

# The Foundation Text Complexity

Leadership I - Grades 6–8 - Day 3



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## 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 s\*\*t, you damn 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 goddamn 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.

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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*

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*This excerpt is used for professional development purposes only.*

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## Excerpt from Chapter 11, *The Miserable Mill*

### By Lemony Snicket

As we have discussed previously, a book's first sentence can often tell you what sort of story the book contains. This book, you will remember, began with the sentence "The Baudelaire orphans looked out the grimy window of the train and gazed at the gloomy blackness of the Finite Forest, wondering if their lives would ever get any better," and the story has certainly been as wretched and hopeless as the first sentence promised it would be. I only bring this up now so you can understand the feeling of dread that Violet and Sunny Baudelaire experienced as they opened a book in the library of the Lucky Smells Lumbermill. The two Baudelaire sisters already had a feeling of dread, of course. Part of the dread came from how cruelly unfairly Sir had behaved. Another part of the dread came from how Charles, kind as he was, seemed unable to help them. Yet another part of the dread came from the fact that Klaus had been hypnotized once more. And of course, the lion's share of the dread—the phrase "lion's share" here means "the biggest part" and has nothing to do with lions or sharing—came from the fact that Count Olaf—or, as he insisted on calling himself, Shirley—was back in the Baudelaires' lives and causing so much misery.

But there was an extra helping of dread that Violet and Sunny felt when they began *Advanced Ocular Science*, by Dr. Georgina Orwell. The first sentence was "This tome will endeavor to scrutinize, in quasi inclusive breadth, the epistemology of ophthalmologically contrived appraisals of ocular systems and the subsequent and requisite exertions imperative for expugnation of injurious states," and as Violet read it out loud to her sister, both children felt the dread that comes when you begin a very boring and difficult book.

"Oh dear," Violet said, wondering what in the world "tome" meant. "This is a very difficult book."

"Garj!" Sunny said, wondering what in the world "endeavor" meant. "If only we had a dictionary," Violet said glumly. "Then we might be able to figure out what this sentence means."

"Yash!" Sunny pointed out, which meant something like "And if only Klaus weren't hypnotized, then he could tell us what this sentence means."

Violet and Sunny sighed, and thought of their poor hypnotized brother. Klaus seemed so different from the brother they knew that it was almost as if Count Olaf had already succeeded with his dastardly scheme, and destroyed one of the Baudelaire orphans. Klaus usually looked interested in the world around him, and now he had a blank expression on his face. His eyes were usually all squinty from reading, and now they were wide as if he had been watching TV instead. He was usually alert, and full of interesting things to say, and now he was forgetful, and almost completely silent.

"Who knows if Klaus could define these words for us?" Violet asked. "He said it felt like part of his brain had been wiped clean. Maybe he doesn't know all those words when he's hypnotized. I don't think I've heard him define anything since the accident with Phil, when he explained the word 'inordinate.' You might as well get some rest, Sunny. I'll wake you up if I read anything useful."

Sunny crawled up on the table and lay down next to *Advanced Ocular Science*, which was almost as big as she was. Violet gazed at her sister for a moment, and then turned her attention to the book. Violet liked to read, of course, but at heart she was an inventor, not a researcher. She simply did not have Klaus's amazing reading skills. Violet stared at Dr. Orwell's first sentence again, and just saw a mess of difficult words. She knew that if Klaus were in the library, and not hypnotized, he would see a way to help them out of their situation. Violet began to imagine how her brother would go about reading *Advanced Ocular Science*, and tried to copy his methods.

First she turned back the pages of the book, back before even the first page, to the table of contents, which as I'm sure you know is a list of the titles and page numbers of each chapter in a book. Violet had paid scarcely any attention to it when she first opened the book, but she realized that Klaus would probably examine the table of contents first, so he could see which chapters of the book might be most helpful. Quickly she scanned the table of contents:

1. Introduction	1
2. Basic Ophthalmology	105
3. Nearsightedness and Farsightedness	279
4. Blindness	311
5. Itchy Eyelashes	398
6. Damaged Pupils	501
7. Blinking Problems	612
8. Winking Problems	650
9. Surgical Practices	783
10. Glasses, Monocles, and Contact Lenses	857
11. Sunglasses	926
12. Hypnosis and Mind Control	927
13. Which Eye Color Is the Best One?	1,000

Immediately, of course, Violet saw that chapter twelve would be the most helpful, and was glad she'd thought of looking at the table of contents instead of reading 927 pages until she found something helpful. Grateful that she could skip that daunting first paragraph—the word "daunting" here means "full of incredibly difficult words"—she flipped through *Advanced Ocular Science* until she reached "Hypnosis and Mind Control."

