The Foundation for Success
Grades 6-8
ELA 1
Day 1
Jumping in: What conclusion can you draw based on the data provided?

• "Performance on the ACT (Reading Text by Degree of Text Complexity)" (This graph shows performance on questions associated with uncomplicated, more challenging, and complex texts in relation to the ACT Reading Benchmark)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACT Reading Benchmark</th>
<th>Uncomplicated</th>
<th>More Challenging</th>
<th>Complex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Percentage of Questions Correct</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standards Institute
Standard CCR.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

What must a student be able to do in order to address this standard comprehensively? Annotate the standard as necessary; break it down into steps. Consider what explicit instruction they must have, and what practice they must have, in order to accomplish this.
College and Career Anchor Standards for Reading

Key Ideas and Details

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when supporting conclusions drawn from the text.

2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyzing how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

5. Analyze the structure of a text, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the text’s overall meaning, as well as its aesthetic and communicative effects.

6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Craft and Structure

7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the strengths and weaknesses of the line of reasoning, the validity of the evidence, and the relevance, sufficiency, and quality of the evidence.

9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.
Reading Standards for Literature 6-12

The following standards offer a focus for instruction each year and help ensure that students gain adequate exposure to a range of texts and tasks. Rigor is also infused through the requirement that students read increasingly complex texts through the grades. Students advancing through the grades are expected to meet each year’s grade-specific standards and retain or further develop skills and understandings mastered in preceding grades.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 6 students:</th>
<th>Grade 7 students:</th>
<th>Grade 8 students:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Ideas and Details</strong></td>
<td><strong>Craft and Structure</strong></td>
<td><strong>Craft and Structure</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</td>
<td>1. Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</td>
<td>1. Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.</td>
<td>2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.</td>
<td>2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Describe how a particular story’s or drama’s plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.</td>
<td>3. Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).</td>
<td>3. Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.</td>
<td>4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.</td>
<td>4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.</td>
<td>5. Analyze how a drama’s or poem’s form or structure (e.g., sonnet, sonnet) contributes to its meaning.</td>
<td>5. Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.</td>
<td>6. Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.</td>
<td>6. Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
from
Cultivating Wonder

David Coleman
president and CEO, the College Board

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“Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” from the poems of Dylan Thomas. Copyright 1939, 1946 by New Directions Publishing Corporation.


www.cultivatingwonder.org
so much depends on a good question. A question invites students into a text or turns them away. A question provokes surprise or tedium. Some questions open up a text, and if followed, never let you see it the same way again.

Our efforts to improve reading in this country have hit a wall. For forty years, reading scores in the 8th grade are basically flat; more than half of the students within our care cannot read the complex texts they need to be ready for college and careers. We cannot expand opportunity if we do not tear down this wall. Rising to this challenge, more than forty states have recently adopted a shared set of literacy standards designed to ensure their students are truly prepared.

The Common Core State Standards challenge students to read like a detective and write like an investigative reporter. Cultivating these capacities will require investing in the craft of good questions. Excellence arises from the regular practice of work worth doing, reading things worth reading and asking questions worth answering.

This essay analyzes five questions about five different texts, inspired by the first five standards in reading. This essay is a little long and somewhat demanding because it takes time to dig into specific texts. Productive work with the standards must go beyond generalities to demonstrate how they might come to life with specific questions about particular texts. This exploration, I hope, will be useful to teachers and curriculum and assessment designers, but also to those parents and members of the public who want to not just hear about the standards but to live inside them for a while.

The first standard asks students to “read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.” Standard 1 emphasizes a rigorous, deductive approach to reading that challenges students to draw as much as possible from the text itself. It remains to us as educators to develop questions that show the power, or the reward, of reading closely this way.

To illustrate the power of looking closely and looking again, let’s reexamine one of the most famous beginnings of all, the opening of Hamlet. Our question is:
In what tone of voice does Bernardo ask “Who’s there?” and how do you know?

ACT I, SCENE I

Elsinore. A platform before the castle.

[Francisco at his post. Enter to him Bernardo]

bernardo

Who’s there?

francisco

Nay, answer me: stand, and unfold yourself.

bernardo

Long live the king!

francisco

Bernardo?

bernardo

He.

francisco

Youcome most carefully upon yourhour.

bernardo

’Tis now struck twelve; get thee to bed, Francisco.

francisco

For this reliefmuch thanks: ’tis bitter cold,

And I am sick at heart.

bernardo

Have you had quiet guard?

francisco

Not a mouse stirring.

bernardo

Well, goodnight.

