

Complexity of Reading Test Passages on EXPLORE[®], PLAN[®], and The ACT[®]: Sample Passages and Annotations

This document contains numerous sample passages from the EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT Reading Tests illustrating the range of text complexity represented in those programs. The passages are sorted first by testing program and then by complexity level.

The three complexity levels correspond to the levels found on ACT's College Readiness Standards for Reading, a copy of which is included at the end of this document. The reading standards include two three-point rubrics defining the relative complexity of literary narratives and informational passages found on the tests. Many of the reading skills represented in the standards are tied closely to a passage complexity level (for example, "Identify clear main ideas or purposes of complex passages or their paragraphs").

Annotations accompanying each of the passages in this document help explain why each passage is considered uncomplicated, more challenging, or complex. Six dimensions are represented in each passage's annotations:

- Relationships: Interactions among ideas or characters
- Richness: Amount and sophistication of information conveyed through data or literary devices
- Structure: How the text is organized and how it progresses
- Style: Author's tone and use of language
- Vocabulary: Author's word choice
- Purpose: Author's intent in writing the text

The following table relates each of the six dimensions to the three passage complexity levels:

Characteristics of Uncomplicated, More Challenging, and Complex Texts
on the EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT Reading Tests

Aspect of Text	Degree of Text Complexity		
	Uncomplicated	More Challenging	Complex
Relationships	Basic, straightforward	Sometimes implicit	Subtle, involved, deeply embedded
Richness	Minimal/limited	Moderate/more	Sizable/highly detailed sophisticated
Structure	Simple, conventional	More involved	Elaborate, sometimes unconventional
Style	Plain, accessible	Richer, less plain	Often intricate
Vocabulary	Familiar	Some difficult, context-dependent words	Demanding, highly context dependent
Purpose	Clear	Conveyed with some subtlety	Implicit, sometimes ambiguous

For more information on this subject, see the report *Reading Between the Lines: What the ACT Reveals About College Readiness in Reading*, available on ACT's Web site: <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/reports/reading.html>

Annotated Examples of Uncomplicated Texts Used on the EXPLORE Reading Test

Annotated Uncomplicated Text from the EXPLORE Reading Test (Prose Fiction)

PURPOSE; STRUCTURE; RICHNESS: The author's goal in the passage is to relate a straightforward scene using a conventional storytelling format.

STYLE: The author employs familiar storytelling conventions: characters, dialogue, suspense, and the like.

PROSE FICTION: This passage is adapted from John Steinbeck's novel *The Red Pony* (©1961, 1965 by John Steinbeck).

When the triangle sounded in the morning, Jody dressed more quickly even than usual. In the kitchen, while he washed his face and combed back his hair, his mother addressed him irritably. "Don't you go out until you get a good breakfast in you."

He went into the dining room and sat at the long white table. He took a steaming hotcake from the platter, arranged two fried eggs on it, covered them with another hotcake and squashed the whole thing with his fork.

His father and Billy Buck came in. Jody knew from the sound on the floor that both of them were wearing flat-heeled shoes, but he peered under the table to make sure. His father turned off the oil lamp, for the day had arrived, and he looked stern and disciplinary, but Billy Buck didn't look at Jody at all. He avoided the shy questioning eyes of the boy and soaked a whole piece of toast in his coffee.

Carl Tiflin said crossly, "You come with us after breakfast!"

Jody had trouble with his food then, for he felt a kind of doom in the air. . . . The two men stood up from the table and went out into the morning light together, and Jody respectfully followed a little behind them. He tried to keep his mind from running ahead, tried to keep it absolutely motionless.

His mother called, "Carl! Don't you let it keep him from school."

They marched past the cypress, where a singletree hung from a limb to butcher the pigs on, and past the black iron kettle, so it was not a pig killing. The sun shone over the hill and threw long, dark shadows of the tree and buildings. They crossed a stubble-field to shortcut to the barn. Jody's father unhooked the door and they went in. They had been walking toward the sun on the way down. The barn was black as night in contrast and warm from the hay and from the beasts. Jody's father moved over toward the one box stall. "Come here!" he ordered. Jody could begin to see things now. He looked into the box stall and then stepped back quickly.

A red pony colt was looking at him out of the stall. Its tense ears were forward and a light of disobedience was in its eyes. Its coat was rough and thick as an airedale's fur and its mane was long and tangled. Jody's throat collapsed in on itself and cut his breath short.

"He needs a good currying," his father said, "and if I ever hear of you not feeding him or leaving his stall dirty, I'll sell him off in a minute."

Jody couldn't bear to look at the pony's eyes any more. He gazed down at his hands for a moment, and he asked very shyly, "Mine?" No one answered him. He put his hand out toward the pony. Its gray nose came close, sniffing loudly, and then the lips drew back and the strong teeth closed on Jody's fingers. The pony shook its head up and down and seemed to laugh with amusement. Jody regarded his bruised fingers. "Well," he said with pride—"Well, I guess he can bite all right." The two men laughed, somewhat in relief. Carl Tiflin went out of the barn and walked up a side-hill to be by himself, for he was embarrassed, but Billy Buck stayed. It was easier to talk to Billy Buck. Jody asked again—"Mine?"

VOCABULARY: For the most part, the passage uses familiar words and phrases, although readers who don't know much about horses may not know what *currying* is (though the context does make clear that it's related to caring for the horse somehow).

RELATIONSHIPS: Motivations tend to be laid out explicitly, as when Carl "walked up a side-hill to be by himself" out of embarrassment. Still, readers need to infer why Carl would be embarrassed (perhaps because of the raw display of emotion).

STRUCTURE; PURPOSE: Although it conveys a fair bit of information about the candy bar, the passage uses the familiar format of narrative history to do it. Paragraphs tend to have clear topic sentences introducing them.

RICHNESS; STYLE: The author conveys a modest amount of information in the passage using an approach that requires relatively little inferring.

SOCIAL SCIENCE: This passage is adapted from Ray Broekel's article "Land of the Candy Bar" (©1986 by Forbes Inc.).

The candy bar as we know it was born in America. So too, many centuries earlier, was chocolate itself. Mexican natives cultivated the cocoa bean for more than twenty-five hundred years before Hernán Cortés took it to Spain with him in 1528. Spanish royalty drank a cold, sweetened beverage made from the beans, but they liked it so much they kept it a secret from the rest of Europe for the remainder of the century. Not until the 1840s did a British firm . . . make the first chocolate bar. The *candy* bar, agglomerating a variety of flavors and textures—almost always including chocolate—in one piece, was a purely American invention. . . .

VOCABULARY: *Agglomerating* is one of a few potentially challenging words in the passage, and even its meaning is clear from context (if not from the sound of the word itself).

Milton Snavely Hershey, the father of the modern candy bar, had already built a successful business in caramels when he first saw German chocolate-making machines at the 1893 Chicago world's fair. He ordered some for his factory in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and began turning out chocolate bars the next year. By the turn of the century he was through with caramels. He made not just plain chocolate and milk-chocolate bars but also innovative items like almond bars, kisses, and chocolate cigars. By 1911 his company had sales of five million dollars a year; by 1921 it was making four times that.

RELATIONSHIPS: It's clear from the rest of the paragraph why Hershey "was through with caramels" by around 1900: his new operation was so much more successful.

Such dazzling success begat swift competition, and soon a multitude of companies was making bars of chocolate combined with caramel, marshmallow, peanuts, crisped rice, and anything else that might sell. . . .

Throughout the first two decades of the century, a bewildering variety of candy bars appeared on shelves across the country, most of them fleetingly. There have probably been more than one hundred thousand different candy bars sold in the United States, including some thirty thousand that existed only in the years just after World War I. Nearly every confectioner in the land turned out a candy bar, choosing a name that might reflect a news or sports event, a popular hero, a food, a place, or even a popular saying of the age. . . .

The industry began on the East Coast but quickly fanned out across the country. Since the basic ingredients were dairy products, Chicago became the natural hub for candy bars, and Milwaukee and Minneapolis were major producers.

The Depression brought lean times to the candy-bar business, and not until the late 1930s did the industry begin to recover. When war struck again, the

makers of candy bars once more were pressed into service supplying the troops. Hershey made “field ration D,” a refined chocolate that didn’t melt at high temperatures, and it was packed in kits for soldiers, sailors, and Marines. On the home front, as the supply of chocolate dwindled, manufacturers struggled to concoct new bars from ingredients such as peanuts and marshmallows and gave them patriotic names like Torpedo.

If World War I made candy bars a major industry, World War II made them a worldwide symbol of America. The GI handing out candy bars to children came to stand for liberation everywhere. Hershey bars became an international wartime currency.

Annotated Examples of More Challenging Texts Used on the EXPLORE Reading Test

Annotated More Challenging Text from the EXPLORE Reading Test (Prose Fiction)

STRUCTURE: The lack of quotation marks may cause some initial confusion, as this deviates from typical practice.

