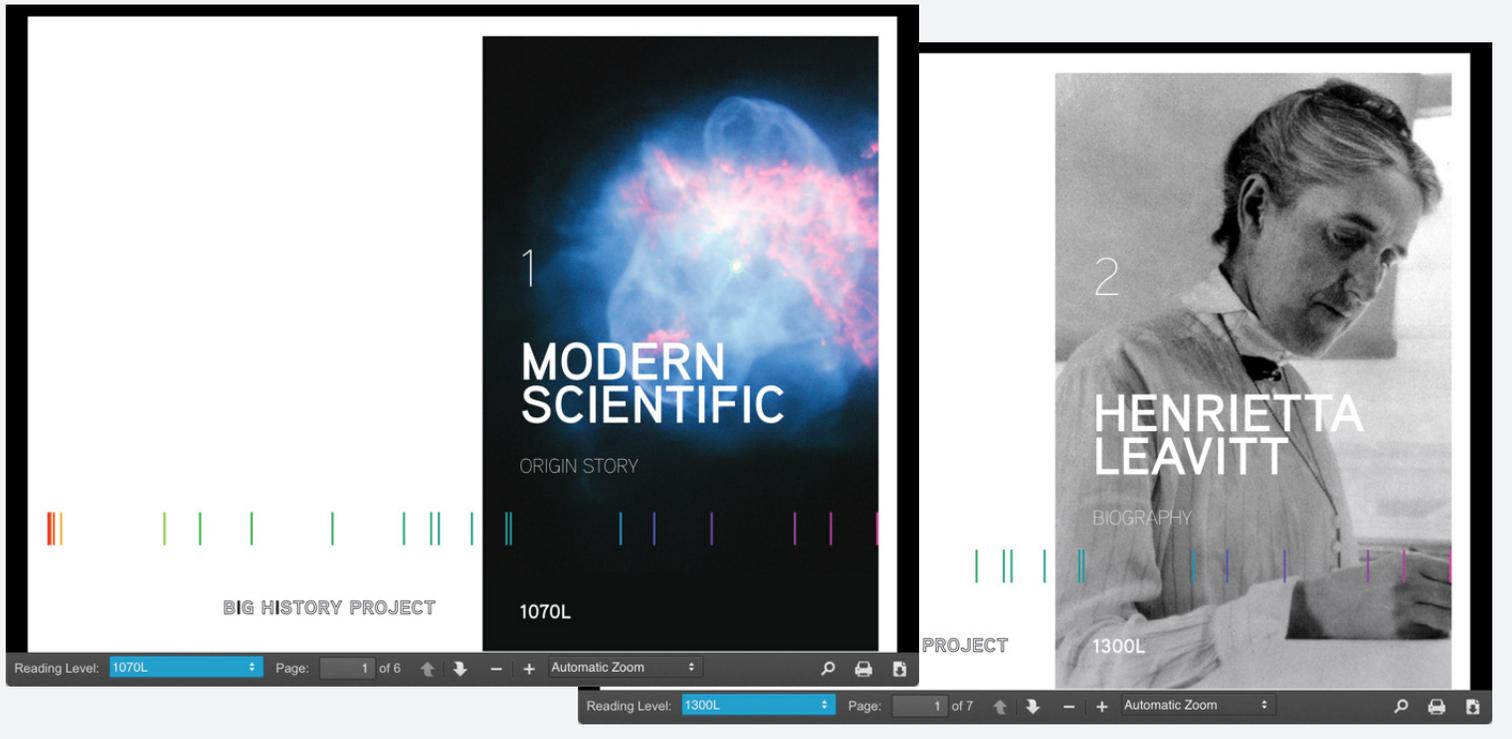




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## BHP TEACHER TAKE

# USING LEVELED TEXTS - PART 1

Teachers of adolescents know that it is important to offer them regular opportunities to read sophisticated texts. But it can be difficult to do this in a way that responds to students' literacy needs.

### Benefits of leveled texts

Leveled text sets are sets of the same text written at a range of Lexile levels. Lexile measures predict the reading challenge of each text. Texts with longer sentences and more specialized language receive higher Lexile scores, and texts with shorter sentences and limited word choice receive lower Lexile scores.

BHP includes leveled text sets that you can use with your students. One of the benefits of using leveled texts in your classroom is that it can enable you to set students up for success in their reading. When students have more successful reading experiences, they are likely to read more often. Another benefit is that using leveled texts can support all students to access the important ideas from those texts.

With these benefits in mind, here are three principles to consider as you use leveled texts in your classroom.



# BIG HISTORY PROJECT

## **Principle I: Assume plasticity and growth**

Like adults, adolescents find some texts more challenging than others. Think about the different degrees of challenge that you may experience reading tax documents versus a Shakespearean play, or legal files versus a piece of long-form journalism. Although each of these texts could have a similar Lexile score, they could feel quite challenging or quite comfortable depending on your familiarity with the concepts and language, your purposes for reading, and so on. Similarly, your students may find some of your classroom texts more challenging than others, even when the Lexile scores are similar.

Further, when students have regular opportunities to read and talk about complex texts, their literacy skills and practices grow, as does their confidence and independence as readers. This means that over the course of the year, students may become readier to take on more challenging versions of texts, and be willing to do so more often.

For these reasons, it is best to avoid putting students in fixed reading groups for an extended period of time or thinking of individual students as a single “type” of reader.

## **Principle II: Position students as competent readers**

Adolescents are particularly aware of and sensitive to negative labeling and positioning in school. A risk of using leveled texts is that students reading lower-leveled texts may become focused on those levels and take them on as part of their identity: the identity of a bad or struggling reader who can only read “easy” texts. Relatedly, when students are assigned lower-leveled texts, they can perceive a lack of confidence from their teacher or begin to feel that others do not think they are capable of doing challenging work. These perspectives can result in adolescents reading less often and with less persistence, which clearly counteracts the potentially positive outcomes of using leveled texts as a form of literacy support.

When using leveled texts, then, it is important to consider how to be sensitive to students' social and emotional needs, including potentially avoiding naming the differences in texts or reasons for giving students different forms of the same text.

## **Principle III: Use leveled texts alongside other forms of literacy support**

As helpful as leveled texts can be for supporting students' access to ideas, it is important to remember that they cannot address all the literacy challenges that your students may face. Texts are challenging for a host of reasons, including the background knowledge they presume of the reader, the concepts they include or describe, the coherence of the message, the emotional or intellectual challenge of the content, and the degree of trustworthiness of the claims. Note that none of these challenges are directly accounted for by Lexile measures or supported by assigning lower-leveled texts to students. In other words, there are many literacy challenges that students may have with a given text that are not addressed by leveled texts; and, in some cases, lower-leveled texts may actually present additional literacy demands even as they reduce others.

Because there are many factors that make texts challenging for students, it's important to consider leveled texts as one tool among many in your toolkit. See *Using Leveled Texts – Part 2* for specific ideas for how you can incorporate leveled texts into your literacy instruction.

