What does rigor, a word that frequently pops up in conversations about education, really mean? More specifically, what does it mean for literacy instruction, and how does it relate to challenging standards-based assessments? In this informative and practical guide, literacy expert Nancy Boyles uses the framework from Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK) to answer these questions, offering experience-based advice along with specific examples of K–8 assessment items.

Boyles defines rigor and shows how it relates to literacy at each DOK level and explains the kind of thinking students will be expected to demonstrate. She then tackles the essence of what teachers need to know about how DOK and its associated rigors are measured on standards-based assessments. Specifically, readers learn how each DOK rigor aligns with:

- standards,
- text complexity,
- close reading,
- student interaction,
- the reading-writing connection, and
- formative assessment.

Teachers, coaches, and administrators will find clear guidance, easy-to-implement strategies, dozens of useful teaching tools and resources, and encouragement to help students achieve and demonstrate true rigor in reading and writing.
To Tessa

For the joy you bring to our family—
May your teachers always recognize your infinite gifts
as a learner and inspire you to dream big.
And may you love books as much as your Auntie.

Smile on!
READING, WRITING, and RIGOR

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I had just completed a full-day workshop and was packing my books for the trip back to the airport when the only teacher who remained in the room hurried toward me. “Could you look at these questions?” she asked, waving a sheet of paper. “My principal is doing a walk-through tomorrow. He’s looking for rigor. Do you think my questions are hard enough?”

I glanced at the clock, which announced a tight timeline if my flight departed on schedule. But I could at least take a quick glance. I found questions that really were pretty good, with lots of inferential thinking required. So, if her principal defined rigor as questions beyond the literal level, I expected this teacher would fare reasonably well. The problem is, however, that “hard questions” miss the essence of rigor.

Defining Rigor in Literacy

What exactly is rigor? Teachers and administrators toss the term about as if it were education’s golden fleece: If we could just get more rigor in our classrooms, all would be well with the world. There are pleas for more rigorous curriculum, rigor in assessments, rigor in the content areas and the questions teachers ask. Once I even heard a teacher ask her students to “sit with rigor.” (I’m still contemplating that one.) The term is often used together with words like high expectations, challenge, complexity, and deep thinking.

It’s easier to find synonyms or words aligned with rigor than it is to find a good definition of it. In fact, a good definition of rigor is especially hard to come by as it relates to an academic area like literacy. Here’s a general definition that I like, a place to start:

Rigor is the result of work that challenges students’ thinking in new and interesting ways. It occurs when they are encouraged toward a sophisticated understanding of fundamental ideas and are driven by curiosity to discover what they don’t know. (Sztabnik, 2015)
The Rigor Is in the Answer

The phrase “sophisticated understanding of fundamental ideas” draws attention as the essence of rigor because it matches other descriptors we often hear. But just focusing on synonyms would miss the most important word here: result. Rigor is the result, or outcome, of work students do. So right from the get-go, we need to acknowledge that rigor doesn’t reside in questions, but in answers. Questions and other tasks provide the opportunity for rigor; it’s the answers that show the rigor.

We should also pay closer attention to the word toward: students are encouraged “toward a sophisticated understanding.” To me, this means that all rigor is not something that is already at the point of “sophisticated understanding,” but that worthy learning opportunities intentionally move students in this direction. There are steps along the way.

Here is how I define rigor in literacy, accounting for four specific steps. Rigor in literacy is (1) precision in identifying the best textual evidence, (2) independence in applying literacy skills and concepts accurately, (3) insight into content and craft based on depth of reasoning, and (4) creativity in synthesizing information, often from multiple sources or points of view.

The Rigor of Each Depth of Knowledge

How did Depth of Knowledge (DOK) become part of our literacy landscape? It all began with Norman Webb (Webb, 2002). He developed DOK as a process for examining the alignment between standards and standardized assessments, using four key criteria, or steps. Those four criteria serve the same purpose today in analyzing items on new standards-based assessments. But we now apply these criteria to the analysis of curriculum, as well: How complex is the task? We recognize that different kinds of tasks require different depths of knowledge, from shallow to great.

The four steps in my definition match the four levels of Depth of Knowledge, as shown in Figure 1. Notice that each DOK and its associated form of rigor are linked to the ones that come before and after. Evidence, associated with DOK 1, is the foundation for everything that follows. Skills, DOK 2, require evidence for suitable elaboration. Insight, associated with DOK 3, is derived from the thoughtful application of skills. The creativity that results from synthesizing information, associated with DOK 4, grows out of the unique interpretation of insights.

Measuring the Depths of Knowledge on Standards-Based Assessments, Then and Now

The way new assessments measure Depth of Knowledge will be explored one level at a time in subsequent chapters. But for now, let’s look in the rearview mirror to see how past assessments have evaluated students’ literacy thinking.
FIGURE 1 | Defining the Rigor in Each Depth of Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOK</th>
<th>Rigor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 1:</strong> Recalling and reproducing information</td>
<td>Precision in identifying the best textual evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 2:</strong> Applying skills or knowledge of concepts</td>
<td>Independence in applying literacy skills and concepts accurately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 3:</strong> Employing strategic thinking and reasoning</td>
<td>Insight into content and craft based on depth of reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 4:</strong> Using extended thinking</td>
<td>Creativity in synthesizing information, often from multiple sources or points of view</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In 2012, RAND published a working paper (Yuan & Le, 2012) that showed all too clearly why new assessments were needed. Not so long ago, state tests did little to evaluate deep thinking, even when the states’ standards may have included that level of knowledge. In an examination of 17 state tests administered to students before the arrival of the Common Core, approximately 80 percent of all items for both reading and writing measured only Depths of Knowledge 1 and 2, with just 20 percent testing DOK 3 and DOK 4. This means that former state assessments most frequently measured students’ ability to recall details and apply skills instead of asking them to analyze, critique, or extend their thinking. In fact, DOK 4 was hardly represented at all on reading items. This meant that students were rarely expected to read multiple sources and synthesize information in their responses.

But this situation is changing. A study published in the journal *Education Next* (Peterson, Barrows, & Gift, 2016) finds that since 2011, 45 states have changed their assessments and raised the levels at which students are considered “proficient.” That action means more emphasis on rigor in students’ responses, deeper levels of knowledge—and stress for teachers.

**Where Our Thinking About DOK Has Gone Off Track**

We see those higher levels of proficiency and want to prepare our students for the rigor they will need to demonstrate on these new, harder tests. But we don’t know where to begin. And if we’re completely honest, we don’t even know what questions at each Depth of Knowledge will look like on these assessments.

For a few years after the arrival of the Common Core, we did not have good models of the kinds of questions students would probably encounter on standards-based assessments. Initially, a few representative items at each grade level appeared in Appendix B of the Common Core (http://www.corestandards
But these became outdated as soon as test-builders such as the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) began designing the "real" assessments. Even the items on these measures weren't too reliable at first. Test length, question types, and scoring have all undergone numerous transformations.

Other missteps occurred as well. One early myth was "DOK 4 is project-based." This assumption led to asking students to complete performance tasks like “Draw a map of your dream bedroom” or “Create a life-size model of Sarah from Sarah Plain and Tall.” We now know that such tasks were off base because they didn’t draw on textual knowledge in substantial ways.

Performance-based tasks as they appear on new standards-based tests are a collection of complex comprehension questions and extended writing tasks that often require students to synthesize information from multiple texts and use that information to answer questions and then generate a product that is uniquely their own. Unfortunately, this misunderstanding about performance tasks has not been the only rabbit hole we’ve tumbled down. Some other guidelines have been too general in nature, and sometimes even misleading.

One example of information that was too general to be helpful for new assessments is Norman Webb’s chart of DOK Question Stems (see http://svesd.net/files/DOK_Question_Stems.pdf). In the chart, the bullet points listed under each DOK are appropriate to the designated level of thinking but in some cases are not a good match for the kinds of tasks students will encounter on assessments. Several of the stems on this chart lack suitable specificity: “What is your interpretation of this text?” “Write a research paper on a topic.” “What can you say about ________?” Students will be given more direct guidance than this on new assessments, and we should provide clearer direction for the tasks we assign as well.

Those wheels of verbs sorted into categories for each DOK level haven’t been very helpful, either. Remember that Depth of Knowledge isn’t about the verb but about what students do with that verb. For example, describe doesn’t fit neatly into one category. Students might be asked to describe a character based on details retrieved directly from a text—a task that would represent a low level of knowledge. Or they could be asked to describe similarities and differences in the way an author portrays characters in two different texts—a much more robust task. Depth of Knowledge is about the task, not the process; it’s about the literacy understanding students have acquired in relation to a specific text.

This attribute is what makes Depth of Knowledge different from Bloom’s taxonomy. Bloom emphasizes the kind of thinking students do, the process. DOK focuses on the outcome of students’ thinking, the product. Students will never “master” a Depth of Knowledge because the DOK 2 product they create based on their knowledge of an easy text may be very different from what they generate for DOK 2 when the text is more difficult.
Teaching Smart

Although reliable information on standards-based assessment items was once unavailable, that is no longer the case. Over the last couple of years, a side-by-side comparison of items from one assessment to another shows more similarities than differences. In other words, we can be relatively confident that the types of questions on last year's test will appear again this year.

Many sample assessment items are available. I rely on SBAC Resources and Documentation: http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/practice-and-training-tests/resources-and-documentation/ and PARCC Released Items: https://parcc-assessment.org/practice-tests/. Smarter Balanced and PARCC were the first organizations to develop assessments based on the Common Core, and other publishers seem to have followed their lead in designing similar measures. To make it easier for you to examine question types, a list of sites with released items is provided on page 198 of Chapter 7, Teaching Tools and Resources.

To help you teach smart, this book will carefully examine sample items for each Depth of Knowledge—not so you can create other questions in their image and teach to the test, but so you can enhance your instruction and help students develop key literacy skills that will empower them as readers and writers. The goal is to teach to the rigor! A tool for teachers, Protocol for Analyzing Assessment Items, is provided on page 195 of Chapter 7 to make this item analysis systematic and as practical as possible. Notice that this analysis begins with understanding the item and ends with understanding the instruction.

Getting On Track for Depths of Knowledge

Teachers want to know, "What can we do in our classrooms to make Depth of Knowledge real for kids?" First, I suggest that we honor rigor at all the Depths of Knowledge. If we view rigor as applying only to DOK 3 and DOK 4, we will have overlooked foundational textual knowledge that students need to fully grasp the deeper complexities of a text.

We should hold our students accountable to rigor at all knowledge levels and ourselves to practices that promote rigor. In the past, we too often made the mistake of omitting tasks that tapped the rigor of DOK 3 and DOK 4—a serious oversight, for sure. But if we don't respect the rigor required for DOK 1 and DOK 2, students will be unprepared to grapple with the rigor of tasks that are more challenging.

