Making Complex Texts Compelling To Middle-School Students

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Amplify ELA
Your Presenters

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The median middle school student reads about 12 minutes a day outside of school.

Reading complex text (or sustained attention to any text at all) is not winning against TV, video games, social media and hormones.
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But there is hope…
Examples of Precise Detail

Follow along in the text as your teacher reads the excerpt about Mrs Pratchett.

Her name was Mrs Pratchett. She was a small, spotty lady with a mouth as old as a green gooseberry. She never smiled. She never wore a smile when she spoke or acted. She was welcome when she said things like, "I'm watching you. You're not doing as you're supposed to be doing." Or, "I don't want you to get involved with Mrs. Pettigrew's daughter on breakfast cereal again."

Mrs Pratchett was the kind of woman who didn't let things just sit around on the table. Her hair was always perfectly tied back in a bun, and her hands were always busy with the things she was doing.
What is a Complex Text?
What is a Complex Text?
“You’re getting good,” Jones told him.

M.C. nodded, waiting.

“I wasn’t trying too hard, though,” Jones said.

M.C. had to smile. “Admit you can’t get in,” he said.

“You didn’t try hard enough, though,” M.C. said. “It’s not impossible.”

“Never,” Jones said.
“A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.”

Tier 2

- **semantic complexity**
- **syntactical complexity**

Quantitative Measures
“To be, or not to be: that is the question:”

– William Shakespeare
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– William Shakespeare

“Because I could not stop for Death – He kindly stopped for me –”

– Emily Dickinson
“I tried to make a real old man, a real boy, a real sea and a real fish and real sharks. But if I made them good and true enough they would mean many things.”

– Ernest Hemingway
Tasks are where the magic happens.

Tasks are what educators can control.

Tasks can make an encounter with a complex text simple, or an encounter with a simple text complicated.
Tasks can make an encounter with complex texts simple:

Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract.

The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.
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Count how many times the word ‘dedicate’ appears.
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OTHELLO: Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.
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**OTHELLO:** Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.

How would the swords end up in the dew?

What does this tell us about what kind of warrior Othello is?
Rigorous and Riveting
Harlem
by Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore—
And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?
The dream

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The dream deferred

Body gets a sore, the sore gets infected, the infection starts to spread rather than heal

Meat starts to rot and stink

1. the honey or syrup spills and hardens,
2. Sap (syrup) comes out of the tree and hardens over the wound.

Gets too heavy, starts to collapse

Can’t be contained anymore and bursts. (Destructive or creative?)
Yu Jian, the chairman of our class, was the first one nominated. Then I heard my name called. My heart raced and I held my breath. I could hardly believe it. I was nominated! After everything that had happened, I was still regarded as somebody in the class! Now I could admit it to myself: I had never wanted anything as much as I wanted to win this election.

I looked gratefully at the student who had nominated me.

Teacher Gu was about to write the names of all the candidates on the blackboard when Yin Lan-lan raised her hand. "When the Red Guards were elected at my sister's school, the class status of the candidates was taken into account. Shouldn't we do the same?"

"Right! Those who don't have good class backgrounds shouldn't be elected," somebody else agreed.

My heart fell. Class status. There was that phrase again.
Her heart was racing because she was nominated, which is what she really really wanted!
Discovering Patterns in Text
Discovering Patterns in Text
...Yet the sound increased... and yet the officers heard it not... I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations; but the noise steadily increased. Why would they not be gone?

I swung the chair... and grated it upon the boards, but the noise... continually increased... Was it possible they heard not?... --no, no! They heard! --they suspected! --they knew! --they were making a mockery of my horror!

I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer... hark! louder! louder! louder! louder!
"Villains!" I shrieked, "dissemble no more! I admit the deed! --tear up the planks! here, here! --It is the beating of his hideous heart!"
Reading like a movie director
...Yet the sound increased... and yet the officers heard it not...I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations; but the noise steadily increased. Why did they not be gone?

I swung the chair...and grated it upon the boards, but the noise... continually increased... Was it possible they heard not? ...--no, no! They heard! --they suspected! --they knew! --they were making a mockery of my horror!

They must hear it. Why do they just sit there?

