New York State Testing Program Common Core English Language Arts
Annotated Passages

With the adoption of the New York P–12 Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics, the Board of Regents signaled a shift in both instruction and assessment. Starting in the Spring 2013, New York State (NYS) began administering tests designed to assess student performance in accordance with the instructional shifts and the rigor demanded by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). To aid in the transition to new assessments, New York State has released a number of resources, including test blueprints and specifications, sample questions, and criteria for writing assessment questions. These resources can be found at [http://www.engageny.org/common-core-assessments](http://www.engageny.org/common-core-assessments).

New York State administered the ELA/Literacy and Mathematics Common Core tests in April 2014 and is now making a portion of the questions and passages from those ELA tests available for review and use. These released questions and passages will help students, families, educators, and the public better understand how tests have changed to assess the instructional shifts demanded by the Common Core and to assess the rigor required to ensure that all students are on track to college and career readiness.

**Annotated Passages Are Teaching Tools**

The released annotated passages herein are intended to help educators, students, families, and the public understand how the Common Core is different. The annotated passages demonstrate the rich, authentic, and complex texts necessary to support instruction and measurement of the knowledge, skills, and proficiencies described in the Common Core Learning Standards. These annotated passages are intended to illustrate how NYS uses quantitative metrics and qualitative rubrics to select and place passages for inclusion on the tests. In addition, the annotation can help educators understand in depth the text complexity demands that are a key requirement for growing students’ reading abilities as articulated by the Common Core.

**Passage selection for Common Core English Language Arts Assessments**

Selecting high-quality, grade-appropriate passages requires both objective text complexity metrics and expert judgment. For NYS Common Core English Language Arts Tests, both quantitative metrics and qualitative rubrics are used to determine the complexity of the texts and their appropriate placement within a grade-level ELA exam.

**Quantitative Measures of Text Complexity**

Quantitative measures of text complexity are used to measure aspects of text complexity that are difficult for a human reader to evaluate when examining a text. These aspects include word frequency, word length (number of characters per word), sentence length, and text cohesion. These aspects are efficiently measured by computer programs, and all of the measures listed below can be accessed for
free online. (For more information about these metrics, including how to access these measures online, please see http://achievethecore.org/page/642/text-complexity-collection.)

Based on research and the guidance of nationally-recognized literacy experts\(^1\), the following ranges for quantitative measures were used to guide initial passage selection to place a passage within a possible grade-level band for the Grades 3–8 exams. (Note: in instances where the quantitative measures do not place the text in the same grade level, the different grade bands resulting are noted and the selection process continues to the qualitative analysis.)

**Updated Text Complexity Grade Bands and Associated Ranges from Multiple Measures\(^2\)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Core Band</th>
<th>Degrees of Reading Power(^a)</th>
<th>Flesch-Kincaid(^3)</th>
<th>The Lexile Framework(^b)</th>
<th>Reading Maturity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Note in looking at all of these quantitative ranges, there are wide ranges within grade bands, and considerable degrees of overlap between the 3–8 grade bands. (See Appendix A of this document for tables visually representing this overlap for these readability metrics.) The overlap within and between grades reflects the range of developmental reading abilities in regards to various facets of literacy. Put simply, different types of texts, text structures, and language demands will challenge individual students within and between grades differently.

**Qualitative Measures of Text Complexity**

While quantitative text complexity metrics are a helpful start, they are far from definitive. Many aspects of writing cause text complexity metrics to produce flawed results. For example, a canonical high school-level novel such as John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* has a lexile level of 680, which would place it in the Grade 2–3 band. To account for these known shortcomings, qualitative measures are a

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\(^1\) Nelson, Jessica; Perfetti, Charles; Liben, David; and Liben, Meredith, “Measures of Text Difficulty: Testing Their Predictive Value for Grade Levels and Student Performance,” 2012.

