

Figure 5.2 Qualitative scale of literary texts.

Score	1 point (comfortable) Texts that are comfortable and/or build background, fluency, and skills	2 points (grade level) Texts that require grade-appropriate skills	3 points (stretch) Texts that would stretch a reader and/or require instruction
Levels of Meaning and Purpose			
Density and Complexity	Single and literal levels of meaning; meaning is explicitly stated	Single but more complex or abstract meaning; some meanings are stated, while others are left to the reader to identify	Significant density and complexity, with multiple levels of meaning; meanings may be more ambiguous
Figurative Language	Limited use of symbolism, metaphors, and poetic language that allude to other unstated concepts; language is explicit and relies on literal interpretations	Figurative language such as imagery, metaphors, symbolism, and personification is used to make connections within the text to more explicit information, and readers are supported in understanding these language devices through examples and explanations	Figurative language plays a significant role in identifying the meaning of the text; more sophisticated figurative language is used (irony and satire, allusions, archaic or less familiar symbolism); the reader is left to interpret these meanings
Purpose	Purpose or main idea is directly and explicitly stated at the beginning of the reading	Purpose is implied but is easily identified based on title or context	Purpose is deliberately withheld from the reader, who must use other interpretative skills to identify it
Structure			
Genre	Genre is familiar, and the text is consistent with the elements of that genre	Genre is unfamiliar, but the text is a reasonable example of that genre, or genre is familiar, but text bends and expands the rules for the genre	Genre is unfamiliar, and text bends and expands the rules for the genre
Organization	Organization is conventional, sequential, or chronological, with clear signals and transitions to lead the reader through a story, process, or set of concepts	Organization adheres to most conventions but digresses on occasion to temporarily shift the reader's focus to another point of view, event, time, or place, before returning to the main idea or topic	Organization distorts time or sequence in a deliberate effort to delay the reader's full understanding of the plot, process, or set of concepts; may include significant flashbacks, foreshadowing, or shifting perspectives
Narration	Third-person omniscient narration or an authoritative and credible voice provides an appropriate level of detail and keeps little hidden from the view of the reader	Third-person limited or first-person narration provides accurate, but limited, perspectives or viewpoints	Unreliable narrator provides a distorted or limited view to the reader; the reader must use other clues to deduce the truth; multiple narrators provide conflicting information; shifting points of view keep the reader guessing

Text Features and Graphics	Text features (e.g., bold and italicized words, headings and subheadings) organize information explicitly and guide the reader; graphics or illustrations may be present but are not necessary to understand the main part of the text	Wider array of text features includes margin notes, diagrams, graphs, font changes, and other devices that compete for the reader's attention; graphics and visuals are used to augment and illustrate information in the main part of the text	Limited use of text features to organize information and guide the reader; information in the graphics is not repeated in the main part of the text but is essential for understanding the text
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Language Conventionality and Clarity			
Standard English and Variations	Language closely adheres to the reader's linguistic base	Some distance exists between the reader's linguistic base and the language conventions used in the text; the vernacular used is unfamiliar to the reader	The text includes significant and multiple styles of English and its variations, and these are unfamiliar to the reader
Register	Register is casual and familiar	Register is consultative or formal and may be academic but acknowledges the developmental level of the reader	Archaic, formal, domain-specific, or scholarly register

Knowledge Demands			
Background Knowledge	The text contains content that closely matches the reader's life experiences	There is distance between the reader's experiences and those in the text, but there is acknowledgment of these divergent experiences and sufficient explanation to bridge these gaps	The text places demands on the reader that extend far beyond the reader's experiences, and provides little in the way of explanation of these divergent experiences
Prior Knowledge	Prior knowledge needed to understand the text is familiar, and draws on a solid foundation of practical, general, and academic learning	Subject-specific knowledge is required, but the text augments this with review or summary of this information	Specialized or technical content knowledge is presumed, and little in the way of review or explanation of these concepts is present in the text
Cultural Knowledge	The reader uses familiar cultural templates to understand the text; limited or familiar intertextuality	Text primarily references contemporary and popular culture to anchor explanations for new knowledge; intertextuality is used more extensively but is mostly familiar to the reader	Text relies on extensive or unfamiliar intertextuality, and uses artifacts and symbols that reference archaic or historical cultures
Vocabulary Knowledge	Vocabulary is controlled and uses the most commonly held meanings; multiple-meaning words are used in a limited fashion	Vocabulary draws on domain-specific, general academic, and multiple-meaning words, with text supports to guide the reader's correct interpretations of their meanings; the vocabulary used represents familiar concepts and ideas	Vocabulary demand is extensive, domain specific, and representative of complex ideas; the text offers little in the way of context clues to support the reader

Source: Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Lapp, D. (2016). *Text complexity*, pp. 47–49 Corwin.