If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,

The rivals of my watch, bid them make haste.

francisco

I think I hear them. Stand, ho! Who’s there?

[Enter Horatio and Marcellus]

horatio

Friends to this ground.

marcellus

And liegemen to the Dane.

francisco

Give you good night.

marcellus

O, farewell, honest soldier:

Who hath relieved you?

francisco

Bernardo has my place.

Give you good night.

[exit]

It is so easy to pass over the beginning of Hamlet and not even consider the question of how Bernardo asks “Who’s there?” The words “who’s there” are quite ordinary, so there are lots of ways to say them. They remain today as pedestrian as picking up the telephone or opening a door.

The language of the opening of Hamlet is not especially forbidding or difficult. I have taught the text to Yale college students and inner-city high school students in New Haven and had the exact same experience: Students read over these first lines and think they understand the beginning of the play. But when you ask them in what tone of voice Bernardo asks “Who’s there?” they often haven’t
thought about it. Some students might have a general sense of Bernardo’s tone, but almost none attend to the specifics of the scene as it unfolds.

Understanding the opening requires recognizing what a very strange thing has happened. It is a situation with which we are all very familiar. Every time we interact with a security guard and give our identification, we walk up to the guard at his station and show him who we are. In the beginning of *Hamlet*, though, Bernardo walks up to the guard and asks him who he is.

Francisco responds no, answer me—tell me who you are. I am the one asking the questions here. In fact, the very next lines show what a normal exchange of the guard should look like.

Francisco now proceeds to ask “Who’s there?” Shakespeare reenacts the opening lines and shows us the way things are supposed to go: The guard is supposed to ask “Who are you?” Horatio and Marcellus identify themselves as friends, and all proceeds smoothly. A careful reading of these opening lines recognizes that Bernardo has jumbled a very familiar routine —relieving Francisco from guard duty.

Now that the strangeness of Bernardo’s opening move is becoming clear, the language further illuminates how Bernardo enters the play. Francisco says, “You come most carefully upon your hour.” Literally, Bernardo is full of care, and Francisco’s use of this word provides a clear indication of Bernardo’s tone and movements as he approaches his guard post. When combined with Bernardo’s immediate desire to know whether Francisco “had a quiet guard,” along with his anxiety that his fellow watchmen “make haste” to join him, the evidence is clear: Bernardo is jittery, spooked. And to call him spooked is quite appropriate—we soon learn why. In the lines that follow, we will learn that Bernardo has twice seen a ghost.

What is extraordinary is that Shakespeare depicts Bernardo’s fright not by having him walk out on stage and say, “I’m scared.” He constructs a scene where the most ordinary language—who’s there—and the most ordinary interaction—a changing of the guard—expresses extraordinary unease. Shakespeare directs a situation in which the words and action break the expectations—shatter the order of things—enacting what jittery anxiety looks like in remarkably few words.

When we approach Shakespeare, we often think about difficult language; yet the words that open *Hamlet* are remarkably simple. The challenge is to pay attention. The only source of insight can be the words themselves, as well as the actions that they orchestrate on stage. The opening words of Hamlet should let a wide range
of students and audience members into the play, if we take the time to follow their lead. Once students have grasped the opening situation, they can later return to a deeper exploration of the language and wonder about such things as what “unfold” means throughout the play, and why it all begins with a question of “who’s there.”

To experience drama fully, readers must read with the alert eye and ear of a director or actor; if you are going to perform the play, the first choice you make is how to say the words “who’s there.” And, on first glance, Shakespeare does not tell you how. Reading Shakespeare well involves discerning how he gives directions in his script, not only in the words he uses but in the scenes and interactions he constructs.

Drama is a wonderful way to illustrate the power of the first standard in reading that focuses both on what the text says explicitly as well as what follows from the text. Rarely when we read a script does it explicitly state how one might say the words or direct the action. But by examining exactly what the script says and then making inferences from this evidence, the playwright’s art comes to light. The standards require students to read Shakespeare; now our shared task is to ensure they witness the drama, the action his language creates.

And, of course, the first standard is not only about students answering questions but asking them themselves. So many readers read over the lines of Hamlet and other plays and don’t realize they have not stopped to understand the scene that unfolds. The stronger readers become, the more they pause on their own to confirm that they see how each line follows from another. The classroom dialogue increasingly becomes a model for an internal conversation.