We need to proceed with care in making these midcourse corrections. Many teachers perceive the rigor associated with Depth of Knowledge 1 as so basic that it barely warrants their time to invest in it. The rigor of Depth of Knowledge 2 relates to building skills and concepts, another area where teachers fall back on a long history of instructional experience. Doing so masks the urgency of more effective teaching of skills.
Depth of Knowledge 3 is probably the weakest link in the pursuit of rigor because so many teachers are unclear about what rigor at this level entails—not to mention their even more limited understanding of how to support it. Then there's the rigor of Depth of Knowledge 4, which may be more familiar because of its connection to performance-based tasks that require the integration of information from multiple sources. Still, when teachers are left on their own to design similar performance tasks, it is apparent that their insights into what constitutes a good text-connection lesson and extended writing task may be off the mark.

The good news is that these issues are fixable—and we don't have to throw out everything we've ever known about teaching and learning to get rigor right. Rather, the charge is to rethink our current practices, tweaking as necessary and enriching our teaching with a few new high-yield strategies that have great turnaround potential. We can achieve this goal by viewing the rigor of each Depth of Knowledge through various lenses:

- Aligning rigor and standards
- Aligning rigor and text complexity
- Aligning rigor and close reading
- Aligning rigor and student interaction
- Aligning rigor and the reading-writing connection
- Aligning rigor and formative assessment

Aligning Rigor and Standards

Any discussion of rigor—or just about anything else in literacy education today—needs to begin with standards. We need a context for our new assessments and the learning opportunities we provide. In other words, what are we aiming for?

Despite some controversy over the Common Core, no one is challenging the need for literacy standards in one form or another. Most states have now adapted or modified the original CCSS document to reflect the needs of their population. But in truth, these new standards, regardless of what we title them, have helped both teachers and students reach higher in meeting literacy goals. We know this because the assessments designed to measure students' literacy knowledge based on these new-era standards do, indeed, raise the bar for what counts as top-of-the-line literacy performance.

The Expectations Set by the New Standards

What do these new standards ask of students? Some of the expectations are the same as earlier ones because many of the essentials of text analysis are just what they've always been: identifying details, story elements, main ideas,
themes—the list goes on. This is the “what” of reading: What is the author saying? Teachers have been holding students accountable to standards such as these for as long as we all can remember, which leads some educators to conclude that these new standards are simply the same old cake with a different frosting. But that would be a naïve conclusion that overlooks much of the rigor expected of students from these new standards.

Beyond the expectation that students will understand the content of what they read, today’s more demanding standards also ask students to attend to the crafting and structure of a text, as well as next steps in applying new knowledge: How is the author communicating meaning and the integration of knowledge and ideas? Why is the author providing this information? What can you do with this knowledge? These are areas often omitted by teachers. Even elementary students, and certainly middle school students, now need to examine these more nuanced dimensions of a text.

If your state doesn’t code standards exactly as the Common Core codes them, know that elements of text analysis are generally consistent wherever you may live. For example, what CCSS calls “College and Career Readiness Standard 2: Determining central ideas” might be labeled as something else in your corner of the world, but it still taps the same kind of textual knowledge.

What’s “Hard”?  

One final thought about standards: teachers often complain to me that these new standards are “hard.” To resolve this complaint, we need to be honest with ourselves: Are they hard because we’ve provided instruction around these standards and students still don’t “get it”? Or are they hard because there are things we have not taught related to the new standards, or not taught in a way that taps deeper levels of thinking? It’s this second possibility that we must face squarely if we aim to make a difference going forward.

Aligning Rigor and Text Complexity

Getting the right reading materials into students’ hands is an essential first step in successful curriculum implementation, and that sometimes feels like half the battle when teaching a lesson. Aligning rigor and text complexity should always be a consideration when planning for literacy instruction. We can begin with the complexities defined for us in Appendix A of the Common Core (http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf). There are both qualitative and quantitative complexities. The qualitative complexities include the following:

- Knowledge demands: The amount of prior knowledge a text requires
- Meaning: The understanding we want students to gain from a text
- Language: The vocabulary of a text
- Structure: The way a text is organized
But there are other qualitative complexities to consider, too. If we want to maximize the rigor at each Depth of Knowledge, we need to consider what makes a text ideal for each DOK. These additional complexities will be addressed in the following chapters.

Then there’s the matter of quantitative complexity. A major shift that has come about in the pursuit of greater rigor through new standards is the expectation that students will read text that is not just more difficult to understand, with more sophisticated language and structure, but that also represents a higher readability level. Readability is a quantitative measure, such as Lexile, which is calculated by sentence length and word frequency (see the Lexile Analyzer at https://lexile.com/analyzer/). A text’s Lexile number does not consider the qualitative complexities of the text nor does it consider how engaging the text might be for a group of students.

In a recent blog post, one notable literacy expert, Timothy Shanahan (2016), offers two suggestions for teaching with complex text:

- Make sure that kids are getting opportunities to read texts that are at the specified reading levels set by your standards. These texts are likely to be somewhat hard to read—in terms of decoding, vocabulary meaning, grasping what the author is explicitly saying. As such, they might not be the best texts for close reading.
- When you do ask kids to read texts that are hard to read, you need to be prepared to scaffold—to give students supports that will help them to make sense of the text; helping with decoding, preteaching vocabulary, breaking down sentences, connecting pronoun referents, making sense of organization, etc.

Although Shanahan’s plea for “texts that are hard to read” contradicts current practices like guided reading that are founded on the precise leveling of students and placement into “just right” books, we should be open to his logic. If we don’t offer students the opportunity to grapple with text that is more complex, we can hardly be surprised when they fall further and further behind. But let’s be sensible about this: there will likely be a line in the sand for many readers, especially young students and those who struggle with fluency, at which point a text simply can’t work. They will not be able to retrieve evidence demonstrating any Depth of Knowledge because they can barely recognize the words.

To make sure the text students read is challenging but not too frustrating, perhaps we need a new definition of “just right.” We should offer students substantially complex texts for whole-class lessons where the teacher is actively part of the process and able to guide and scaffold. When students are reading in small groups, reasonable differentiation should be considered. But take a chance on text that might be a bit more challenging than one you would have considered in the past. Careful scaffolding and manageable challenge will push students to “level up.”
Aligning Rigor and Close Reading

We should also consider the relationship between rigor and instruction. Given that close reading is so often cited as a key instructional approach to support students’ achievement of standards and understanding of complex text, we’ll need to examine close reading for its effect on the rigor of each Depth of Knowledge (see page 7, https://parcc-assessment.org/content/uploads/2017/11/PARCCMCFELALiteracyAugust2012_FINAL.pdf).

I am a passionate advocate of close reading. Through close reading we endeavor to build students’ capacity for deep textual analysis. We want readers to probe both big ideas and subtle nuances of content and craft. But in the end, close reading is simply the process, the way students engage with a text during reading.

New assessments have now addressed what students should be able to do after reading, though the close reading path to getting there is less clear. In this book, we will examine differences in close reading practices at each Depth of Knowledge, but we can begin to solve this riddle by identifying principles of instruction before, during, and after close reading that prevail across all levels.

Before close reading. We know by examining the teacher’s manual in many published programs that experts in the past have advocated heavy-duty scaffolding before reading: lots of personal connections, predictions about what the text will probably be about, building background knowledge, introducing vocabulary, and in the primary grades, a picture walk—all to enhance students’ comprehension. For close reading, these practices may no longer be the best approach. We want students to get their information from the text, not the teacher, to develop independence rather than dependence.

During reading. In the recent past, the approach during reading has been for students to find the evidence for a specific comprehension skill that was a good match for the text. In fact, we teachers often chose a text based on its potential to advance a particular skill, and during reading we guided students to retrieve evidence related to this single focus. We used the text as a vehicle for teaching the aligned skill and then often moved on to a different text or passage to reinforce the same objective.

What does close reading say about using a text during reading in this way? For what Depths of Knowledge is identifying evidence for a specific focus a good idea? When should support during reading guide students to examine evidence more broadly? Different Depths of Knowledge call for different approaches to making meaning during close reading.

After reading. For many years, the time after reading has been characterized by asking questions—sometimes long lists of questions—that students answer in writing. But when teachers just ask questions and expect students to “publish” their thinking on paper, is this instruction or assessment? What might
instructed scaffolding look like after close reading at different Depths of Knowledge?

In the chapters that follow, we will examine rigor before, during, and after reading for each Depth of Knowledge as it relates to student interaction, the reading-writing connection, and formative assessment.

**Aligning Rigor and Student Interaction**

We hear a lot about student engagement and hardly need to be convinced of its importance. But “engagement” is difficult to measure. That quiet kid in the corner looks like he’s tuned in, but he hasn’t said a word throughout the entire lesson. Is he just shy and reluctant to participate, or is his mind miles away, contemplating the soccer game scheduled for after school? Although it’s hard to quantify engagement, we can more easily assess interaction: To what extent are students interacting with the text, their peers, and their teacher?

*Interaction* isn’t always a synonym for *discussion*. Interaction can mean opportunities for student responses, from a simple “thumbs up” to extended discourse around a literacy-related problem—and many things in between. Where will these various kinds of interaction fit most naturally into the challenges of each Depth of Knowledge? Find out, chapter by chapter.

**Aligning Rigor and the Reading-Writing Connection**

Many schools and districts ask me to work with their teachers on “writing.” I always need to ask, “Do you mean writing short answers to constructed-response questions, approximately a paragraph or two? Or do you mean writing full stories or analytical essays of many paragraphs, like arguments and informational pieces?” The challenges are different.

Connecting reading and writing by writing to sources is a new expectation for many learners, especially younger ones. How do reading and writing standards work together and how are they different at different Depths of Knowledge? More important, how do we support the reading-writing connection through our day-to-day instruction?

**Aligning Rigor and Formative Assessment**

Whether scoring reading or writing, we need to measure what our students have achieved so we know to what extent they (and we) have been successful. There are many kinds of assessments, but for classroom purposes, we will focus in this book on formative measures.

*Formative assessment* “refers to a wide variety of methods that teachers use to conduct in-process evaluations of student comprehension, learning needs,
and academic progress during a lesson, unit, or course” (Glossary of Education Reform, 2014). In short, formative assessments seek to inform instruction, to answer the question: Where shall I go next with my teaching? We are trying to find out: Did my students achieve the goal I intended? Who “gets it”? Who doesn’t “get it”? Are there common problems among students who did not demonstrate sufficient understanding? What are the problems? Who needs reteaching? How will I reteach this?

Assessing comprehension is tricky because “comprehension” can mean many things depending on the Depth of Knowledge we are measuring. Are we determining students’ understanding of basic text content? Are we measuring their competence in applying a comprehension skill? Are we examining their metacognition, their ability to think strategically about what they read? Are we analyzing their capacity to use textual knowledge to synthesize sources and solve a problem?

For meaningful formative assessment, the monitoring task must measure the rigor of what we teach. So our first job is to know which Depth of Knowledge we want to evaluate and to determine the criteria by which that DOK should be analyzed. Hence, rubrics will be essential to using the data we collect to drive our instruction.

As we contemplate formative assessment, we should also consider how we can guide teachers in their instruction aimed at the rigor of each Depth of Knowledge. If you’re a teacher, how can you reflect on your own practice to take the next step forward? If you’re a coach, how can you support your colleagues’ pursuit of best practices for each DOK in a nonevaluative way? If you’re an administrator, what should you look and listen for when you visit classrooms to observe lessons or talk with teachers about comprehension instruction? The Protocol for Monitoring and Supporting Instruction for Deep Thinking on page 196 of Chapter 7 offers a starting point for professional reflection.

