

## **Text Analysis and Critique**

EDDN 637

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**Analysis of a Chapter or Aspect:**

Oftentimes, teachers are drawn to certain books for the sole purpose that they align with the lexile level appropriate for the grade level they teach. According to EL Education. (n.d.), a lexile level is obtained through careful analysis of various quantitative measures which include factors like word frequency, word count, and sentence length. What we fail to acknowledge is the importance of qualitative measures like language features, structure, meaning, and knowledge demands (EL Education., n.d.). This text analysis carefully examines both the quantitative and the qualitative factors of a picture book titled, “The Tree of Hope: The Miraculous Rescue of Puerto Rico’s Beloved Banyan” by Anna Orenstein- Cardona, and illustrated by Juan Manuel Moreno.

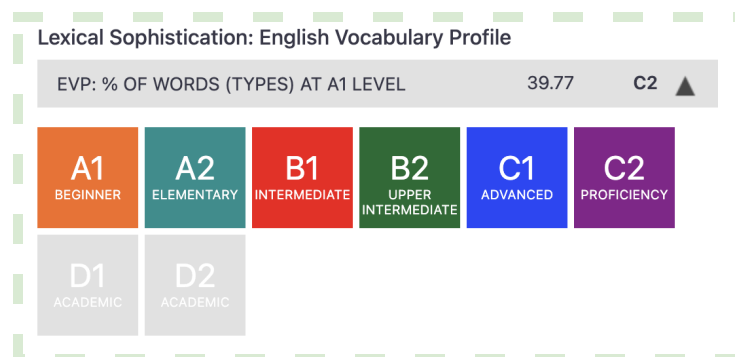
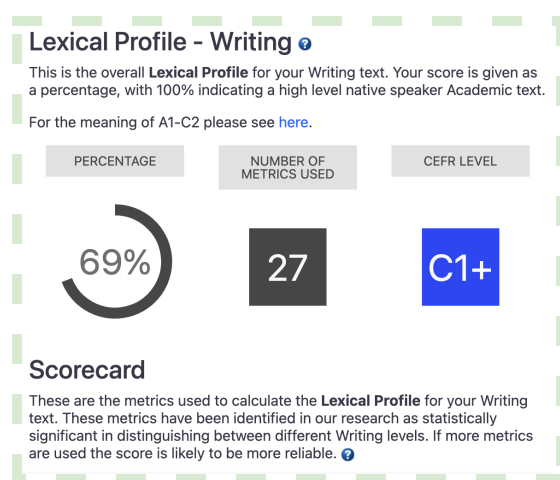
This book is used as a means to introduce hurricanes, a topic embedded within the severe weather unit in a 10th grade high school ENL Earth Science class. Resilience is a big theme in the story as it describes the catastrophic damage and devastation caused by hurricane Maria on the island of Puerto Rico. More specifically, citizens rally together in hopes of reviving the ancient banyan tree which has been a beloved historic site outliving generations of people, before it was destroyed by the fierce hurricane. This book is used in the curriculum because it is fitting for the student population and considered culturally appropriate, primarily because an overwhelming majority of the class is of latino descent and is likely to have been directly impacted by this storm. Additionally, a theme as powerful as resilience or togetherness can inspire students greatly, particularly those who are currently struggling to become accustomed to a new language, culture, or environment.

*The Tree of Hope* by Anna Orenstein- Cardona has been classified as having a lexile level of AD920L. Though a lexile level of 920L is generally appropriate for students ranging from grades four to grade six, it is important to note that this book is being presented to a group of students with diverse language proficiencies, many of which are reading, writing, and speaking well below grade level. Since the lexile level for the picture book selected contains the letters AD in front, it is also recommended that the book be read and directed by an adult (*Lexile levels: How to use this tool to understand your child's reading skills*). Understanding the designated lexile level can be done by taking note of the quantitative elements beginning with word count and number of pages. The total word count for the story itself is 783 words. These words are distributed over 34 pages, 14 of which only contain illustrations. The screenshot below accurately demonstrates the average amount of text on each page.