Shared standards in literacy provide a platform for innovation, sharing insights, and crafting and refining high-quality options. While the standards articulate the goals of what students need to know and be able to do, they do not prescribe the how: curriculum and teacher practice. This essay is meant to be suggestive rather than prescriptive, to explore questions and texts as a way to provide one picture of what the standards might look like in practice. Once we have examined a few specific questions and texts—like the scene from Hamlet above—we can then explore whether there are useful design principles for good questions....
Seven principles have guided the development of questions in this essay. These are not design principles for all questions—there are other types of good questions not featured here. But if our aim is to design questions that plunge students into a text, seven things may be worth bearing in mind.

1 **Beginnings matter and are often worthy of sustained attention.** Many of the questions in this essay focus on how a work begins. When an author starts writing on the blank page, all possibilities are open—but the first words reflect choices that carve out the world of the text. Authors consider carefully how and where to begin, so a great way into their thinking and craft is to observe the beginning closely. A careful, slower examination of a beginning also allows students to get into the text to grasp its rhythm before ranging over it more broadly. Aristotle says “the beginning is thought to be more than half of the whole.” A student who understands how a text opens stands ready to follow how it unfolds.

2 **Great questions follow the author’s lead.** Good questions begin in humility. They assume that what is within the text is more interesting than whatever was on our mind before we read. Preconceptions are the enemy of the discovery of an author’s distinct voice and ideas. Often what the author has written is our best guide to good questions; authors signal that a word is important through repetition; they break patterns to illuminate them. Following Martha Graham, the only path to the achievement of a good question is the practice of reading carefully.

3 **Great questions make the text the star of the classroom; the most powerful evidence and insight for answering lies within the text or texts being read.** Most good questions are text dependent and text specific. They reflect a love
or reverence for the text at hand, and they demand that attention be paid to what is most interesting and worth discovering within it. There are some good general questions. It is almost always interesting to ask: Why this word and not another? Why did the author choose to begin here? What would happen if this section of the text were removed (or what is the contribution of this sentence to the argument)? What exactly did the author mean by this? Or simply, I find this mysterious or confusing—what do you think? But most good questions are text specific; they follow from a feature of the text at hand. Some good questions force students to go beyond the text for answers, but it is almost always more powerful (and respectful of an author’s work) first to immerse oneself in the world of the text.

**4 Great questions have a simplicity that allows students to get started by observing and gathering evidence and gradually to earn larger insights and ideas.** Truly deep questions are often very simple—though the text is complex; questions themselves don’t have to be complicated to unearth richness and complexity. One sign of a good question is that it is not too hard to get started. Beginning a discussion of the *Gettysburg Address* by asking what word Lincoln uses most often allows a wide range of students to engage. By then examining how *dedicate* unfolds in the Gettysburg Address, students gradually observe Lincoln’s larger ideas about America. Good questions encourage readers to begin with things they can see and to look deeper.

**5 Great questions provoke a sense of mystery and provide a payoff in insight that makes the work of reading carefully worth it.** Good questions break the smooth exterior of the text and invite students to investigate it more deeply. All of us tend to read over things until we press ourselves to pay closer attention; the best questions sharpen that attentiveness. To ask in what tone of voice Bernardo speaks provokes mystery; it positions students to read like a detective and see what clues they can find. But what is important is that the search has results, treasures worth seeking. This depends foremost on the quality of the text itself—only well-crafted and deep things are worth looking at closely. But a question should also follow a thread that leads to insight or even surprise; it should make reading worth it.

**6 Great questions and follow-up questions draw on the advantages of students reading together by sharing what they have noticed and seen.** Henry James says that a writer should aspire to be someone “on whom nothing is lost.” This is a demanding ideal for a writer, or a reader, because all of us miss things when we read. But what is wonderful about a classroom is that we can gather together to read, to see more than we can on our own. The classroom becomes a place where details and evidence matter, where students follow and debate leads, like
fellow detectives. Good follow-up questions from either the teacher or students sustain the shared inquiry. As a group and as individuals, students practice becoming more alert to curious details in the text and inquisitive about them. Part of the excitement of such teaching is that with a rich text, there is always room to see more, for surprise. Great questions show their power in the pleasure of seeing something new and the gratitude of learning from someone else.

7 Some great questions do not follow these principles and some may even break them. The principles and questions outlined in this essay are meant to be evocative rather than comprehensive. Some great questions provoke arguments and force students to confront their own assumptions and beliefs. Some great questions ask students to apply what they have gleaned from a text to solve problems or design solutions. Sometimes questions need to provoke students to go beyond the text to additional sources, for example to evaluate the evidence or opinions presented by the text. Once again, what the author has written often offers us a guide as to what we might read next. For example, when Martin Luther King mentions Socrates throughout his Letter from Birmingham Jail, King gives his readers a strong indication that encountering Socrates would provide insight into his thought and action.