PROSE FICTION: This passage is adapted from the novel *Ellen Foster* by Kaye Gibbons (©1987 by Kaye Gibbons).

I already knew everything I planned to say to my new mama.

Ever since I saw her at church I rehearsed what I would say and a variety of answers she might give me. I just hoped I had made a good impression when she spotted me at church. I had on the same clothes and my hair bangs were stuck down the best I could manage with just spit to work with. She's bound to recognize me I thought. I am not just a face in the crowd.

So I stood in front of her house with my box and tried not to think about where I would go if she said she had a house full of girls already. And I decided that if she turned me down I would just have to give up. I racked my head trying to think of another place but I was fresh out of folks. There was always Julia and Roy but I was too wore out to track them down.

I saw her girls moving around inside the house. They had the curtains pulled back and I could see her girls milling around. . . .

I thought that house could try out for a greeting card. Merry Christmas from the Fosters! it might say.

And I said then Ellen you can stand out here and freeze or you can knock on her door. So I went ahead and . . . knocked. . . .

She came to the door and there I was. I tried my best to look proud.

She asked me more questions right off than I could answer. Like are you cold? Are you hungry? Where did you come from? Would you like to come inside? What's your name? Why are you outside? Were you in an accident? Who are you?

I said to myself she is really interested in me.

I started out by saying I would like to come in and no I have not been in a accident. I came here by myself. I mean to be here.

I went in her house that smelled like a Christmas tree and I saw fruit laying all around in bowls. And somebody fried a chicken in this house yesterday. I could smell that separate from the Christmas tree scent and I wondered if they had any wings or thighs left in the refrigerator.

STRUCTURE; PURPOSE: Readers are left in suspense about why the narrator is seeking a "new mama" until near the end of the passage. This suspense helps pull readers through the narrative, but it means that many of their questions won't get answered right away.

STYLE; VOCABULARY: The author uses familiar words, but the diction is surprisingly formal. While the narrator is a young girl, she speaks more like an adult (which the passage suggests she's had to become, owing to her circumstances).

Why don't you come back here and warm up? Come on back to my room she said to me and then she yelled for Stella to take my box for me. Stella and the other girls had the parades turned up loud and they were sprawled out on the floor relaxing like you are supposed to do on Christmas Day.

I followed her back to her room and took off my coat.

And she noticed my dress right away.

What a pretty dress! she said. You sure are mighty spiffed up to be out walking on Christmas. Tell me honey. Did you run away?

I told her I did not. I am not in trouble I said but I do need a place to stay. What do you think of me staying here?

Well I've had some pretty unusual requests before but this is the strangest yet. I need to find out who you are and a few other things like your parents' names. Are you sure you didn't run away from home? I bet your mom and dad are pretty worried about you right now.

No they aren't. They are both dead and I have just been thrown out of my aunt's house. You might know her. Nadine Nelson. But it is no use to call her and ask her to come fetch me back. She told me flat out to leave.

Well how did you know to come here?

Last Sunday at church I saw you and your girls and I asked Dora who you were. She told me and I figured since you already had some girls about my size that you might be able to squeeze me in.

RELATIONSHIPS; RICHNESS: Readers must read carefully to assess the attitude of the woman who speaks to the narrator. The woman is sympathetic to the narrator but also perplexed by the request and unwilling to accept the narrator's story without some probing.

PURPOSE: Though lacking an explicit thesis statement, the passage is consistently focused on the introduction of starlings into the United States.

SOCIAL SCIENCE: This passage is adapted from Jake Page's article "Fly away, fly away, fly away home" (©1990 by the Smithsonian Institution).

Officially they are called "European starlings," with a fitting scientific name: *Sturnus vulgaris*. They are one of the most successful birds in the world. There are an estimated 600 million of them on the globe, of which one-third inhabit North America. The United States houses about three starlings for every house cat. A century ago there were no starlings here. Like most of us they are recent immigrants. In 1890, a lunatic (we can now say for certain) named Eugene Schieffelin brought 80 of the birds to this country from Europe and on March 6 released them in Central Park in New York City. He released 40 more in April 1891. There is a rumor that Schieffelin had devised a crazed scheme to introduce into this country all the birds mentioned in the works of Shakespeare. . . . By 1891 twenty starlings had made it to Staten Island. In 1896 they were in Brooklyn, and two years later they were on their way in all directions. . . .

Bird people began to look upon the starling with wariness. In 1917, ornithologist Edward Howe Forbush wrote: "As undesirable qualities are often accentuated when a bird is introduced into a new country, we cannot view the introduction of the starling without some apprehension." Referring to the bird's "general fitness for the battle of life," Forbush insightfully pointed out that the starling thrives especially in cultivated lands, and that in Europe it had had thousands of years to adapt to such places as well as to the propinquity of large numbers of people, while the native American songbirds with whom the starling was already seen to be competing had had only a couple of centuries of such learning conditions. . . .

By 1959, the same year that Alaska was admitted to the Union, there were starlings in San Diego: Manifest Destiny for starlings, achieved in a mere 69 years. Today, from Alaska to northern Mexico, there is hardly a place they do not go, even the beach. They are often found in the company of grackles, blackbirds and other avian lowlifes. In March, hundreds, even thousands of members of this demimonde gather in the skeletal trees around my house and in the pasture, jostling and shrieking, suddenly to gust up and swarm in the air like insects, only to settle down in other trees nearby as the unmusical chorus continues. . . .

Some experts say that starlings actually provide great benefit from the "economic" standpoint. The chief enemy of the clover weevil, they also serve to control cutworms and Japanese beetles (another import). Half their diet is insects of one sort or another, mostly ground-dwelling insects, but they will pick off the occasional wasp or bee as well. Thus, they are said to be the farmer's friend. But you can have, at any given moment, too many friends around. When a flock

← **RICHNESS:** Though the passage is not primarily focused on statistics, this section adds a degree of reading challenge.

← **STRUCTURE:** The passage blends factual information about starlings with some narrative historical elements, such as the story of Eugene Schieffelin, the "lunatic" who introduced starlings into the United States.

← **STYLE:** The quotation from Edward Howe Forbush is, on its own, somewhat difficult to read, but the author leads into it with an easier-to-follow paraphrase.

← **VOCABULARY:** Several likely-to-be-unfamiliar words are used by the author, including *propinquity* and, later, *demimonde*.

← **RELATIONSHIPS:** The claim that "you can have, at any given moment, too many friends around" is a fairly subtle way of saying that if starlings are the farmer's friend, the farmer doesn't need enemies.

of starlings, sometimes numbering in the tens of thousands, swarms into a cherry orchard or vineyard and methodically takes the entire season's fruit crop, the farmer or vintner would probably prefer the mercies of a few enemies.

Annotated Examples of Uncomplicated Texts Used on the PLAN Reading Test

Annotated Uncomplicated Text from the PLAN Reading Test (Humanities)

STRUCTURE; STYLE: The passage's mode switches from primarily descriptive (in the first paragraph) to primarily narrative—two familiar forms. In both modes, the author is direct and explicit in making most of his points; relatively little has to be inferred by readers.

VOCABULARY: The passage uses few if any words or phrases likely to be unfamiliar to readers.

HUMANITIES: This passage is adapted from N. Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (©1969 by the University of New Mexico Press).

A single knoll rises out of the plain in Oklahoma, north and west of the Wichita Range. For my people, the Kiowas, it is an old landmark, and they gave it the name Rainy Mountain. The hardest weather in the world is there. Winter brings blizzards, hot tornadic winds arise in the spring, and in summer the prairie is an anvil's edge. The grass turns brittle and brown, and it cracks beneath your feet. There are green belts along the rivers and creeks, linear groves of hickory and pecan, willow and witch hazel. At a distance in July or August the steaming foliage seems almost to writhe in fire. Great green and yellow grasshoppers are everywhere in the tall grass, popping up like corn to sting the flesh, and tortoises crawl about on the red earth, going nowhere in the plenty of time. Loneliness is an aspect of the land. All things in the plain are isolate; there is no confusion of objects in the eye, but one hill or one tree or one man. To look upon that landscape in the early morning, with the sun at your back, is to lose the sense of proportion. Your imagination comes to life, and this, you think, is where Creation was begun.

I returned to Rainy Mountain in July. My grandmother had died in the spring, and I wanted to be at her grave. She had lived to be very old and at last infirm. Her only living daughter was with her when she died, and I was told that in death her face was that of a child.