\(^2\) The band levels themselves have been expanded slightly over the original CCSS scale that appears in Appendix A at both the top and bottom of each band to provide for a more modulated climb toward college and career readiness and offer slightly more overlap between bands. The wider band width allows more flexibility in the younger grades where students enter school with widely varied preparation levels. This change was provided in response to feedback received since publication of the original scale (published in terms of the Lexile® metric) in Appendix A.

\(^3\) Since Flesch-Kincaid has no ‘caretaker’ that oversees or maintains the formula, the research leads worked to bring the measure in line with college and career readiness levels of text complexity based on the version of the formula used by Coh-Metrix.
crucial complement to quantitative measures. In the Steinbeck example, a qualitative review reveals that even though the author uses short sentences and common words, the level of meaning in his novel, as well as the knowledge demands and emotional maturity required for comprehension, would make it more appropriate for use in a high school classroom.\(^1\)

Using qualitative measures of text complexity involves making an informed decision about the difficulty of a text in terms of one or more factors discernible to a human reader applying trained judgment to the task. The following passage annotations illustrate the application of a qualitative rubric based largely on the qualitative resources from PARCC and the SCASS rubrics from Student Achievement Partners. The qualitative criteria used in these rubrics and the qualitative rubric used for qualitative analysis by NYS uses four required qualitative factors and one optional qualitative factor. The rating on these criteria will result in an overall qualitative rating of the text along a continuum of readily accessible, moderately complex, and very complex.

These criteria are described below:

1. **Meaning (literary texts) or Purpose (informational texts).** Literary texts with a single and obvious level of meaning tend to be easier to read than literary texts with multiple levels of meaning (such as satires, in which the author’s literal message is intentionally at odds with his or her underlying message). Similarly, informational texts with an explicitly stated purpose are generally easier to comprehend than informational texts with an implicit, hidden, or obscure purpose.

2. **Text Structure.** Texts that are readily accessible within a grade-band tend to have simple, well-marked, and conventional structures, whereas very complex texts tend to have complex, implicit, and (particularly in literary texts) unconventional structures. Simple literary texts tend to relate events in chronological order, while complex literary texts make more frequent use of flashbacks, flash-forwards, and other manipulations of time and sequence. Simple informational texts are likely not to deviate from the conventions of common genres and subgenres, while complex informational texts are more likely to conform to the norms and conventions of a specific discipline.

3. **Language Features.** 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. The relative complexity of sentence structures is also an aspect of this criterion, with the presence of mostly simple sentences being an indication of a readily accessible text and the presence of many complex sentences with subordinate phrases and clauses being a feature of a very complex text.

4. **Knowledge Demands.** Texts that make few assumptions about the extent of readers’ life experiences and the depth of their cultural/literary and content/discipline knowledge are generally less complex than are texts that are written for a specific audience with a specific schema of knowledge on a topic.

5. **Optional Graphics.** Graphics elements that accompany the passages that are indicators of a readily accessible text can be images or features that are simple and/or supplementary images to the meaning of texts, with a primary focus being to orient the reader to the topic. Complex and detailed graphics

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\(^1\) See IV, #3 of Key Considerations in Implementing Text Complexity recommendations from the Supplemental Information for Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy: New Research on Text Complexity for more information about exceptions to using quantitative measures to place texts within grade bands.
and/or graphics whose interpretation is essential to understanding the text, and graphics that provide an independent source of information within a text are graphic features common to moderately and very complex texts.

**Passages in the classroom vs. Passages on a test.**

Passages serve different purposes depending on the context in which they are used. As stated in Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards, in an instructional context (including a student’s independent reading for the purpose of this discussion) there are aspects of individual readers that will impact comprehension—emotional maturity/thematic concerns, background knowledge, and motivations are some considerations that may impact understanding. Good instruction supports these individual aspects of comprehension in an effort to grow learning. In a summative assessment context, however, the task is considerably more constrained; the task is to determine the degree to which students can independently make meaning of texts. As such, there are no scaffolds, no opportunities for collaboration with peers, and no framing by adults before the student is accessing the content. In the testing context, students work independently to read the texts and answer questions that measure their abilities to make meaning of the texts and topics they are reading about. Using texts that are grade-level complex according to the CCSS helps to determine where the student is in terms of his/her pathway to college and career-readiness, and as such fulfills a crucial purpose of the Grades 3–8 ELA testing program.
Appendix A: Text Complexity Grade Ranges for Quantitative Measures