Perhaps one thing to keep in mind is the order in which we ask questions. Most questions that move beyond the text are richer after students have first deeply immersed themselves in the world of a text. Additionally, it is a mistake to assume that it is always “higher order” to go beyond a text and evaluate an author’s view, or always more demanding to compare one text to another text. Sometimes the most difficult and rewarding work is paying precise attention to a single text and observing exactly what an author has done, as C.S. Lewis says, “to look and go on looking until one sees exactly what is there.”

Good questions and texts worth reading are at the heart of students taking pleasure in the challenging work of reading complex texts. Designing good questions is critical to motivating students to dig deeper; it is work and it evokes natural resistance. Students can conspire to avoid the demanding attention to the details and fall back on ready-made comments.

But while it is challenging work to read and think well, it is important to emphasize the many ways in which it is easy and natural for students and teachers to be curious and pay attention. When students talk about a movie, the remarks they make and questions they ask often have a refreshing ease: Did you see that? Could you believe it when that happened? —and perhaps—Did you see how the
**director or actor did that?** We may make reading more difficult than it needs to be by not spending more time noticing and wondering about what is read—losing ourselves in simple questions like: *What exactly is going on here?* Texts may be complex, but the most beautiful questions are often simple, squarely within the grasp of teachers and students.

Perhaps the greatest misconception about the standards is that only very few teachers or students can do the work they require. A very different way to look at the standards is as an opportunity for a far broader range of teachers and students to find reading a range of texts fascinating and rewarding. The kinds of questions we design will be critical to inviting people in.

The literature and literary nonfiction in this essay would likely be read in high school years, but similar work could be done for texts appropriate to earlier grades as well as readings in other areas such as social studies, history, science, and technical subjects. While this essay explores individual texts, additional work should be done to design thoughtful sequences of texts that build coherent knowledge within and across grades.

At stake in good questions is not just reading well but delivering the opportunity to engage in conversations with the finest minds and artists. We can no longer talk to Dr. Martin Luther King, but if we immerse ourselves in what he has written, follow each move of his thought and words, we begin to weave his language and ideas into our own fiber. Good questions give students access to the greatest teachers of all, the texts in front of them. Only reading that plunges into the thoughts of others makes all the great teachers truly available, as models for our own thought, knowledge, writing, and action.

In our time, the technology of interruption has outpaced the technology of concentration. We are going to need to discover new and powerful ways to motivate all students to achieve the sustained attention and repeated practice reading well requires. Perhaps the most important breakthrough technology will be good questions. Let’s all press ourselves to find the great questions already made, craft new ones, test them with students and share the best of them.

What do you think is a magnificent text and a question worth answering about it?
Excerpt from “Every Little Hurricane”
by Sherman Alexie

Although it was winter, the nearest ocean four hundred miles away, and the Tribal Weatherman asleep because of boredom, a hurricane dropped from the sky in 1976 and fell so hard on the Spokane Indian Reservation that it knocked Victor from bed and his latest nightmare.

It was January and Victor was nine years old. He was sleeping in his bedroom in the basement of the HUD house when it happened. His mother and father were upstairs, hosting the largest New Year’s Eve party in tribal history, when the winds increased and first tree fell.

“Goddamn it,” one Indian yelled at another as the argument began. “You ain’t sh*t, you da*n apple!”

The two Indians raged across the room at each other. One was tall and heavy, the other was short, muscular. High-pressure and low-pressure fronts.

The music was so loud that Victor could barely hear the voices as the two Indians escalated the argument into a fistfight. Soon there were no voices to be heard, only guttural noises that could have been curses or wood breaking. Then the music stopped so suddenly that the silence frightened Victor.

“What the f**k’s going on?” Victor’s father yelled, his voice coming quickly and with force. It shook the walls of the house.

“Adolph and Arnold are fighting again,” Victor’s mother said. Adolph and Arnold were her brothers, Victor’s uncles. They always fought. Had been fighting since the very beginning.

“Well, tell them to get their g**da*n asses out of my house,” Victor’s father yelled again, his decibel level rising to meet the tension in the house.

“They already left,” Victor’s mother said. “They’re fighting out in the yard.”