Mapping the Path Forward: The Rest of This Book

The Depths of Knowledge build on each other, so that in the end we maximize students’ "sophisticated understanding of fundamental ideas"—rigor’s gold standard. Here is how the rest of this book is organized, with the goal of supporting your efforts to help students achieve and demonstrate rigor in their literacy learning.

**Part 1: The Depths of Knowledge in Literacy (Chapters 1–4)**

In Part 1 of this book, we’ll unpack the levels, beginning with DOK 1. Each topic in the list that follows is addressed sequentially in Chapters 1 through 4, as applied to DOK 1 through DOK 4, respectively:
• *Understanding Underlying Principles: The Rigor at Each Depth of Knowledge*—This is where understanding the rigor associated with each Depth of Knowledge begins. What kind of thinking will be expected of students?

• *Measuring Depth of Knowledge on Standards-Based Assessments*—Each chapter includes examples of questions for each Depth of Knowledge from released items and practice tests. Items are organized by standard and have been carefully researched to represent questions that appear on tests frequently.

• *Aligning Rigor and Standards*—After examining the items themselves, we will explore the challenges they pose, as well as hints for making the toughest items more manageable.

• *Aligning Rigor and Text Complexity*—For each Depth of Knowledge, we will identify the kind of complexity best suited to the rigor of that DOK. Also provided is a list of texts from the bibliography in Chapter 7 (Teaching Tools and Resources) that are well suited to that qualitative complexity.

• *Aligning Rigor and Close Reading*—Each chapter provides close reading guidelines appropriate to that Depth of Knowledge, as well as easy-to-implement classroom strategies. Tools for students to use during and after close reading for each DOK are included in Chapter 7.

• *Aligning Rigor and Student Interaction*—Different Depths of Knowledge call for different interactive strategies. These are explained in each chapter, along with classroom scenarios showing these strategies in action.

• *Aligning Rigor and the Reading-Writing Connection*—Students are now expected to write about their reading in different ways for different Depths of Knowledge. But write what? Find suggestions in each chapter to take back to your classroom.

• *Aligning Rigor and Formative Assessment*—There are many ways to assess students’ thinking at each Depth of Knowledge, but one or more strategies will be highlighted and explained in every chapter as a place to begin. Rubrics for evaluating students’ performance on each formative assessment are featured in Chapter 7.

**Part 2: Materials to Support DOK in Literacy Instruction (Chapters 5–7)**

In Part 2, we’ll identify and provide resources for each Depth of Knowledge that are classroom-ready and can be used to streamline planning for literacy instruction and assessment. These resources include the following:

• *Sample Lessons and Planning Templates* (Chapter 5)—In this chapter, you will find a model lesson to support each Depth of Knowledge that can be used as a prototype for lessons you write yourself. A planning template follows each lesson for this purpose. Lesson components are explained step-by-step to support your lesson design.
• **Books and Other Resources That Inspire Deep Thinking** (Chapter 6)—
What kinds of books and other resources will work best for inspiring rigor? In this chapter, you will find an annotated bibliography of short texts with a variety of qualitative complexities that will keep kids tuned in. These resources are integrated into different chapters and support different Depths of Knowledge.

• **Teaching Tools and Resources** (Chapter 7)—The final chapter contains classroom-ready tools and resources that support all Depths of Knowledge. These include anchor charts, rubrics, planning forms, graphic organizers, and more. An explanation is provided for how to use each resource most effectively.

**Let the Learning Begin**

Of course, the bibliographies provided in this book could have included thousands of other worthy titles; and for each Depth of Knowledge, there could have been more assessment items, instructional practices, and tools for teachers and students. But I shouldn’t be the one having all the fun here! These resources, practices, and principles will give you a place to begin. Use these exemplars to design models and protocols of your own, just right for the students in your care. As you read, consider the following questions:

• **Teachers**—What can you use from this book “as is”—no modifications needed? What do you need to adapt or modify for your grade level? For high or low achievers? For students with special needs? For English learners? How will you make these revisions?

• **Coaches**—How will your enhanced understanding of rigor affect your work with colleagues? What can you model in classrooms? How else can you help teachers grow in their implementation of best practices that lead to rigor for their students?

• **Administrators**—What kinds of opportunities for discourse around rigor can you structure so that teachers learn to think systematically about what rigor means to students’ thinking? How can you monitor the implementation of rigor-related practices schoolwide—or districtwide if you serve at that level?

And for all educators, there are “bottom line” summaries of key points throughout the text. Use these to reinforce your professional learning.
With Depth of Knowledge 3, we enter the realm of complex thinking. Let’s begin by considering the underlying principles of this level and its associated rigor (see Figure 3.1).

**FIGURE 3.1 | Depth of Knowledge 3 and Rigor**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Depth of Knowledge 3</th>
<th>The Rigor</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Employing strategic thinking and reasoning</td>
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**Underlying Principles: Rigor for DOK 3**

The criteria for both Depth of Knowledge 3 (“employing strategic thinking and reasoning”) and the rigor of this Depth of Knowledge (“insight into content and craft based on depth of reasoning”) are a bit mysterious at first glance. Just what do we mean by “strategic thinking and reasoning”? What counts as “insight into content and craft”?

The best way to begin to understand the rigor of DOK 3 is to view it in comparison to DOK 2. Whereas DOK 2 typically yields a single right answer, DOK 3 often generates divergent thinking and more than one possible answer. The second Depth of Knowledge relies primarily on text evidence for responses,
whereas the third asks students to think more abstractly, going deeper into the text by using logic as well as evidence. Although tasks at both levels involve a process for deciding how to answer, DOK 3 also asks students to explain their thinking, the reasoning behind their response. This is what we mean by “strategic reasoning.”

**Strategies Reimagined**

We need to clarify some language here. Back in the day—not so very long ago, actually—the word strategies, when applied to comprehension, referred to a repertoire of metacognitive processes such as visualizing, making personal connections, and synthesizing (Boyles, 2004). Those processes continue to be useful tools to gain meaning from a text: *What do you picture here? Has something like this ever happened to you?* But “strategic reasoning” in the context of Depth of Knowledge is more about how you puzzle through a text, putting all the pieces together until you can see the big picture.

You read like a reader, mining nuances of meaning; and you read like a writer, discerning why the author crafted a text in particular ways. How deep are your insights? That’s what DOK 3 tasks are designed to measure. Yes, questions at this level are harder. But truth to tell, they are also more fun.

**The Hard Fun of DOK 3**

Consider the wisdom of Seymour Papert (1999): “We learn best and we work best if we enjoy what we are doing. But fun and enjoying doesn’t mean ‘easy.’ The best fun is hard fun.”

What kind of “hard fun” can we offer up in the design of literacy tasks? Let’s be honest: most of what we ask students to do at the first two Depths of Knowledge does not qualify as “fun.” For example, you ask, “Can you find two details that show that the mother was motivated to steal the apples because her children were hungry?” Competent readers know to return to the text to retrieve the requisite details, though this may signal more of a robotic obligation than a passion for self-expression.

Now let’s try out a question that builds on the application of a concept: “In your opinion, are the mother’s actions more justified once you understand what motivated her? Make an inference about her motivation, and explain your reasoning based on events in the story.” Now there’s a question kids can sink their teeth into. Why?

Although this question is challenging, students also find it “fun” because their thinking matters. They need the same textual details as in the first question. But to answer the second query well, they must go deeper into the text, generating a response that may be different from that of their peers because they get to consider the problem from their unique vantage point. This “hard fun” is the essence of Depth of Knowledge 3, and it plays a central role in new standards-based assessments—it’s that important.
We can have lots of hard fun with Depth of Knowledge 3. Let’s look at the rigor that new assessments are expecting.

**Measuring DOK 3 on Standards-Based Assessments**

The first issue at hand is the number of items at this Depth of Knowledge. Remember from Chapter 1 that past assessments focused only minimally on DOK 3. By contrast, new standards-based assessments include approximately the same proportion of DOK 2 as DOK 3 items, which is a sizable shift. Remember, too, that all DOK 3 items ask students to explain their thinking. In the list of sample items shown in Figure 3.2, that part of the question is not repeated for each item.

**Aligning Rigor and Standards for DOK 3**

The questions in Figure 3.2 are the kind of items that are likely to appear on new standards-based assessments. However, many additional questions for Depth of Knowledge 3 could be asked within our instruction. Those questions will be featured later in this chapter when we examine the implications of DOK 3 for close reading. For now, let’s focus only on the items in the list in the figure.

**Standards Emphasized for DOK 3**

Apart from Standard 1, with its emphasis on evidence only, all standards are emphasized at this Depth of Knowledge. Hence, rather than looking at individual standards, it’s more important to look at trends across all standards.

You perhaps noticed a few key points right away. First, and perhaps most important of all, every DOK 3 task demands inferential thinking. Sometimes this language will be right in the question: *Make an inference about ________*. Other times, students will be asked to *draw a conclusion about ________*, which is essentially the same thing. It’s possible that other language will be used, too. But regardless, it’s all about the inference (or conclusion).

Other common Depth of Knowledge 3 expectations for students will be to do the following:

- Determine importance
- Recognize relationships
- Make qualitative judgments—for example, what is best or most likely
- Think like the author (or narrator or character)
- Examine the development of ideas
- Explain why or how
- Construct responses, in addition to responding to multiple-choice questions
### FIGURE 3.2 | Sample Assessment Items for DOK 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Standard 1: Textual evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Which details are the most surprising? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Which details are the most important? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Why do you think the author included these details?</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Standard 2: Development of central ideas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- What is the theme (or main idea) of the passage? Use details from the passage to support your answer. (Could also ask for multiple main ideas or themes.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What conclusions can be drawn based on the paragraph? Select two conclusions from the list below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How did the author develop the theme (or central idea) of __________ in this [poem]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What inference can be made about [Annie Sullivan, based on her work with Helen Keller]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What conclusion can be drawn about the author’s point of view about [school uniforms] based on information in this article?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Standard 3: Story/text components and relationship among story parts or parts of an informational text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Which of these conclusions about [character/person] is supported by the passage?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How might this story be different if told from __________’s point of view?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How does the characters’ relationship develop throughout the text?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In what ways is the [problem] in this story related to the [setting]? Choose all statements that apply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What conclusion can be drawn about [the problem] from details in the text?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Which of these inferences about the [character’s/person’s attitude—or motivation] is supported in the text?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What does the information in this [article] show about the author’s point of view about [living in the woods]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How do the characters’ actions show their relationship in the story?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In your opinion, what was the turning point of this [story/situation]?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Reading Standard 4: Vocabulary in context</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Why did the author most likely use the underlined phrase? (What is the [metaphor] showing?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Why did the author [write the word FIRE in a larger font with all uppercase letters]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Explain how the author’s choice of words [in this advertisement] helps to convince [buyers] that [they will want to purchase this product].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Choose the sentence that fits logically into the story and best maintains the [narrator’s] tone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What does the use of the [word/figurative phrase] suggest about __________?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What effect does the author create by using the phrase __________?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What does the phrase __________ tell the reader about [character]?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Standard 5: Text features, structure, and genre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- What is the most likely reason the author included [a graph of __________]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How does this [text feature] add to your understanding of __________?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What is the most likely reason the author used a [cause-and-effect structure] in the passage?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**FIGURE 3.2 (continued)**

- Why is including [description] important to understanding this passage?
- Why do you think the author chose to write about [sharks] in the form of a [poem]?
- How does the [third paragraph] add to your understanding of the [problem]?

