UNDERSTANDING TEXT COMPLEXITY K-5

Dr. Terry Rusin
trusin@i-kan.org
The Sad News

• About 1/3 of first year students in 2007-08 took at least one remedial course (42% at a two year college).

• People who cannot write and communicate clearly will not be hired and are not likely to be considered for promotion.
Benefits of the CCSS

- Internationally benchmarked
- Expectations clear to students, parents, teachers, and the general public
- Allow for collaboration with other states on best practices, instructional materials, and professional development
- Costs to the state reduced
- Consistent expectations for all—*not* dependent on a zip code
Advantages to Common Core Standards

• A focus on college and career readiness
• Inclusion of the four strands of English Language Arts:
  • Reading
  • Writing
  • Listening and speaking
  • Language
• An integrated literacy approach - all educators have a shared responsibility for literacy instruction, regardless of discipline or content area.
• A focus on results rather than means - (“the Standards leave room for teachers, curriculum developers, and states to determine how those goals should be reached and what additional topics should be addressed” (p. 4).)
• Efficiencies of scale - common standards allow for greater collaboration among states in the areas of
  • Professional development
  • Resource development
  • Teaching tools
A growing body of research presents a challenge to current K-12 reading/English-language Arts instruction. In essence, we need to “up” the level of text complexity and provide greater opportunities for independent reading.
Reading Standards

• Literature
  • Key Ideas and Details
  • Craft and Structure
  • Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
  • Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

• Informational Text
  • Key Ideas and Details
  • Craft and Structure
  • Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
  • Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

• Foundational Skills
  • Print Concepts K-1
  • Phonological Awareness K-1
  • Phonics and Word Recognition K-5
  • Fluency K-5
Included within the Standards is an enhanced focus on text complexity. Specifically, within reading standard #10:

**Anchor Standard:**

R.CCR.10 Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.
Focus on Text Complexity

Specifically, within reading standard #10:

**Anchor Standard:**

- **R.CCR.10** Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

  **Example Grade-level Standard (2nd grade):**

- **RI.2.10** By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories and poetry, and informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts in the grades 2-3 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
Reading Strand

Deep Comprehension

Close and Critical Reading

- Close and Critical Reading Bookmarks

- Four Questions
  - What does the text say?
  - How does it say it?
  - What does it mean?
  - So what?
So...

• What do the Common Core Learning Standards mean by text complexity?

• What is a text complexity band?

AND

• How do we ensure the texts our students are reading are in the appropriate text complexity band?
Analyzing Texts That Have Appropriate Challenges for Students

Guiding Questions:

- *How do you make informed decisions about choosing appropriate texts for students to read?*
- *How do you insure that all students are exposed to texts that are appropriate for them to read as well as exposing them to increasing text complexity?*
Text Complexity is defined as:

- Qualitative
- Quantitative
- Reader and Task
## Lexile Analysis of Occupational Reading Materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Cluster</th>
<th>Occupation (Entry Level)</th>
<th>Reading Material</th>
<th>Lexile Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture &amp; Natural Resources</td>
<td>Ag Business Assistant</td>
<td>Best Management Practices – Livestock &amp; Poultry Operations</td>
<td>1510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture &amp; Construction</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>Personal Protective Equipment Manual</td>
<td>1060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Audiovisual Technology &amp; Communication</td>
<td>Printing/Graphics Technologist</td>
<td>Publishing with PhotoShop</td>
<td>1430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Cluster</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hospitality &amp; Tourism</td>
<td>New hotel employee</td>
<td>Hilton Hotels – New Employee Packet</td>
<td>1330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law &amp; Public Safety</td>
<td>Police Officer</td>
<td>Emergency Response to Terrorism</td>
<td>1260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail/Wholesale Sales &amp; Service</td>
<td>Sales Associate</td>
<td>Dress Barn – Associate Handbook</td>
<td>1270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Research/Engineering</td>
<td>Structural Engineering Technician</td>
<td>Penn. Code training consortium</td>
<td>1130</td>
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<td>Business &amp; Administration</td>
<td>General Office Staff</td>
<td>Job Responsibilities - Medical Office Asst.</td>
<td>1210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Training</td>
<td>Assistant Teacher</td>
<td>Head Start Staff Handbook</td>
<td>1370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation, Distribution &amp; Logistics</td>
<td>Automotive Technician</td>
<td>Nissan Product Knowledge Reference Guides</td>
<td>1270</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health Science</td>
<td>Emergency Medical Technician</td>
<td>EMS Safety Techniques and Applications</td>
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</table>
Where do we find texts in the appropriate text complexity band?