The sentence length and number of words in this book are not too overwhelming or out of reach for this age group. However, the lexical profile for this text demonstrates that challenges would take place for this population of students if the appropriate scaffolds, supports, and guidance

were not put into effect. This is primarily due to the higher-level vocabulary that is being used. The snapshots below were generated using [textinspector.com](https://textinspector.com), and show that the average CEFR level is a C1. This standardized system used to measure language proficiency indicates that C1 level text is generally classified as being “advanced”, which explains the “AD” in front of the numerical lexile level, and the reason why an adult should facilitate the reading. We can also see below, that the lexical sophistication is ranked at a C2 upon review of the vocabulary. This means that students would need to be performing at a “proficient” level in order to fully understand the vocabulary on their own.



(Text Inspector, 2022)

Since vocabulary would be the main challenge upon introducing this book to ELL's, it is important that key vocabulary terms be reviewed and exercised prior to reading. Some of the words that should be considered are those that appear frequently, and are critical for comprehension of the text. The word cloud below suggests what some of these words should be for *The Tree of Hope* by Anna Orenstein- Cardona. Analysis of the illustrations on each page and use of context clues to draw conclusions would be powerful strategies to exercise while reading.



(Free Word Cloud Generator)

Upon review of the qualitative elements, it appears that this may cause an even larger barrier to comprehension of this text than vocabulary. Personification, for instance, is used frequently. Students who encounter a phrase like, “his heart was full of renewed bravery” are likely to get confused as this was in reference to the tree, which is being referred to with the pronoun “his”. It would be important to discuss what it means to personify inanimate objects before reading the text as the tree’s feelings and pronouns are mentioned recurrently throughout the text. Cultural references are also used, which may resonate with some students, but confuse others who are not of Puerto Rican descent. “jagüey blanch,” “le-lo-lai,” and “Ay Bendito!” are all quoted at some point in the text. Though the insertion of these phrases do not skew comprehension much, it is possible that students will ask what the meaning of these phrases are. Other qualitative elements should also be considered, like figurative or descriptive language and abstract themes since language learners at a lower proficiency are likely to interpret words, phrases, or ideas literally. The quote, “His once-glorious crown sinking into the ocean” for example, may have students wondering why a tree would be wearing a crown. Sparking class discussion and brainstorming what the author means by this would be a meaningful and effective strategy to consider during reading.

**Development of Thesis and Purpose:**

*The Tree of Hope* by Anna Orenstein- Cardona will be used as a wonderful segway into the next topic in the Earth Science curriculum, “Severe Weather”. Content objectives such as hurricane development and hurricane safety will be infused into the lesson through a KWL chart which students will add information to before, during, and after reading. Through a multidisciplinary approach, language objectives will simultaneously be addressed as we exercise

and develop literary strategies which will ultimately promote higher levels of language proficiency as students learn how to break-down and digest challenging texts. Using context clues to obtain meaning from text, generating a glossary of unfamiliar words, annotating text, and using visuals to draw conclusions are the techniques students will practice as we read the book. These strategies, if practiced religiously, can be applied by students on standardized tests like the New York State Regents Exam, or during encounters with other challenging texts which may appear in laboratory activities, current event articles, or even other content areas.

Echevarría, Vogt, & Short (2016) stress the importance of providing “ample opportunities” for students to use learning strategies so we can strengthen cognitive and metacognitive ways of thinking in our students, and skills in the target language (English). This is the ultimate objective as we tackle this challenging text together as a class.

### **Linguistic Analysis:**

- **Vocabulary-**

The selected text contains vocabulary that is not entirely accessible to this class, which contains a wide range of language proficiencies from emerging all the way to expanding. However, the objective of this lesson is to practice the effective use of literary strategies to obtain meaning, requiring the difficulty of the text to be higher than typical, but not out of reach. For comprehension of this picture book to be achievable there are words, phrases, cultural references, and linguistic features that should be taken into consideration and highlighted during the planning and instruction stages.

- Big Idea Words (will be used to describe the theme of the story):

**resilience, perseverance, strength, collaboration, togetherness**

- **Key Vocabulary** (appear in abundance, and are needed to understand the setting, plot, and characters):  
**tree, trunk, roots, branches, leaves, banyan, island, caribbean, majestic, giant, old, mighty, crown** (*Free Word Cloud Generator*)
- **High Frequency Words** (in order of importance and frequency):  
**the (57x), and (36x), to (22x), of (19x), his (18x), a (17x), he (14x), was (13x), had (10x), with (9x)** (*Text Inspector, 2022*)
- **Prefix** (appears in various words from the text) :
  - **re-** *to repeat or do again*
    - Examples from text... **renewed, rebuilt, recovered**
- **Suffix** (appears in various words from the text):
  - **-ful** *to be filled with*
    - Examples from text... **hopeful, powerful**
- **Linguistic features** (to be defined and identified in the text):  
**personification, imagery, simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia, symbolism**
- **Cultural References**:  
**"jagüey blanch", "le-lo-lai", "Ay Bendito!", "Amigo, estás vivo?"**

