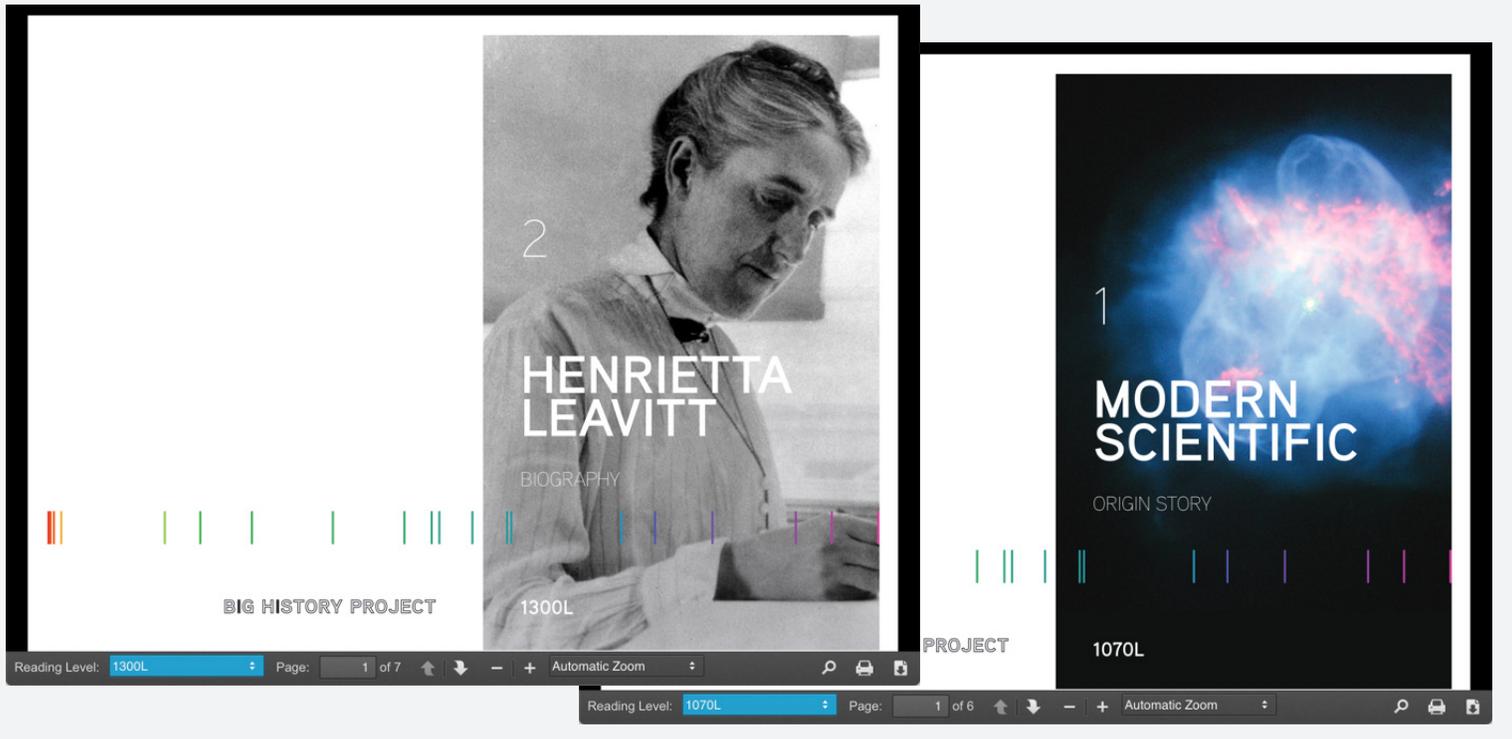




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BHP TEACHER TAKE

USING LEVELED TEXTS - PART 2

Leveled texts are one type of literacy scaffolding that you can use in your classroom. As you may know, each Big History Project article is available in four different Lexile levels. Below are some ideas for incorporating leveled texts into your literacy instruction. (Note: I wrote about some basic principles of leveled texts in Using Leveled Texts Part 1!)