The phrase "stylistic consistency" is used to describe books that are similar from start to finish. For instance, the book you are reading right now has stylistic consistency, because it began in a miserable way and will continue that way until the last page. I'm sorry to say that Violet realized, as she began chapter twelve, that Dr. Orwell's book had stylistic consistency as well. The first sentence of "Hypnosis and Mind Control" was "Hypnosis is an efficacious yet precarious methodology and should not be assayed by neophytes," and it was every bit as difficult and boring as the first sentence of the

whole book. Violet reread the sentence, and then reread it again, and her heart began to sink. How in the world did Klaus do it? When the three children lived in the Baudelaire home, there was a huge dictionary in their parents' library, and Klaus would often use it to help him with difficult books. But how did Klaus read difficult books when there was no dictionary to be found? It was a puzzle, and Violet knew it was a puzzle she had to solve quickly.

She turned her attention back to the book, and reread the sentence one more time, but this time she simply skipped the words she did not know. As often happens when one reads in this way, Violet's brain made a little humming noise as she encountered each word—or each part of a word—she did not know. So inside her head, the opening sentence of chapter twelve read as follows: "Hypnosis is an hmmm yet hmmm method hmmm and should not be hmmmmed by hmmmms," and although she could not tell exactly what it meant, she could guess. "It could mean," she guessed to herself, "that hypnosis is a difficult method and should not be learned by amateurs," and the interesting thing is that she was not too far off. The night grew later and later, and Violet continued to read the chapter in this way, and she was surprised to learn that she could guess her way through pages and pages of Dr. Orwell's book.

This is not the best way to read, of course, because you can make horribly wrong guesses, but it will do in an emergency.

From *The Miserable Mill (A Series of Unfortunate Events, Book 4)*, by Lemony Snicket

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# Updated Text Complexity Grade Bands and Associated Ranges from Multiple Measures<sup>1</sup>

COMMON CORE BAND	ATOS	DEGREES OF READING POWER®	FLESCH-KINCAID <sup>2</sup>	THE LEXILE FRAMEWORK®	READING MATURITY	SOURCERATER
2 <sup>nd</sup> – 3 <sup>rd</sup>	2.75 – 5.14	42 – 54	1.98 – 5.34	420 – 820	3.53 – 6.13	0.05 – 2.48
4 <sup>th</sup> – 5 <sup>th</sup>	4.97 – 7.03	52 – 60	4.51 – 7.73	740 – 1010	5.42 – 7.92	0.84 – 5.75
6 <sup>th</sup> – 8 <sup>th</sup>	7.00 – 9.98	57 – 67	6.51 – 10.34	925 – 1185	7.04 – 9.57	4.11 – 10.66
9 <sup>th</sup> – 10 <sup>th</sup>	9.67 – 12.01	62 – 72	8.32 – 12.12	1050 – 1335	8.41 – 10.81	9.02 – 13.93
11 <sup>th</sup> – CCR	11.20 – 14.10	67 – 74	10.34 – 14.2	1185 – 1385	9.57 – 12.00	12.30 – 14.50

Find links and instructions for using these quantitative analysis tools at [achievethecore.org/text-complexity](https://achievethecore.org/text-complexity).

<sup>1</sup> The band levels themselves have been expanded slightly over the original CCSS scale that appears in Appendix A at both the top and bottom of each band to provide for a more modulated climb toward college and career readiness and offer slightly more overlap between bands. The wider band width allows more flexibility in the younger grades where students enter school with widely varied preparation levels. This change was provided in response to feedback received since publication of the original scale (published in terms of the Lexile® metric) in Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> Since Flesch-Kincaid has no ‘caretaker’ that oversees or maintains the formula, the research leads worked to bring the measure in line with college and career readiness levels of text complexity based on the version of the formula used by Coh-Metrix.