I like to think of her as a child. When she was born, the Kiowas were living that last great moment of their history. For more than a hundred years they had controlled the open range from the Smokey Hill River to the Red, from the headwaters of the Canadian to the fork of the Arkansas and Cimarron. In alliance with the Comanches, they had ruled the whole of the Southern Plains. War was their sacred business, and they were among the finest horsemen the world has ever known. But warfare for the Kiowas was preeminently a matter of disposition rather than of survival, and they never undertook the grim, unrelenting advance of the U.S. Cavalry. When at last, divided and ill-provisioned, they were driven onto the Staked Plains in the cold rains of autumn, they fell into panic. In Palo Duro Canyon they abandoned their crucial stores to pillage and had nothing then but their lives. In order to save themselves, they surrendered to the soldiers at Fort Sill and were imprisoned in the old stone corral that now stands as a military museum. My grandmother was spared the hu-

RICHNESS; VOCABULARY: Though evocative, the author's description of the Rainy Mountain country relies mainly on homely images and simple figurative language: Grass is "brittle" and "brown" and it "cracks"; tortoises "crawl about on the red earth."

PURPOSE: Although the purpose is never directly stated, it's made fairly clear in the second paragraph: the author has returned to Rainy Mountain (prompting the description of the country) to visit the grave of his recently deceased grandmother (prompting the narration of the history of the Kiowas and his desire to place her within that history).

miliation of those high gray walls by eight or ten years, but she must have known from birth the affliction of de-feat, the dark brooding of old warriors.

Her name was Aho, and she belonged to the last culture to evolve in North America. Her forebears came down from the high country in western Montana nearly three centuries ago. They were a mountain people, a mysterious tribe of hunters whose language has never been positively classified in any major group. In the late seventeenth century they began a long migration to the south and east. It was a journey toward the dawn, and it led to a golden age.



RELATIONSHIPS: The grandmother's connection to the Kiowas is stated directly.

PURPOSE: The author's clear intent in the passage is to explore and lament the challenges associated with being a First Woman and to express appreciation for First Women.

STYLE: The author uses a conversational, forceful style, combining humor with serious points in a way designed to appeal to readers.

STRUCTURE: The passage is written in a conventional opinion-piece style.

SOCIAL SCIENCE: This passage is adapted from an essay by Ellen Goodman that appeared in *Keeping in Touch* (©1985 by The Washington Post Company).

Twenty years ago, when Valentina Tereshkova went into space, she was followed by an appalling trail of words. The Russians' "smiling cosmonette" and "dimpled space sister" had "her feminine curves hidden in a clumsy space suit." You get the idea.

Sally Ride, in turn, suffered some before she went up in the Challenger. Johnny Carson quipped that the launch was being postponed until Sally could find the purse to match her shoes. A *Time* magazine writer asked if she wept when things went wrong.

By lift-off, however, the media were just about as (1) tamed, (2) repressed, or (3) enlightened as we could have hoped. Indeed, it was Sally Ride's name which seemed to provide more twists, puns, and plays on words for headline writers than her sex. To wit: "Ride, Sally Ride," "Sally Rides High," and "Sally's Joy Ride."

Still, what we are witnessing is a classic case of First Womanitis, a social disease that comes with prolonged exposure to the spotlight. Sally Ride, First American Woman in Space, is taking this trip right into history while her male companions are destined for the trivia shows.

She is also, like it or not, joining a large sorority whose ranks include Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman to be graduated from an American medical school, in 1849, and Ruth Wilson, the first woman hired as a street cleaner by the Philadelphia Sanitation Department, in 1976.

When all is said and done, Sally Ride is just another First Woman.

Ride is luckier than many of the others in this sorority. People are rooting for her, rather than against her. But the initiation rites are by now familiar.

As a First Woman, she is watched and called upon to explain her very existence in a way that her co-travelers are not. She is asked opinions on everything "female"—from fashion to feminism—and everyone offers opinions about her from her fashions to her feminism.

RICHNESS: While numerous names and accomplishments are listed here and throughout the passage, the point is always to identify First Women.

RELATIONSHIPS: The author makes clear that Sally Ride is a First Woman, in most ways like other First Women before her.

Nearly all of the select have felt this glare of extra-ordinariness, even in their more earthly pursuits. Nearly all of them have sighed, at some moment, as Ride did, “It may be too bad that our society isn’t further along and that this is such a big deal.”

But most First Women share something else: a special conflict. There is the desire to be accepted as a self-made woman, a person who was and is judged on individual merit. There is the realization that each carries a load of other women’s frustrations and hopes.

Ride has borne the disappointments of women such as those would-be astronauts of 1961, the dozen whose space futures were canceled out because “the times” were not ripe. She has also taken on the hopes of a generation of young girls in search of heroines. When it all gets to be too much, she flips “the switch marked ‘oblivious.’” Maybe First Women wear that switch like a sorority pin.

In any case, Ride is now initiated. She’s learned the rules. Being a full-fledged First Woman means carrying your self as a second job. Being a First Woman means taking every step for womankind. It’s not easy, but the company is fine.

VOCABULARY: From the context of the passage, it’s easy to infer that that when the author says “the company is fine,” she’s expressing admiration for the achievements and perseverance of First Women.

Annotated Examples of More Challenging Texts Used on the PLAN Reading Test

Annotated More Challenging Text from the PLAN Reading Test (Prose Fiction)

STRUCTURE; RELATIONSHIPS: Readers may face some challenge trying to understand the shifting time frame and the finer details of the relationship between the mother and father, but the strong, skillful narrative voice binds the passage together.

PURPOSE; RICHNESS: Though its main purpose is to tell a story about the narrator's parents, the passage also contains a good deal of background information about Holland, Pakistan, England, and America at midcentury.

PROSE FICTION: This passage is adapted from "The Color of the Lahore Sky," a short story by Sorayya Y. Khan (©1995 by the Kenyon Review).

A few years after he boarded the plane in Pakistan, my father met my mother in America. Until they met, my mother thought of 1955 as the tenth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, and my father considered it only as the eight-year marker since Partition (separation of Pakistan from India) and the birth of Pakistan. She was not as far away from home as he was, but the stretch of ocean she had sailed on from Holland to America often seemed that far to her. Surviving World War II had left her with a life to live, but also furnished her with an imagination that could conjure up visions at the least bit of notice. She had learned this skill lying in bomb shelters, trying to think over the sound of planes and gunfire. It was in those moments that she began to dream of being somewhere else, of leaving the old country for the new one. What she most looked forward to was leaving behind the reminders of war, the skeletons of buildings, and moving to a new city where everything was peaceful, where buildings stood tall and sported panes of clean and unbroken glass, and the people who worked in them took it all for granted. It was ten years before she brought herself to the new country, the time it took for her to grow from a child to an adult, witness her father abandon his family, and care for her mother confined to a hospital bed. Although the new country was as she had supposed, by then her need to imagine had become a habit that would not be quieted. She often thought of home, and when she took her break at work she imagined the nurse washing her mother's hair, turning her over, and drawing the curtains, all before the morning sun rose over Amsterdam.

← **VOCABULARY:** The potentially unfamiliar term *Partition* is glossed in the passage.

← **STYLE:** The style of the passage is literary and somewhat elevated. Though approachable, the passage pushes readers to visualize, for instance, a city untouched by war or the mother's own mother being cared for by a nurse.

But she occupied herself with different worlds as well, ones far away from her, worlds that had created the paintings her grandmother had hung in her room and the music her grandfather picked out on instruments accumulated in his travels. It was then that she met my father and found in him a companion to share in fact and dreams the places she had never been. Later, my mother said it was as if my father gave life to a part of her she did not know she had.

There were stories, though, many of which she could scarcely grasp. My father described the English to her, what it had been like (as a Pakistani living under

rule of the British Empire) to sing “God Save the King” every morning before school and in the mandatory school prayer, give thanks to the Empire for the schools and the roads they had brought to his land.

They laughed together at the absurdities, but in her heart my mother could not reconcile the England she had seen, the dark, stricken country that had suffered as much as her own, with what she heard. It was similar to the way she had felt when her grandfather spoke to her in the shelter above the noise of bombing raids, and he described Indonesia to her, the markets, the sand on beaches that he thought should glow in the night. My mother told my father she would take him to England one day and show him what she meant. He promised he would take her to Pakistan, and then, without saying that this is what they were doing, they began to plan what would become a lifetime together.



RICHNESS; RELATIONSHIPS: The narrator conveys the mother and father’s attitude toward British colonial rule with some subtlety. While the mother and father agree about “the absurdities,” the mother’s take on England and the English is in other ways different from that of the father.

RELATIONSHIPS; STRUCTURE: The back-and-forth, supporters-say-this-opponents-say-that approach makes it somewhat challenging to keep track of the perspective and to locate the author's own position on the subject.

SOCIAL SCIENCE: This passage is adapted from the essay "Radiant Grub" by Michael Castleman (©1993 by Sierra Magazine).

Food irradiation, say its advocates, may save your life. No, say its detractors, it just might kill you. With contradictory claims like these flying around, it's time to look at the facts behind this blessing . . . or curse.