Victor heard this and ran to his window. He could see his uncles slugging each other with such force that they had to be in love. Strangers would never want to hurt each other that badly. But it was strangely quiet, like Victor was watching a television show with the volume turned all the way down. He could hear the party upstairs move to the windows, step onto the front porch to watch the battle.
During other hurricanes broadcast on the news, Victor had seen crazy people tie themselves to trees on the beach. Those people wanted to feel the force of the hurricane firsthand, wanted it to be like an amusement ride, but the thin ropes were broken and the people were broken. Sometimes the trees themselves were pulled from the ground and both the trees and the people tied to the trees were carried away.

*From Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven, by Sherman Alexie*
*Published by Perennial/Atlantic Monthly Press, 1993*
*This excerpt is used for professional development purposes only.*
*ISBN 978-0-06-097624-8*
## Text Complexity: Qualitative Measures Rubric

### LITERATURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Title</th>
<th>Text Author</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exceedingly Complex</th>
<th>Very Complex</th>
<th>Moderately Complex</th>
<th>Slightly Complex</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TEXT STRUCTURE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is intricate with regard to such elements as point of view, time shifts, multiple characters, storylines and detail</td>
<td>Organization: May include subplots, time shifts and more complex characters</td>
<td>Organization: May have two or more storylines and occasionally be difficult to predict</td>
<td>Organization: Is clear, chronological or easy to predict</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of Graphics:</td>
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<tr>
<td>If used, illustrations or graphics are essential for understanding the meaning of the text</td>
<td>Use of Graphics: If used, illustrations or graphics support or extend the meaning of the text</td>
<td>Use of Graphics: If used, a range of illustrations or graphics support selected parts of the text</td>
<td>Use of Graphics: If used, either illustrations directly support and assist in interpreting the text or are not necessary to understanding the meaning of the text</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LANGUAGE FEATURES</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Conventionality:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dense and complex; contains abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language</td>
<td>Fairly complex; contains some abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language</td>
<td>Largely explicit and easy to understand with some occasions for more complex meaning</td>
<td>Explicit, literal, straightforward, easy to understand</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocabulary:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complex, generally unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic language; may be ambiguous or purposefully misleading</td>
<td>Fairly complex language that is sometimes unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic</td>
<td>Mostly contemporary, familiar, conversational; rarely unfamiliar or overly academic</td>
<td>Contemporary, familiar, conversational language</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sentence Structure:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainly complex sentences with several subordinate clauses or phrases; sentences often contain multiple concepts</td>
<td>Many complex sentences with several subordinate phrases or clauses and transition words</td>
<td>Primarily simple and compound sentences, with some complex constructions</td>
<td>Mainly simple sentences</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MEANING</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Meaning:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple competing levels of meaning that are difficult to identify, separate, and interpret; theme is implicit or subtle, often ambiguous and revealed over the entirety of the text</td>
<td>Multiple levels of meaning that may be difficult to identify or separate; theme is implicit or subtle and may be revealed over the entirety of the text</td>
<td>Multiple levels of meaning clearly distinguished from each other; theme is clear but may be conveyed with some subtlety</td>
<td>One level of meaning; theme is obvious and revealed early in the text</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>KNOWLEDGE DEMANDS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Life Experiences:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explores complex, sophisticated or abstract themes; experiences portrayed are distinctly different from the common reader</td>
<td>Explores themes of varying levels of complexity or abstraction; experiences portrayed are uncommon to most readers</td>
<td>Explores several themes; experiences portrayed are common to many readers</td>
<td>Explores a single theme; experiences portrayed are everyday and common to most readers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge: Many references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements</td>
<td>Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge: Some references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements</td>
<td>Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge: Few references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements</td>
<td>Intertextuality and Cultural Knowledge: No references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Text Complexity: Qualitative Measures Rubric

