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Book Study:

Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading

by Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, & Diane Lapp

Sample Pages

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Course Overview

Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading (2012) by Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey and Diane Lapp clearly describe in practitioner terms how to effectively and efficiently use the three-part model for measuring text complexity as described in Reading Standard 10 and Appendix A, of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (CCSS/ELA) for Reading - quantitative measures, qualitative measures and matching reader to text and task. More importantly, the authors speak directly to teachers about the need for a "deep understanding about what makes a text complex"(16) helping you to take charge of determining what choosing complex texts and how best to use increasingly difficult texts for close reading to create curriculum and instruction for your students to meet the CCSS/ELA Reading Standards, 1-10.

The study guide for this book study course parallels the five Chapters in the book, *Text Complexity.* Each page in the study guide references a Chapter in the book. Each page includes "Key Ideas", "Before Reading", "After Reading" and "Suggestions for Activities." The last pages offer you a sample lesson plan and resources.

Though short, and easy to read, *Text Complexity* is dense in content. It is a complex text! Read closely. Claims made in each chapter are supported by a substantive bibliography. Keep an annotated reading log that is useful to you. Take notes. Highlight. Interact with the text. Ask questions. Have discussions with colleagues. Read and reread. Reflect. What's important and what's interesting to YOU. Summarize what you learn from your reading and annotations in the final Reflection Paper. A close study of this book and attention to your own meta-cognitive habits as a reader will empower your understanding and application of the CCSS/ELA Reading Standards for your classroom practices.

After reading each chapter in *Text Complexity*, come back to the study guide to choose an activity to help you apply what you are reading to your professional practices. Feel free to create your own activity if one occurs to you that makes more sense. In Chapter 1, you will explore what makes a text complex (10) and how to balance the three-part model for determining text complexity. In Chapter 2 you will examine the use of quantitative measures. Try several quantitative measures to determine which work most efficiently for you. In Chapter 3 you will read about using your professional judgment to determine qualitative measures of text complexity. Use the rubrics designed by the authors of *Text Complexity* to assess qualitative measures of texts. In Chapter 4 study and employ the checklists cited to match readers to texts and tasks. In Chapter 5 study how using the three-part model for assessing text complexity works in harmony to create close reading lesson plans.

Apply the concepts and strategies of raising the rigor in reading in practical and useful ways for your grade specific CCSS/ ELA Reading Standards 1-9 by creating two lesson plans using complex texts.

Finally, synthesize your learning from your reading and application of the findings from *Text Complexity* in a final Reflection Paper. There are two parts. First, summarize your annotated reading log. How did your reading of *Text Complexity* inform or change your thinking about text complexity and its application to your classroom practice? Identify your thinking about what makes a text complex, what quantitative measures work effectively for you, what you learned about qualitative measures, and matching reader to text and task. Make specific references to the book, and site them in your reflection paper.

Secondly, reflect on what are the 3 most important things you learned that have the greatest impact on your teaching of close reading, choosing complex texts and your student's learning. As a result of your reading, completing the activities and lesson plans identify the 1 most important thing you have done and will continue that has radically changed the experience of close reading of complex texts for you and your students. And lastly, what support do you need to continue best practices to promote close reading of complex texts?

In the end, it is hoped that this will be an ongoing process; that you will leave this book study empowered to identify complex texts worthy of close study, that will help you create meaningful reading curriculum and instruction to meet the CCSS/ELA Reading Standards 1-10.

Use the text, outside reading and writing activities to complete the course work.

A syllabus is available on www.collegecoursesonline.com

Course Requirements for Book Study

Use the study guide to direct your reading of *Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading.* Complete the following course requirements:

1**. Annotated Reading Log**: Keep an annotated reading log/ journal of your reading of *Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading.* As you read, note what's important, and what's interesting – to YOU. Read closely. You may find it helpful to correlate your reading of this text with Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (CCSS/ELA) for Reading. **Summarize your insights and findings in the Reflection Paper.** It is anticipated that you will invest about 10 hours of your time in reading and annotating.