**Reading Standard 6: Point of view and purpose**

- What inference can be made about the [character’s/person’s] feelings about ________?
- What conclusion about the author’s point of view is supported by the passage?
- Why do you think the author [begins this article with a quote]?
- What was the author’s purpose for including [the sentence about ________]?
- Which of these inferences best support the author’s purpose in writing this [article]?

**Reading Standard 7: Illustrations and other nonprint sources**

- How does [the chart] add to your understanding of ________?
- What were the author’s most likely reasons for including [the map] in the passage?
- Why is using a [timeline] important to understanding the information in the passage?

**Reading Standard 8: Use of evidence and reasoning**

- Which details from [the text] best support [the argument that ________]?
- Which details from the text are irrelevant to the author’s claim that ________?
- What additional evidence could the author have included to make his argument more convincing?
- What point does the author of the article support with at least two pieces of evidence?
- What do you think is the most convincing (or best) evidence in support of the author’s claim? Why?
- What did the author intend by mentioning ________?

**Reading Standard 9: Text connections**

- Explain why ________ Use two details from Source 1 and two details from Source 2.
- [Source 1] gives information about ________. Choose two facts from [Source 2] that could add to your understanding from Source 1.
- Match each source with the detail that is included in that source.
- Each source explains ________. Use one example from Source 1 and one example from Source 3 to support your explanation. For each example, include the source title and number.
- Source 3 includes information about ________. Explain how this information could be helpful if it were added to Source 2. Give two examples from Source 2 to support your explanation.
- Which element specific to [historical fiction] do [Source 1] and [Source 2] have in common? Explain.
- Explain how each [tall tale] could be improved by including more [tall tale] elements.
- Which detail in [Source 1] is most relevant to the argument in [Source 2]?
- Which of the [three] sources would be most helpful for explaining ________?
- What point of view is expressed in each passage?
- Based on the features of [an adventure story], which features do you find in [Source 1]? Which features do you find in [Source 2]?
FIGURE 3.2 | (continued)

- Which source provides better information about ________?
- Which source is more convincing?
- Does the author of [Source 2] do a good job of convincing you that ________? Give at least two details from that source.

Writing: Revising and editing for organization, elaboration, and clarity

- Write an introduction to this writing piece that states your opinion.
- Write an introduction that clearly states the main idea and sets up the information to come.
- Write an introduction to this story that establishes the setting and introduces the main character and the problem.
- Revise [paragraph 6] of this story to include more narrative elements such as dialogue and description.
- Use the student’s notes to write a paragraph that adds more facts to support [paragraph 3].
- Write an ending to the narrative that follows logically from the events.
- Write an introduction that establishes a clear claim that supports _________. (Grade 8)

The Format of DOK 3 Items

Noting that a key element at this Depth of Knowledge is asking students to explain their thinking—why they believe their answer is correct—it would seem DOK 3 is better suited to questions with a constructed response rather than a multiple-choice format. But that’s not always true. Although some reasoning can’t be assessed by multiple-choice items (also called selected responses), it works well for other items (see http://ctf2point0.weebly.com/selected-response.html).

For example, the question might ask: Which two conclusions about the impact of global warming are supported in the text? Six options are provided, and students need to activate their inferential reasoning skills to make their selections. Here’s another possibility: Which statement best shows how the story would have been different if it had been told from the grandmother’s point of view? Here, students need to infer how a narrator’s perspective influences how a story unfolds.

There are abundant examples of selected-response items that measure DOK 3 on standards-based assessments, which could be considered both a strength and a weakness. On the plus side, we’re not attempting to measure students’ capacity to read by their writing proficiency, as we do when the question requires a constructed response. On the other hand, students need to be able to articulate their reasoning if they intend to apply critical thinking skills to solve real problems outside the classroom. Hence, some DOK 3 assessment items are designed to examine the way readers put their thinking into words.

Consider this example: What conclusion can be drawn about the author’s point of view about wolves? Use details from the article in your response. Now
we get to see not only how insightful the student is, but how well she can communicate those insights. It’s the ability to communicate thinking that makes reasoning useful. Expressing ideas is also what makes thinking fun.

There’s something exhilarating about having an opinion and sharing it. You choose just the right details and just the right words to convey your ideas effectively. And if you do a good job, your audience is convinced—another reason why DOK 3 tasks qualify as hard fun—though it’s safe to say that “fun” won’t be the first word that comes to mind when students see some of these assessment questions.

**Academic Language and Graphic Support for DOK 3**

Depth of Knowledge 3 underscores additional complexities in academic language and in the kinds of supports we can provide students to make language accessible. As the expected rigor goes deeper, questions become more complex. Sometimes the issue is not multiple labels for the same concept, but too many words that require translation all at once.

Here’s a 6th grade item: *Which plot event is the first to contribute significantly to the folktale’s resolution?* (McGraw-Hill, 2015c, p. 5). Students need to integrate the words *plot, contribute, folktale, and resolution.* It’s a lot to digest, and what students really need to navigate items like this is practice—not practice answering the question, but practice paraphrasing the question.

Go to any site where you can find released assessment items that mimic the kinds of questions students are likely to see on new assessments. (Several sites are listed on page 198, at the end of Chapter 7, Teaching Tools and Resources.)

The following question is a 4th grade item and comes from STAAR, the assessment students take in Texas (tea.texas.gov/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=51539609632):

> The author included the simile in paragraph 13 to suggest that Pacy’s school vacations —
> F are no longer fun for her
> G have gotten longer
> H allow her time to play with her sisters
> J make her think of her friends

Sometimes when you share potential assessment items with your students, it’s good to include answer options as well, to demonstrate how to approach the elimination of incorrect responses. For any question, have students identify the key words—in this case, *simile, paragraph, suggest.* Can they explain what the question is asking in their own words? With so many samples available, choose items at or near grade level for realistic views of the language your students are likely to see.

Helping students cope with the language of questions will improve their ability to demonstrate understanding across all standards. But there are
additional ways we can increase the odds for student success at the DOK 3 level by tweaking our instruction, standard by standard.

**Where to Increase Instructional Focus for DOK 3**

At DOK 3, almost every potential question reveals an opportunity for increased rigor. Here are a few highlights.

**Standard 1**

- *Which details are the most surprising? Why?*

  This is an excellent question to help students monitor their understanding. If they’re always looking for a possible surprise, they’ll stay tuned in. At the same time, they’ll recognize what’s important because when an author catches you off-guard, the detail is usually worth remembering.

**Standard 2**

- *What inference can be made [about Annie Sullivan based on her work with Helen Keller]?*
- *What conclusion can be drawn about the author’s point of view about [school uniforms] based on information in this article?*

  Many, many Standard 2 questions will focus on inferring the text’s central idea, although sometimes these items won’t look like central-idea questions. The question about Annie Sullivan appears to be about a person, thus related to Standard 3 (text components). The school-uniforms item asks about point of view. So, isn’t this Standard 6 (point of view)? Not really.

  Look again at these two questions and you’ll see that both are really probing the main idea: the reason for Annie’s success with Helen, and the writer’s rationale for or against school uniforms. Standard 2 questions can be tricky because they do not always scream theme. Help students recognize when the question is, in fact, addressing the big idea in the text—even when the task doesn’t mention theme or one of its substitute terms. Note that sometimes items within other standards will ask for an inference, too. It could be an inference about a person, a problem, or just about anything.

  Essential for DOK 3 rigor is making sure that you talk about theme (or main idea) for every text your students read. Begin looking for this big idea (or multiple big ideas) from the very first paragraph so students can see that a theme is a thread of meaning that runs through the entire work and the author starts developing it right away.

  Finally, don’t stop with simply finding the theme. Make sure students can explain how the author developed it, and why, in real life, this theme/main idea is so important. We’ll cover more about this when we get to the formative assessment of DOK 3, later in this chapter.
Standard 3

• How might this story be different if told from ________’s point of view?

Here’s another instance where the question asks about point of view, but now the focus is on understanding character. Students will be successful responding to a question of this sort if you move on from character basics like traits and feelings to motivations, attitudes, relationships, and character development.

• How do the characters’ actions show their relationship in the story?

If you reread Standard 3, you will see that the essence is for students to recognize the relationship between textual elements, which is precisely the focus of this question. On page 181 in Chapter 7, you’ll find an anchor chart, Words That Describe Character Relationships (Figure 7.18). It can get your students thinking about how characters in a story (or people in an informational article) relate to and interact with each other. Are they supportive? Hostile? Antagonistic? Something else? But hanging this chart on your classroom wall will not be enough. You’ll also need to talk with your students about the meaning of these words and the kinds of behavior that define each one.

Standard 4

• What effect does the author create by using the phrase ________?

• What does the phrase ________ tell the reader about [character/person]?

A highlight of Standard 4 (vocabulary) for Depth of Knowledge 3 is the emphasis on word choice and how the author’s use of words contributes to the tone or effect of a piece of writing. I think we can make the biggest difference in this area just by training ourselves to pause when we come upon a strong word in the text and taking the time to reflect with students: Why do you think the author chose this word? What does it show about the author’s attitude toward ________?

In the second sample question, readers need to recognize not just the tone of the word, but also its implications for understanding the character: What does the phrase “jumpy as a flea” tell you about this person? We need to be more intentional about looking for teachable moments to contemplate tone as we’re reading any text. You’ll be amazed at the words and phrases that leap off the page once you’re aware of what to look for. Here’s a sample from the Black Beauty passage used in Chapter 5 of this book (the complete text of Black Beauty is available at http://www.gutenberg.org/files/271/271.txt) for the close reading lessons, where Ginger, Beauty’s companion, is explaining to him what her early life was like:

Several men came to catch me, and when at last they closed me in at one corner of the field, one caught me by the forelock, another caught me by the nose and held it so tight I could hardly draw my breath; then another
took my under jaw in his hard hand and wrenched my mouth open, and so by force they got on the halter and the bar into my mouth; then one dragged me along by the halter, another flogging behind, and this was the first experience I had of men’s kindness; it was all force.

We can first ask students to identify the strong words. They may respond with these: *catch, closed me in, held it so tight, could hardly draw my breath, wrenched my mouth open, force, dragged, flogging.* Answering this question accurately is a good DOK 2 task. But it’s our next question, for DOK 3, that matters most: *What tone is the author creating here, and how do you think she feels about Ginger’s treatment?*

**Standard 5**

- What is the most likely reason the author included [a graph of _______]?
- Why do you think the author chose to write about [sharks] in the form of a [poem]?
- What is the most likely reason the author used a [cause-and-effect structure] in the passage?
- How does this [text feature] add to your understanding of ________?
- What is the best reason the author chose to begin this story with [a conversation]?