#### INFORMATIONAL TEXTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Title</th>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>TEXT STRUCTURE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>○ Organization: Connections between extensive range of ideas, processes or events are deep, intricate and often ambiguous; organization is intricate or discipline-specific</td>
<td>○ Organization: Connections between an expanded range of ideas, processes or events are deep, intricate and often ambiguous; organization is intricate or discipline-specific</td>
<td>○ Organization: Connections between some ideas or events are complex or difficult to discern; organization is occasionally ambiguous or confusing</td>
<td>○ Organization: Connections between ideas, processes or events are explicit and clear; organization of text is chronological, sequential or easy to predict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Text Features: If used, are essential in understanding content</td>
<td>○ Text Features: If used, are essential in understanding content</td>
<td>○ Text Features: If used, enhance the reader's understanding of content</td>
<td>○ Text Features: If used, help the reader navigate and understand content but are not essential to understanding content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Use of Graphics: If used, are essential in understanding content</td>
<td>○ Use of Graphics: If used, are essential in understanding content</td>
<td>○ Use of Graphics: If used, help the reader understand the written text</td>
<td>○ Use of Graphics: If used, graphic, pictures, tables, and charts are neat and helpful, but not essential to understanding content</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LANGUAGE FEATURES</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>○ Conventionality: Dense and complex; contains considerable abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language</td>
<td>○ Conventionality: Fairly complex; contains some abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language</td>
<td>○ Conventionality: Largely explicit and straightforward, easy to understand</td>
<td>○ Conventionality: Explicit, literal, straightforward, easy to understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Vocabulary: Complex, generally unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic language; may be ambiguous or purposefully misleading</td>
<td>○ Vocabulary: Fairly complex; contains some unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic language</td>
<td>○ Vocabulary: Mostly contemporary, familiar, conversational; rarely overly academic</td>
<td>○ Vocabulary: Contemporary, familiar, conversational language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Sentence Structure: Mainly complex sentences with several subordinate clauses or phrases and transition words; sentences often contain multiple concepts</td>
<td>○ Sentence Structure: Many complex sentences with several subordinate clauses or phrases and transition words</td>
<td>○ Sentence Structure: Primarily simple and compound sentences, with some complex constructions</td>
<td>○ Sentence Structure: Mainly simple sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PURPOSE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>○ Purpose: Subtle and intricate, difficult to determine; includes many theoretical or abstract elements</td>
<td>○ Purpose: Implicit or subtle but fairly easy to infer; more theoretical or abstract than concrete</td>
<td>○ Purpose: Implied but easy to identify based upon context or source</td>
<td>○ Purpose: Explicitly stated, clear, concrete, narrowly focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>KNOWLEDGE DEMANDS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>○ Subject Matter Knowledge: Relies on extensive levels of discipline-specific or theoretical knowledge; includes a range of challenging abstract concepts</td>
<td>○ Subject Matter Knowledge: Relies on moderate levels of discipline-specific or theoretical knowledge; includes a mix of recognizable ideas and challenging abstract concepts</td>
<td>○ Subject Matter Knowledge: Relies on common or practical knowledge and some discipline-specific content knowledge; includes a mix of simple and more complicated, abstract ideas</td>
<td>○ Subject Matter Knowledge: Relies on everyday, practical knowledge; includes simple, concrete ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Intertextuality: Many references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.</td>
<td>○ Intertextuality: Some references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.</td>
<td>○ Intertextuality: Few references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.</td>
<td>○ Intertextuality: No references or allusions to other texts, or outside ideas, theories, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Readers and Tasks

Students’ ability to read complex text does not always develop in a linear fashion. Although the progression of Reading standard 10 (see below) 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. Students need opportunities to stretch their reading abilities but also to experience the satisfaction and pleasure of easy, fluent reading within them, both of which the Standards allow for. As noted above, such factors as students’ motivation, knowledge, and experiences must also come into play in text selection. Students deeply interested in a given topic, for example, may engage with texts on that subject across a range of complexity. 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.

Students reading well above and well below grade-band level need additional support. Students for whom texts within their text complexity grade band (or even from the next higher band) present insufficient challenge must be given the attention and resources necessary to develop their reading ability at an appropriately advanced pace. On the other hand, students who struggle greatly to read texts within (or even below) their text complexity grade band must be given the support needed to enable them to read at a grade-appropriate level of complexity.

Even many students on course for college and career readiness are likely to need scaffolding as they master higher levels of text complexity. As they enter each new grade band, many students are likely to need at least some extra help as they work to comprehend texts at the high end of the range of difficulty appropriate to the band. For example, many students just entering grade 2 will need some support as they read texts that are advanced for the grades 2-3 text complexity band. Although such support is educationally necessary and desirable, instruction must move generally toward decreasing scaffolding and increasing independence, with the goal of students reading independently and proficiently within a given grade band by the end of the band’s final year (continuing the previous example, the end of grade 3).
Academic Vocabulary

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS for ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS & LITERACY in HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES, SCIENCE, AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Vocabulary

Acquiring Vocabulary

Words are not just words. They are the nexus—the interface—between communication and thought. When we read, it is through words that we build, refine, and modify our knowledge. What makes vocabulary valuable and important is not the words themselves so much as the understandings they afford.