2. **Activities:**

Complete an activity from the study guide for each of the five chapters of *Text Complexity*. Feel free to create your own activity for each Chapter. Identify each activity you choose for the five chapters. Summarize what you did and what you learned that helped you internalize the content for the chapter. It is estimated that you will spend about 10 hours in completing and recording 5 activities. **Each activity is worth 5% of your grade for a total of 25%.**

- Chapter 1: What makes a text complex? "The Case for Struggle"(10)
- Chapter 2: Practice using quantitative measures to measure text complexity.
- Chapter 3: Assess qualitative measures of text complexity using rubrics.
- Chapter 4: Use the rubrics to match readers to text and task.
- Chapter 5: Use close reading and the study the sample lessons from 4th grade and 9th grade in preparation of creating your own lesson plans for text complexity.

3. **Classroom Application: Create 2 lesson plans for your grade level.**

Use the close reading of *Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading* as a reference and the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (CCSS/ELA) for Reading or your State Standards for Reading for your grade level. Prepare two (2) close reading lessons using complex texts. Include grade level, text selection, Common Core State Standard focus or your State Standard, quantitative and qualitative assessment tools, criteria for matching reader to text and tasks, discussion questions and scaffolding. It is estimated that you will invest about 5 hours in the preparation of the 2 lesson plans. **Completion of the 2 lesson plans constitutes 25% of your grade**.

4. **Reflection Paper**. Write a 3-4-page reflection paper addressing the annotated reading log and your reflection on the chapter activities, lesson plans and overall significant learning from this book study course. It is expected that you will spend about 5 hours in completing the reflection paper. **There are 2 parts. Each part is worth 25% of your grade**.

Part 1: Reflection on Annotated Reading Log: Using your annotations, describe how your reading of *Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading* informed or changed your thinking about text complexity and its application to your classroom practice. Identify your thinking about what makes a text complex, what quantitative measures work effectively for you, what you learned about qualitative measures, and matching reader to text and task. Make specific references to the book, and site them in your reflection paper.

Part 2: Reflection on Activities and Lesson Plans: What are the 3 most important things you learned that have the greatest impact on your teaching of close reading, complex texts and your student's learning? As a result of your reading, completing the activities and lesson plans identify the 1 most important thing you have done and will continue that has radically changed the experience of close reading of complex texts for you and your students. And lastly, what support do you need to continue best practices to promote close reading of complex texts?

A syllabus for this course is available on www.collegecoursesonline.com/

Chapter 1: Text Complexity is the New Black

Key Idea: What makes a text complex? The case for struggle.

Before Reading

The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (CCSS/ELA) set a demanding course for curriculum and instruction, requiring " more rigor in reading." Fisher, Frey and Lapp, respected and trusted researchers and authors, have guided teachers for years in best practices in reading instruction using research based and classroom tested strategies. In this book, *Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading*, the authors specifically addresses the CCSS/ELA Anchor Standard10, "Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently," and flesh out the three-part model for evaluating text complexity as described in Appendix A of the CCSS/ELA. A close study of *Text Complexity* and practice of the suggested assessment tools will inform and empower your ability to assess and choose complex texts with increasingly difficulty to help you develop curriculum and instruction to meet your grade specific CCSS/ELA Reading Standards 1-9.

After Reading

What struck you in "Chapter 1:Text Complexity is the New Black"? What's important? What's interesting? Record your thinking in an annotated reading log. At the end you will summarize all your findings from your close reading of the book in the reflection paper.

Reading is about finding meaning. Using complex texts is a way to teach students how to become independent and proficient readers using increasingly difficult texts. Choosing complex texts, and scaffolding the instruction is what makes the work of reading and search for meaning worthwhile. Complex texts are the heart of curriculum and instruction, the ones you select and scaffold to help students meet the criteria in the CCSS/ELA Reading Standards 1-9. It is suggested that you use short, worthy passages excerpted from narrative or informational texts that are rich in content, language, and structure for complex texts. Short stories, poetry, picture books, articles as well as well-chosen excerpts work well for instructional purposes. The key is they must stretch the reader in skill, strategy and thinking. Complex texts are interesting and intriguing texts, chock full of big ideas. Complex texts help students to integrate knowledge and ideas. Complex texts offer many ways to access meaning, often layered in depth. Scaffolding reading skills to guide students to learn how to handle complex texts independently and proficiently is the heart of reading instruction. Notice the skills you use as you read this text- I annotate, reread, highlight, talk with others, ask myself questions and reference outside sources to make sense of text complexity. These are the same skills I want to scaffold for students to help them to be independent, proficient readers. As you read

through the chapters in *Text Complexity,* note the bibliography of narrative and informational texts chosen as complex texts. Feel free to use these texts if they match your purposes and grade level. Notice that picture books, articles, short stories can be used at any grade level. The important thing is that they are complex in content and craft. They are mentor or anchor texts. They can be used over and over to mine for ideas, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge. Make a list of criteria for selecting complex texts, from literature and informational texts that meets the criteria for complex texts for your classroom.