You will need to fasten your seatbelt for Standard 5 (text features and structure) because this standard promises to be a wild ride for Depth of Knowledge 3. As noted in Chapter 2, about Depth of Knowledge 2, much of the focus on text structure will be uncharted territory for many students. And now at Depth of Knowledge 3, the questions are even more demanding—with the likelihood of several DOK 3 items for this standard appearing on new assessments at any grade level.

As seen in the questions above, structure can be viewed from many perspectives—the inclusion of text features like graphs; the genre chosen by the author; the organizational framework, such as cause and effect; and literary elements used, such as conversation. To respond to these questions, readers will be asked to “think like the author.” They will be asked to consider how a structural feature adds to their understanding. Students will not be able to answer questions such as these if the first time they see them is on assessments.

Model your thinking as you talk about text: *I think the author may have started this article with a conversation to show that people have very different opinions about year-round school. He wanted us to see that these individuals disagreed strongly, and they each had their reasons.* Then ask your students to weigh in: *What do you think?* With more opportunities to think deeply about text structure, students will begin to understand how to approach these questions.
Standard 6

- What inference can be made about the [character's/person's] feelings about ________?
- What conclusion about the author's point of view is supported by the passage?
- What was the author's purpose for including [the sentence about ________]?

There are a few highlights worth noting for Standard 6 items. First, remember that this standard is not represented below Depth of Knowledge 3, so all questions students see aligned to this standard will expect deep thinking—for example, understanding that a character's feelings reflect the character's point of view. Also, students will be challenged to discern the author's point of view, which is often subtler than the point of view of a fictional narrator.

Especially significant is a new expectation for author's purpose. Students have gotten too complacent about what purpose means. They barely look at a text before announcing: The purpose of a story is to entertain; expository writing is to inform; opinion writing is to persuade. These automatic responses will not get the job done on new assessments. Look at the following item from a 4th grade STAAR test:

What is the author's primary purpose in writing the letter?
- A. To explain why dogs are better behaved if they are used to being around people
- B. To share information about a potential volunteer opportunity at the Medway dog park
- C. To suggest that many dog owners do not give their pets an opportunity to exercise
- D. To convince the town council that the citizens of Medway would benefit from a dog park

It is clear from this item that recognizing the author's purpose will require a thoughtful analysis: When the author wrote this letter, what was she hoping the outcome would be? Our instruction should press for this deeper reasoning, as well. If the letter was to persuade, persuade about what? How did the author make her argument convincing?

Share books with students that may not fit their rote definition of author's purpose. I finished reading Turtle, Turtle, Watch Out! by April Pulley Sayre to a class of 2nd graders. “That was a nice story,” one of the students announced as I closed the book. “Yes, it was,” I agreed, “but do you think the author wrote this book just to tell us a nice story?” “Well, I think she wanted us to know sea turtles are in danger and we can all help save them.” This 2nd grade friend was right; this “nice story” had a purpose beyond entertainment.

A final observation about this standard is that many assessment items focus on the purpose of a part of a text rather than the whole text. When the
question asks, "What is the author's purpose for including paragraph 2?" we should go back and scrutinize that paragraph and the ones preceding and following it. We need to figure out not just the information it contains, but why the author wanted us to have this information and how it contributes to the text as a whole. These are the kinds of questions that will get kids thinking!

**Standard 7**

- *How does [the chart] add to your understanding of _________?*
- *What were the author's most likely reasons for including [the map] in the passage?*

Standard 7, with its emphasis on nonprint text, does not play a major role in new assessments right now, though this may change as more states move to online tests where there's greater opportunity to include video, audio, and full-color images like photographs and artwork. For now, many of the images students will see, other than text features like maps and charts, will be illustrations or black-and-white photographs accompanying a text.

As with the questions for Standard 6, students will again be charged with deciding how an image adds to their understanding or why the author may have included it. We have a clear pattern of questions from standard to standard, especially at this third Depth of Knowledge. Asking these questions in our literacy instruction will help students succeed not just as test-takers but as thinkers.

**Standard 8**

- *Which details from [the text] best support [the argument that _________]?*
- *Which details from the text are irrelevant to the author's claim that _________?*

Because Standard 8 is not addressed below DOK 3, this will be students' first experience with critical analysis of text to judge the sufficiency and relevance of evidence. Remember that this standard applies only to informational text, so ask your Standard 8 questions for nonfiction. Clarify the words *relevant* and *irrelevant.* For any author's claim, ask your students what they consider the best (or strongest) evidence, and then have them explain their reasoning.

Although it’s not likely to be a test item, I also like to ask, "What do you think the author could have explained more clearly to help you understand it better?" It’s important for readers to realize that sometimes their lack of comprehension is more a function of the author's writing than their thinking.

**Standard 9**

- *Explain why _________.* *Use two details from Source 1 and two details from Source 2.*
- *Which element specific to [historical fiction] do [Source 1] and [Source 2] have in common? Explain.*
• Which source is more convincing?
• Source 3 includes information about ________. Explain how this information can be helpful if it were added to Source 2. Give two examples from Source 2 to support your explanation.

The focus of Standard 9 is making connections between texts. Text connections are often considered the domain of Depth of Knowledge 4 because using texts together is a defining feature of performance tasks. When students write a story, a full essay, or a research report of several pages, doing so will require DOK 4, which will be discussed at length in the next chapter. However, questions that focus on a specific task and may be answered using a multiple-choice format, or in a paragraph, are usually considered DOK 3.

The most basic observation about Standard 9 questions is that items will call for many kinds of connections. The most rudimentary expectation, as noted in the first bullet item, will be for students to use information from all (two or three) sources to answer a question. Many of these questions will simultaneously address other standards, such as the one above that requires genre knowledge (Standard 5), and the item asking which source is more convincing (Standard 8). A more sophisticated challenge will be for students to recognize how information from one source could enhance another source.

**Writing standards**

• Write an introduction that clearly states the main idea and sets up the information to come. (Grade 4)
• Revise [paragraph 6] of this story to include more narrative elements such as dialogue and description.
• Use the student’s notes to write a paragraph that adds more facts to support [paragraph 3].

Notice first that the rigor of Depth of Knowledge 3 for Writing standards asks students to focus on parts of a text, rather than writing full texts. This alone should be a major takeaway for teachers: all writing instruction does not need to culminate in a whole published story, essay, or any other kind of writing. By contrast, there should be lots of lessons on the crafting of specific parts of a writing piece.

This approach might apply to any mode of writing—opinion/argument, informative/explanatory, or narrative—and could focus on the introduction to the piece, a body paragraph, or its conclusion. Recognizing crafted elements under each writing trait, explained in the previous chapter for connecting reading and writing at Depth of Knowledge 2, will be a critical first step. Teaching students to apply these crafts in their own writing will be the challenge for writing at Depth of Knowledge 3.

For opinion/argument and informative/explanatory writing (Writing Standards 1 and 2), the expectations are clear for the organization and elaboration...
(development) of a writing piece, especially for grades 3 and above, where the standard is divided into several substandards. We look at those standards and we can imagine the instruction for each part of the piece: beginning, middle, and end. But for narrative writing, there’s a greater disconnect between what we want the outcome to be and our plan for helping students get there. We can’t divide a narrative text into neatly segmented parts the way we can with informational or opinion writing. In support of well-developed narrative writing, a high-impact strategy is described later in this chapter under Connecting Reading and Writing.

Bottom Line for Aligning Rigor and Standards for DOK 3: When we say that new standards are hard or assessments that measure new standards are hard, what we are recognizing is that these standards now assess knowledge at a deeper level than students have experienced in the past. We can help our students succeed at this Depth of Knowledge first by making sure we include DOK 3 questions for all standards in our literacy instruction.

Aligning Rigor and Text Complexity for DOK 3

Different kinds of thinking call for different kinds of texts. For Depth of Knowledge 1, we talked about choosing resources that keep kids engaged, so they’ll be motivated to pursue evidence. For DOK 2, we focused on texts that were a good match for different standards. Now we come to Depth of Knowledge 3, where the challenge is to select resources students will want to discuss. What kinds of text might be worthy of discussion?

Students will be eager to talk about texts that are ambiguous, provocative, or personally or emotionally challenging (Strong, Silver, & Perini, 2001). If teachers selected reading material for students based on these criteria, I expect there would be many more lively conversations in classrooms. And out of those conversations, as students probed texts deeply, would come great insights—exactly what we’re seeking for the rigor of DOK 3.

Let’s look at what we mean by ambiguous, provocative, and personally or emotionally challenging, and texts that might qualify for each category. These sources, all from the Bibliography of Student Resources at the end of this book, were selected to provide opportunities for deep thinking.

Meaning That Is Ambiguous

Ambiguous doesn’t mean “confusing.” Precisely what we do not want is a roomful of confused kids. More to the point, ambiguous texts may include
more than one way of looking at a situation; the message might be interpreted in multiple ways. There could be different criteria for deciding, or different points of view. Perhaps the story is an allegory in which the central idea is not immediately clear. Or the author leads the reader down a familiar path—and then switches it up for a surprise ending. It could be a mystery in which readers collect clues along the way and must distinguish them from the “red herrings” thrown in for extra intrigue. Or it could be a matter of opinion, based on the sufficiency of evidence. Students will sustain interest in these texts because they must piece together clues to make meaning. It’s the messiness that holds their attention.

**Ambiguous texts for grades K–2 students**

- *Egbert*, by Tom Ross (picture book), is an allegory that requires students to unravel meaning.
- “The New Kid on the Block” (poem), by Jack Prelutsky, in *The New Kid on the Block*, has a surprise at the end.
- “The Wind” (poem), by James Reeves, provides clues to solve a riddle.
- “Should You Be Afraid of Sharks?” (ReadWorks) presents surprising but true facts.
- “World Wonders” (ReadWorks) offers the opportunity to choose a personal favorite among world wonders.

**Ambiguous texts for grades 3–5 students**

- *Voices in the Park*, by Anthony Browne, tells the same story from four points of view.
- “Farewell” (speech), by Lou Gehrig, is an example of a person facing reality with a commendable but unlikely perspective.
- “Spaghetti” (short story), by Cynthia Rylant, in *Every Living Thing*, serves up many unanswered questions to ponder.
- “Your Name in Gold” (short story), by A. F. Bauman, in *Chicken Soup for the Kid’s Soul*, ends with a surprise that readers might (or might not) see coming.

**Ambiguous texts for grades 6–8 students**

- *Encounter*, by Jane Yolen, shows how unsettling it can be to view historical “facts” from a different perspective.
- *The Wretched Stone*, by Chris Van Allsburg, will have readers synthesizing clues to make an inference.
- *The Three Questions: Based on a Story by Leo Tolstoy*, by Jon Muth, is an allegory that begs readers to consider how they would answer these same three questions.
• “Battle over the Pledge” (ReadWorks) underscores the value of understanding both sides of an issue before taking a stand.
• *Yertle the Turtle, by Dr. Seuss,* is not just a story for little kids but a book with allegorical implications for big kids, too.