Table 1: Text Complexity Grade Ranges for Grades 3–8 as represented by Degrees of Reading Power® Metric

![Degrees of Reading Power Ranges](image1)

Table 2: Text Complexity Grade Ranges for Grades 3–8 as represented by Flesch-Kincaid® readability metric

![Flesch-Kincaid Ranges](image2)

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5 Since Flesch-Kincaid has no ‘caretaker’ that oversees or maintains the formula, the research leads worked to bring the measure in line with college and career readiness levels of text complexity based on the version of the formula used by Coh-Metrix.
Table 3: Text Complexity Grade Ranges for Grades 3–8 as represented by Lexile Framework®

![Lexile Ranges Diagram]

Table 4: Text Complexity Grade Ranges for Grades 3–8 as represented by Reading Maturity Matrix

![Reading Maturity Ranges Diagram]
In this fictionalized account of a real event, a group of Canadian climbers is stranded in France on a treacherous part of Mont Dax called the Slide. DeMaistre and Leval, two experienced climbers, have begun their rescue mission when they encounter a surprise.

Excerpt from *In Caverns of Blue Ice*

by Robert Roper

As DeMaistre edged out to his left, he felt the rock shift under his feet. This was some of that rotten, unstable rock for which Mont Dax is well known. It occurred to him that the covering of ice might actually work in their favor: to a certain extent it held the rocks in place, froze them solid to one another. As long as the sun didn’t melt the ice, the traverse they were on might be possible.

After half an hour of difficult, slippery climbing, DeMaistre reached the area directly under the Slide. The caves where the Canadians might be were above, forty yards straight up. But now he saw something that caused his blood to run cold. A hundred yards below and to the right, two climbers were clawing their way up a steep, icy stretch of the mountain wall.

“Who can that be?” he thought. “Who’d be so crazy as to come out today, when the rocks are covered with ice?”

Now Leval caught up with DeMaistre. He, too, noticed the climbers below them.

“Who can that be? Why, they’re completely mad, Jules! They’ll never make it—that part of the wall has never been climbed, as far as I know.”

As the two men watched, the two other climbers—Jean-Claude and Louise, of course—came to rest on a slanted ledge. Though DeMaistre recognized them now, he still couldn’t believe what he was seeing: his own children, aged fifteen and thirteen, climbing one of the most dangerous routes in the Alps. Even more astonishing, it was young Louise, not her older brother, who was leading on the rope. (She had taken over from Jean-Claude when, as had happened on Henry’s Hat, he reached a part of the cliff he couldn’t manage.) Louise, apparently, was the more agile of the two, better at keeping her balance on tiny, slippery footholds.

“Jules,” Leval whispered, “I’m afraid that those two youngsters are your own—”

“Yes, yes, I know. And please—don’t speak too loudly. You might startle them.”
After a short rest, the young climbers continued up. It was clear to DeMaistre that they were completely exhausted, that only a combination of fear and desperation was keeping them from falling off. Having come more than halfway up the mountain, they now realized that their only chance lay in making it to the top. To climb back down would have been harder—maybe impossible.

“When they reach that shattered boulder,” DeMaistre whispered, “I’m going to call out. But I’m going to speak calmly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world to run into them up here, on this terrible, icy face.”

When he saw Louise at the boulder, DeMaistre called down to his daughter. He asked her in a cheerful voice if she had remembered to bring him up some chocolate—he was getting hungry, he said, and it was still hours till dinnertime. At the sound of her father’s voice, an expression of fear, surprise, and deep relief crossed Louise’s face. Until that moment, she had believed that she would never see him again—that she and her brother were doomed to die on this terrible cliff, which they had mistakenly thought they could climb.

