toward reading that leads to abandoning reading as a pastime or even abandoning reading altogether.

 I do maintain, however, that students need to spend at least a small amount of time in the frustration zone in order to grow as readers. We learn more from mistakes than from successes. But, there is a right way to set up a safe and supportive environment that will allow a student to become frustrated and still deal with the frustration in a positive way. That, however, is for another paper. But, for this paper, I have learned that I can be the usher of individual growth if I can choose texts specifically for each child at his particular ability and interest level using this analysis strategy.

 Now that I know how to approach and select appropriate texts in a streamlined way, I can start a professional development group that focuses on selecting and compiling an archive of texts in a range of grade bands so that in the future we can supply students with these texts rapidly. I have however, seen a little problem with the complexity analysis strategy; not every teacher will assign the same grade band to each text. I tested this theory when I had three other teachers from other content areas use the qualitative rubric to place this text in its level. We all had different reasons for choosing different bands. The social studies teacher placed this text in the 9-10 grade band because of the “advanced” vocabulary and sentence structure. The math teacher placed this text in the 11+ grade band because he said it “sounded like a professor lecturing.” And the science teacher placed this text in the 9-10 grade band because it covered world history-a subject students are not required to take as a class until 10th grade in Texas.

 In order to rectify this problem in the future, I plan to have a few other colleagues analyze texts I plan to use to ensure that there is at least some sort of consensus as to whether or not the text is appropriate. I asked two other English teachers to analyze this text. They both agreed that the appropriate grade band was 6-8. In fact, our rubrics and notes were nearly identical. Apparently, the other content area teachers are using simpler texts for a variety of reasons. I see a bug problem there! I plan to invite content area teachers to our PD meetings to review and analyze text complexity as a group so that we can continue to challenge our students. Choosing appropriate texts for students is extremely important and as proof “an entire standard is devoted to increases in students’ ability to read complex text over the school years to the point of college and career readiness” (Hiebert 2012, p.1).

References

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1. Adapted from the Rubric from http://programs.ccsso.org/projects/common%20core%20resources/documents/Informational %20Text%20Qualitative%20Rubric.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)