We could...

• Choose an excerpt of text from Appendix B:

Use available resources to determine the text complexity of other materials on our own.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Text Complexity Grade Bands</th>
<th>Suggested Lexile Range</th>
<th>Suggested ALOS Book Level Range **</th>
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Determining Text Complexity

A Four-step Process:

1. Determine the quantitative measures of the text.
2. Analyze the qualitative measures of the text.
3. Reflect upon the reader and task considerations.
4. Recommend placement in the appropriate text complexity band.
Step 1: Quantitative Measures

Measures such as:
- Word length
- Word frequency
- Word difficulty
- Sentence length
- Text length
- Text cohesion
The Quantitative Measures Ranges for Text Complexity:

This document outlines the suggested ranges for each of the text complexity bands using:

1. Lexile Text Measures

---or---

2. ATOS Book Levels (Accelerated Reader)

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** Taken from Accelerated Reader and the Common Core State Standards, available at the following URL: http://doc-relearn.com/KMNet/6045721175/KC46b.pdf
Step 1: Quantitative Measures

Lexile® Measures

Based on two factors

- Word Frequency (semantic difficulty)
- Sentence Length (syntactic complexity)

Decades of research have revealed that both of these factors are consistently excellent predictors of how difficult a text is to comprehend.
Step 1: Quantitative Measures

Let’s imagine we want to see where a text falls on the quantitative measures “leg” of the text complexity triangle, using either the Lexile text measures or the ATOS book level (or both).

For illustrative purposes, let’s choose Trinka Hakes Noble’s *The Day Jimmy’s Boa Ate the Wash*. 
Step 1: Quantitative Measures

Lexile Text Measure: AD 540 L

ATOS Book Level: 2.2

Scholastic’s Book Wizard Level: 3.7

http://bookwizard.scholastic.com

In which of the text complexity bands would this novel fall?
### Quantitative Measures Ranges for Text Complexity Grade Bands

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Step 1: Quantitative Measures

Additional Resources for Lexile Measures:

• Overview video
  http://www.lexile.com/about-lexile/lexile-video/

• “What Does the Lexile Measure Mean?”

• “Lexile Measures and the Common Core State Standards”

• KSDE Lexile Resource Page

• Kansas Lexile Map
  http://www.ksde.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=LoE9qJxEzAc%3d&tabid=3670&mid=8721
Step 1: Quantitative Measures

For texts not in the Lexile database, consider using the Lexile Analyzer: http://www.lexile.com/analyzer/

- Registration is required (free) http://www.lexile.com/account/register/
- Allows user to receive an “estimated” Lexile score
- Accommodates texts up to 1000 words in length
- Texts of any length can be evaluated using the Professional Lexile Analyzer—educators can upgrade to this tool for free by requesting access http://www.lexile.com/account/profile/access/
Step 1: Quantitative Measures

For texts not in the AR Bookfinder database, consider using The ATOS Analyzer:
http://www.renlearn.com/ar/overview/atos/

- No registration is required (however, you must provide an email address to receive results)
- Three methods of analysis are available:
  1. ATOS for Books - for submitting complete text of a book
  2. ATOS for Books with Estimated Word Count - does not require full text, just three 150-word passages
  3. ATOS for Text - works well for short, full-text submissions (short stories, magazine/newspaper articles, etc.)
Step 1: Quantitative Measures

Step 1: Quantitative Measures

Additional Resources for ATOS Book Level Measures:

• Accelerated Reader Website
  http://www.renlearn.com/ar/
• “Accelerated Reader and the Common Core State Standards”
  http://doc.renlearn.com/KMNet/R004572117GKC46B.pdf

• Kansas All Books Connect Website
  http://kansas.bookconnect.com/default.aspx
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Step 1: Quantitative Measures

Remember, however, that the quantitative measures is only the first of three “legs” of the text complexity triangle.

Our final recommendation may be validated, influenced, or even overruled by our examination of qualitative measures and the reader and task considerations.
QUANTITATIVE MEASURES:

Free Readability Formula:


Book Leveling Information:

http://school.discoveryeducation.com/schrockguide/fry/fry.html

Readability Article

Step 2: Qualitative Measures

Measures such as:

- Layers/Levels of meaning
- Levels of purpose
- Structure
- Organization
- Language conventionality
- Language clarity
- Prior knowledge demands
- Cultural Demands
- Vocabulary
**Structure:**
Complicated *text-structures* (chronological, problem-solution, cause-effect, etc.) will add to a text’s complexity level.

