

Text Complexity Analysis

Text complexity analysis					
Created by:	Donna Drasch	Event/Date:	TeachFest 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. It sets the tone by disclosing Lincoln's anxiety surrounding the outcome on the battlefield as well as issues with his own family's health. It reveals how Lincoln had not even been asked to deliver the major speech at the dedication ceremony of the Gettysburg National Cemetery. He 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 concise, deceptively dull speech. 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. In its brevity, this succinct speech connected our country's past, present and expected rebirth as a nation to convey a very powerful message.</p>					
Quantitative					
Lexile and Grade Level	1,100 – grades 6 th -8th	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 of Lincoln's personal sacrifice to be at the Gettysburg ceremony is revealed as the text unfolds and requires the reader to read between the lines.</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 very 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.</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. There is some irony in that the photographer did not even have time to take pictures of this famous speech.</p>			
Potential Reader/Task Challenges					
<p>The biggest challenge would be the understanding of human nature and perspective of time and place. Students may not have the maturity to understand the level of responsibility and thought behind Lincoln's decisions. This text requires the reader to infer meaning that is not implicitly stated. Guiding questions will need to help students infer the complexity of the problems Lincoln faced and the consequent decisions that he made prior to the speech.</p>					

Big Takeaway

Lincoln's attendance at the dedication ceremony and the preparation for his short speech came at a personal cost. He decided to put the future of the country over his own needs and that of his family. Recognizing the importance of the event, and realizing that Gettysburg was a turning point in the war, he needed to use the event to help ensure the continuation of believers as others have sacrificed for the restoration of the country. Lincoln sacrificed to be there. Even with all the stress and distress, Lincoln was able to compose a powerful message that conveyed his beliefs and hopes in a few words.

There are two distinct messages that should be shared about this text. First, is the importance of effective word choice and structure when conveying a lasting message. Historically speaking the battle seemed incredibly important, when in actuality, Lincoln's speech overshadowed any bearing that the battle may have had at the time. Second, is the understanding of the personal sacrifice that was given willingly by our great leaders so that "the government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from this earth".

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)