**Meaning That Is Provocative**

Meaning that is provocative is often derived from texts that address life’s “big issues”—the atrocities of the Holocaust, slavery, or child labor, to name a few. Provocative text could involve making a difficult decision, cause you to question your values, or involve an ethical or moral choice. This is the stuff that people feel so passionate about that they can hardly wait to make their voice heard, take a stand, or act.

Sometimes, when the big issue is a current one—something that’s in the news—students hear commentary at home that may define their position. But often it’s their child-size sense of justice and dignity that prevails. There are texts of all descriptions that speak to big issues—from chapter books to picture books, informational articles, speeches, even poetry. Some are true, and others are based on what’s true. If you want to have a great discussion, start with a provocative topic.

**Provocative texts for grades K–2 students**

- *Last Stop on Market Street,* by Matt de la Peña—Big question: Whose responsibility is it to feed the poor?
- *Something Beautiful,* by Sharon Denis Wyeth—Big question: Where can we find beauty in our world when beauty does not seem to surround us?
- *Never Smile at a Monkey,* by Steve Jenkins—Big question: Why is it important to behave responsibly around wild animals?
- “Meet Rosa Parks” (ReadWorks)—Big question: How do we resist authority respectfully?
- *Turtle, Turtle, Watch Out!* by April Pulley Sayre—Big question: How do we protect an endangered animal?
- *Peppe the Lamplighter,* by Elisa Bartone—Big question: What makes a job important?

**Provocative texts for grades 3–5 students**

- *Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot: A True Story of the Berlin Airlift and the Candy That Dropped from the Sky,* by Margot Theis Raven—Big question: How do we find hope amid destruction?
- *Freedom Summer,* by Deborah Wiles—Big question: What is the impact of discrimination?
- “Ballad of Birmingham” (poem), by Dudley Randall—Big question: Who are the victims of prejudice?
• **Martin’s Big Words**, by Doreen Rappaport—Big question: How do we fight for change in a positive way?

• “A Tale of Segregation: Fetching Water” (ReadWorks)—Big question: How can we stand up for the dignity of all people?

**Provocative texts for grades 6–8 students**

• **14 Cows for America**, by Carmen Agra Deedy—Big question: What does empathy look like?

• **Remember: The Journey to School Integration**, by Toni Morrison—Big question: What is the impact of racism?

• “World War II Posters” (ReadWorks)—Big question: How do images reveal a culture’s values?

• **My Secret Camera: Life in a Lodz Ghetto**, photographs by Mendel Grossman; text by Frank Dabba Smith—Big question: How could the world let something as horrific as concentration camps happen?

• “Letter from Jackie Robinson on Civil Rights” (ReadWorks)—Big question: How do we ensure the civil rights of all people?

• “Japanese Internment Camps: A Personal Account” (ReadWorks)—Big question: What can our country learn from its mistakes?

• **Oh, Rats! The Story of Rats and People**, by Albert Marrin—Big question: What do we do about rodent infestation?

**Meaning That Is Personally or Emotionally Challenging**

We’re hardly strangers to the idea of connecting personally to text. In fact, the past couple of decades have witnessed what many now consider an overemphasis on text-to-self connections. The intent was a good one: read books on topics that are relatable and then focus on what makes the subject personally meaningful. Where this went off track, I think, was that the connection remained focused on what happened in the reader’s past rather than how it might affect life going forward.

Let’s suppose the book was about bullying, certainly an issue of personal challenge that affects many students. Kids (and teachers) got caught up in conversations about who had been bullied, how this made them feel, and the details of those experiences. A more productive way to go might have been to acknowledge the past but then quickly move on to the future: How could the experience of the character in this book make a difference to you the next time you are bullied or when you see someone else bullied?

Making a powerful personal connection means connecting to the message. This is what makes reading transformative. Texts with the potential to have an impact on personal growth might focus on making good choices, the importance of a character trait, making a mature decision, or putting others before ourselves.
Personally or emotionally challenging texts for grades K–2 students

- *Stand Tall, Molly Lou Mellon*, by Patty Lovell, is about dealing with bullies.
- *Amazing Grace*, by Mary Hoffman, is about dealing with discrimination based on gender and race.
- *Those Shoes*, by Maribeth Boelts, is about making the distinction between wants and needs.
- *Down the Road*, by Alice Schertle, is about making choices and accepting consequences.
- *The Goose That Laid the Golden Eggs*, an Aesop’s Fable, is about being happy with what we have.
- *The Sandwich Swap*, by Queen Rania of Jordan Al Abdullah, is about appreciating someone else’s point of view and trying something new.

Personally or emotionally challenging texts for grades 3–5 students

- *The Summer My Father Was Ten*, by Pat Brisson, is about taking responsibility for our actions.
- “Mother to Son” (poem), by Langston Hughes, is about perseverance in the face of challenges.
- *More Than Anything Else*, by Marie Bradby, is about following our dreams.
- “Spaghetti” (short story), by Cynthia Rylant, in *Every Living Thing*, is about everyone needing a friend.
- “Big Dreams” (ReadWorks) is about setting personal goals.
- *The Can Man*, by Laura Williams, is about thinking of others’ needs before our own.

Personally or emotionally challenging texts for grades 6–8 students

- *Fox*, by Margaret Wild, is about distinguishing between real and “fake” friends.
- “Still I Rise” (poem), by Maya Angelou, is about overcoming obstacles to achieve our dreams.
- “Taking Down the Green-Eyed Monster” (Read Works) is about dealing with jealousy.
- *The Fun They Had*, by Isaac Asimov, warns us to be careful about what we wish for.
Strategic Reasoning: Supporting Depth of Knowledge 3

Aligning Rigor and Close Reading for DOK 3

The rigor of Depth of Knowledge 3 is our strongest reason thus far for teaching students to read closely. We need texts that are ambiguous, provocative, and personally or emotionally challenging to ask those weighty questions that lead students to profound insights. Our goal is insight, based on strategic reasoning. But what's the plan to get there?

Unlike the one-step process of returning to the text to find evidence—the close reading go-to strategy for DOK 1—and the multistep, gradual-release process for building skills featured for DOK 2, there is no actual process for approaching DOK 3, no set of steps to follow.

No steps to follow? This situation makes us nervous. Our teacher playbook is filled with best practices that have nice-and-neat procedures. We implement the procedures well, with a little tweaking here and there, and our students achieve. But DOK 3 is all about logic. We perhaps could teach them the rules of formal argument, or stage a debate—which might work for older students and which we could implement occasionally in the classroom. But we need a way to engage students in logical thought regularly and often (every day!). And the approach needs to work for little kids as well as big kids.

The solution is simpler and more straightforward than you might think. What all students need, and what will make the biggest difference, is exposure. Yes, exposure! Students need to hear DOK 3 questions. They need to hear their teachers modeling logical thinking. And they need to experiment with logical thinking of their own.

It's a matter of asking the follow-up question, the one that moves the needle from an answer with essentially one correct response, to a response with many possibilities. For the most part, DOK 3 questions bear a strong resemblance to DOK 2 items, now “kicked up” to require strategic reasoning, beyond the retrieval of basic evidence or the application of a skill.

Bottom Line for Aligning Rigor and Text Complexity for DOK 3: Because this Depth of Knowledge invites students to contemplate controversial topics, or topics that can be viewed from more than one perspective, we need to choose resources that lend themselves to conversation. Choosing texts that are ambiguous, provocative, or personally or emotionally challenging will offer students a wide range of literary vistas to explore.
Moving from DOK 2 to DOK 3

For DOK 2, we ask students to name the character trait displayed by Anna and Caleb in the early part of Patricia MacLachlan’s *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, when those two characters are contemplating Sarah’s arrival. The children are afraid Sarah will not like them, and so probable answers will be *nervous, cautious, worried*, or another term with about the same meaning. In a very limited way, these responses could be considered divergent because the words are different. We could even ask students to explain their thinking. However, most students will cite the same evidence in the text and give the same basic trait a different name.

What if we followed our initial trait question with this query: *How might Anna’s and Caleb’s cautiousness make a difference when Sarah arrives?* This is the stuff of an interesting conversation, and suddenly your classroom is alive with ideas: *I bet Anna and Caleb will behave really well so that Sarah likes them. Maybe they’ll pretend they don’t like Sarah, so their feelings won’t be hurt if she doesn’t like them.* When you ask the right question, rigor happens!

Where will we get these great questions? Some will be specific to an individual text, and you will need to invent them on your own. But others might be more generic. It’s a matter of extending the standards-based DOK 2 question. The questions shown in Figure 3.3, Extending Questions from DOK 2 to DOK 3, for Standards 1 through 8, demonstrate this. You will note that the left-hand column includes many of the same questions for Depth of Knowledge 2 from the previous chapter (see Figure 2.2). Now, a companion DOK 3 question is suggested alongside it in the right-hand column.

For Standard 9, there were no DOK 2 questions, so that standard is not represented. (Use the list of DOK 3 questions from earlier in this chapter.) For Writing, the difference between DOK 2 and DOK 3 is that Depth of Knowledge 2 expects students to *recognize* good writing, whereas Depth of Knowledge 3 challenges students to *produce* good writing. Review the list of DOK 3 Writing items earlier in this chapter for these DOK 3 expectations.

Some questions may not necessarily appear on standards-based assessments. But close reading rigor in our classroom should be driven by more than test-taking expectations.

**Bottom Line for Aligning Rigor and Close Reading for DOK 3:** Without close reading, it is unlikely that students will ever achieve the rigor of Depth of Knowledge 3. It is this kind of deep thinking that asks students to seek meaning beyond the evidence itself: When you probe beneath the surface, what insights are revealed? What nuances of meaning can you tease from between the lines of a text? Although this might seem a tall order for teachers, it’s often a matter of asking the “next” question, the one that builds on a DOK 2 response.
### FIGURE 3.3 | Extending Questions from DOK 2 to DOK 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DOK 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which [two] details support the conclusion?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DOK 3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which details are the most surprising?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Which details are the most important?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Standard 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DOK 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the meaning of the quote [“_______”]? Explain it in your own words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which sentence in the passage best describes the lesson?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose a sentence that best summarizes the central idea [or main idea]. Which statements belong in a summary of _________, and which statements should be left out?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DOK 3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you explain this quote to a younger child?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you explain this quote to someone who didn’t know anything about [Martin Luther King]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why did you choose this line?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the life lesson we can learn from this story [or significance of this information]?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Standard 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DOK 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which words below best describe [Character A]?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Which word describes how _________ was feeling?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where does the setting change?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the main problem in the story?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arrange the events from the passage in order.</td>
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<tr>
<td>How are these events related to each other?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DOK 3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How might [character’s trait] make a difference to what happens next in the story?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What motivated Isabel to stand up to Greta when Greta bullied Trevor?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did Marcus demonstrate his negative attitude toward his new school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do the characters’ actions show their relationship in the story?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How might the story be different if told from _________’s point of view?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what ways is the [problem] in this story related to the [setting]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your opinion, what is the turning point in this [situation/story]? Explain your thinking using details from the text. (Cannot be an obvious turning point.)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Standard 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DOK 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any DOK 2 question about context clues could be extended to focus on word choice (DOK 3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DOK 3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What effect does the author create by using the phrase _________?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does the phrase _________ tell you about [character/problem]?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
**FIGURE 3.3 | (continued)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard 4</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|  | - What [other word/phrase] could the author have used to create the same tone?  
- What [word/phrase] could the author have used to create a different tone? |