STYLE: The author tries to catch readers' interest with punchy language, such as the claim that irradiated food "just might kill you."

First, while irradiation does chemically alter food, it absolutely does not make that food radioactive. The exposure to cobalt 60 for up to an hour kills bacteria, insects, and molds. These bugs are responsible for at least 10 million cases of food poisoning and 9,000 deaths in the United States each year. Advocates of food irradiation say that the process would make food poisoning a thing of the past, without affecting food quality or endangering workers or the public. In addition, they assure us, irradiation would eliminate the need to apply pesticides after harvest.

Opponents answer that food irradiation solves one set of problems only to confront us with another. Nuking our burgers and beets is not the only way to guarantee food safety. Spices, which are often riddled with insects and microbes, can be treated with a chemical fumigant. And in Sweden, for example, *Salmonella* poisoning has been largely eliminated by decontaminating chicken feed, rat-proofing chicken farms, and tightening up hygiene standards at chicken-processing plants.

Everyone agrees that irradiation destroys some nutrients, and everyone applies an appropriate spin. Critics call the nutritional loss degradation of the food supply; advocates say that plain old cooking has similar effects. (Cooking irradiated food, like cooking any processed food, would impose a double whammy.)

VOCABULARY: Some potentially unfamiliar words, phrases, and concepts pop up—for example, "degradation of the food supply" and, later, "blue-sky promises."

When it comes to potential problems for diners, each side presents data to support its case. Proponents of irradiation cite a British study in which 2,000 mice—and 40 generations of their offspring—were fed only irradiated food. The mice remained "normal in every respect," according to one researcher. But opponents point to a U.S. Army/Department of Agriculture study showing that mice fed irradiated chicken had unexpectedly brief lives and were more likely to develop tumors.

RICHNESS: Data are sprinkled here and throughout the passage. While none of the details is all that complicated on its own, the cumulative effect on readers is of being presented with a rush of information.

The controversy extends to the irradiation facilities themselves. Advocates of the process point out that the United States already has 40 problem-free sites quite similar to irradiation plants, where about half of the nation's surgical instruments are sterilized. Critics note that blue-sky promises regarding the safety of irradiation sound painfully like the promises heard in the 1950s about the peaceful atom and clean nuclear power. Supporters insist that cobalt 60, the most commonly

used radiation source, is largely recyclable and can be transported safely; opponents reply that promoters of nuclear power also dismissed concerns about nuclear waste, and now spent fuel is an enormous problem.

Food irradiation is likely neither as wonderful as its backers claim, nor as heinous as its critics charge. Rather than let each side go on ad nauseam, we must push federal policymakers to answer the two most basic questions: Is food irradiation safe? And is it really necessary?

PURPOSE: The author ends the passage with a plea to stop the debating and get down to hard science.

Annotated Examples of Complex Texts Used on the PLAN Reading Test

Annotated Complex Text from the PLAN Reading Test (Humanities)

STRUCTURE; PURPOSE: The passage, a review of the book *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, is, like most reviews, a hybrid—part plot summary, part commentary on the work and the author, part effort to place the work into a larger context. While it appears at first that the passage will be a personal essay, the introduction serves mainly as an enticing lead-in to an analytical discussion of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*.

HUMANITIES: This passage is adapted from the essay “This Tree Still Grows in Brooklyn,” Robert Cornfield’s reappraisal of Betty Smith’s 1943 best-selling novel *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (©1999 by The New York Times Company).

When I was young I avoided *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, though I always liked the 1945 film adaptation, its plot reworked intelligently by the novelist and screenwriter Tess Slesinger and her husband, Frank Davis, who sharpened the character of the mother and shortened the time frame. It was a girl’s book, and I preferred the swashbuckling novels of Rafael Sabatini and books about collies or German shepherds. From them I moved on to *Look Homeward, Angel* and never returned to “adolescent” literature. I’ve come late to *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, and though its intense study of a mother-daughter relationship still categorizes it as a “girl’s book,” I was wrong to hold out. But then again maybe the book has grown better since its first appearance. Some books do.

Certainly, the novel has grand ambitions. It is nothing less than a portrait of the artist as a young girl, and Betty Smith set out not only to record a young life but to show where a writer’s ambition and will come from. It is a story of triumph over adversity. Francie, ridiculed, betrayed by her first love, trusts her imagination to save her. Francie’s teacher advises her to burn her essays about poverty and starvation and instead to write of “the true nobility of man.” *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* is Francie’s revenge. Yet the mean social existence she dramatizes is countered by Francie’s family inheritance. Francie’s illiterate maternal grandmother instructs Katie, Francie’s mother, in what will make for success in America: the children must know how to read and write, and they must believe in heaven so they will have something to hope for; every day read them one page of the Bible and Shakespeare, and put money in a tin can nailed to the floor so that one day you will own some property.

The book is a social document with the power of Jacob Riis’s photographs. It gives the detail that illuminates the past—the coffee pot, the air shaft, the barber’s cup. But it is the book’s emotional life that has kept it in print. Though the recording angel, its center of consciousness, is Francie, the dramatic center is Katie, filled with ambivalences that will determine the lives of her children. The study of Katie is bold, deadly, without sentiment. Smith’s achievement is to make this woman’s steely resolve, her fierce sense of

RELATIONSHIPS: Part of the challenge of reading the passage is handling the comparison between the film and print versions of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, both of which may well be unfamiliar to readers.

RICHNESS: Readers have to process a great deal of information about a book they may well not have read (or a movie they may well not have seen). Even the plot summary in the second paragraph is intricately laid out, with complicated concepts such as “*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* is Francie’s revenge.”

STYLE; RELATIONSHIPS: The diction is elevated, and the ideas presented are abstract. While the passage’s author is direct in his assertions, he also uses intricate language, sophisticated sentence structure, and potentially unfamiliar allusions, such as his comparison of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* to Jacob Riis’s photographs.

reality, her struggle with her own character, not only comprehensible but admirable.

The book's determination to fill in all the details, to get everyone and everything in, and to follow its heroine through adolescence, leaves it shaggy—the movie does a firm editing job on its dutifulness. But Smith has a treasure lode and she knows it—and in this one book she gives all of it away. The intensity of her recall provides the book with its graceless but sincere sentiment and style. Smith wrote that one book we each have in us, and hers remains the most telling Brooklyn novel, our best depiction of the city's poor at the turn of the century. It is the Dickensian novel of New York that we didn't think we had.

PURPOSE: It requires careful reading even to be sure that the passage's author is lavishly praising *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. The last paragraph makes this even trickier to see, as it notes a weakness in the book.

STYLE: The academic style and tone of the passage are meant to convey information, not to entertain or (particularly) to engage readers' interest.

SOCIAL SCIENCE: This passage is adapted from *Nomads of the Wind: A Natural History of Polynesia* by Peter Crawford (©1993 by Peter Crawford).

The slow but persistent rising of the sea in relation to the land was a powerful factor in the spread of the ancestral Polynesian people across Southeast Asia and into the western Pacific. The last Ice Age reached its peak 17,000 years ago. As ice caps locked up more and more of the planet's water supply in vast mile-deep ice sheets, the seas of the world dropped in level. At the height of the glaciation, all the oceans were nearly 400 feet lower than they are today. Although the Ice Age climate did not markedly lower air and water temperatures in the tropics, it did dramatically change the size and shape of tropical islands. Many of them were substantially larger than they are today; others that had been submerged coral reefs in warmer epochs now stood high and dry as islands in their own right. Throughout the western Pacific, the entire geography was changed by the lowering of the seas. During that period many plant and animal species increased their range by island-hopping between specks of land that have now disappeared again beneath the rising sea.

When the great thaw eventually came, about 15,000 years ago, the melting ice caps and glaciers released vast quantities of water. Century after century, as the global climate warmed, the oceans rose.

The process was not a steady one. Six or seven thousand years ago there was a marked surge in global temperatures which led to the final melting of the great ice cap that had covered much of North America. Sea levels rose dramatically during that era, causing extensive flooding in many parts of the world. The warm era lasted almost 2,500 years and for a time, the world sea level was six or seven feet higher than it is today.

Imagine the effects of all this on people who were living as fishermen in the coastal areas of Southeast Asia. For generations they had earned a living catching fish in the shallow waters of a sprawling archipelago that would eventually be transformed into the South China Sea. Year by year the ocean continued to rise, drowning the land they had cultivated for their root crops and forcing them to move on in search of safer places to rebuild their settlements. The Asian mainland was already heavily populated by other Asian peoples whose civilizations were well established. The coastal fishermen had only one option. They took to their boats and relied on their seagoing skills.