- **Sentence Structure-**

- **Sentence Length:**

Sentence length in *The Tree of Hope* by Anna Orenstein- Cardona ranges from very simple to complex. This is suitable and appropriate not only for the lesson objectives, but also for the diverse student population and varying levels of language proficiency. “He was a giant with an enormous twisted trunk.” and “The tree felt confident.” serve as evidence of the short, simple, and understandable sentences that are embedded throughout the story. Sentences like this will act as an effective foundation for all students, and provide some level of understanding without much attention and scaffolding from the teacher. When combined with the illustrations on each page, students will likely obtain a general grasp on what is taking place during each point of the story. The complex sentences which are greater in length will challenge more proficient students, but also provide opportunities for us to exercise and practice using literary strategies in order to extract meaning from text. The following sentence serves as evidence of the sentences more complex in nature; "Day in and day out, young and old carried small buckets of the precious freshwater they had stored and doused the exposed dry roots tenderly.". Using context clues, annotating the text, defining unfamiliar vocabulary, and breaking the sentence down into smaller parts will be demonstrated and practiced throughout the text when sentences like this appear, tying directly back to the language objectives for the lesson.

- **Grammatical Structures:**

The author's use of tenses are quite dynamic for a children's picture book, and this may be another reason for the "AD" classification attached to the lexical level. In the text, the author primarily uses the past tense to describe a sequence of events leading up to the devastating strike of Hurricane Maria. However, tense shifts are apparent throughout the reading, and should be addressed to mitigate confusion and raise awareness to students. This occurs in more than one instance, but the following sentence from the book provides excellent evidence of shifting tenses, and at times in the same sentence... "The waves crashed against the shore, and now, she always fears the ocean.". Although the action of waves crashing occurred in the past, the feeling of fear is occurring at the present moment. To better comprehend the fusion of tenses in one sentence, we may wish to put this into perspective by asking our ELL's to think of an event that happened in their past which still leaves a lasting impact on them today. Perhaps, to take it a step further we may wish to have them create their own sentence using both tenses. In fact, Echevarría, Vogt, & Short (2016) suggest that we allow ample opportunities for our students to "imitate" the behaviors of native English speakers/ writers to enhance language development, or to help them complete a target task.

*The Tree of Hope* by Anna Orenstein- Cardona does not indicate many other challenges relative to grammatical structures aside from the tense shifting. Conditionals were not detected, and relative clauses were utilized in a fashion that is digestible for students at lower levels of proficiency with the appropriate supports in place. Sentences like "He was a giant with an enormous twisted trunk." and "The jagüey blanch was a generous friend to many." are excellent

examples from the text to display how the nouns are being described by the relative clauses, but in a way that does not overwhelm the readers or listeners. This contributes to the text's potential to be achievable by students of diverse language and learning needs with guided instruction and utilization of various literary strategies.

- **Syntactic Complexity:**

To allow for gradual progression of language proficiency, the texts introduced to our ELL's should maintain an appropriate level of syntactic complexity. This text diversifies its sentences by including a combination of simple, compound, and complex sentences. Therefore, students of lower language proficiencies would likely be incapable of comprehending this book on their own. However, the frequent implementation of simple sentences throughout the book, allows the text to remain within reach when combined with the illustrations/ visual aids on every page, structured supports and scaffolds by the teacher, and the appropriate usage of literary strategies. More challenging sentences will ultimately serve as valuable teaching moments, and provide opportunities for us to demonstrate how we can productively struggle through higher level texts using helpful strategies applicable across all content areas. This instructional approach is illustrated and supported by Dr. Cowin through a mind map which demonstrates the various strategies we can use to help our ELL's prevail in the area of reading. On Dr. Cowin's mind map, we can see that healthy discourse is encouraged, and can be sparked by incoming questions or statements from our students such as "What is the author trying to tell us?", "I was confused by...",

and “I reread that part because...” (Cowin, *Reading strategies for Multilingual learners*). Students who are not challenged by a text, will be less inclined to ask questions and less likely to think on a deeper level. Echevarría, Vogt, & Short (2016) greatly emphasise the importance of fostering critical thinking within our ENL classrooms as this is the clearest path towards achieving higher order tasks like synthesis and evaluation on Bloom’s Taxonomy. Our ultimate goal is to bump our students up to higher levels of proficiency, hence the selection of this slightly more challenging than normal text, which is very achievable with the appropriate scaffolds in place. Additionally, demonstrating literary strategies to students such as using context clues or annotating text would be ineffective if done with a book at or below most students’ reading level which could be clearly understood by the majority of the class.

