

Text Complexity Analysis

Grade 7, CRW Informational Text in Language Arts, Activity 1

Text: From *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass

Text Description:

Published in 1845, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* is a seminal example of a slave narrative and a pivotal text in the Abolitionist Movement in which Frederick Douglass recalls observations of rapturous slave songs from the Great House Farm as expressions of extreme anguish.

Context	Quantitative/Complexity Measures
<p>The excerpt from <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> in Activity 1 is the first of two print texts that comprise the Close Reading of Informational Texts in English/Language Arts, in which students engage in three close readings. First they are then asked to complete a silent close reading of the text, identifying and diffusing Tier 2 vocabulary. Next, students follow along as the teacher reads the text aloud, continuing to mark the text for additional vocabulary and make meaning of the passage. On the third reading, students will read the text again, when they will address Key Ideas and Details questions through class discussion and provide textual support for their responses. Later in Activity 4, students have an opportunity to synthesize their learning from this text with two others in a synthesis assignment.</p>	<p>Genre: Personal Narrative Overall: Complex Quantitative: 1050L Qualitative: Moderate Task Demands: Moderate (Analyze)</p> <p>The Lexile for this text places it in the middle of the Grades 6–8 band, and qualitative measures indicate a moderate difficulty; both measures support the inclusion of this text. It is made accessible because of the initial reading for vocabulary understanding; the oral reading and the accompanying think-aloud by the teacher prior to a third reading in which students address Key Ideas and Details questions.</p>
Qualitative Considerations	
<p>Purpose/Levels of Meaning: The personal narrative genre signals the sharing of a significant personal experience and a reflection on how the situation affected the author. In this passage, Douglass uses descriptive details to depict the life of a slave and the conflicting emotions associated with working in a new situation at the “Great House.” Douglass’s purpose in describing the significant situation and its effect on him is somewhat complex to infer based on the context. Through details about slaves moving to a new location and slave songs, Douglass shares the complex conflicting emotions that characterize the slave experience to which some readers may not easily relate. Douglass’s reflection explores the significance of slave songs and relates the Great House Farm slave situation to his life as a slave and his extreme sadness for those still in slavery.</p> <p>Structure: This text is written in first-person point of view, with the first two paragraphs serving as the exposition and set the purpose of the text. Beginning in paragraph three, Douglass relates the situation to his own life as a slave. In paragraph four, he reflects on slave songs and how they are often</p>	

misunderstood. The text contains no graphics or ancillary text features.

Language: The text is challenging not only because of 19th century sentence structure and vocabulary use, but also because of the complexity of Douglass’s rhetoric. The language is elevated and formal. Douglass compares moving to the “Great House Farm” to many aspects of political parties. He writes about the complexity and conflicting emotion of slave songs, using descriptive words like “wild” and “highest joy and deepest sadness,” “They would sing in the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone,” and “the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery than reading the whole volumes of philosophy on the subject would do.” Vocabulary is likely to be challenging to understand because of its 17th century structure and archaic vocabulary.

Knowledge Demands: Limited background knowledge about slavery is helpful for comprehension of this text, and is offered after the second close reading because the experiences and feelings portrayed are unfamiliar to most readers.

Task and Reader Considerations

Students are asked to **analyze** this text by reading closely, addressing text-based questions, and determining the speaker, subject, purpose and tone of the passage. Before this occurs, students engage in two readings with teacher support which are intended to give them an opportunity to make meaning of the passage, then to provide intensive practice with in-text vocabulary study that leads to deep comprehension and the ability to interpret. To aid close reading practice, underlined words are glossed for students; bolded words indicate Tier 2 words that students should learn.

Considerations regarding the motivation and experience of the reader should be made at the classroom level.

Placement Considerations

The quantitative and complexity measures support inclusion of this text. The task demands require students to analyze the effect of the incident-response-reflection structure, thus the overall rating of Complex.

This text supports student achievement of multiple reading standards, including RI.7.1 (cite textual evidence), RI.7.2 (determine central idea), RI.7.5 (analyze how a particular section contributes to the development of the ideas) RI.7.6 (determine author’s point of view or purpose).

This text also supports student achievement of language standard L.7.4 (determine the meaning of unknown or multiple meaning words).