“Papa! Oh—Papa! I don’t know what to do! I’m so scared. And Jean-Claude has cut his hand badly, and we’re very tired. . . .”

Just then, Jean-Claude reached the boulder, too. DeMaistre could see that his hand was wrapped in a piece of bloody cloth. Jean-Claude was equally surprised to see his father above them—so surprised, that he almost lost his grip and fell.

“Careful!” his father shouted anxiously. “Quickly, tie yourselves in to the rock! I can’t believe you’ve climbed all this way without belaying. Be calm now; don’t do anything foolish, and I’m sure we’ll get out of this alive.”

When his two children were attached to the cliff, DeMaistre dropped a rope down to the shattered boulder. Then he carefully climbed down. He examined Jean-Claude’s hand. Two of the boy’s fingers looked broken, and there was a deep cut across the back of his hand.

“You’ll be all right,” he said. “But we have to keep climbing—on up to the caves. Think you can do it?”

“Y-y-yes,” Jean-Claude said uncertainly.

“You’ve done well so far. No one has ever climbed this route before, did you know that? But tell me: has Louise been leading the whole time? Or just since you hurt your hand?”

“Well . . . not quite the whole time,” the boy answered slowly. “There was a smooth patch of rock, you see, very icy and steep, and I had trouble getting up. Louise isn’t bothered by things like that. Oh, Papa—I’m so sorry! I don’t know why I did this crazy thing! I’ll never disobey you again, never! I promise!” And then he started to cry.
DeMaistre comforted his son, and he tied him on to his own climbing rope. He urged Jean-Claude to begin climbing to the higher ledge. The boy went at a painfully slow pace, but eventually he arrived. Then it was Louise's turn. She climbed much faster, with little show of difficulty.

“Very good,” their father called up. “Now follow Leval’s instructions. I’ll climb behind you, bringing the yellow rope.”

By slow, careful progress, the party made its way up. Just before dark they arrived at a tiny cave, so small that they couldn’t all squeeze into it together. DeMaistre had to spend the night outside, huddled on a ledge. The cave with the Canadians was just above, only about fifty feet away. However, neither party was aware of the other, and everyone passed a cold, uncomfortable night.
Grade 6
Title and Author: Excerpt from *In Caverns of Blue Ice* by Robert Roper  
Word count: 959

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative Analysis</th>
<th>Summary of Grade 6 Assessment Placement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Degrees of Reading Power (DRP):       | 53  
Overall rating: Readily Accessible  
This excerpt from *In Caverns of Blue Ice* is readily accessible for students in grade 6. The narrative is fast-paced and interesting; with dialogue that is engaging and clear. The exciting and suspenseful story (a father worried about his children scaling a mountain), and the inclusion of necessary background knowledge, create an engaging text for 6th grade. |
| Lexile:                               | 850  
Flesch-Kincaid: 4.9  
Reading Maturity Metric (RMM): 6.8 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Analysis LITERARY TEXT</th>
<th>Very Complex</th>
<th>Moderately Complex</th>
<th>Readily Accessible</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple levels of meaning that may be difficult to identify, separate, and interpret; theme is implicit, subtle, or ambiguous and may be revealed over the entirety of the text.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>In this narrative, suspenseful excerpt, the theme is clear and develops throughout the passage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Structure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prose or poetry contains more intricate elements such as, subplots, shifts in point of view, shifts in time, or non-standard text structures.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>The text structure is organized clearly and chronologically with a linear plot. It follows a storyline that builds and leaves the reader with suspense at the conclusion of the excerpt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Features</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language is generally complex, with abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language, and regularly includes archaic, unfamiliar, and academic words; text uses a variety of sentence structures, including complex sentences with subordinate phrases and clauses.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>The language is explicit and literal. The use of proper names in French, as well as, the variety of sentence structures, make this text moderately complex in terms of its language features.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Demands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The text explores complex, sophisticated, or abstract themes; text is dependent on allusions to other texts or cultural elements; allusions or references have no context and require inference and evaluation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>While it may helpful to have knowledge of rock and ice climbing, the story presents all the necessary information for students to understanding the main conflict and resolution of this excerpt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional Graphics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When graphics are present, the connection between the text and graphics is subtle and requires interpretation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Graphics support and assist in interpreting text by directly representing important concepts from the corresponding written text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Windblown