*Holes, by Louis Sachar*
Quantitative Measurement: 4.9 (Fry Readability value).

Qualitative Measurement:
**Structure:** Story continuously jumps back and forth between different time periods/settings, and character groups.

**Adjusted text-complexity value:** 5.9 – 7.5 for independent reading.

- **Possible “Stretch-Text”:** In order to challenge students’ reading capacity—stretching them to grow to a higher reading level—teachers might have students read the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, (7.9) describing the effects of racism during the slavery period.

- **Scaffolding needed:** Teacher should provide critical background knowledge, along with teacher-directed reading of the text.
Language Conventionality & Clarity:
Texts that rely on literal, clear, contemporary, and conversational language tend to be easier to read than texts that rely on figurative, ironic, ambiguous, purposefully misleading, archaic or otherwise unfamiliar language or on general academic and domain-specific vocabulary.

- Examples:
  - Shakespeare
  - Arcane classics
  - Medieval, Puritan, or other dialects/language patterns

The actual reading level is not difficult, but due to unfamiliar language patterns and old-fashioned language, the reading becomes more difficult.
Knowledge Demands

Specific examples:

- Life Experiences/Cultural/Literary/Content & Discipline Knowledge
  - Simple theme vs. complex or sophisticated theme
  - Single theme vs. multiple themes
  - Single perspective vs. multiple perspectives
  - Perspective(s) like one’s own vs. perspective(s) unlike or in opposition to one’s own
- Everyday knowledge vs. cultural and literary knowledge
- Few allusions to other texts vs. many allusions to other texts
- Low intertextuality (few or no references to other texts) vs. high intertextuality (many references or citations to other texts)
Knowledge Demands

*Chew on This, by Eric Schlosser*

Quantitative Measurement: 8.7 (Fry Readability value).

Qualitative Measurement:

**Knowledge Demands:** History of fast food; familiarity with food industry and the role that government and politics play in this industry; lasting and ongoing impact of fast food on our country and on our health; the correlation between fast food and poverty.

Adjusted text-complexity value: 10-11.
Step 2: Qualitative Measures

The Qualitative Measures Rubrics for Literary and Informational Text:

The rubric for literary text and the rubric for informational text allow educators to evaluate the important elements of text that are often missed by computer software that tends to focus on more easily measured factors.
Step 2: Qualitative Measures

- Rubrics contain different content
- Formatting for each rubric exactly the same
- Points along each continuum is identified: high, middle high, middle low, and low
Step 2: Qualitative Measures

So...

How is the rubric used?

And how would *The Day Jimmy’s Boa Ate the Wash* fair when analyzed through the lens of the Literary Text Rubric?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT COMPLEXITY: QUALITATIVE MEASURES RUBRIC</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LITERARY TEXTS</td>
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</table>

### LEVELS OF MEANING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High</th>
<th>Middle High</th>
<th>Middle Low</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Levels of Complex Meaning</td>
<td>Multiple Levels of Meaning</td>
<td>Single Level of Complex Meaning</td>
<td>Single Level of Simple Meaning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### STRUCTURE

<table>
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<tr>
<th>High</th>
<th>Middle High</th>
<th>Middle Low</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Structure: complex, implicit, and unconventional</td>
<td>Narrative Structure: some complexities, more implicit than explicit, some unconventional</td>
<td>Narrative Structure: largely simple structure, more explicit than implicit, largely conventional</td>
<td>Narrative Structure: simple, explicit, conventional, no shifts in point of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narration view</td>
<td>Order of Events: occasional use of flashback, no major shifts in time</td>
<td>Order of Events: chronological</td>
<td>Order of Events: chronological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order of Events:</td>
<td>Use of Graphics: largely simple graphics, supplementary to understanding of the text</td>
<td>Use of Graphics: use of simple graphics, unnecessary to understand the text</td>
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### USAGE CONVENTIONALITY AND CLARITY

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<td>Meaning: meaning, ironic language, ambiguous</td>
<td>Meaning: largely explicit and literal meaning, subtle use of figurative or ironic language</td>
<td>Meaning: explicit and literal meaning, little or no use of figurative or ironic language</td>
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<tr>
<td>Register: archaic, formal, academic</td>
<td>Register: largely contemporary, familiar, conversational, rarely unfamiliar, archaic, domain-specific, or overly academic</td>
<td>Register: contemporary, familiar, conversational</td>
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### KNOWLEDGE DEMANDS