- **Discourse Patterns-**

- As mentioned previously, one of the larger challenges with this particular text is the tense shifting which takes place periodically throughout the book. With that being said, it is critical that the discourse patterns are developmentally appropriate for the target audience, and that transitions between ideas, and periods of time are smooth and seamless. Upon analysis of the discourse markers in the text, it is clear that the book’s use of conjunctions and transitional phrases are highly effective and used in a fashion that is appropriate enough for younger age groups to easily observe and identify. In fact, distinct and highly specific markers such as “suddenly”, “by morning”, and “as the day turned into night” were detected all throughout the text. The importance of these conjunctions and transitional phrases

is that they clearly tell the reader when there has been a shift in action, passage of time, or a transition from one point in the storyline to the next. The cohesion techniques used in the book additionally ensure the presence of smooth transitions, particularly through the strategic use of pronouns and repetition. In other words, the text is able to produce a smooth flowing read as nouns become replaced with pronouns where appropriate to mitigate the presence of similar sounding sentences or redundancy. "The tree felt confident. He had withstood many storms and mighty hurricanes in his lifetime." is concrete evidence from the text which supports the seamless continuation of a thought from one sentence to another. Rather than using the noun "tree" in the following sentence, the author replaces it with the pronoun "he". Since the thought is continued, it is clearly implied by the reader that "he" is in reference to the tree. Furthermore, the author maintains consistency throughout the entire book by personifying the tree with the pronouns "he" and "his", making it easy for us to identify the object being referenced.

### **Sequencing Ideas with Textual Evidence:**

Selecting text for a class with a wide range of language proficiencies is a challenging task. This is primarily due to the fact that our goal is not just to have students comprehend the text. More importantly, students should be able to elicit higher order thinking skills as they make inferences and draw conclusions from text. This is ultimately how we achieve higher levels of English proficiency and help build both confidence and independence in our students. *The Tree of Hope* by Anna Orenstein- Cardona provides ample opportunities for us to demonstrate literary

strategies as it is a more challenging read in regards to vocabulary, sentence length, and occasional tense shifting. Familiarity and excess practice with strategies like using context clues, annotating text, breaking sentences into smaller parts, and translating complex words can ultimately help students across all content areas and on high stake exams like the NYS Regents. For these reasons, the objectives of this lesson are centered strictly on sharpening students' skills in these areas in hopes that they can gradually start executing them on their own. The following sentence from the text demonstrates how the presence and usage of various linguistic features might act as a barrier to comprehension, particularly for students with lower proficiencies... "By morning, the thunderous winds had quieted, the rain had disappeared, and the sea had stopped its roaring; there was total silence and a suffocating heat." (Orenstein-Cardona & Moreno, 2022). This particular sentence can in essence, be the basis of an entire lesson. Not only are there words in this sentence which students may have never seen before like "thunderous", "roaring", and "suffocating", but imagery and personification are also being used as the author attempts to evoke a sensory experience and set a dramatic scene. With that being said. We may wish to emphasise the fact that the sea does not actually speak or roar, and that winds don't actually sound like thunder to mitigate confusion and make students comfortable with the author's writing style. The sentence length in this case, may also be a hurdle, which we may want to address through breaking the sentence into smaller parts or clauses, annotating, and using pictures/ surrounding sentences as context clues to obtain meaning. Though this sentence does not explicitly demonstrate a tense shift, there is a shift in time indicated by the phrase "By morning". Students should be able to identify that time has passed in the story or that there is a change in scenes by observing discourse markers, which can be exercised throughout the text via highlighting or underlining conjunctions or transitional phrases.