The importance of students acquiring a rich and varied vocabulary cannot be overstated. Vocabulary has been empirically connected to reading comprehension since at least 1925 (Whipple, 1925) and has its importance to comprehension confirmed in recent years (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). It is widely accepted among researchers that the difference in students’ vocabulary levels is a key factor in disparities in academic achievement (Beaumann & Kameenui, 1991; Beck, 1977; Stanovich, 1986) but that vocabulary instruction has been neither frequent nor systematic in most schools (Biemiller, 2001; Dunn, 1978; Lesaux, Kuefler, Faller, & Kiley, 2010; Scott & Nagy, 1997).

Research suggests that if students are going to grasp and retain words and comprehend text, they need incremental, repeated exposure in a variety of contexts to the words they are trying to learn. When students make multiple connections between a new word and their own experiences, they develop a nuanced and flexible understanding of the word they are learning. In this way, students learn not only what a word means but also how to use that word in a variety of contexts, and they can apply appropriate senses of the word’s meaning in order to understand the word in different contexts (Landauer & Dumais, 1997; Landauer, McNaughton, Dennis, & Kintsch, 2007; Nagy, Herman, & Anderson, 1996).

Initially, children readily learn words from oral conversation because such conversations are context rich in ways that aid in vocabulary acquisition: in discussions, a small set of words (accompanied by gesture and intonation) is used with great frequency to talk about a narrow range of situations. Children are exposed to on a day-to-day basis. Yet as children reach school age, new words are introduced less frequently in conversation, and consequently vocabulary acquisition eventually stagnates by grade 4 or 5 unless students acquire additional words from written context (Hayes & Ahrens, 1988).

Written language contains literally thousands of words more than are typically used in conversational language. Yet, writing lacks the interactivity and nonverbal context that make acquiring vocabulary through oral conversation relatively easy, which means that purposeful and ongoing concentration on vocabulary is needed (Hayes & Ahrens, 1988). In fact, at most between 5 and 15 percent of new words encountered upon first reading are retained, and the weaker a student’s vocabulary is, the smaller the gain (Daneman & Green, 1981; Hayes & Ahrens, 1988; Herman, Anderson, Pearson, & Nagy, 1987; Sternberg & Powell, 1983). Yet research shows that, if students are truly to understand what they read, they must grasp upward of 95 percent of the words (Batts, 1946; Carver, 1944; Hu & Nation, 2000; LaFever, 1988).

The challenge in reaching what we might call “vocabulary dexterity” is that, in any given instance, it is not the entire spectrum of a word’s history, meanings, usages, and features that matters but only those aspects that are relevant at that moment. Therefore, for a reader to grasp the meaning of a word, two things must happen: first, the reader’s internal representation of the word must be sufficiently complete and well articulated to allow the intended meaning to be known to him or her; second, the reader must understand the context well enough to select the intended meaning from the realm of the word’s possible meanings (which in turn depends on understanding the surrounding words of the text).

Key to students’ vocabulary development is building rich and flexible word knowledge. Students need plentiful opportunities to use and respond to the words they learn through playful informal talk, discussion, reading or being read to, and responding to what is read. Students benefit from instruction about the connections and patterns in language. Developing in students an analytical attitude toward the logic and sentence structure of their texts, alongside an awareness of word parts, word origins, and word relationships, provides students with a sense of how language works such that syntax, morphology, and etymology can become useful cues in building meaning as students encounter new words and concepts (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2006). Although direct study of language is essential to student progress, most word learning occurs indirectly and unconsciously through normal reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Miller 1996; Nagy, Anderson, & Herman, 1987).

As students are exposed to and interact with language throughout their school careers, they are able to acquire understandings of word meanings, build awareness of the workings of language, and apply their knowledge to comprehend and produce language.
Three Tiers of Words
Isabel L. Beck, Margaret G. McKeown, and Linda Kucan (2002, 2008) have outlined a useful model for conceptualizing categories of words readers encounter in texts and for understanding the instructional and learning challenges that words in each category present. They describe three levels, or tiers, of words in terms of the words’ commonality (more to less frequent occurrence) and applicability (broad to narrow).

While the term tier may connote a hierarchy, a ranking of words from least to most important, the reality is that all three tiers of words are vital to comprehension and vocabulary development. Although learning tier two and three words typically requires more deliberate effort (at least for students whose first language is English) than does learning tier one words.

Tier One words are the words of everyday speech usually learned in the early grades, albeit not at the same rate by all children. They are not considered a challenge to the average native speaker, though English language learners of any age will have to attend carefully to them. While Tier One words are important, they are not the focus of this discussion.