## Qualitative Analysis: Literature Text Complexity Rubric

Text \_\_\_\_\_

Reviewer \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Criteria	Very Complex	☑	Moderately Complex	☑	Readily Accessible	☑	Notes
Meaning	Multiple levels of meaning that may be difficult to identify, separate, and interpret; theme is implicit, subtle, or ambiguous and may be revealed over the entirety of the text.		Multiple levels of meaning that are relatively easy to identify; theme is clear but may be conveyed with some subtlety.		One level of meaning: theme is obvious and revealed early in the text.		
Text Structure	Prose or poetry includes more intricate elements such as subplots, shifts in point-of-view, shifts in time or non-standard text structures.		Prose includes two or more storylines or has a plot that is somewhat difficult to predict (e.g.: in the case of a non-linear plot); poetry has some implicit or unpredictable structural elements.		Prose or poetry is organized clearly and/or chronologically; the events in a prose work are easy to predict because the plot is linear; poetry has explicit and predictable structural elements.		
Language Features	Language is generally complex with abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language, and regularly includes archaic, unfamiliar, and academic words; text uses a variety of sentence structures including complex sentences with subordinate phrases and clauses.		Language is often explicit and literal but includes academic, archaic, or other words with complex meaning (e.g.: figurative language); text uses a variety of sentence structures.		Language is explicit and literal, with mostly contemporary and familiar vocabulary; text uses mostly simple sentences.		
Knowledge Demands	The text explores complex sophisticated or abstract themes; text is dependent on allusions to other texts or cultural elements; allusions or references have context and require inference and evaluation.		The text explores several themes; text makes few references or allusions to other texts or cultural elements; the meaning of references or allusions may be partially explained in context.		The text explores a single theme; if there are any references or allusions, they are fully explained in the text.		
<b>Quantitative Analysis</b>		Briefly explain recommended placement					
Lexile:							
Flesch-Kincaid:							
Reading Maturity Metric:							
<b>Final Placement</b>							
Complexity Level _____							

## Qualitative Analysis: Informational Text Complexity Rubric

Text \_\_\_\_\_

Reviewer \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Criteria	Very Complex	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Moderately Complex	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Readily Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Notes
<b>Meaning</b>	The text contains multiple purposes, and the primary purpose is subtle, intricate, and or abstract.		The primary purpose of the text is not stated explicitly but is easy to infer based upon context or source; the text may include multiple perspectives.		The primary purpose of the text is clear, concrete, narrowly focused, and explicitly stated; the text has a singular perspective.		
<b>Text Structure</b>	Connections among an expanded range of ideas, processes, or events are often implicit, subtle, or ambiguous; organization exhibits some discipline-specific traits; any text features are essential to comprehension of content.		Connections between some ideas, processes, or events are implicit or subtle; organization is generally evident and sequential; any text features help facilitate comprehension of content.		Connections between ideas, processes, and events are explicit and clear; organization is chronological, sequential, or easy to predict because it is linear; any text features help readers navigate content but are not essential to understanding content.		
<b>Language Features</b>	Language is generally complex, with abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language, and archaic and academic vocabulary and domain-specific words that are not otherwise defined; text uses many complex sentences with subordinate phrases and clauses.		Language is often explicit and literal but includes some academic, archaic, or other words with complex meaning; text uses some complex sentences with subordinate phrases or clauses.		Language is explicit and literal, with mostly contemporary and familiar vocabulary; text uses mostly simple sentences.		
<b>Knowledge Demands</b>	The subject matter of the text relies on specialized, discipline-specific knowledge; the text makes many references or allusions to other texts or outside areas, allusions or references have no context and require inference.		The subject matter of the text involves some discipline-specific knowledge; the text makes some references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas; the meaning of references or allusions may be partially explained in context.		The subject matter of the text relies on little or no discipline-specific knowledge; if there are any references or allusions, they are fully explained in the text.		
<b>Use of Graphics (optional)</b>	Graphics are essential to understanding the text; they may clarify or expand information in the text and may require close reading and thoughtful analysis in relation to the text.		Graphics are mainly supplementary to understanding of the text; they generally contain or reinforce information found in the text.		Graphics are simple and may be unnecessary to understanding the text.		

<b>Quantitative Analysis</b>	<b>Briefly explain recommended placement</b>
Lexile	
Flesch-Kincaid:	
Reading Maturity	
Metric RMM:	
<b>Final Placement</b>	
Complexity Level _____	

## Features of Complex Text

- Complex sentences
- Uncommon vocabulary
- Lack of words, sentences or paragraphs that review or pull things together for the student
- Longer paragraphs
- Any text structure which is less narrative and/or mixes structures
- Subtle and/or frequent transitions
- Multiple and/or subtle themes and purposes
- Density of information
- Unfamiliar settings, topics or events
- Lack of repetition, overlap or similarity in words and sentences

## Grammatical and Rhetorical Features of Complex Text

- Information density (dependent clauses and phrases within sentences)
- The use of nominalizations
- Passive voice
- A combination of complex and simple sentences
- The use of adverbial clauses and phrases to situate events
- Ellipses
- The use of abstract agents as subjects
- The use of devices for backgrounding and foregrounding information

