What and Why

Text sets are groups of texts on the same topic or theme. The texts share similar or the same concept and ideas, and those concepts and ideas are expressed with similar or the same vocabulary. For this reason, text sets help to increase children's general comprehension and knowledge-building skills by:

- Building up schema and understanding of a topic or theme
- Exposing children to repetitive vocabulary needed for understanding that topic or theme
- Providing opportunities for children to refine their understanding of the same ideas in comparable texts so they can implicitly construct knowledge and comprehension cumulatively across texts as they read (Cervetti et al., 2018; Gelzheiser et al., 2014)

How

Text sets can be used in a number of different ways to support knowledge development, vocabulary development, and comprehension in whole class, small group, and independent reading, as well as read alouds. Below are some options for ways to organize text sets and utilize them in instruction.

Easy-to-Complex Texts

Make sets that begin with relatively easy books on a topic and theme, and then use progressively more complex ones, with the intention of using the easier books to scaffold children's understanding of the more complex ones, as well as to motivate children to read the more complex ones, having been already fascinated by the topic or theme through their exposure to the easier texts.

- **For example**, in a fifth-grade ELA/social studies unit on the Montgomery bus boycott, children might read easy-to-complex text sets where they begin by reading relatively simple short books about some of the key figures in the boycott—Claudette Colvin, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King, Jr.—before reading a longer, more complex book about the history of the boycott in general. Here, the shorter, more immediately accessible biographical texts would scaffold children's understanding of the longer, more involved historical text

- **For example**, in a second-grade ELA/science unit on frogs, children might read an easy-to-complex text set where they begin by reading picture books on different kinds of frogs before reading more complex, detailed informational texts on the life cycle of frogs in general. As in the ELA/social studies example for the Montgomery bus boycott, the immediacy and specificity of the initial books read in the set solicit interest and engagement, and give children some of the background knowledge they need to understand the more abstract, complex text read later in the set.

Read Alouds and Leveled Texts

Another way to organize text sets is to choose a complex read aloud on a topic or theme, and then have individual groups of children read texts on the same topic or theme at their actual reading levels, so that they have the opportunity to build knowledge and comprehension of the featured topic or theme through both the read aloud and their own independent reading on the topic or theme.

- **For example,** in a first-grade class, the read aloud of *Beware Crocodile* (Kitamura, Candlewick, 2019) could serve as an introduction to a set of various leveled texts on reptiles, with the class keeping a chart of how the reptiles they read about in their leveled texts were different from and similar to the crocodiles described in *Beware Crocodile*. The compelling presentation of facts in *Beware Crocodile*, and the concrete example of the crocodile, can spark children's more general interest in reptiles and give them a reason to read the follow-up leveled texts on reptiles (i.e., to find out about more reptiles, and how different kinds of reptiles are different and similar to crocodiles).

The Quad Text Set Framework

This framework was designed by a group of reading researchers. Quad Text Sets are built around four different types of texts: **the target text**, a **challenging, above-grade level text**; and three other texts that build the **background knowledge and motivation** needed to understand the target text. The framework is meant to replace the time students spend listening to build background knowledge with time spent actually reading and improve motivation with real reading and interpretation of visuals (Lupo et al., 2018; Lupo et al., 2020).

When Selecting Quad Text Sets:
- Select a challenging text, in terms of language and knowledge demands, that is aligned to curricular goals.
- Then select three different kinds of texts for building background knowledge, increasing motivation, and assisting with understanding of the target text:
  - Visual or video text to build background knowledge(s)
  - Informational text to build background knowledge(s)
  - Accessible texts to foster motivation and buy-in (this would vary by grade but could include picture books, articles, popular media text, short leveled texts, etc.)

When Implementing Quad Text Sets, plan for **the order** in which the different kinds of texts are read (order is flexible and likely depends on the grade, genre, characteristics of the texts, and the instructional purpose for using the texts). The three texts for building background knowledge and motivation are likely to be read before the target text, but it may also happen that one or two of the background knowledge or motivational texts is read before a long target text, and one or two are interspersed within the reading of the target text to support background knowledge and motivation.

- **For example**, a third-grade class reading the target text, *The Birchbark House*, a novel about the life of an Ojibwe girl and her community in the nineteenth century, might first watch a video about nineteenth-century Ojibwe life, then read some chapters of the novel, stopping before a section about the role of storytelling in the community, to read an Ojibwe folktale and a short article on the role of storytelling in Ojibwe life.

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