by Britt Norlander

When howling winds whip up in Earth’s largest deserts, it’s time to head for cover. Billowing gusts kick up sand, forming walls of fast-moving dust that can block the sun. “You can’t see anything that’s more than a few meters away,” says Joseph Prospero, an atmospheric chemist at Florida’s University of Miami, who studies dust storms.

Grains of sand pelt against your skin like thousands of piercing needles, and musty-smelling grit coats your mouth and nostrils. “The amount of dust that gets in the air feels suffocating,” says Prospero.

For people who live in and around the deserts along Earth’s midsection—such as Central Asia’s Gobi Desert and Africa’s Sahara Desert—dust storms frequently disrupt daily routines. “When a storm kicks up, you just have to go inside and wait it out,” says Prospero. But scientists have discovered that the effects of dust storms extend much farther than the deserts’ sandy borders.

Global winds lift dust from Asia and Africa and carry it to other continents thousands of miles away, including North America. Now, many scientists are concerned that the grimy visitor may be putting people and other organisms in danger. Hoping to learn more about the storms’ potential health risks, researchers are following the dust trails.

WORLD TOUR

During the Asian dust storm season—from March through May—winds frequently blow dust clouds eastward across the Pacific Ocean. In just a week, the dust can complete a journey from Asia, over the Pacific, and across the entire United States.

As Asia’s storms settle, windstorms begin kicking up dust in Africa’s deserts. Between May and October, African dust drifts westward across the Atlantic Ocean, making its way toward the southeastern coast of the U.S. and islands in the Caribbean Sea.

FOUL CLOUDS

The billows of traveling dust disrupt air quality—creating hazy skies along their routes. Eventually, the winds slow and can no longer keep the sandy particles airborne. The dust drops from the sky, depositing a gritty film on every exposed surface.

Studies have shown that this falling desert dust is actually an important nutrient for plants. “Researchers think that rain forests in the northern Hawaiian Islands are nurtured by Asian dust events,” says Dale Griffin, a microbiologist with the U.S. Geological Survey.
But the same falling dust that is welcomed by plants can cause health problems for humans and other animals that inhale it.

**HITCHHIKERS**

Many scientists are now concerned that dust storms are also carrying harmful chemical pollutants. In many areas around deserts, farmers sprinkle artificial herbicides and pesticides onto the soil. When that soil blows skyward, these dangerous chemicals can hitch a ride too.

By examining Asian dust that has been dumped on the U.S., scientists have also discovered that soot and other air pollutants can latch on to the particles. In New England, scientists analyzed the material left behind after dust from a Gobi Desert storm passed by in 2001. They discovered that the airborne particles contained the toxic gas carbon monoxide—probably emitted by a power plant in Asia. “As a dust storm generated in Asia passes over urban areas, polluted air gets mixed with the dust, and it all gets transported at the same time,” explains Robert Talbot, an atmospheric chemist at the University of New Hampshire.

**DRIED OUT**

Scientists believe that local sources of air pollution outweigh the input from foreign dust storms. But the amount of dust traveling across oceans—and the pollutants it carries—is growing. Today, an estimated 3 billion metric tons of dust blow around Earth each year. And, according to the United Nations Environmental Programme, dust storms in Northeast Asia have increased five fold in the last 50 years. Africa’s storms have also intensified over the last 30 years.