Rapidly, groups of these people moved through the ever-changing island world of Southeast Asia, nomadically making a living wherever they could. Some built settlements and traded with the other tribes. They exchanged their fish and pottery for the wild and cultivated produce of the islands' interiors. Others

RELATIONSHIPS; RICHNESS: A discussion of the process and effects of expanding and receding glaciers complicates the first three paragraphs. In describing the sequence of events, the author provides a number of dates and figures.

VOCABULARY: The author introduces some demanding terms and concepts, such as species *increas[ing] their range*.

STRUCTURE; PURPOSE: After the opening sentence of the passage, readers must wait until the start of the fourth paragraph to return to the main subject: how the ancient Polynesian people were affected by rising waters.

VOCABULARY: The term *root crops* is never defined by the passage; readers who don't know what such crops are must infer from context that they were vital to the Polynesians.

sailed on eastward, in search of a homeland of their own. In the course of a few hundred years, these people developed a distinct voyaging culture as they moved from island to island, fishing the sea and gleaning the land.

Annotated Examples of Uncomplicated Texts Used on the ACT Reading Test

Annotated Uncomplicated Text from the ACT Reading Test (Prose Fiction)

STRUCTURE: The passage uses a familiar first-person narrative form. Three major events are depicted—the narrator falling, the grandfather and his men building the basketball hoops, and the narrator constructing shelves—all of which are directly tied into and illustrate the theme.

PROSE FICTION: This passage is adapted from the title story of *Only the Little Bone*, a collection of short stories by David Huddle (©1986 by David Huddle).

My grandfather has made crutches for me. These are sturdy crutches, just the right size. I am delighted with them and launch myself around the house on them.

And take a fall immediately. And continue falling several times a day, great splatting, knocking-into-furniture-and-breaking-things falls that cause everyone in the family to come running. My grandfather has forgotten to put rubber tips on the ends of my crutches. When we figure this out and buy the rubber tips and put them on the crutches, I stop falling. But by then the bone-set that was coming along nicely has slipped, and the doctor has ordered me back to the wheelchair.

The missing crutch-tips are the first clue I have to this peculiar family trait, one that for lack of any better term I must call “flawed competence.” We Bryants are a family of able and clever people, industrious, intelligent, determined, and of good will. We are careful in our work. After all, my grandfather measured me on two occasions before he made the crutches. But we usually do something wrong.

Four years later I become increasingly aware of “flawed competence” when I develop a plan for converting our old grown-over tennis court into a basketball court. My grandfather is always interested in plans, and in this planning session, we decide that he will make the hoops, and he will help me make the backboards. Clearing the ground and smoothing the surface will be my tasks. So I rip out honeysuckle and hatchet down a few little scrub cedars. We Bryants are known for setting our minds to things.

Then my grandfather delivers the hoops. They are beautifully designed and constructed, metalwork of a high order for such amateurs as my grandfather and his men. But the hoops are twice as big around as ordinary basketball hoops.

I say, simply, that they are too big. I am not ungrateful, not trying to be hateful, not in my opinion being overly fastidious. I am simply describing a characteristic of the hoops. But my grandfather’s feelings are damaged. No, they can’t be made smaller, and no, he’s not interested in helping me with the backboards now or with any other part of my plan. He’s sorry he got involved in the first place. This, too, is a corollary

VOCABULARY; STYLE: The story in the passage is told in a straightforward, accessible way with few challenging words or phrases. The two concepts introduced—*flawed competence* and *diminished excellence*—are clearly defined by the narrator.

RICHNESS: The narrative makes little use of literary devices or subtlety; ideas and concepts are expressed directly in everyday language.

PURPOSE: The clear purpose of the passage is to tell an entertaining story about the narrator and the narrator’s family. The theme of the passage is made explicit in the third paragraph, in which the narrator describes the concept of *flawed competence*.

of “flawed competence.” We are sensitive, especially about our work, especially about the flawed part of our work.

At the place where I work twenty-eight years after the basketball hoops, I am given a new office, one with a view of the lake. There’s a string attached, though, and that is that I have to build my own bookcases. I commence planning with enthusiasm. That’s another, less harmful family trait, that attraction to making plans. I measure, I look at other people’s shelves, I get someone to help me attach brackets to my office walls.

It is while I am cutting a notch in one of the uprights to allow access to the light-switch that I suddenly think of my grandfather and those basketball hoops. I feel a light sweat break out on my forehead. A pattern of genetic fate reveals itself to me: I’m going to mess up these bookshelves just as my grandfather before me would have messed them up. No doubt I’m sawing the notch in the wrong place.

The whole time I work I wait to see where the screw-up is going to come. I imagine what my colleagues will be saying about me in the hallways. Did you know that Bryant built his shelves so they tilt? Did you know that Bryant’s books rejected the color he painted his shelves? But the screw-up doesn’t appear. I paint the shelves red, and they look O.K. (Granddaddy Bryant once painted yellow a whole row of company houses he built.) I paint a chair blue and red, and it’s a little silly-looking, but it picks up the blue of the carpet and the red of the shelves. The vision isn’t nearly as impressive as I thought it would be, but then what vision ever is? We plan-makers are accustomed to things turning out not-quite-as-good-as-we-had-in-mind. Our world view includes the “diminished excellence” component. Diminished excellence is a condition of the world and therefore never an occasion for sorrow, whereas flawed competence comes out of character and therefore is frequently the reason for the bowed head, the furrowed brow. Three months later, when I try to turn the heat off in my office, I discover that I have placed one of the shelf uprights too close to the radiator to be able to work the valve. The screw-up was there all along, but in this case I am relieved to find it. I am my grandfather’s grandson after all.

RELATIONSHIPS: The key relationship in the passage, which the whole narrative builds up to, is that between the narrator and the Bryant family trait of *flawed competence*. When the narrator says, “I am my grandfather’s grandson after all,” he makes it obvious that he feels he shares that trait.

STRUCTURE: Although the passage conveys information, it reads like a story. Indeed, the focus is as much on the personalities involved as on the science itself.

NATURAL SCIENCE: This passage is adapted from "Publish and Punish: Science's Snowball Effect" by Jon Van (©1997 by The Chicago Tribune Company).

It's a scientific finding so fundamental that it certainly will make the history books and maybe snag a Nobel Prize if it pans out, but the notion that cosmic snowballs are constantly pelting Earth is something Louis Frank just as soon would have ducked.

Frank is the University of Iowa physicist whose research led him to declare more than a decade ago that Earth is being bombarded by hundreds of house-sized comets day after day that rain water on our planet and are the reason we have oceans. That weather report caused the widely respected scientist to acquire a certain reputation among his colleagues as a bit unstable, an otherwise estimable fellow whose hard work may have pushed him over the edge.

Frank and his associate, John Sigwarth, probably went a way toward salvaging their reputations when they presented new evidence that leaves little doubt Earth is indeed being bombarded by something in a manner consistent with Frank's small-comet theory. Rather than gloating or anticipating glory, Frank seemed relieved that part of a long ordeal was ending. "I knew we'd be in for it when we first put forth the small-comet theory," Frank conceded, "but I was naive about just how bad it would be. We were outvoted by about 10,000 to 1 by our colleagues. I thought it would have been more like 1,000 to 1."

To the non-scientist this may seem a bit strange. After all, the point of science is to discover information and insights about how nature works. Shouldn't every scientist be eager to overturn existing ideas and replace them with his or her own? In theory, that is the case, but in practice, scientists are almost as loath to embrace radically new ideas as the rest of us.

"Being a scientist puts you into a constant schizophrenic existence," contends Richard Zare, chairman of the National Science Board. "You have to believe and yet question beliefs at the same time. If you are a complete cynic and believe nothing, you do nothing and get nowhere, but if you believe too much, you fool yourself."

It was in the early 1980s when the small-comet theory started to haunt Frank and Sigwarth, who was Frank's graduate student studying charged particles called plasmas, which erupt from the sun and cause the aurora borealis (northern lights). As they analyzed photos of the electrical phenomena that accompany sunspots, they noted dark specks appearing in several images from NASA's Dynamics Explorer 1 satellite. They assumed these were caused by static in the transmission.

STYLE; PURPOSE: While the passage discusses scientific data and presents a theory, the main intent, as signaled in the jocular language of the first paragraph, appears to be to entertain readers with a story of ridicule and redemption.

VOCABULARY: The passage is written to be accessible to a wide audience and so lacks a good deal of complicating scientific precision. Even the name "small-comet theory" has a humble, everyday feel to it.

RELATIONSHIPS: Much of the passage centers on Louis Frank and John Sigwarth's relationship to the larger scientific community. The process of discovery is discussed in human terms, and scientists as a group are characterized as ordinary people.

After a while their curiosity about the dark spots grew into a preoccupation, then bordered on obsession. Try as they did, the scientists couldn't find any plausible explanation of the pattern of dark spots that appeared on their images. The notion that the equipment was picking up small amounts of water entering Earth's upper atmosphere kept presenting itself as the most likely answer.