## Determining Text Complexity

- **What:** The characteristics of the text
  - Qualitative/quantitative evaluation
  - Reader-task considerations
- **Who:** The characteristics of the reader
  - Reading ability
  - Age, experience
  - Motivation
- **Why:** The purpose for the reading
  - Assignment type (research, pleasure, analysis of writer's craft)
- **Where** and **When:** The conditions of the reading—
  - Teacher/parent guided
  - Independent
  - Group discussion/literary circle,
  - Instruction vs. assessment

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## Excerpt from *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck

Kino awakened in the near dark. The stars still shone and the day had drawn only a pale wash of light in the lower sky to the east. The roosters had been crowing for some time, and the early pigs were already beginning their ceaseless turning of twigs and bits of wood to see whether anything to eat had been overlooked. Outside the brush house in the tuna clump, a covey of little birds chattered and flurried with their wings.

Kino's eyes opened, and he looked first at the lightening square which was the door and then he looked at the hanging box where Coyotito slept. And last he turned his head to Juana, his wife, who lay beside him on the mat, her blue head shawl over her nose and over her breasts and around the small of her back. Juana's eyes were open too. Kino could never remember seeing them closed when he awakened. Her dark eyes made little reflected stars. She was looking at him as she was always looking at him when he awakened. ...

Kino heard the creak of the rope when Juana took Coyotito out of his hanging box and cleaned him and hammocked him in her shawl in a loop that placed him close to her breast. Kino could see these things without looking at them. Juana sang softly an ancient song that had only three notes and yet endless variety of interval. And this was part of the family song too. It was all part.

Sometimes it rose to an aching chord that caught the throat, saying this is safety, this is warmth, this is the Whole. Across the brush fence were other brush houses, and the smoke came from them too, and the sound of breakfast, but those were other songs, their pigs were other pigs, their wives were not Juana. Kino was young and strong and his black hair hung over his brown forehead. His eyes were warm and fierce and bright and his mustache was thin and coarse. He lowered his blanket from his nose now, for the dark poisonous air was gone and the yellow sunlight fell on the house. Near the brush fence two roosters bowed and feinted at each other with squared wings and neck feathers ruffed out. It would be a clumsy fight. They were not game chickens. Kino watched them for a moment, and then his eyes went up to a flight of wild doves twinkling inland to the hills. The world was awake now, and Kino arose and went into his brush house. ...

The sun was warming the brush house, breaking through its crevices in long streaks. And one of the streaks fell on the hanging box where Coyotito lay, and on the ropes that held it. It was a tiny movement that drew their eyes to the hanging box. Kino and Juana froze in their positions. Down the rope that hung the baby's box from the roof support a scorpion moved slowly.

His stinging tail was straight out behind him, but he could whip it up in a flash of time. Kino's breath whistled in his nostrils and he opened his mouth to stop it. And then the startled look was gone from him and the rigidity from his body. In his mind a new song had come, the Song of Evil, the music of the enemy,

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of any foe of the family, a savage, secret, dangerous melody, and underneath, the Song of the Family cried plaintively.

The scorpion moved delicately down the rope toward the box. Under her breath Juana 6

repeated an ancient magic to guard against such evil, and on top of that she muttered a Hail Mary between clenched teeth. But Kino was in motion. His body glided quietly across the room, noiselessly and smoothly. His hands were in front of him, palms down, and his eyes were on the scorpion.

Beneath it in the hanging box Coyotito laughed and reached up his hand toward it. It sensed Danger when Kino was almost within reach of it. It stopped, and its tail rose up over its back in little jerks and the curved thorn on the tail's end glistened.

Kino stood perfectly still. He could hear Juana whispering the old magic again, and he could hear the evil music of the enemy. He could not move until the scorpion moved, and it felt for the source of the death that was coming to it. Kino's hand went forward very slowly, very smoothly. The thorned tail jerked upright. And at that moment the laughing Coyotito shook the rope and the scorpion fell.

Kino's hand leaped to catch it, but it fell past his fingers, fell on the baby's shoulder, landed and struck. Then, snarling, Kino had it, had it in his fingers, rubbing it to a paste in his hands. He threw it down and beat it into the earth floor with his fist, and Coyotito screamed with pain in his box. But Kino beat and stamped the enemy until it was only a fragment and a moist place in the dirt. His teeth were bared and fury flared in his eyes and the Song of the Enemy roared in his ears. ...