

Text Complexity Analysis Template

Text complexity analysis			
Created by:	Carolyn Nixon (National LearnZillion Dream Team, 2014)	Event/Date:	TeachFest 2014 New Orleans, Louisiana
Text and Author	Ain't I a Woman? Speech by Sojourner Truth Delivered 1851 at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio	Where to Access Text	Public Domain
Text Description			
Sojourner Truth was an abolitionist and women's rights activists. "Ain't I A Woman?" is the text of a speech she delivered in 1851 at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio. The women in attendance were being challenged to call for the right to vote.			
Quantitative			
Lexile and Grade Level	810L , 8 th grade	Text Length	356
Qualitative			
Meaning/Central Ideas		Text Structure/Organization	
The purpose of the speech is to persuade the audience that giving women the right to vote is common sense. Because the reader must connect ideas and events throughout the entirety of the speech to understand Sojourner Truth's argument, the meaning of the text is very complex. Truth draws on her experience as a slave as proof that the argument that women should be treated delicately is invalid. Sojourner Truth never states her argument directly; the reader must connect implicit and subtle bits of evidence over the entire text to understand her argument in favor of voting rights for women. Throughout the speech, Sojourner presents her unique perspective. By using examples from her life as a slave, her experiences as a mother, and her background as a Pentecostal preacher, Truth builds a complex argument in support of the rights of "Negroes" and women.		The title, subtitle and photograph with a caption are text features that help the reader understand the historical context of the text of the speech. The reader does not have the benefit of 'hearing' the words spoken aloud as would have been the case with original audience. Without this, the reader has to work harder to make sense of the text.	
Prior Knowledge Demands		Language Features	
The prior knowledge demands of this text are extensive. Deep comprehension of this text demands prior knowledge of U.S. historical events and climate of the 1800's such as slavery, the abolitionist movement, and the women's suffrage movement. The subtitle and photograph will provide minimal scaffolding to support students who have little frame of reference for this time period. Readers who lack background knowledge of Bible stories familiar to those of Christian faith will encounter difficulty interpreting Biblical allusions used in the speech (e.g., Mary, mother of Christ, and Eve, the first woman in the Garden of		At surface level, the structure of the sentences and words appears simple. On closer analysis, several language features of this text make it exceedingly complex. Sojourner Truth's dialect is typical of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), a style of speaking used by many African Americans. Student understanding of the text may break down in places where Truth uses specific words and phrases (typical of AAVE) to make reference to events and situations specific to the time period in which she lived. To access deeper levels of meaning, the reader must understand connotative	

<p>Eden).</p> <p>Students may also have difficulty understanding two references made to men who are in the audience (“<i>Than man over there...</i>” and “<i>Then that little man in black there...</i>”). They may fail to understand that the word “<i>there</i>” is an indication that she is pointing toward male members of the audience who have counter arguments to her point of view.</p>	<p>meanings and idiomatic phrases (e.g., “<i>racket</i>” and “<i>out of kilter</i>”). The reader must analyze the effect of the author’s colloquial words and phrases which she uses in reference to her life as a slave (e.g., “<i>...no man could head me</i>” and “<i>...bear the lash...</i>”). The reader will also need to understand the impact of repetition and rhetorical questioning as a persuasive technique (e.g., “<i>Ain’t I a woman?</i>”). Furthermore, the reader must interpret Truth’s pint/quart metaphor. Although this is a speech given in a very formal setting, the tone is informal. It reads like an informal, interactive conversation (e.g., “[<i>member of the audience whispers, “intellect?”</i>”]) between a wise teacher (e.g., “<i>...old Sojourner...</i>”) and a group of learners (e.g., “<i>Well, children...</i>”).</p>
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Potential Reader/Task Challenges

While the Lexile level of this text is below of the complexity band for middle school, the content of this speech is emotionally appropriate only for older students. Readers are likely to struggle to read across the text to interpret Truth’s argument and combine that with prior knowledge to make meaning of the central ideas in the text. Language and allusions including Biblical references are likely to be a big barrier to all readers, especially ELL’s.

Big Takeaway

Based on evidence from the text of Sojourner Truth’s speech, events in her own life influenced her perspective about the rights of slaves and women. Her experiences as a slave, mother, and Christian empowered her to acknowledge and respond to arguments against the rights of slaves and women.

Truth called into question the male argument that women should always be helped and put on a pedestal. Through repetition and rhetorical questioning, she established the fact of her own female gender. Her experiences as a slave empowered her to understand and express the fact that she was equal to any man when it came to working, eating and standing up to beatings at the hands of slave owners. Using anecdotal references to her life as a slave, she effectively called into question the male argument that women are the weaker sex.

Sojourner’s experience as a mother played a significant part in her argument for women’s rights. Her claim that femininity gave her no special privileges gained momentum as she recounted that even the natural female right to mother her children had been stolen away. When her children were sold away into slavery, the white male owners turned a deaf ear to her grief. This piercing element of truth from her own life added poignancy to her argument and evoked empathy from those listening.

Truth’s ability to reason and her knowledge of the Bible also equipped her to argue in favor of the rights of slaves and women. She was able to use logic to dispel the irrelevant claim that intelligence has anything at all to do with one’s rights. She did this by creating the metaphor of the pint and the quart and asking, in a very straight-forward manner, “What’s that got to do with women’s rights or negroes’ rights?” By using her knowledge of the Bible stories of Eve, the first woman in the garden of Eden, and Mary, mother of Jesus, she effectively refuted the idea that males alone have ever been (or should ever be) solely responsible for being in charge of everything.

The events of Sojourner Truth’s life uniquely empowered her perspective and her ability to create effective arguments in favor of the rights of slaves and women.

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"> • 'twixt (Tier 2) • borne (Tier 2) • obliged (Tier 2) • quart (Tier 2) • pint (Tier 2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • racket (Tier 2) • in a fix (Tier 2) • head (as in "...no man could head me...") (Tier 2) • "bear the lash" (Tier 2) • "turn it back" (Tier 2) • "right side up" (Tier 2)
Words that cannot be determined in context		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rights (Tier 2)