Choose the level of text you assign based on the degree of independence you expect from students

One way of using leveled texts is to adjust the difficulty of the text you assign up or down based on the other forms of literacy support that students will have during the task or activity you have designed.

- When you ask students to read independently (as in silent reading or homework), consider assigning them a lower-levelled version of the text. Because lower-levelled texts have shorter sentences and fewer specialized words, students are likely to access the ideas in the text more easily. This would be most appropriate in situations where you have some evidence that students may struggle unproductively to make meaning with the more complex forms of the text.
- When your instructional approach will give students more support (as in teacher-led interactive reading or reading with a graphic organizer), consider using a higher-levelled version of the text. This will offer all students the opportunity to hear and see more specialized language and more complex sentence and paragraph construction.

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Choose the level of text you assign based on your instructional purpose

You can also adjust the difficulty of the text you assign based on your instructional goals.

- If your instructional goal is simply for students to get the gist of a text, then you might consider using a lower-leveled text. Students will be able to read it more quickly and then you can spend more time in class applying or building on the idea. This can be a productive move in situations where you're pressed for time and you're worried that the time it will take to read a more complex version of a particular text may exceed the instructional value of that text.
- If your instructional goal is to deepen students' conceptual understanding through reading, then consider using a higher-leveled text (and stepping up the support that students will need to become familiar with the specialized language and other demands of that text). Note that this sort of goal and approach is typically best suited for the BHP classroom.

Choose the level of text you assign based on the individual needs of students

A third possibility is to adjust the level of text based on your (ever expanding) knowledge of the strengths and needs of each student.

- In a given lesson, you can put students in more homogenous reading groups based on your prediction of the ease or challenge with which students will read a particular text, and then you can assign a corresponding level of the text to each group. In their small groups, students can read the text and construct meaning together by talking about the big ideas; creating concept maps or other visual representations of the ideas; working through a graphic organizer; or writing discussion questions that they would like to pose to the whole class. Then, you can pull the class back together for a whole class discussion about the ideas that all students read. Note that your reading group configurations will likely change from one lesson to the next as you consider the different combinations of knowledge, engagement, and skill that your students will bring to each text.
- Alternatively, you can put students in more heterogeneous reading groups and assign the same higher-leveled text to each group, giving the most fluent readers of each group the job of reading aloud to their groupmates. You can then give the remaining students in each group other roles, such as asking questions while reading, taking notes about the small group discussion, or reporting important points from their small group discussion back to the whole class. Again, note that different students may fluctuate in their readiness to read the varied texts of your classroom.

Enable students to choose their own text levels

Another way that you can use leveled texts is to empower your students to make choices for themselves about the version of the text that they read on any given day.

- One way of doing this is by establishing a lower-leveled version of the text as the classroom expectation and then encouraging students to challenge themselves to choose to read a higher-leveled version. This disrupts the idea of "below grade level" readers, it opens the possibility that all students can "level up," and it supports students' comprehension monitoring. Note that you have the option of choosing the range of texts you offer students! Although BHP typically offers four versions ranging in Lexile score from 700 to 1300, you could, for example, decide to only use the 1050L and 1300L texts—the 1050L as your minimum expectation, and the 1300L for students who want to push themselves.

Final thoughts

As mentioned in Using Leveled Texts – Part 1, it is important to approach the use of leveled texts with flexibility and sensitivity. This involves continually collecting information about students' reading, allowing your own understandings of your students as readers to deepen and evolve, and checking your practice to ensure that you are using these evolving understandings in your decisions about grouping and ability. This also involves avoiding negative or deficit labeling and any approach that would put students into a fixed leveled reading group for an extended period of time. Finally, it may involve having explicit conversations with students about their reading and what Lexile scores mean and do not mean, always with a focus on all that students can do and the sorts of growth that they can make.