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Standard 5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DOK 2</strong></td>
<td><strong>DOK 3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| - Which text feature tells about the photo? Or, How is this information provided in the article? (captions, key words, sidebar, glossary)  
- What is the overall structure of most paragraphs in the article?  
- What kind of information is the author giving us in this part of the article?  
- What craft is the author using in this part of the text? | - What is the most likely reason the author included a map of [_______]?  
- How does this [text feature] add to your understanding of [_______]?  
- Why do you think the author included some narrative scenes within this [cause-effect] structure?  
- What is the most likely reason the author wrote this piece as [a poem]?  
- Why did the author begin the passage with this paragraph? (Let the reader know about the problem, introduce characters, give us the message, etc.)  
- Why did the author choose to end this text with a [summary]? How does [paragraph 2] contribute to the development of the plot?  
- Why is including [dialogue] important to understanding the passage?  
- How does the use of [flashback] affect the events in the text?  
- What effect does the [quote] have on the reader’s understanding?  
- How could you use this craft within your own writing? |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard 6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DOK 2</strong></td>
<td><strong>DOK 3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| - What is the character’s point of view about [_______]?  
(This could be identified as a DOK 3 question because of the inference involved. However, it is more basic than the “next step” questions for DOK 3.) | - How would this story be different if it were written from [character’s] point of view?  
- How did the author make this poem entertaining? (Or make the article convincing, etc.)  
- What does the phrase [_______] suggest about the author’s feelings about [_______]?  
- Why did the author write the article?  
- What is the difference in focus between [Source 1] and [Source 2]?  
- How does the author develop the narrator’s point of view? |
FIGURE 3.3 | (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard 7</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DOK 2</strong></td>
<td><strong>DOK 3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| - What part of the [story/article] does this [photograph] show? | - How does the [chart] add to your understanding of [ ]?
| - Why is using a [timeline] important to understanding the information in the passage? | - What additional graphic would you have added to this [article] to add to meaning? |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard 8 (Informational text only)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DOK 2</strong></td>
<td><strong>DOK 3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What kind of evidence does the author provide to support the point that [ ]? (interviews, statistics, opinions, experiences)</td>
<td>- Which details from the text are irrelevant to the author’s claim?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What reason does the author provide to support the point that [ ]?</td>
<td>- Which details from the text offer the strongest support?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How does the author support the claim that [ ]?</td>
<td>- What could have been explained more clearly?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Which statement from the report is not fully supported?</td>
<td>- What additional evidence could the author have included to make his argument more convincing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What do you think is the most convincing (or best) evidence in support of the author’s claim? Why?</td>
<td>- Does anything in this [article] show bias? Explain.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aligning Rigor and Student Interaction for DOK 3

Although Depth of Knowledge 3 will often culminate in students constructing written responses to questions such as those identified in Figure 3.3, conversation will be a nonnegotiable initial step if we hope to see real rigor. Conversation is where students will “draft” and “revise” their ideas before “publishing” them on paper, trying them out with the guidance of their teacher and the (hopefully) gentle critiquing of their peers.

We’ve all seen classroom charts of discussion etiquette—how to build on another student’s response, disagree respectfully, listen politely, and the like. I trust your resourcefulness to locate one of these lists via the Internet or elsewhere if you don’t already have one hanging in your classroom. But two points regarding discussion protocols will be particularly important to the rigor of DOK 3: engaging reluctant participators and listening to hear.
Engaging Reluctant Participators

No matter how supportive the classroom environment is, some students are reluctant participators. They may not enjoy engaging in discussions with their peers because they are shy or self-conscious, or quiet by nature. It’s doubtful we’ll turn that introvert into the life of the party. But we do need to hear that student’s thinking if we’re going to guide logical reasoning forward. Sometimes I solve this problem with poker chips (or any kind of marker.) Everyone gets three chips—or a different number, if you prefer. The discussion isn’t over until everyone has “used up” their chips, which go into the center of the reading table when a student shares a thought that he or she has initiated.

Although I don’t love strategies like this, which feel more like gimmicks than authentic teaching practices, sometimes the end justifies the means. I find that using chips in this way gets students to insert themselves into a conversation all by themselves when they may otherwise remain silent. Even if what they express is not the most profound thought, it’s a starting point, and I can massage it from there. Here’s an exchange with Max, a 1st grader, who seldom spoke without prompting:

Max (responding to a question about Molly Lou from the book Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon, by Patty Lovell): I think Molly Lou was really brave to stand up to Ronald Durkin when he bullied her, when he called her “Shrimp-o.”

Me (pushing for some logical reasoning): Excellent answer. How do you think Molly Lou got to be so brave?

Max: She got brave because her grandma kept telling her if she acts big and strong, people won’t put her down. She did what her grandma said.

Max cashed in his chip with an accurate but basic response about Molly Lou’s behavior. However, it opened the door just enough so that I could ask the next, deeper question. For a 1st grader, I was satisfied with the inference about Grandma.

This chip-depositing system has some collateral benefits as well. Everyone gets the same number of chips, so the kids who would like to answer every question and monopolize the conversation are now restricted. They need to be selective, tossing in their chips only when they have something truly valuable to say.

Listening to Hear

There’s another issue, too, that has as much to do with listening as it does with speaking. Students need to do more than listen politely and patiently; they need to listen to hear. I’ve watched it happen time after time, and my experience in this 5th grade classroom was a perfect example. Several students in this group had their hands in the air, eager to share their thinking about the story
“Spaghetti” from Cynthia Rylant’s book *Every Living Thing*. This slim volume, perfect for intermediate-grade readers, features 12 short stories in which animals play a central and positive role. This is one of my most beloved resources, and multiple copies have accompanied me over the years to classrooms from coast to coast.

This particular tale is about a young boy named Gabriel, who, for reasons unclear to the reader, appears to be alone in the world and without any sense of purpose. He then finds a kitten (which he names Spaghetti), and that changes everything. My question, which built on another, more rudimentary one, was this: "Why do you think the author uses the color gray so much?"

Hands go into the air right away. I call on Jake, and the gist of his answer is that gray is a sad color. Gabriel was sad, so this color matches his mood. Jake finishes, and the same hands shoot up again, hoping for their turn. Emma takes the floor, and you think at first she is building on Jake’s answer because she mentions gray, and how the night can appear gray, and gray is a common cat color. But in truth, this is what she was going to say all along. She simply waited (politely) until her classmate was done talking and then made her own point.

No one’s reasoning will improve via polite waiting. Teach your students to make a specific link—to find a connection between their idea and the previous student’s idea, or to explain how their interpretation is different. If Emma had really built on Jake’s thinking, she might have said something like this: “Sometimes gray seems sad because it is almost no color at all. Before Gabriel found Spaghetti, his life seemed gray and colorless, like it had no meaning.”

Model for your students what connecting to a previous comment looks like. Ask them how their response shows such a connection. Doing so will also demand more wait time between student responses. It takes time for readers to think through a genuine connection. When they race to answer, it might signal that what you will hear is their unedited opinion, not the thoughtful words that reflect consideration of a previous reply.

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**Bottom Line for Aligning Rigor and Student Interaction for DOK 3:** Talking to each other is essential for students to build the habits of mind that lead to deep thinking. But not all talk will achieve this goal. Teachers need to recognize the point a student is making and push for the next level of reasoning. Students all need to participate so that their teacher and their peers can benefit from their thinking, and listening to *hear* is as important as engaging in the conversation themselves.
Aligning Rigor and the Reading-Writing Connection for DOK 3

Writing sources at Depth of Knowledge 3 requires lots of rigor! This is the first DOK on new assessments for which students will probably need to construct a written response to a question. Likewise, they may also have to produce short responses that demonstrate their capacity to craft portions of a text themselves. Because analytic writing—written response to a reading question—will be such a big player on assessments, it will be addressed in the next section about aligning rigor and formative assessment. Keep reading here, though, for an instructional practice linking the writing standards to the reading standards through a narrative task.

The previous chapter laid out crafts under each writing trait so that students could identify them for the rigor of Depth of Knowledge 2. Now, for DOK 3, we need to teach students to use these crafts in their own writing. Addressing them all would require an entire book—way beyond what is reasonable in a single chapter. Instead, I will describe one high-impact strategy that can make a difference when the item states, “Revise [this paragraph] to add narrative elements like description and dialogue”—a likely expectation for students at all grade levels. This calls for the development of ideas, the first of the six writing traits.

Narrative: Making a Scene

As teachers, we explain to our students that good writing is showing, not telling, but then we sometimes have a hard time showing what we mean by this. How can we demonstrate to students how they can transform their narratives from flat and lifeless to robust and lively? Teach your students to make a scene. This is easier than you think, armed with the four crafts that are the cornerstone of any author’s narrative-writing toolbox. Provide a little description (which I sometimes call a “snapshot”). Include a bit of dialogue that builds character. Add internal thoughts (“thoughtshots”) in which the character or narrator shares thoughts in his head with the reader that are not revealed to other characters. And don’t forget gestures (small actions) that convey attitude.

To demonstrate to students how powerful this technique can be, give them a “stripped down” passage from a piece of children’s literature. I take a short segment from a story and remove all the fun, interesting language; then ask students to rewrite it with description, dialogue, internal thoughts, and gestures. Here’s a sample stripped passage:

Sara had been looking forward to this day for a long time. She was going to audition for her school play, Annie. She wanted to play Annie, herself. She got out of bed and looked in her closet. She decided to wear her red sweater because the real Annie wore red. She glanced in the mirror to make sure she looked good. Her mother called her down to breakfast, but she was so excited she wasn’t very hungry.
A few hours later, Sara sat on a bench outside Ms. Bartlett's door. Ms. Bartlett was the music teacher, and she was playing piano for the children as they sang their audition song. Sara noticed that she wasn't the only kid who thought to wear something red. She looked around at the other students who were auditioning for the lead role. She didn't think Rebecca would get the part because she was too quiet.

Now here's one 6th grader's version, including the four crafts:

Sara could hardly wait! This was going to be the best day of her life, the day she'd finally get to audition for the school play, Annie. As a 4th grader, she figured she had a chance at a big part. In fact, she wanted to play the leading role—Annie!

*I just know I'll get picked to be Annie*, Sara thought as she drifted off to sleep the night before. *I'm a natural actress. I even have red, curly hair like the real Annie.* She sleepily hummed a few bars to herself, *Tomorrow, tomorrow, I love ya tomorrow*…

Audition day dawned bright and sunny. Sara bounded out of bed and rustled through the clothes hanging in her closet. What could she wear that would make her really look like Annie? *I know*, she decided, *I'll wear my red sweater. Red is the color of the dress Annie always wore.* She buttoned it up so that only the top of her white turtleneck was sticking out. She glanced in the mirror, and smiled.

