Why are texts worth teaching key to student learning?

- The single factor that distinguishes those who are ready for college and careers and those who are not is the ability to read and understand complex text. (ACT, 2006[1])

- Reading a set of meaningful texts allows readers to organize their thinking in a way that helps them identify patterns, make literary connections, and develop insights across texts. (Lehman, 2007[2])

- From Marilyn Jager Adams[3]:

  - "Every concept—simple or complex, concrete or abstract—is learned in terms of its similarities, differences, and relationships with other concepts with which we are familiar. As a simplistic example, when we read about tigers, [. . .] we learn more about all sorts of cats and, further, about every subtopic mentioned along the way. The more deeply we read about tigers, the more nuanced and complex these concepts and interrelations become." (p. 22-23)

  - "What makes reading valuable and important is not the words themselves so much as the understandings they afford. The reason we need to know the meanings of words is that they point to the knowledge from which we are to construct, interpret, and reflect on the meaning of the text." (p. 23)

  - "…the connections that effectively define the meanings of words [. . .] shift continuously, continually, and always in relation to one another. Thus, the addition or modification of any one connection impacts many others, [. . .] altering the strengths and patterns of connections among words and contexts. Due to this dynamic, Landauer and Dumais (1997) found that with each reading the model effectively increased its understanding not just of words that were in the passage but also of words that were *not* in the passage." (p. 22)

- From Kucan, Lapp, Flood, and Fisher[4]:

  - "Making connections among multiple and diverse texts is one way that experienced readers make sense of what they have read." (p. 286)

  - "There are cognitive as well as literary consequences for students who interact with multiple texts. Hynd (1999) suggests that students who make use of multiple textual resources engage in processing that involves evaluating the importance, credibility, and relevance of individual texts. The result of such processing is that students are able to construct more elaborated representations of people, events, and concepts (Perfetti, Britt, & Georgi, 1995)." (p. 286)

  - "Literacy researchers and educators emphasize that inviting students to notice and participate in the ongoing conversation among texts is an enterprise of critical importance (e.g., Frey & Fisher, 2006; Hartman, 1995; Lapp & Flood, 1993; Lenski, 1998; Lipson, Valencia, Wixson, & Peters, 1993)." (pgs. 286-287)

  - "While each text provides information and insights, it is the accumulation of insights from multiple texts and multiple media that expands and reinforces students' developing understanding." (p. 288)

---

[1] "Reading Between the Lines" (ACT, 2006): http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/reading_report.pdf
[2] *Children's Literature and Learning: Literary Study Across the Curriculum*, Barbara Lehman (2007)
[3] "The Challenge of Advanced Texts" (Adams, 2009): http://www.childrenofthecode.org/library/MJA-ChallengeofAdvancedTexts.pdf
[4] "Instructional Resources in the Classroom: Deepening Understanding through Interactions with Multiple Texts and Multiple Media" by Linda Kucan, Diane Lapp, James Flood, and Douglas Fisher, included in *Best Practices in Literacy Instruction*, Third Edition, by Linda B. Gambrell, Lesley Mandel Morrow, and Michael Pressley

Why are tasks worth completing key to student learning?

- Using meaningful texts can support student knowledge building of abstract or unfamiliar concepts and can support their writing. For example, writing prompt 1 asks students to write about a challenge they encountered while writing prompt 2 asks students to write about how the main character encounters a challenge in text they are reading in class. Consider which writing prompt requires more outside knowledge and privileges students who've had a variety of life experiences about which they are able to write?

- "The careful layering of content through the use of [meaningful] texts allows students to generate questions that can guide their learning [. . .] As each text is confronted, students' questions can deepen and change. This inquiry also cultivates interest and engagement, allowing students to care deeply about pursuing answers. Ownership of their learning then follows." (Cappiello and Dawes, p. 24[5])

- "Students need multiple opportunities to interact with important words and concepts in order for those word and concepts to become part of their working knowledge and expressive language. When teachers have students read a variety of texts on a topic, [. . .] students have repeated opportunities to confront and grapple with content vocabulary and hear, read, speak, and write those words. In this language-rich environment, students will develop an understanding of certain words through expert modeling and explaining by the teacher, repeated exposure, and specific meaningful use (Beck, McKeown, and Kucan 2002; Graves 2005), all of which are strategies particularly supportive to English language learners and students with learning difficulties." (Cappiello and Dawes, p. 27[6])

- "About 90% of the words in texts come from a small percentage of the words in English—about 4,000 word families (e.g., help, helped, helps, helping, helper). The other 10% of the words that make texts unique from a group of at least 300,000 words. The words in the 10% are different for narrative and informational texts. The unique words in narratives usually come from networks of words that students already know. Fourth-graders may not know the words *exasperated* or *irate* but they know *mad*. The unique words of informational texts—*convection*, *radiation*, *inflation rate*—often represent new concepts for students and are understood through inquiry, discussion, demonstration, reading, and writing extensively." (Hiebert, p. 5[7])

Additional articles, essays, studies worth reading:

- "Letting the Text Take Center Stage," Tim Shanahan: http://www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/fall2013/Shanahan.pdf

- "7 Actions that Teachers Can Take Right Now: Text Complexity," Elfrieda Hiebert: http://textproject.org/assets/text-matters/Text-Matters_7-Actions-Text-Complexity.pdf

- "Rethinking Reading Comprehension Instruction: A Comparison of Instruction for Strategies and Content Approaches," McKeown, Beck, Blake (2009): http://www.lrdc.pitt.edu/pubs/Abstracts/McKeownRethinking.pdf

- The Importance of Vocabulary and Syntax: http://achievethecore.org/file/130

- The Progression of Reading Comprehension: http://achievethecore.org/content/upload/liben_pearson_progression_of_comprehension_research_ela.pdf

---

[5] *Teaching with Text Sets*, Mary Ann Cappiello and Erika Dawes (2012)
[6] *Teaching with Text Sets*, Mary Ann Cappiello and Erika Dawes (2012)
[7] "7 Actions that Teachers Can Take Right Now: Text Complexity" (Hiebert 2012): http://textproject.org/assets/text-matters/Text-Matters_7-Actions-Text-Complexity.pdf