

Text Complexity Analysis Template

Text complexity analysis			
Created by:	Clare Kilfoyle	Event/Date:	Teachfest 2014 Hartford, Connecticut
Text and Author	“My Uncle Terwilliger on the Art of Eating Popovers” By Dr. Seuss	Where to Access Text	Book of Great American Speeches for Young People Edited by Suzanne McIntire 2001 http://www.humanity.org/voices/commencements/dr.seuss-geisel-lake-forest-college-speech-1977
Text Description			
<p>The poem is written by Dr. Seuss (Theodor Geisel). It is a short commencement speech to the 1977 graduating class of Lake Forest College, Illinois. It is a whimsical poem written to give advice to the students about questioning what they are told or taught to believe.</p>			
Quantitative			
Lexile and Grade Level	900L Grade 4/Grade 5	Text Length	15 line verse 103 words 2 stanzas
Qualitative			
Meaning/Central Ideas		Text Structure/Organization	
<p>The poem is an allegory. The meaning is very complex. It has a hidden meaning. The author uses humor to advise the reader/listener to develop a skepticism about what they are lead to believe. In the poem, the uncle eating the popover tells his nephew to swallow what is solid or true and spit out the hot air or what is not true. “You must exercise great care. You may swallow down what’s solid BUT...you must spit out the air!”</p>		<p>The text structure is moderately complex. It is an allegory that can be read on two levels. The wisdom imparted is done with brevity, humor and in a whimsical tone. The author uses font, capitalization and punctuation (commas, colon, ellipses and quotation marks).</p>	
Prior Knowledge Demands		Language Features	
<p>The poem has an abstract theme. The comprehension of the theme demands reflection on life’s teachings and experiences. Although the author’s message is to think for yourself and question what you are told as truth, it should be noted that the poem was written in 1977. That was a time of American college campus unrest over the country’s involvement in the Vietnam War. Often Dr. Seuss veils his deeper meaning or opinion in what on the surface appears to be a lighthearted whimsical verse. The text presumes that the students know what an allegory is.</p>		<p>The language features are very complex. The verse contains abstract multi-meaning words. For example, the word swallow means to believe. The popover pastry is used as a metaphor. The poem contains both rhythm and rhyme.</p>	

Potential Reader/Task Challenges

The poem is an allegory. It can be read on two levels. The first being a humorous verse of an uncle's reflection upon eating a popover pastry. The second on the deeper meaning of deciding for yourself what is true. The popover pastry is a metaphor. The students must know that a popover is a pastry with a hot hollow center. The center is the hot air or untruths told in life. There are multiple meaning words to be deciphered. Prior knowledge of opinions, point of view, allegories and metaphor would be beneficial.

Big Takeaway

This poem as with many other Dr. Seuss poems has a hidden meaning for the reader. The central meaning is for the readers to listen to teachings and to think for themselves as to what is true or what is to be believed. One should think for oneself and come to one's own conclusions. Students may take the meaning to an even deeper level of question traditional thought or be skeptical of what is establishment.

Vocabulary Analysis Template

	Words that demand less teaching time (i.e. the definition is singular and concrete)	Words that demand more teaching time (i.e. words with multiple meanings and/or that are part of a word family)
Words that can be determined in context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partake (Tier 2) • Bill of fare (Tier 2) • Words of Wisdom (Tier 2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regarded (Tier 2)
Words that cannot be determined in context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Popover (Tier 2) • Hot air (Tier 2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Penetrating (Tier 2) • Exercise (Tier 2) • Solid (Tier 2) • Swallow (Tier 2)