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<td>Life Experiences: requires extensive, perhaps specialized content knowledge</td>
<td>Life Experiences: explores a single complex theme, experiences portrayed are common to many readers or are clearly fantasy</td>
<td>Life Experiences: explores a single theme, experiences portrayed are everyday and common or are clearly fantasy</td>
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<td>Cultural/Literary Knowledge: many references/allusions to other texts (intertextuality) and cultural elements</td>
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<td>Cultural/Literary Knowledge: no references/allusions to other texts (intertextuality) and cultural elements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subject Matter Knowledge: requires extensive, perhaps specialized content knowledge</td>
<td>Subject Matter Knowledge: requires moderate levels of content knowledge</td>
<td>Subject Matter Knowledge: requires only everyday content knowledge</td>
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Step 2: Qualitative Measures

From examining the quantitative measures, we knew:

Lexile Text Measure:  AD 540 L
ATOS Book Level:  2.2
Scholastic’s Book Wizard Level:  3.7

But after reflecting upon the qualitative measures, we believed:
Step 3: Reader and Task Considerations
Step 3: Reader and Task

Considerations such as:

- Motivation
- Knowledge and experience
- Purpose for reading
- Complexity of task assigned regarding text
- Complexity of questions asked regarding text
Step 3: Reader and Task Considerations

Questions for Professional Reflection on Reader and Task Considerations:

Step 3: Reader and Task Considerations

Questions for Professional Reflection on Reader and Task Considerations

Cognitive Capabilities
- Does the reader possess the necessary attention to read and comprehend this specific text?
- Will the reader be able to remember and make connections among the various details presented in this specific text?
- Does the reader possess the necessary critical/analytic thinking skills to understand the relationships between the main idea, purpose, and/or theme of the text and the various details used to support that main idea, purpose, and/or theme?
- Will this specific text help to develop the attention, memory, and critical/analytic thinking skills necessary for future reading endeavors?

Reading Skills
- Does the reader possess the necessary inferencing skills to “read between the lines” and make connections among elements that may not be explicit in this specific text?
- Does the reader possess the necessary visualization skills to imagine what is occurring or what is being described in this specific text?
- Does the reader possess the necessary questioning skills to challenge the ideas being presented in this text and consider those ideas from multiple points of view?
- Does the reader possess the necessary comprehension strategies to manage the material in this specific text?
- Will this specific text help to develop the inferencing skills, visualization skills, questioning skills, and comprehension strategies necessary for future reading endeavors?

Motivation and Engagement with Task and Text
- Will the reader understand the purpose—which might shift over the course of the reading experience—for reading this specific text (i.e., skimming, studying to retain content, close reading for analysis, etc.)?
- Will the reader be interested in the content of this specific text?
Step 4: Recommended Placement
## Step 4: Recommended Placement

**Lexile Text Measure:**

**ATOS Book Level:**

**Scholastic’s Book Wizard Level:**

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*Lexile Text Measure*

**The Day Jimmy’s Boa Ate the Wash**

*by Trinka Hakes Noble*  
*pictures by Steven Kellogg*  

- **Recommended Placement:**
  - **Lexile Text Measure:** AD 540 L  
  - **ATOS Book Level:** 2.2  
  - **Scholastic’s Book Wizard Level:** 3.7
Step 4: Recommended Placement

Template for Text Complexity Analysis and Recommended Placement Form:

Text Complexity Analysis of

Qualitative Measures

Levels of Meaning/Purpose:

Structure:

Language Conventionality and Clarity:

Knowledge Demands:

Quantitative Measures

Reader-Task Considerations

Recommended Placement
Text Complexity Analysis of *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

### Qualitative Measures

**Levels of Meaning/Purpose:**
The book has multiple levels of meaning. Set in Alabama, the female main character Scout Finch struggles to understand issues of race and prejudice when her lawyer father defends a black man accused of raping a white woman.

**Structure:**
Although the story has a largely simple structure with a straightforward writing style, several issues complicate the narration and structure. Scout's narration is as an adult reflecting back on a few pivotal years of her childhood; flashbacks are used throughout. And at several points it seems as though the narration is from the point of view of a less-reliable Scout still in her childhood.