Based on their images, the Iowa scientists estimated 20 comets an hour—each about 30 feet or so across and carrying 100 tons of water—were bombarding the Earth. At that rate, they would produce water vapor that would add about an inch of water to the planet every 10,000 years, Frank concluded. That may not seem like much, but when talking about a planet billions of years old, it adds up.

Such intimate interaction between Earth and space suggests a fundamentally different picture of human evolution—which depends on water—than is commonly presented by scientists. Frank had great difficulty getting his ideas into a physics journal 11 years ago and was almost hooted from the room when he presented his theory at scientific meetings. Despite the derision, colleagues continued to respect Frank's mainstream work on electrically charged particles in space and the imaging cameras he designed that were taken aboard recent NASA spacecraft to explore Earth's polar regions.

Unbeknown to most, in addition to gathering information on the northern lights, Frank and Sigwarth designed the equipment to be able to snatch better views of any small comets the spacecraft might happen upon. It was those images from the latest flights that caused even harsh critics of the small-comet theory to concede that some water-bearing objects appear to be entering Earth's atmosphere with regularity.

To be sure, it has not been proved that they are comets, let alone that they have anything to do with the oceans. But Frank's evidence opens the matter up to study. Had he been a researcher of lesser standing, his theory probably would have died long ago.

RICHNESS: The passage contains very little hard data. The eighth paragraph contains the bulk of the facts and figures, and even this information is relatively simple.

Annotated Examples of More Challenging Texts Used on the ACT Reading Test

Annotated More Challenging Text from the ACT Reading Test (Humanities)

STRUCTURE; PURPOSE: While students are likely to be familiar with the question-and-answer format, which is often found in popular magazines, these questions and responses are more abstract and focused on a subject—computer art—with which many students are unlikely to be familiar. The purpose of the interview—to explore John Maeda’s work and thought processes—isn’t directly stated but comes through after reading some of the questions and answers.

HUMANITIES: This passage is adapted from “When M.I.T. Artist Shouts, His ‘Painting’ Listens,” an interview with Professor John Maeda conducted by Claudia Dreifus that appeared in the July 27, 1999, edition of *The New York Times* (©1999 by The New York Times).

Within the art world, Prof. John Maeda, 32, is an anomaly—a prize-winning graphic designer and kinetic artist with a fistful of engineering degrees from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

From his base in M.I.T.’s Media Laboratory, Professor Maeda uses the computer as a tool and medium to create art that can be produced only digitally and that has the specific look of the new technology. One of his best-known pieces is a drawing called “Time Paint,” in which colors fly through space. Another piece, “The Reactive Square,” is about squares that change shape when a viewer shouts at them.

Q. *Your last book, Design by Numbers, is an art book that is also a manual for a new computer language that you invented to help artists understand the guts of computer design. Why create a whole new computer language?*

A. One reason was that programming languages are made for people to write programs—big applications. For someone just starting out making art on their computers, they don’t want this big truck of a system. They just want a simple bicycle that they understand. So I designed the visual equivalent of a simple bicycle. Design by Numbers, D.B.N., was an attempt to demystify the technology behind computer art, to show how simple it is, and that people can do it.

Q. *When you are creating your own computer art pieces, do you ever use prepackaged drawing programs?*

A. Oh, yes, all the time. There are all kinds of fine touches that prepackaged software makes easy. I could invent my own finishing system, but this is faster. Of course, the basic ideas, I create.

The problem is that most people can’t just “finish” things with this software. They have to use it to start them, also. For much of recent history, people have created with brush, ink, paper—the materials of art. Now that they have begun creating with software and computers, the styles that emerge are homogeneous because the software is universal. Without being able to

VOCABULARY: The text uses some difficult general and specialized terms whose meaning is discernible from context (for example, *anomaly* and *kinetic artist*).

STYLE: The interview format is designed to appeal to readers, and it helps make the passage accessible, but the questions and answers are focused on art and ideas rather than on everyday subjects.

RICHNESS: John Maeda makes a rather sophisticated metaphorical comparison between a “big truck of a system” (most programming languages) and “a simple bicycle” (the language Maeda developed) in order to argue that his language fills a need felt by novice computer artists for some basic tools.

know how to program, you can't break out of the technology—just like if you don't know how to use brush and ink, you're limited.

For most people, this really isn't a problem; they aren't necessarily looking for anything new. But for people who are seeking the next step, the prepackaged becomes an impossible barrier to break free from.

I make everything I do. Many people are surprised that I don't have a programmer making things for me. And others are surprised that I don't have an artist controlling me, telling me how to program. Because today, people don't realize that it is possible to think and create on the computer. Artists are used to thinking that programming is very hard—impossible.

And technologists are used to thinking that they can never become artists. Me, I just make things. It's just a natural flow of action and thought. If people see, "Oh, he does that," then maybe they'll think, "I can do it too."

Q. *But lots of nonartists use computers for creating images . . .*

A. They are using it as a tool, but not as a material. And to use it as a tool, you need to understand the medium, which means understanding the technology. Young people are changing this, because they have grown up with computers.

Q. *If a conventional artist produces an object on a computer, does that automatically make it art?*

A. It's art, but it's just a painting and no different than conventional art.

It's not intrinsically different or superior just because it was created digitally and it's not digital art. Because digital art starts with an understanding and appreciation of the medium—which, unfortunately, is today programming.

Q. *What did studying in Japan teach you?*

A. The most important thing was to not be embarrassed about who I was. I had always been embarrassed about coming from a manual-labor family. In Japan, I was studying conventional art, and I used my hands all the time. That made me feel in touch with my human side, which I had lost when I came to M.I.T.

Q. *Does the new technology mean the end of art as we know it?*

A. Yes, it does. It represents a new dimension to the way art will be understood or perceived.

It's a departure from appreciating a singular moment. What that means is . . . the reason why we can appreciate art is because most art has a single resting point: canvas.

It's painted. It's dried. It aspires to be perfect. The medium of the computer is continually shifting. It can shift at will, in a microsecond. Or an hour. There's no limit on how it can be taught to change.

RELATIONSHIPS: John Maeda discusses the fairly subtle distinction between art created digitally and digital art.

RICHNESS: The text includes a good deal of historical information about the commons in England and elsewhere.

SOCIAL SCIENCE: This passage, which describes land practices in the commons (tracts of land that belonged to and were used by a community as a whole), and the enclosure movement (when the commons were taken over by private interests and fenced off), is adapted from the essay “The Place, the Region, and the Commons” by Gary Snyder, which is included in his book *The Practice of the Wild* (©1990 by Gary Snyder).

I stood with my climbing partner on the summit of Glacier Peak looking all ways round, ridge after ridge and peak after peak, as far as we could see. He said: “You mean there’s a senator for all this?” It is easy to think there are vast spaces on earth yet unadministered, perhaps forgotten, or unknown, but it is all mapped and placed in some domain. In North America there is a lot that is in the public domain, which has its problems, but at least they are problems we are all enfranchised to work on.

American public lands are the twentieth-century incarnation of a much older institution known across Eurasia—in English called the “commons”—which was the ancient mode of both protecting and managing the wilds of the self-governing regions. It worked well enough until the age of market economies, colonialism, and imperialism. Let me give you a kind of model of how the commons worked.

Between the extremes of deep wilderness and the private plots of the farmstead lies a territory which is not suitable for crops. In earlier times it was used jointly by the members of a given tribe or village. This area, embracing both the wild and the semi-wild, is of critical importance. It is necessary for the health of the wilderness because it adds big habitat, overflow territory, and room for wildlife to fly and run. It is essential even to an agricultural village economy because its natural diversity provides the many necessities and amenities that the privately held plots cannot. It enriches the agrarian diet with game and fish. The shared land supplies firewood, poles and stone for building, clay for the kiln, herbs, dye plants, and much else. It is especially important as seasonal or full-time open range for cattle, horses, goats, pigs, and sheep.

In the abstract the sharing of a natural area might be thought of as a matter of access to “common pool resources” with no limits or controls on individual exploitation. The fact is that such sharing developed over millennia and always within territorial and social contexts. In the peasant societies of both Asia and Europe there were customary forms that gave direction to the joint use of land. They did not grant free access to outsiders, and there were controls over entry and use by member households. The commons is both specific land *and* the traditional community institution that determines the carrying capacity for its various subunits and defines the rights and obligations of those who use it, with penalties for lapses. Because it is traditional and *local*, it is not identical with today’s “public domain,” which is land held and managed by a

PURPOSE; STRUCTURE: The first paragraph might lead a reader to assume that this will be a personal narrative about the author’s experience, but in fact the text quickly veers away from direct experience into a history and explanation of the concept of the commons.

STYLE: After the opening paragraph, the text adopts a formal, informative tone in the process of explaining the history and nature of the commons. By the end of the text, the tone becomes somewhat more critical as the author relates some of the negative consequences of the enclosure movement. These shifts make reading the text somewhat of a challenge.