"Sara! Breakfast!" her mom called from the kitchen. But Sara only picked at her Cheerios. She was too excited to eat.

A few hours later, Sara sat on a bench outside Ms. Bartlett's door. Ms. Bartlett was the music teacher and she was playing piano for the children as they sang their audition song. Sara noticed that she wasn't the only kid who thought to wear red. She looked around at the other students who were auditioning. She thought to herself, *I doubt Rebecca will get to be Annie. She has such a quiet voice you can hardly hear her when she talks in class.*

Yes, this revision came from a 6th grader, and we may not receive such polished writing from a younger student. But you will be amazed by how dramatically these four crafts enhance narrative performance—immediately. This example illustrates the outcome we are seeking for DOK 3 narrative tasks such as this, and our means of getting there.

And there are a couple of bonuses. When I return to the original passage—the one before I had removed all the "good stuff"—and share it with students, they are quick to point out, "I like Martin's better." Or, "The real author didn't think to include any dialogue." Suddenly, the mystery of how authors make their writing engaging is no longer quite as mysterious. And if students can write one scene, they can write many—which is what a story is: lots of scenes strung together.
This strategy is a big win for connecting reading and writing and achieving the rigor of Depth of Knowledge 3. If you think this is a slam-dunk, check out the even higher-stakes strategy for analytic writing later in this chapter, in the section Teaching Written Response.

Bottom Line for Aligning Rigor and Reading-Writing Connections for DOK 3: It is at this Depth of Knowledge that students need to put their knowledge of authors’ crafts into practice. For informational and opinion/argument writing, much of the DOK focus will be on the organization of a portion of an essay or the relevance and logical connection between facts and details. For narrative writing, the strength of DOK 3 performance will be determined by competence with narrative elements.

Aligning Rigor and Formative Assessment for DOK 3

Remember that Depth of Knowledge 3 is the first DOK where learning will at times be measured through constructed response. And strange as it sounds, there will be one question that dominates: Draw a conclusion about _________ or Make an inference about _________. Often this conclusion or inference will relate to the theme or main idea. But it could also focus on point of view, the setting, the structure, or just about any dimension of a text.

Suppose the question asks this: What inference can be made about the author's message in this passage? This question, aligned to Standard 2 (development of a theme), relates to the excerpt from *Black Beauty* (p. 132) and the DOK 3 lesson provided on page 141 in Chapter 5. We would be happy if we got the following answer from a 5th grader who participated in this lesson:

My inference about the author’s message is that we shouldn’t mistreat animals. Take Ginger, Beauty’s friend. She told Beauty she had never been treated nicely from the time she was born. “I was taken from my mother as soon as I was weaned, and put with a lot of other young colts; none of them cared for me.” No one ever talked to her kindly, or brought her good food to eat. Boys would throw rocks at her and they thought it was funny. Men also “wrenched her mouth open” to put on her halter. Then she was shut up in a stall all day. She wanted to get free. “You know yourself it’s bad enough when you have a kind master.”

If you look closely at this response, you will see it is consistent with the expectations for Standard 2 at the grade 5 level:
Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text. (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/5/#CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2)

The student infers the theme and then summarizes the text. This would be a full-score response based on some rubrics, whether full score is based on a 4-point scale, a 2-point scale, or something else. But some other assessments want more, including Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) [see http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/practice-and-training-tests/resources-and-documentation/ and click the ELA Scoring Guide for any grade level]. The SBAC criteria for a constructed response to this question is worth a total of 2 points:

A 2-point response:
- Gives sufficient evidence of the ability to make a clear inference/conclusion
- Includes specific examples/details that make clear reference to the text
- Adequately explains inference/conclusion with clearly relevant information based on the text

The third bullet point asks for an explanation or extension of the inference. To receive a full score for an answer to this question, the student would need to add a concluding thought such as this:

These details are important because they show that animals have feelings, too. Just like Ginger, if we want animals to behave well, we should treat them the way we want to be treated.

This final component doesn't need to be long, just a sentence or two, but it does need to show the significance of the issue at hand and connect it back to the text. Regardless of whether students are scored for this final component of an inference, I like the idea of pushing for this level of reasoning. It shows an understanding of the application of a big idea to real life, beyond the boundaries of the text.

Failing to meet this criterion, or any criteria, will result in only partial credit:

A 1-point response:
- Gives limited evidence of the ability to make an inference/conclusion
- Includes vague/limited examples/details that make reference to the text
- Explains inference/conclusion with vague/limited information based on the text

Here's an example of a 1-point response:

You should always be kind. Like people were kind to Beauty, but they were never kind to Ginger. She had a bad life where people hurt her and laughed at her. You should be kind, not mean like it shows in this story.
A no-credit response, according to SBAC, has the following flaws:

- A 0-point response:
  - Gives no evidence of the ability to make an inference/conclusion

OR

- Gives an inference/conclusion but includes no examples or examples/details that make reference to the text

OR

- Gives an inference/conclusion but includes no explanation or no relevant information from the text

Consider the following example:

Some horses have bad behavior. Ginger wanted to run away.

Now, what do we need to do to teach students to produce high-quality written responses?

**Teaching Written Response**

Plain and simple, students need to know that responding in writing to an inference question is a three-step process, and it’s the same sequence whether the text is literary or informational:

1. Answer the question (the inference/conclusion/main idea).
2. Summarize the main points in the story/article.
3. Extend/explain.

If you’ve addressed the matter of oral rehearsal (explained in the previous chapter), that instruction will benefit students here. But there are additional guidelines that will support students as well.

If students are stuck on the first step of this process, making an inference about theme or some other textual component, that is a reading problem, not a writing problem. Identifying a theme or main idea can be difficult, and backtracking to DOK 2, where this skill is taught, is your best option. If students can’t determine the theme or main idea, there’s no way they can move forward with the rest of their response.

The second step of the response should be manageable because it asks only for evidence—literal knowledge of the text. The difficulty here is that the rubric for a 2-point response is misleading: *includes specific examples/details that make clear reference to the text*. This leads teachers and students to believe that an example or two will get the job done. It will not—despite how we may have taught this in the past. Recall the last phrase in the grade 5 benchmark for Standard 2 (p. 92–93): *summarize the text*. The same expectation prevails for all grade levels and is also represented in the anchor standard. Students need to
show how the author *develops* the theme or main idea. There are no shortcuts here, and what is needed for successful completion of this part of the response is sufficient stamina as well as adequate comprehension.

"You've got this. Keep going," I prodded a 5th grader whose energy for the task appeared to be waning. When I introduce written response, I do it in small groups where I can keep a close eye on students’ progress. In its early stages, written response is more instruction than assessment.

This nurturing is even more important for the third and final part of the answer, the extension or explanation. Even when students persevere through the citing of evidence, I’ve seen a few come to a screeching halt when they reach this step. One forthright young lady put down her pencil and looked up at me imploringly: “I have absolutely no idea what to write here.” Many students will feel the same way if we are not proactive in helping them understand what this part of the response is asking of them.

What we’re really asking is this: *What is the life lesson? Why is this important?* And the irony (in this era where everything is evidence-based) is that no amount of going back to the text will resolve this. This thinking comes from insights derived partly from reading and partly from background knowledge built outside school, or in school through discussion of topics in history, social studies, and science. *Why* is it important to protect endangered animals? *How* do we show integrity? *What* qualities make a great leader? Can we extend our disciplinary teaching to ponder these “what ifs”? Or, more fundamentally, “what if” we’re not teaching enough history or science content to even have these conversations?

**Helping Students Achieve Deeper Insights by Asking “What If”**

Begin by revisiting the theme chart in Figure 2.3 and discussing some of these big ideas alongside contrasting perspectives: *When is courage important? When is it best not to take a chance? If cooperation is the goal, is it ever acceptable to take control?* If students can talk about these “life connections,” they will be more likely to succeed on this part of their written response.

Having the language to get started on this part of the answer helps, too. See the chart Guidelines for Explaining and Extending Your Answer (Figure 7.3) in Chapter 7, page 161, for words and phrases to initiate an explanation.

Guiding students through the three steps of a quality written response to an inference question may be easier if they have a visual reference to keep them on track. See Figure 7.4, Stepping Up to Success: Answering a Question to Draw a Conclusion or Make an Inference, in Chapter 7, page 162. For easy reference, place this graphic on your small-group-instruction table or provide a copy to each student for safe keeping in their reading folder.
There has been a lot to digest in this chapter, which is not surprising, as there is so much rigor expected for Depth of Knowledge 3. Now it’s time to move on to Chapter 4 and the even deeper thinking required of Depth of Knowledge 4.

**Bottom Line for Aligning Rigor and Formative Assessment for DOK 3:** When assessing DOK 3, be sure to provide opportunities for written response and look beyond inference to insight. Can students use textual evidence to draw a conclusion or make an inference? Can they support their inference or conclusion with relevant text-based details? And then can they recognize a broader context for an idea, linking it to a life lesson or real-world implication?
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Nancy is the author of *Closer Reading, Grades 3–6; Lessons and Units for Closer Reading, Grades 3–6;* and *Lessons and Units for Closer Reading, K–2.* Nancy has also written many articles and six additional books on reading comprehension.

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Related ASCD Resources: Literacy

At the time of publication, the following resources were available (ASCD stock numbers in parentheses).

Print Products

**Achieving Next Generation Literacy: Using the Tests (You Think) You Hate to Help the Students You Love** by Maureen Connolly and Vicky Giouroukakis (#116023)

**Building Student Literacy Through Sustained Silent Reading** by Steve Gardiner (#105027)

**A Close Look at Close Reading: Teaching Students to Analyze Complex Texts, Grades K–5** by Diane Lapp, Barbara Moss, Maria Grant, and Kelly Johnson (#114008)

**Effective Literacy Coaching: Building Expertise and a Culture of Literacy** by Shari Frost, Roberta Buhle, and Camille Blachowicz (#109044)

**Engaging Minds in English Language Arts Classrooms: The Surprising Power of Joy** by Mary Jo Fresch, Michael F. Opitz, and Michael P. Ford (#113021)

**Literacy Leadership for Grades 5–12** by Rosemarye Taylor and Valerie Doyle Collins (#103022)

**Literacy Strategies for Grades 4–12: Reinforcing the Threads of Reading** by Karen Tankersley (#104428)

**Literacy Unleashed: Fostering Excellent Reading Instruction Through Classroom Visits** by Bonnie D. Houck and Sandi Novak (#116042)

**Read, Write, Lead: Breakthrough Strategies for Schoolwide Literacy Success** by Regie Routman (#113016)

**Research-Based Methods of Reading Instruction, Grades K–3** by Sharon Vaughn and Sylvia Linan-Thompson (#104134)

**Tools for Teaching Writing: Strategies and Interventions for Diverse Learners in Grades 3–8** by David Campos and Kathleen Fad (#114051)

**Total Literacy Techniques: Tools to Help Students Analyze Literature and Informational Texts** by Pérsida Himmele, William Himmele, and Keely Potter (#114009)

**Vocab Rehab: How do I teach vocabulary effectively with limited time? (ASCD Arias)** by Marilee Sprenger (#SF114047)

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