Tier Two words (what the Standards refer to as general academic words) are far more likely to appear in written texts than in speech. They appear in all sorts of texts: informational texts (words such as relative, vary, formulate, specificity, and accumulate), technical texts (calibrate, itemize, periphery), and literary texts (misfortune, dignified, faltered, unabashedly). Tier Two words often represent subtle or precise ways to say relatively simple things—saunter instead of walk, for example. Because Tier Two words are found across many types of texts, they are highly generalizable.

Tier Three words (what the Standards refer to as domain-specific words) are specific to a domain or field of study (lava, carburetor, legislature, circumference, aorta) and key to understanding a new concept within a text. Because of the specificity and close ties to content knowledge, Tier Three words are far more common in informational texts than in literature. Recognized as new and “hard” words for most readers (particularly student readers), they are often explicit in the text itself, repeated, and otherwise heavily scaffolded (e.g., made a part of a glossary).

Tier Two Words and Access to Complex Texts
Because Tier Three words are obviously unfamiliar to most students, contain the ideas necessary to a new topic, and are recognized as both important and specific to the subject area in which they are instructing students, teachers often define Tier Three words prior to students encountering them in a text and then reinforce their acquisition throughout a lesson. Unfortunately, this is not typical with Tier Two words, which by definition are not unique to a particular discipline and as a result are not the clear responsibility of a particular content area teacher. What is more, many Tier Two words are far less well defined by contextual clues in the texts in which they appear and are far less likely to be defined explicitly within a text than are Tier Three words. Yet Tier Two words are frequently encountered in complex written texts and are particularly powerful because of their wide applicability to many sorts of reading. Teachers thus need to be alert to the presence of Tier Two words and determine which ones need careful attention.

Tier Three Words and Content Learning
This normal process of word acquisition occurs up to four times faster for Tier Three words when students have become familiar with the domain of the discourse and encounter the word in different contexts (Landauer & Dumais, 1997). Hence, vocabulary development for these words occurs most effectively through a coherent course of study in which subject matters are integrated and coordinated across the curriculum and domains become familiar to the student over several days or weeks.

Examples of Tier Two and Tier Three Words in Context
The following annotated samples call attention to Tier Two and Tier Three words in particular texts and, by singling them out, foreground the importance of these words to the meaning of the texts in which they appear. Both samples appear without annotations in Appendix B.

Example I: Volcanoes (Grades 4-5 Text Complexity Band)

Excerpt

In early times, no one knew how volcanoes formed or why they spouted red-hot molten rock. In modern times, scientists began to study volcanoes. They still don’t know all the answers, but they know much about how a volcano works.
“Every Little Hurricane” Part I

1. What happens in the first sentence? What do we learn in the first sentence? What can we infer in the first sentence?

2. What weather words and phrases does the author use?

3. Why would the author include the information about how people behave in hurricanes?

4. Alexie uses the paradox of *fighting at a party*, two seemingly incompatible events that none-the-less occur. What other examples of paradox appear in the excerpt?

5. Which character do you most resemble?

6. What about the silence frightens Victor?
“Every Little Hurricane” Part 2

1. What do we know about the storm?

2. Why would the author choose a storm metaphor?

3. How does Alexie use an extended metaphor to convey a specific tone in this excerpt?

4. What do we know with certainty about the argument? What can we infer about the argument?

5. What is the effect of lines 22-23? ("He could ... hurt each other that badly.")

6. Summarize the excerpt and its use of symbolism and paradox to illustrate a theme.
# Knowing What You Are Seeing: *Hunger Games*

**CCSS.ELA-LIT.RL.9-10.1** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

**CCSS.ELA-LIT.RL.9-10.2** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Students analyze how the theme is shaped and refined through the text</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher expects evidence and precision from students and probes responses accordingly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questions return students to the text</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Students cite specific evidence from text(s) to <strong>support analysis, inferences, and claims</strong> orally and in writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students use evidence to <strong>build on each other's observations or insights</strong> during discussion or collaboration</td>
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</table>
Knowing What You Are Seeing: *The Lottery*

CCSS.ELA-LIT.RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LIT.RL.9-10.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

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Write First

Compare the complexity of the texts and discourse with a focus on:

- Expectations for student performance
- Evidence of strong belief in students’ intellectual capacity
- Questions that attend to specific words, phrases and sentences within the text?
- Questions that return students to the text to build understanding?
- How students identify key ideas and details from the text to support their answers.