What’s to blame for the increase? Africa has been experiencing a drought, or period of time when there is unusually low rainfall. With less moisture weighing down the sand, it’s easier for strong winds to kick it up. And in some areas, humans may be partly to blame for the growing intensity of the dust storms. Overuse of water has drained lakes—leaving behind dusty holes. Plus, farmers sometimes cut down forests to plant crops, or they allow livestock to overgraze grasslands. “In areas where agriculture strips the protective vegetation from the surface of the soil, you can get a lot more dust moving,” says Prospero.

**CLEAN UP**

Better farming practices may keep more soil packed close to the ground. But, Griffin says, “You are never going to stop the dust storms. They have been occurring for billions of years.”

Still, scientists hope that by reducing worldwide pollution from sources like power plants and cars, the most negative impacts of the storms can be lessened. “There’s not much that humans can do to control the emissions [of dust] from a desert,” says Talbot. “But you can do something to reduce the emissions [of pollutants] in industrial areas.”
Two major global wind belts blow dust around Earth. Along the planet’s midsection, trade winds (examples shown above), blow from east to west while moving toward the equator. These winds propel dust from Africa across the Atlantic Ocean. At mid-latitudes, prevailing westerlies (examples shown above), travel from west to east while blowing toward Earth’s poles. Dust from Asia that gets caught in this wind pattern journeys to the U.S.
### Qualitative Analysis for INFORMATIONAL TEXT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Very Complex</th>
<th>Moderately Complex</th>
<th>Readily Accessible</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>The text contains multiple purposes, and the primary purpose is subtle, intricate, and/or abstract.</td>
<td>The primary purpose of the text is not stated explicitly, but is easy to infer based on the content or source. The text may include multiple perspectives.</td>
<td>The primary purpose of the text is clear, concrete, narrowly focused, and explicitly stated. The text has a singular perspective.</td>
<td>The text contains perspectives from a number of scientists. The purpose of the text is not stated explicitly, but it is accessible to students because of the text’s topic and organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text Structure</strong></td>
<td>Connections among an expanded range of ideas, processes, or events are often implicit, subtle, or ambiguous. Organization exhibits some discipline-specific traits. Text features are essential to comprehension of content.</td>
<td>Connections between some ideas, processes, or events are implicit or subtle; organization is generally evident and sequential; any text features help facilitate comprehension of content.</td>
<td>Connections between ideas, processes, and events are explicit and clear; organization is chronological, sequential, or easy to predict because it is linear; any text features help readers navigate content but are not critical to understanding content.</td>
<td>The organization is evident and sequential due to the headings and organization of information in each section. The map helps facilitate student comprehension of content, but it is not critical to understanding it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Features</strong></td>
<td>Language is generally complex, with abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language, and archaic and academic vocabulary and domain-specific words that are not otherwise defined; text uses many complex sentences with subordinate phrases and clauses.</td>
<td>Language is often explicit and literal, but includes some academic, archaic, or other words with complex meaning; text uses some complex sentences with subordinate phrases or clauses.</td>
<td>Language is explicit and literal, with mostly contemporary and familiar vocabulary; text uses mostly simple sentences.</td>
<td>The language is generally complex, with figurative language (“whip up,” dust “hitch[ing] a ride”); academic vocabulary (prevailing, intensified); and domain-specific words (westerlies, tradewinds, windbelts, overgraze) throughout. The text uses many complex sentences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge Demands</strong></td>
<td>The subject matter of the text relies on specialized, discipline-specific knowledge; the text makes many references or allusions to other texts or outside areas; allusions or references have no context and require inference.</td>
<td>The subject matter of the text involves some discipline-specific knowledge; the text makes some references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas; the meaning of references or allusions may be partially explained in context.</td>
<td>The subject matter of the text relies on little or no discipline-specific knowledge; if there are any references or allusions, they are fully explained in the text.</td>
<td>Although the text relies on some discipline-specific knowledge, it is balanced by sections that are more accessible and do not require outside knowledge for comprehension (paragraph 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Optional Graphics</strong></td>
<td>Graphics are essential to understanding the text; they may clarify or expand information in the text and may require close reading and thoughtful analysis in relation to the text.</td>
<td>Graphics are mainly supplementary to understanding the text; they generally contain or reinforce information found in the text.</td>
<td>Graphics are simple and may be unnecessary to understanding the text.</td>
<td>The graphic reinforces information found in the text and offers detailed and illustrative/supplementary information to the text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You hand the man your ticket. The round platform rocks slightly as you step onto it. Spying your favorite mighty steed, you rush toward it, weaving your way past the other horses. As you scramble into the sky-blue saddle, the bouncy cadence of the organ makes you smile. You hold on tightly to the shiny gold pole in front of you as your horse begins to move up and down, round and round. The world whirls around you, the horse galloping through it. What a wonderful ride!

