

**SD148 CCSS Summer Portfolio:  
Social Studies 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Grade  
Activity 4: Investigating Complex Text**

Goals:

- The participants will investigate complex text
- The participant will connect with student issues while reading complex text

Purpose

- To understand the impact of text complexity on student learning

Procedure:

1. Read the **“Defining Complex Text”** section of this activity
2. Read the **Gordon Kane** article
3. Complete the **“Text Reflections”** on the graphic organizer based on the articles
4. Answer the questions about **“Making Student Connections”**
5. Place the completed graphic organizer in your portfolio

Timeline:

Read the “Defining Complex Text”, the Gordon Kane article, complete the graphic organizer, and answer the “making Student Connections” questions. 2 hours

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**“Defining Complex Text”**

The move to CCSS has the skills of the high school graduate in mind. Graduates need to be ready and at the level for college and career. We understand that there are basic skills related to this readiness of students. Student must be able to read to infer, interpret and draw conclusions. Students must be able to support arguments with evidence. They have to be able to resolve conflicting views encountered in source documents. We must teach them to solve complex problems with no obvious answer. We must give them the ability to navigate and comprehend complex text in any discipline.

What does that look like? How do we navigate complex text? How do we know if text is complex? Here are some questions for teachers to consider about the reader in relationship to the reading

Does the text:

- Use sophisticated language structure?
- Include unfamiliar vocabulary?
- Require or infer certain levels of background knowledge?
- Require the reader to “work it” to understand it?
- Require the reader to have an interest and motivation in the topic in order to be able to comprehend?
- Require scaffolding for the reader to become independent?

Text complexity is a problem for struggling readers and for those of us who teach them

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**Excerpt from Mann, Charles C. Before Columbus: The Americas of the 1491**

“Given the charged relations between white societies and native peoples, inquiry into Indian culture and history is inevitably contentious. But the recent scholarship is especially controversial. To begin with, some researchers—many but not all from an older generation—deride the new theories as fantasies arising from an almost willful misinterpretation of data and a perverse kind of political correctness. “I have seen no evidence that large numbers of people ever lived in the Beni,” Betty J. Meggers, of the Smithsonian Institution, told me. “Claiming otherwise is just wishful thinking.” Indeed, two Smithsonian-backed archaeologists from Argentina have argued that many of the larger mounds are natural floodplain deposits; a “small initial population” could have built the remaining causeways and raised fields in as little as a decade. Similar criticisms apply to many of the new scholarly claims about Indians, according to Dean R. Snow, an anthropologist at Pennsylvania State University. The problem is that “you can make the meager evidence from the ethno-historical record tell you anything you want,” he says. “It’s really easy to kid yourself.” And some have charged that the claims advance the political agenda of those who seek to discredit European culture, because the high numbers seem to inflate the scale of native loss.

Disputes also arise because the new theories have implications for today’s ecological battles. Much of the environmental movement is animated, consciously or not, by what geographer William Denevan calls “the pristine myth”—the belief that the Americas in 1491 were an almost untouched, even Edenic land, “untrammelled by man,” in the words of the Wilderness Act of 1964, a U.S. law that is one of the founding documents of the global environmental movement. To green activists, as the University of Wisconsin historian William Cronon has written, restoring this long-ago, putatively natural state is a task that society is morally bound to undertake. Yet if the new view is correct and the work of humankind was pervasive, where does that leave efforts to restore nature?

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(use the Charles Mann article)

<b>Does the text. . .</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>	<b>If yes, show example from article. . .</b>	<b>Describe your thinking as you read. . .</b>
<b>Use sophisticated language?</b>			
<b>Include unfamiliar vocabulary?</b>			
<b>Require the reader to have specific background knowledge?</b>			
<b>Require the reader to have interest and motivation to read?</b>			

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**Making Student Connections**

How did you read the text in order to make meaning of the text? What strategies did you use?
Why is this considered a complex piece of text?
What would have helped you to make meaning of the text?
What connection can you make to your students reading the text in your class?
What consideration must you give to your students as they read text that is complex to them?