VOCABULARY: The text uses a number of terms and concepts related to the commons that are unlikely to be familiar to many students (for example, *agricultural village economy* and *agrarian diet*). The author provides the needed context to understand these terms, but students will likely have to read carefully to understand them.

central government. Under a national state such management may be destructive (as it is becoming in Canada and the United States) or benign, but in no case is it locally managed. One of the ideas in the current debate on how to reform our public lands is that of returning them to regional control.

An example of traditional management: what would keep one household from bringing in more and more stock and tempting everyone toward overgrazing? In earlier England and in some contemporary Swiss villages, the commoner could only turn out to common range as many head of cattle as he could feed over the winter in his own corrals. This meant that no one was allowed to increase his herd from outside with a cattle drive just for summer grazing.

There is a well-documented history of the commons in relation to the village economies of Europe and England. In England from the time of the Norman Conquest the knights and overlords began to gain control over the many local commons. From the fifteenth century on the landlord class increasingly fenced off village-held land and turned it over to private interests. The enclosure movement was backed by the big wool corporations who found profit from sheep to be much greater than that from farming. The wool business had a destructive effect on the soils and dislodged peasants. The arguments for enclosure in England—efficiency, higher production—ignored social and ecological effects and served to cripple the sustainable agriculture of some districts.

The enclosures created a population of rural homeless who were forced in their desperation to become the world's first industrial working class. The enclosures were tragic both for the human community and for natural ecosystems. The fact that England now has the least forest and wildlife of all the nations of Europe has much to do with the enclosures.

RELATIONSHIPS: The last two paragraphs detail a rather subtle sequence of events involving the enclosure movement and some of its consequences. Readers not only have to pay attention to what happened but also to cause-effect relationships such as the ecological damage done to England as a result of enclosure.

Annotated Examples of Complex Texts Used on the ACT Reading Test

Annotated Complex Text from the ACT Reading Test (Humanities)

PURPOSE: While this story has some familiar narrative elements, such as characters and suspense, its real purpose is to illustrate a larger point: that a person can connect “the interior life” and the outer world or, for a time anyway, choose to live inside his or her mind.

HUMANITIES: This passage is adapted from the essay “The Interior Life” by Annie Dillard, which appeared in her book *An American Childhood* (©1987 by Annie Dillard).

The interior life is often stupid. Its egoism blinds it and deafens it; its imagination spins out ignorant tales, fascinated. It fancies that the western wind blows on the Self, and leaves fall at the feet of the Self for a reason, and people are watching. A mind risks real ignorance for the sometimes paltry prize of an imagination enriched. The trick of reason is to get the imagination to seize the actual world—if only from time to time.

When I was five, I would not go to bed willingly because something came into my room. My sister Amy, two years old, was asleep in the other bed. What did she know? She was innocent of evil. There was no messiness in her, no roughness for things to cling to, only a charming and charmed innocence that seemed then to protect her, an innocence I needed but couldn’t muster. Since Amy was asleep, furthermore, and since when I needed someone most I was afraid to stir enough to wake her, she was useless.

I lay alone and was almost asleep when the thing entered the room by flattening itself against the open door and sliding in. It was a transparent, luminous oblong. I could see the door whiten at its touch; I could see the blue wall turn pale where it raced over it, and see the maple headboard of Amy’s bed glow. It was a swift spirit; it was an awareness. It made noise. It had two joined parts, a head and a tail. It found the door, wall, and headboard; and it swiped them, charging them with its luminous glance. After its fleet, searching passage, things looked the same, but weren’t.

I dared not blink or breathe. If it found another awareness, it would destroy it.

Every night before it got to me it gave up. It hit my wall’s corner and couldn’t get past. It shrank completely into itself and vanished. I heard the rising roar it made when it died or left. I still couldn’t breathe. I knew that it could return again alive that same night.

Sometimes it came back, sometimes it didn’t. Most often, restless, it came back. The light stripe slipped in the door, ran searching over Amy’s wall, stopped, stretched lunatic at the first corner, raced wailing toward my wall, and vanished into the second corner with a cry. So I wouldn’t go to bed.

It was a passing car whose windshield reflected the corner streetlight outside. I figured it out one night.

STYLE; VOCABULARY: Much of the language the author uses—“charming and charmed innocence,” for example—is both difficult and self-consciously artistic, requiring readers to read carefully and to reason the meaning of many words and phrases from context.

STRUCTURE: This text has a sophisticated structure. At the center of the text is a narrative about how the author came to realize that the “transparent, luminous oblong” that had come into her childhood bedroom at least once a night, and that she had so feared, was in fact the headlights of a passing car.

Figuring it out was as memorable as the oblong itself. Figuring it out was a long and forced ascent to the very rim of being, to the membrane of skin that both separates and connects the inner life and the outer world. I climbed deliberately from the depths like a diver who releases the monster in his arms and hauls himself hand over hand up an anchor chain till he meets the ocean's sparkling membrane and bursts through it; he sights the sunlit, becalmed hull of his boat, which had bulked so ominously from below.

I recognized the noise it made when it left. That is, the noise it made called to mind, at last, my daytime sensations when a car passed—the sight and noise together. A car came roaring down hushed Edgerton Avenue in front of our house, stopped, and passed on shrieking as its engine shifted up the gears. What, precisely, came into the bedroom? A reflection from the car's oblong windshield. Why did it travel in two parts? The window sash split the light and cast a shadow.

Night after night I labored up the same long chain of reasoning, as night after night the thing burst into the room where I lay awake.

There was a world outside my window and contiguous to it. Why did I have to keep learning this same thing over and over? For I had learned it a summer ago, when men with jackhammers broke up Edgerton Avenue. I had watched them from the yard. When I lay to nap, I listened. One restless afternoon I connected the new noise in my bedroom with the jackhammer men I had been seeing outside. I understood abruptly that these worlds met, the outside and the inside. "Outside," then, was conceivably just beyond my windows.

The world did not have me in mind. It was a coincidental collection of things and people, of items, and I myself was one such item—a child walking up the sidewalk, whom anyone could see or ignore. The things in the world did not necessarily cause my overwhelming feelings; the feelings were inside me, beneath my skin, behind my ribs, within my skull. They were even, to some extent, under my control.

I could be connected to the outer world by reason, if I chose, or I could yield to what amounted to a narrative fiction, to a show in light projected on the room's blue walls.

RELATIONSHIPS: While the author is describing a child's discovery of the difference between inside and outside a window, she's also making the subtler distinction between the worlds inside and outside the self.

RICHNESS: Concepts such as "I could yield to what amounted to a narrative fiction, to a show in light projected on the room's blue walls"—even the very idea of an interior life as the author defines it—are likely unfamiliar to many readers.



RICHNESS; VOCABULARY: This text contains a great deal of information related to the idea of biological uniqueness, focusing on the “collaboration” between a particular species of medusa and a particular kind of nudibranch. The vocabulary in the text is often demanding and the concepts are subtly presented.

NATURAL SCIENCE: This passage is adapted from Lewis Thomas's *The Medusa and the Snail: More Notes of a Biology Watcher* (©1979 by Lewis Thomas).

We tend to think of our selves as the only wholly unique creations in nature, but it is not so. Uniqueness is so commonplace a property of living things that there is really nothing at all unique about it. Even individual, free-swimming bacteria can be viewed as unique entities, distinguishable from each other even when they are the progeny of a single clone. Spudich and Koshland have recently reported that motile microorganisms of the same species are like solitary eccentrics in their swimming behavior. When they are searching for food, some tumble in one direction for precisely so many seconds before quitting, while others tumble differently and for different, but characteristic, periods of time. If you watch them closely, tethered by their flagellae to the surface of an antibody-coated slide, you can tell them from each other by the way they twirl, as accurately as though they had different names.

Fish can tell each other apart as individuals, by the smell of self. So can mice, and here the olfactory discrimination is governed by the same H2 locus which contains the genes for immunologic self-marking.

The markers of self, and the sensing mechanisms responsible for detecting such markers, are conventionally regarded as mechanisms for maintaining individuality for its own sake, enabling one kind of creature to defend and protect itself against all the rest. Selfness, seen thus, is for self-preservation.

In real life, though, it doesn't seem to work this way. The self-marking of invertebrate animals in the sea, who must have perfected the business long before evolution got around to us, was set up in order to permit creatures of one kind to locate others, not for predation but to set up symbiotic households. The anemones who live on the shells of crabs are precisely finicky; so are the crabs. Only a single species of anemone will find its way to only a single species of crab. They sense each other exquisitely, and live together as though made for each other.