Suggested Activities for Chapter 1: Choose one of the following activities or create an activity based on the information of Chapter 1 that is useful to you. Record the activity you choose. Summarize what you did and what you learned that helped you internalize the content for this chapter.

1. What are you reading right now that you would define as "complex"? As adult readers, we have developed an intuitive sense of what makes a text complex. We might pause or reread to relish word play or slow down to digest a thought or idea. We might talk about a concept or look for evidence to back up what the author is claiming or investigate other sources for reliability. These are the strategies of independent and proficient reading that we want our students to know and use. Study your habits as a reader and teach them to your students.

    o **Example**: "I'm reading Barbara Kingsolver's book *Flight Behavior*. I started to read it as a book for pleasure. I hadn't gotten past the first page, when I stopped and slowed my reading down to study the craft of writing. I am blown away by the first 7 sentences of Chapter 1 - Kingsolver never says, "have an affair", but the reader KNOWS what the main character, Dellarobia, is contemplating. How did the author do that? How did she tap into the reader's mind (mine) and know I would know the secret language of "behind closed doors", the language that is rarely spoken, but certainly felt? How did I infer that from this opening line? "A certain feeling comes from throwing your good life away, and it is one part rapture."(1) And if I wasn't certain, a few lines later, Kingsolver says, "…even the teenage cashiers at the grocery would take an edge with her after this, clicking painted fingernails on the counter while she wrote her check, eyeing the oatmeal and frozen peas of an unhinged family..." (1)

    o I often think first lines and first pages are worthy studies. Authors spend hours writing and rewriting first lines and first pages. It set the tone for the narrative or informational texts. First lines hook the reader; first pages keep the reader. This novel is chock full of big ideas -from the migration patterns of the monarch butterfly, climate change, the unspoken social mores of schooling in small town USA, parenting, commitment to marriage, being true to oneself, relationships… and enough craft and structure to use for a variety of reading

and writing lessons. I could mine this text to meet any and all the CCSS/ELA Reading Standards 1-9, and still have a good time reading the story.

2. Choose a quote from "Chapter 1 Text Complexity is the New Black". Write a short response showing your thinking.
    o Example: "The text difficulty level is not the real issue. Instruction is. Teachers can scaffold and support students, which will determine the amount of their learning and literacy development."(7)
       ▪ To me, this means that I need to choose texts that are challenging for my students that I can use as the content for developing curriculum and instruction to meet end of year CCSS/ELA Reading Standards 1-10 for my grade level. I need to teach how to read "hard" texts.
       ▪ I notice that writing this short response that I re-read the quote several times, each time another idea occurred to me. First, I was focused on choosing complex texts, and then I realized I might be able to choose and use texts with various levels of text complexity. But most importantly, I realized that it is the scaffolding of lessons and support for student is central. What is not said in this quote, is that the students need to keep achieving "independence and proficiency" and that means choosing texts that are not too hard, and not too easy and scaffolding instruction that allow for students to" struggle" knowing that challenge is the best teacher and the success is the best learning.

3. What does "text complexity" mean to you? Make a list of your ideas. Check back when you complete the reading of *Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading* and do a follow up.

4. Watch a video of Doug Fisher talking about text complexity. Click on "Chapter 1" and "Videos" to view. Go to: http://www.corwin.com/rigorousreading/chapter.htm

5. Start your collection of complex texts sources. Identify 2 short and worthy selections for close study appropriate for your grade level. Use both narrative and informational texts. Choose short, worthy passages to use as your exemplar. The passages need to be worthy of study and short enough to read, re-read and have a discussion about in a class period. The selections you make here can also be used in your lesson plans. I am a big believer in using your time wisely! See "Course Requirements".

6. Spend some time reading and reviewing Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards. http://www.corestandards.org/ What did you find helpful? What's confusing? How does Appendix A support you in assessing text complexity? Write a brief evaluation of your reading.