

Text Complexity Analysis

Text complexity analysis			
Created by:	Donna Drasch	Event/Date:	Learn Zillion Connecticut, July 2014
Text and Author	A Great Speech, by Harold Holzer	Where to Access Text	Cobblestone Magazine, February 2010
Text Description			
<p>This concise, narrative nonfiction text provides the backstory for Lincoln’s delivery of the Gettysburg Address. The tone is set when the author discloses Lincoln’s anxiety surrounding the outcome on the battlefield as well as issues with his own and family’s health. It reveals a surprising revelation of how Lincoln had not even been asked to deliver the major speech at the dedication ceremony of the Gettysburg National Cemetery. Lincoln was asked only to provide a “few appropriate remarks.” The major speech that day was delivered by a professional orator, Edward Everett, who spoke for two hours and held the crowds spellbound. Everett was then followed by Lincoln’s delivery of a speech described at the time by some newspapers as “silly,” “dull,” and “commonplace.” Although Lincoln’s speech was not particularly well received, and he himself believed it to be a failure, it is remembered today as one of the greatest speeches of all time.</p>			
Quantitative			
Lexile and Grade Level	1,100 – grades 5 th -6 th	Text Length	550 words
Qualitative			
Meaning/Central Ideas		Text Structure/Organization	
<p>The meaning is very complex. The comparison of the long and charismatic, well received speech to Lincoln’s short and simple speech sets the stage for understanding of the central idea, <i>although when given, Lincoln thought his speech a failure, it is now considered one of the greatest speeches of all time because of his use of such few words in a carefully crafted way.</i> The understanding that Lincoln personally sacrificed to be at the Gettysburg ceremony, and he dedication to the country is revealed as the text unfolds and requires the reader to read between the lines.</p> <p><i>Is there enough context for students to be able infer the importance and the stress that the situation is having on Lincoln and its emotional burden?</i></p>		<p>The structure of text is moderately complex. It is narrative and organized sequentially. There are some connections between ideas that are subtle and require attention to key details in the text. There are no text features or graphics to support the understanding of the text.</p>	
Prior Knowledge Demands		Language Features	
<p>This text demands some complex knowledge about human nature and political savvy (choices that leaders need to make). Some knowledge about the Battle of Gettysburg and Lincoln’s speech aids in understanding of the text. An understanding of this text will help students better analyze the Gettysburg Address through a whole new perspective and appreciation. Students will revisit this text after analyzing the Gettysburg Address to put it all in perspective. This close reading is part of a larger unit where students have been reading historical novels set during the Civil War (for Social Studies), studying characterization in both literary and informational text (as part of ELA) and connecting the decisions made by all of these “characters” to make choices</p>		<p>The language features are moderately to very complex. It includes some complex sentences and transition words. The vocabulary is sometimes unfamiliar and abstract, but also includes many familiar words. The text uses some abstract and figurative language (“<i>rich voice</i>”, “<i>soaring words</i>”) as well as contrast, created by the uplifting description of the “<i>balmy, Indian-summer day</i>” compared to the darkness of a “<i>mournful procession</i>”. There is also a mix of simple, compound and complex sentences with subordinate and independent clauses.</p>	

about their own behaviors and actions (Social Emotional).

Would this come before or after introducing the Gettysburg Address? Why?

Potential Reader/Task Challenges

The biggest challenge would be the understanding of human nature/behavior and the perspective of time and place. Students may not have the maturity to understand the level of responsibility, selflessness and thought behind Lincoln's decisions. This text requires the reader to infer meaning that is not implicitly stated. Guiding questions will be required to help students infer the complexity of the problems Lincoln faced and the consequent decisions that he made prior to the speech.

Big Takeaway

There are two distinct takeaways that should be shared about this text. First, is the recognition of the power of effective word choice and sentence structure when appealing to an audience. What you say and how you say it makes a difference! Lincoln's succinct speech is now considered one of the one of best speeches of all time.

The second takeaway is about the sacrifice and dedication of great leaders (which speaks to character). Lincoln's recognition of the importance of the event, and his attendance at the ceremony and preparation for his short speech came at a personal cost - to put the future of the country over his own needs and that of his family. As readers, we are left to draw our own conclusions (based on evidence from the text) about why Lincoln decided not to abide by his wife's wishes and to attend the ceremony. What does this say about Lincoln? Did he not care about his or his family's own health? Or, does this speak to his commitment to a higher purpose, a responsibility to do what is necessary as the nation's leader. Looking at Lincoln through that lens, we recognize the personal sacrifice that was given willingly by Lincoln, given so that we can enjoy the benefits of freedom and equity that is and was the foundation of our democratic nation. Lincoln was able to put aside his own feelings about his family and anxiety over a war that could destroy the Union he believed in, and compose and deliver, a succinct, meaningful, and very significant message. This concept is becomes the springboard for looking at the character and sacrifice of other great leaders.

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	flawed (tier 2)	fragile (tier 2) unrelieved tension (tier 2) urged (tier 2)
Words that cannot be determined in context	prevailed (tier 2) orator (tier 3) dedication (tier 2) momentous (tier 2) half-hearted (tier 2) hysteria (tier 2) balmy Indian Summer (tier 2) mournful (tier 2) spellbound (tier 2) spectators (tier 2) four score and seven years ago (tier 3) high pitch (tier 2) smattering (tier 2) commonplace (tier 2)	burden (tier 2) rich voice (tier 2) soaring words (tier 2) stenographer (tier 2)