You've probably ridden a carousel at least once, maybe many times. Did you ever wonder who decided to make pretend horses spin in a circle with people riding them? The origins of the carousel can be traced all the way back to games played on horseback by Arabian and Turkish men in the 1100s. In one game riders played catch with clay balls filled with scented oil or water. In another the men held a lance while riding and tried to run it through a small ring dangling by ribbons from a tree or pole. If a rider was successful, the ribbons would pull off the tree and stream behind the ring on his lance like a waving rainbow.

Hundreds of years later, Italian and Spanish travelers observed these games and brought them to Europe. The contests were called garosello by the Italians and carosella by the Spanish. Both words mean “little war.” The English word carousel comes from those words.

The first carousel-like contraption was created in France and was designed to help men practice for their “little war” games. It didn’t look as fancy as the carousels you see today, but the structure was similar. The umbrella-like construction had a wooden pole with spokes radiating from the top. Chains hanging from the spokes held carved wooden horses. Men, real horses, or mules turned the center pole while riders practiced putting their lances through a brass ring hanging to one side.

In the late 1700s carousels like the ones we know today began to appear throughout Europe. Rather than being used for training, these were enjoyed for the sheer thrill of the ride. In the beginning the carousel was ridden mostly by grownups, not children. Light and small, these first carousels were designed to be easily spun by man or mule.

Gustav Dentzel began building the first carousels in America in the 1860s. Powered by steam engines, these carousels moved faster and held more weight than the old model, allowing for a more lavishly decorated machine. Dentzel's company is famous for having carved and painted a variety of animals for his carousels, including cats, lions, ostriches,
pigs, rabbits, and even a kangaroo! For those who could not or did not want to straddle a horse or other animal, he created handsome chariots.

Remember the game of tilting a lance through a brass ring? The early carousel designers had this game in mind when they hung brass rings on a wooden arm next to many of their carousels. As the carousel turned, riders would try to grab the ring; if they succeeded, they won a free ride. Today you’d be lucky to find a carousel with a brass ring arm—only a handful in the United States still feature them.

Carousels were so popular that nearly 4,000 were built from 1860 to 1930. But when hard times came upon America during the Great Depression in the 1930s, few people had money to spend on extras. Many carousels stopped being used and fell into disrepair, and no one could afford to fix them. Some were even taken apart and put into storage.

These beautiful machines had nearly disappeared when, in the 1970s, people began to realize the importance of keeping the magic of the carousel alive for future generations. Enthusiasts formed the National Carousel Association and the American Carousel Society to raise money, restore, and preserve wooden carousels. Thanks to their efforts, today about 150 antique carousels are back in service.
Grade 6
Title and Author: *Ring of Horses* by Cindy Seiffert

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<tr>
<td>DRP: 61</td>
<td>Overall rating: Readily Accessible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lexile: 1020</td>
<td>This text is appropriate for use in a 6th grade assessment. The topic of how the carousel developed and its connection to horses and jousting should be interesting for students. The author's use of informal tone balanced with clear presentation of information makes this text thoughtfully engaging. Although the passage contains some sophisticated language and complex sentences, the vocabulary is presented with sufficient context to determine the meanings and the sentence structures are appropriate for 6th grade.</td>
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<td>Flesch-Kincaid: 8</td>
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Word count: 673