**Language Conventionality and Clarity:**
The characters speak in easily readable, conversational language. Some slang is indicative of the time period in which the novel is set, and there is some dialect.

**Knowledge Demands:**
Higher level themes of justice, prejudice, and civil rights are implied. Thinking at deeper levels is required to contemplate the personal, moral, and ethical struggles of the characters as set against the culture and society of the time period.

### Quantitative Measures

The ATOS formula (used with the Accelerated Reader program) identifies this title as having a book level of 5.6. A Lexile measure for this novel is 870L. Although the Lexile and ATOS levels fall in the 4th-5th grade text complexity band, the complexity of the book's theme, the issue of rape, and the length of the book would indicate that higher level reading skills are necessary, along with a consideration for the maturity level of the reader regarding the book's subject matter.

### Reader-Tasks Considerations

These are to be determined locally with reference to such variables as a student's motivation, knowledge, and experiences as well as purpose and the complexity of the task assigned and the question posed. However, the complexity of the book's theme, the issue of rape, and the length of the book would indicate that higher level reading skills are necessary, along with a consideration for the maturity level of the reader regarding the book's subject matter.

Here in Kansas, educators might want to examine the following elements or issues: social and historical events of the late 50s, early 60s, and issues surrounding racial stereotyping and prejudice in the Deep South at this same time period.

### Recommended Placement

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is a Pulitzer prize winner. It is a classic, and many teaching resources are available online at various websites. Although the quantitative measures suggest placement in the 4th-5th grade level text complexity band, the qualitative measures and reader and task considerations suggest that the novel is best placed at the 9th-10th grade complexity band. The Common Core Standards Text Exemplars also places the novel in the 9th-10th grade complexity band.

Reviewed by Julie Aikins, Chanute USD 413, aikinsj@usd413.org 2/17/2011
Additional Resources for Text Complexity

Text Complexity Bookmarks

Additional Examples of Completed Final Recommendations

- Diamond Willow
- Hunger Games
- How to Steal a Dog
- Countdown
Reader and Task Assessment

YOU are the best judge of what you students can manage

Considerations such as:

• Motivation
• Knowledge and experience
• Purpose for reading
• Complexity of task assigned regarding text
• Complexity of questions asked regarding text
What big ideas SHOULD we take away, from the “Text Exemplar” List & the new Common Core?

- Begin NOW to bring more INFORMATIONAL text into your curriculum.

- Make an effort to “bridge the gap” for your students by making 20% of your classroom reading grade-level-challenging text or “stretch-text.”

- Be sure to offer an appropriate amount of “scaffolding” in order for students to be able to access this challenging text!
Questions to Focus Instruction

- What are the foundational reading skills students must master in order to be able to read books of increasing complexity?
- What motivational factors need to be considered to support children reading books in the higher end of their grade level complexity band?
- Why should teachers select books to read-aloud that are above the independent reading level of a child?
- Why is it important to develop a classroom library that offers books of various types and at various levels of complexity?
- How can children be supported to read increasingly more complex texts in their grade level complexity band?
- How can teachers determine text complexity for the students at the grade level they teach?
In sum . . .

All Teachers will need to
- Scaffold comprehension of increasingly Complex Texts
- Integrate Media Sources into instructional activities
- Support/monitor Informal Talk

ELA Teachers will need to
- Teach how a wide variety of genres fall into three big buckets: Expository, Persuasive, and Narrative

Science and History Teachers will need to
- Teach Reading and Writing strategies in their content areas explicitly
WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO NOW

• Take *Complexity Inventory* of what students are reading in each grade and make adjustments.

• Adjust balances of texts so students are exposed to:
  More informational text k-12 in and out of English classes
  More traditional narratives and poetry
  As much support use on grade/level text for instruction (with support).

• Ask students to stretch to read more complex texts—especially short texts—beyond their reading level (with support).
RESOURCES

http://parcconline.org/
So, Teachers...

We hope that helps take a little of the confusion and trepidation out of approaching the new Common Core standards and utilizing them in your own classes.

FEEL EMPOWERED!!!

And remember...
When determining whether a text is suitable for use in your class:

“Such assessments are best made by the teachers employing their professional judgment, experience, and knowledge of their students and the subject.”

Common Core State Standards for English, Appendix A, p. 4
SOURCES

www.webertube.com/download.php?key=b365664e3d91de9e9700


www.corestandards.org

www.schoolweb.dysart.org/