Sometimes there is such a mix-up about selfness that two creatures, each attracted by the molecular configuration of the other, incorporate the two selves to make a single organism. The best story I've ever heard about this is the tale told of the nudibranch and medusa living in the Bay of Naples. When first observed, the nudibranch, a common sea slug, was found to have a tiny vestigial parasite, in the form of a jellyfish, permanently affixed to the ventral surface near the mouth. In curiosity to learn how the medusa got there, some

PURPOSE: The text begins with a general discussion of the phenomenon of biological uniqueness, arguing, paradoxically, that “uniqueness is so commonplace a property of living things that there is really nothing at all unique about it.”

STYLE: While science essays commonly cite other researchers by name and summarize their studies, this sort of in-text reference may not be typical of students' science textbooks.

VOCABULARY: Difficult terms (*olfactory discrimination, immunologic self-marking*) and some undefined concepts (*H2 locus*) contribute to the challenge of reading this passage. Readers may need to press on, at least momentarily ignoring terms they aren't familiar with, in order to maintain an overall sense of what the passage is about

RELATIONSHIPS: In the third and fourth paragraphs, the author presents and then challenges the way “the markers of self, and the sensing mechanisms responsible for detecting such markers, are conventionally regarded.”

marine biologists began searching the local waters for earlier developmental forms, and discovered something amazing. The attached parasite, although apparently so specialized as to have given up living for itself, can still produce offspring, for they are found in abundance at certain seasons of the year. They drift through the upper waters, grow up nicely and astonishingly, and finally become full-grown, handsome, normal jellyfish. Meanwhile, the snail produces snail larvae, and these too begin to grow normally, but not for long. While still extremely small, they become entrapped in the tentacles of the medusa and then engulfed within the umbrella-shaped body. At first glance, you'd believe the medusae are now the predators, paying back for earlier humiliations, and the snails the prey. But no. Soon the snails, undigested and insatiable, begin to eat, browsing away first at the radial canals, then the borders of the rim, finally the tentacles, until the jellyfish becomes reduced in substance by being eaten while the snail grows correspondingly in size. At the end, the arrangement is back to the first scene, with the full-grown nudibranch basking, and nothing left of the jellyfish except the round, successfully edited parasite, safely affixed to the skin near the mouth.

It is a confusing tale to sort out, and even more confusing to think about. Both creatures are designed for this encounter, marked as selves so that they can find each other in the waters of the Bay of Naples. The collaboration, if you want to call it that, is entirely specific; it is only this species of medusa and only this kind of nudibranch that can come together and live this way. And, more surprising, they cannot live in any other way; they depend for their survival on each other. They are not really selves, they are specific *others*.

I've never heard of such a cycle before. [These creatures] are bizarre, that's it, unique. And at the same time, like a vaguely remembered dream, they remind me of the whole earth at once.

RICHNESS: The heart of the text, the fifth and sixth paragraphs, is a discussion of the complicated medusa-nudibranch interaction, which serves mainly to help make the author's broader point about the commonness of uniqueness in biology.

STRUCTURE: The text ends, somewhat jarringly and cryptically, with a personal observation about how the medusa and the nudibranch remind the author of "the whole earth at once."

College Readiness Standards — Reading

	Main Ideas and Author's Approach	Supporting Details
13–15	Recognize a clear intent of an author or narrator in uncomplicated literary narratives	Locate basic facts (e.g., names, dates, events) clearly stated in a passage
16–19	Identify a clear main idea or purpose of straightforward paragraphs in uncomplicated literary narratives	Locate simple details at the sentence and paragraph level in uncomplicated passages Recognize a clear function of a part of an uncomplicated passage
20–23	Infer the main idea or purpose of straightforward paragraphs in uncomplicated literary narratives Understand the overall approach taken by an author or narrator (e.g., point of view, kinds of evidence used) in uncomplicated passages	Locate important details in uncomplicated passages Make simple inferences about how details are used in passages
24–27	Identify a clear main idea or purpose of any paragraph or paragraphs in uncomplicated passages Infer the main idea or purpose of straightforward paragraphs in more challenging passages Summarize basic events and ideas in more challenging passages Understand the overall approach taken by an author or narrator (e.g., point of view, kinds of evidence used) in more challenging passages	Locate important details in more challenging passages Locate and interpret minor or subtly stated details in uncomplicated passages Discern which details, though they may appear in different sections throughout a passage, support important points in more challenging passages
28–32	Infer the main idea or purpose of more challenging passages or their paragraphs Summarize events and ideas in virtually any passage Understand the overall approach taken by an author or narrator (e.g., point of view, kinds of evidence used) in virtually any passage	Locate and interpret minor or subtly stated details in more challenging passages Use details from different sections of some complex informational passages to support a specific point or argument
33–36	Identify clear main ideas or purposes of complex passages or their paragraphs	Locate and interpret details in complex passages Understand the function of a part of a passage when the function is subtle or complex

Descriptions of the ACT Reading Passages

Uncomplicated Literary Narratives refers to excerpts from essays, short stories, and novels that tend to use simple language and structure, have a clear purpose and a familiar style, present straightforward interactions between characters, and employ only a limited number of literary devices such as metaphor, simile, or hyperbole.

More Challenging Literary Narratives refers to excerpts from essays, short stories, and novels that tend to make moderate use of figurative language, have a more intricate structure and messages conveyed with some subtlety, and may feature somewhat complex interactions between characters.

Complex Literary Narratives refers to excerpts from essays, short stories, and novels that tend to make generous use of ambiguous language and literary devices, feature complex and subtle interactions between characters, often contain challenging context-dependent vocabulary, and typically contain messages and/or meanings that are not explicit but are embedded in the passage.

College Readiness Standards — Reading (continued)

	Sequential, Comparative, and Cause-Effect Relationships	Meanings of Words	Generalizations and Conclusions
13–15	Determine when (e.g., first, last, before, after) or if an event occurred in uncomplicated passages Recognize clear cause-effect relationships described within a single sentence in a passage	Understand the implication of a familiar word or phrase and of simple descriptive language	Draw simple generalizations and conclusions about the main characters in uncomplicated literary narratives
16–19	Identify relationships between main characters in uncomplicated literary narratives Recognize clear cause-effect relationships within a single paragraph in uncomplicated literary narratives	Use context to understand basic figurative language	Draw simple generalizations and conclusions about people, ideas, and so on in uncomplicated passages
20–23	Order simple sequences of events in uncomplicated literary narratives Identify clear relationships between people, ideas, and so on in uncomplicated passages Identify clear cause-effect relationships in uncomplicated passages	Use context to determine the appropriate meaning of some figurative and nonfigurative words, phrases, and statements in uncomplicated passages	Draw generalizations and conclusions about people, ideas, and so on in uncomplicated passages Draw simple generalizations and conclusions using details that support the main points of more challenging passages
24–27	Order sequences of events in uncomplicated passages Understand relationships between people, ideas, and so on in uncomplicated passages Identify clear relationships between characters, ideas, and so on in more challenging literary narratives Understand implied or subtly stated cause-effect relationships in uncomplicated passages Identify clear cause-effect relationships in more challenging passages	Use context to determine the appropriate meaning of virtually any word, phrase, or statement in uncomplicated passages Use context to determine the appropriate meaning of some figurative and nonfigurative words, phrases, and statements in more challenging passages	Draw subtle generalizations and conclusions about characters, ideas, and so on in uncomplicated literary narratives Draw generalizations and conclusions about people, ideas, and so on in more challenging passages
28–32	Order sequences of events in more challenging passages Understand the dynamics between people, ideas, and so on in more challenging passages Understand implied or subtly stated cause-effect relationships in more challenging passages	Determine the appropriate meaning of words, phrases, or statements from figurative or somewhat technical contexts	Use information from one or more sections of a more challenging passage to draw generalizations and conclusions about people, ideas, and so on
33–36	Order sequences of events in complex passages Understand the subtleties in relationships between people, ideas, and so on in virtually any passage Understand implied, subtle, or complex cause-effect relationships in virtually any passage	Determine, even when the language is richly figurative and the vocabulary is difficult, the appropriate meaning of context-dependent words, phrases, or statements in virtually any passage	Draw complex or subtle generalizations and conclusions about people, ideas, and so on, often by synthesizing information from different portions of the passage Understand and generalize about portions of a complex literary narrative

Uncomplicated Informational Passages

refers to materials that tend to contain a limited amount of data, address basic concepts using familiar language and conventional organizational patterns, have a clear purpose, and are written to be accessible.

More Challenging Informational Passages refers to materials that tend to present concepts that are not always stated explicitly and that are accompanied or illustrated by more—and more detailed—supporting data, include some difficult context-dependent words, and are written in a somewhat more demanding and less accessible style.

Complex Informational Passages refers to materials that tend to include a sizable amount of data, present difficult concepts that are embedded (not explicit) in the text, use demanding words and phrases whose meaning must be determined from context, and are likely to include intricate explanations of processes or events.