**Critique of Challenging Concepts:**

There is no doubt that with a culturally and academically diverse group of students challenges will arise throughout this text. Linguistic challenges are typically the ones we think about when teaching ELLs/ MLs, but it is important to also acknowledge the cultural and cognitive struggles that students are likely to face. Through this text analysis, a wide variety of linguistic challenges were addressed in detail whether that included difficulties with the author's terminology or use of linguistic features like imagery/ personification, the size of sentences, or the shifting of tenses from time to time. However, it is important to hone in on the cultural challenges students may encounter as well. Though many students may relate deeply to the setting, characters, and natural disaster described, we must acknowledge that not every student is of latino descent. For this reason, students may struggle with the various cultural references that appear such as "jagüey blanch," "le-lo-lai," "Ay Bendito!", and "Amigo, estás vivo?". Even students of latino descent may encounter difficulty here, as some of these phrases are strictly associated with Puerto Rican culture or forms of speech. To overcome this struggle, it would be valuable to hear from students who can relate to these cultural references. If few students can relate, it would be important to translate the meaning of the target phrases as a class, then have students share similar sayings used in their native language to create a bridge between what they know, and the unknown. In the selected text, cognitive challenges are also likely to arise. For instance, students at this level, unless highly proficient in English, may be unable to successfully acknowledge the messages or themes being delivered as they are not explicitly mentioned or implied. For instance, there is a point in the book that elaborately describes the “awakening” of the tree’s roots and its “regrowth” after the hurricane has passed, and once the community came

together as one, to revive it. The roots “awakening” suggest the idea of inner strength returning, while the tree’s gradual “regrowth” mirrors the resilience of the community after the hurricane. Though it is unlikely for students to develop these thoughts on their own, it is important to demonstrate how deep analysis of a text can reveal implied themes and messages that we can learn from.

### **Attention to De-Mystifying Complex Texts:**

Despite the challenges this text will bring, there are also valuable strategies to be taught to our ELLs along the way. Our ultimate goal is to foster growth and independence in our student population, and the strategies we demonstrate to help them “de-mystify” complex text will ultimately help us achieve this.

Upon careful analysis of any text, it is clear that even students native to the English language struggle with digesting long and complex sentences. This by far, was the most challenging aspect of this text as lengthy sentences were apparent throughout the text, resulting in the “AD” classification ahead of the textile level. To combat this aspect of the text, it is critical that we demonstrate how to break long sentences into clauses, then carefully analyze the words in each clause, particularly targeting those which are unfamiliar to most students. Echevarría, Vogt, & Short (2016) suggest dividing longer words into syllables in order to clearly identify root words, prefixes, or suffixes. If we take the word “ecosystem” for example, we can present this word as “eco + system”. Analyzing each word part can help us obtain definitions particularly since most root words are of latin descent, allowing students to make seamless connections to their native language. Annotating text, and inserting translations where appropriate can also be useful strategies for decoding longer or more complex sentences.

Though tense shifting may not significantly hinder student comprehension of the text, it is important for students to have a clear understanding of the plot. This can become distorted if conjunctions and transitional phrases are not acknowledged. Since tense shifting took place on multiple occasions in this text, it would be appropriate to provide students with a graphic organizer of some sort, preferably a timeline, ultimately allowing students to visually represent the past, present, and future events closely associated with the plot. Echevarría, Vogt, & Short (2016) support the use of graphic organizers as well, stating that they “...provide scaffolding for students in the form of a visual representation of language”.

The vocabulary used by the author in this text additionally raises concerns, particularly if extensive scaffolds and supports are not in place. To address this final challenge associated directly with *The Tree of Hope* by Anna Orenstein- Cardona, it is recommended that we take advantage of technology tools such as word cloud generators that help us analyze the most commonly used words in the text, or words we think our group of ELLs will struggle with. From here it is important to spend time preparing for the book by studying the key vocabulary extracted from the word cloud. It may be helpful to help students generate a glossary using these words, which could include a direct translation, a definition, and an example of the word/ phrase in context, and even a picture if applicable. Echevarría, Vogt, & Short (2016) also suggest that during the text, we demonstrate how to appropriately make logical guesses based on contextual and syntactic evidence, commonly known as using context clues to extract meaning. While reading, if context clues are used in combination with the glossaries created at the start of the lesson, it is apparent that scaffolds are being used, in addition to valuable literary strategies. Repeated use of the various strategies we demonstrated to students during this lesson should ultimately help build student confidence upon entering future complex texts. As a result, our

ELLs will develop the necessary skills to navigate and comprehend complex texts independently, fostering both language proficiency and deeper engagement with academic content.

### *Resources*

*Considerations for Determining the Right Level of Text Complexity for Students.* El Education.

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