I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer...hark! louder! louder! louder! louder! louder! "Villains!" I shrieked, "dissemble no more! I admit the deed! --tear up the planks! here, here! --It is the beating of his hideous heart!"
THE NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS, AN AMERICAN SLAVE

By Frederick Douglass
Working with Text Out Loud

Rhythm and the Raven

www.projected.com/rhythm-and-the-raven
Sequencing of Texts and Tasks
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= reading like a scientist
Who Killed EDGAR ALLAN POE?

THE QUEST

START
Not pictured:
Space under floorboards
Perfumes smell
Window open
At 5:00 AM on October 7, 1849, Edgar Allan Poe was found dead in the Gothic mansion where he lived with all of his characters in Baltimore, Maryland. His house, very similar to the one in which Prince Prospero lived, consists of seven colored rooms: Blue, Purple, Green, Orange, White, Violet, and Black. Poe’s body was found in his own room, the Black Room, and an examination of the body revealed no sign of struggle, except for a nasty wound on the back of his head and the strange fact that one eye remained open while the other was shut tight. His body was found inches away from his writing desk.

The window in the room was wide open, and there was a draft blowing through. Though the room was not visibly disrupted, there were a number of objects found around the body, including a black feather, a dropper, a piece of cloth, and a key, and there was a scent as if from some unseen censer. Poe’s watch was smashed; the hands, visible through the cracked glass, pointed to exactly 9:49 PM. Strangely, the floorboards made an echoing sound, and when we lifted one up, we discovered there was a hollow space underneath. Finally, Poe’s last will and testament, found in his writing desk, stipulated that a Mr. Rufus Wilmot Griswold would be the executor of his estate.
Chapter 1

LENORE
CHAPTER III

BRING THIS TO THE GROUP’S ATTENTION:
I heard that Montresor was very happy that Annabel Lee finally let him spend some time with her on the night Poe died.

IF SOMEONE ASKS YOU ABOUT THE LETTER:
No, I never received that letter. But it did make me happy to read. However, I wouldn’t celebrate too quickly. Why did Dupin have it on his desk? Could he have forged it?

IF SOMEONE ASKS YOU ABOUT THE LOCKBOX:
Poe just allowed Dupin to use that box, because Dupin kept saying he was as good a writer as Poe and wanted his writing to be kept in the same place. There’s no conspiracy between us; in fact this whole framing concept is a little blatant, no?
THE ACCUSATION

USE THIS PAGE TO ORGANIZE YOUR THOUGHTS BEFORE COMPOSING A NARRATIVE OF THE CRIME.

1. WHO DID IT?
   Lenore - by herself

2. HOW DID HE/SHE/ THEY DO IT?
   Dropped a bust on his head that she got from the Raven!

3. WHAT TIME DID THE MURDER TAKE PLACE?
   At 9:49 when the watch stopped

4. WHERE WAS POE MURDERED?
   In the black room next to the desk

5. WHAT EVIDENCE LED TO THESE CONCLUSIONS?
   Lenore was given a key, and she got the bust from the raven and dropped it on his head giving him the bump

It was a dark and stormy night when Edgar Allen Poe was murdered by LENORE. The reason Lenore did this was because she was jealous that Annabel Lee was Poe's greatest love. She was mad with Edgar that night, but also with Annabel Lee. After fighting with Annabel, she didn't want her to be happy, and killing Edgar would also take away her happiness. Whether that was true or not, that's what she believed when she borrowed the bust of Pallas from the Raven in her room and went next door to the Black Room at quarter to ten in the evening. She knew he was alone because she just left Annabel. She entered the room, met him at his desk, and smashed Edgar with the bust on the back of his head. A tragic end to a tragic romance.
Supporting English Learners

Challenging grade-level texts

Students prepared, confident, and energized for participation in core instruction.
Supporting English Learners

Lesson 3

1. COLLABORATE ABOUT LANGUAGE EXTENSION
   Passage 1

2. SUPPORT YOUR OPINION
   Passage 1

3. TEXT DISCUSSION
   Passage 1

4. WRITE
   (Respond to prompt)

5. SHARE AND DISCUSS
   Passage 1
Thank You