

Into Literature Publisher's Response

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt is very satisfied with EdReports' "All Green" assessment for all levels of our *Into Literature* program. *Into Literature* 6-12 is a comprehensive English language arts solution that provides engaging and rigorous texts to build intellectual stamina and tenacity while developing analytical readers, independent thinkers, and proficient writers. High-interest, relevant materials motivate students and serve to build agency and a growth mindset. The program provides a clear path through every classroom moment: the right tools and the right amount of choices for every situation, reaching every goal.

We would like to provide some specific comments on two areas in the Gr 9-12 reviews.

1. Indicator 1c ("Texts have the appropriate level of complexity for the grade level (according to quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis").

Grade 9

We believe that EdReports' assessment of this indicator overemphasizes Lexile scores and underemphasizes the qualitative and reader and task considerations, which are central to text complexity. Two selections were called out as "not support[ing] grade-level expectations": an excerpt from *Night* by Elie Wiesel and the text it is paired with, an excerpt from *The Pianist* by Wladyslaw Szpilman. We believe that both of these texts are grade-level appropriate. *Night* is frequently read at all levels of high school—all the way up to Gr 12. The Lexile score for our excerpt (440L) technically makes it appropriate for Grades 2 or 3, but that raw score leaves out the complexity of the subject (the Holocaust), the maturity required to grapple with its themes, and the strong conceptual elements in the narrative. Also, by pairing it with the excerpt from *The Pianist*, students are required to synthesize two very different memoirs from the same historical era and to analyze complex issues of writer's craft and purpose. For these reasons, we feel confident that these two selections are grade-level appropriate.

Grade 10

Reviewers singled out three selections as "not support[ing] grade-level expectations": "Joyas Voladoras," an essay about nature that explores the diversity of the natural world by reflecting on the enormous differences of scale in the animal world (1170L), "The Hawk Can Soar," a personal memoir that describes the author's experience with a degenerative muscular disease (790L), and the short story "The Briefcase" by Rebecca Makkai (860L). Each of these rich, diverse texts is grade-level appropriate.

We agree with reviewers' that "Joyas Voladoras" is quite complex. From a holistic perspective, it's more complex than its 1170L score suggests. But even accounting for that, it's well within the CCSS Stretch Band for Gr 9-10 (1050L–1335L). The excerpt is also well supported with apparatus, guided reading questions, and footnotes (all things that Lexile cannot account for, but which make a text more accessible). Nevertheless, this short essay might be a challenge for some students, but Gr 10 is the right level to ask students to reach a little extra—with appropriate scaffolds and support. The other two selections are faulted for being too low. Their

Lexile scores are below band, but quantitative measures are deficient for both. With its focus on living with a physical disability, “The Hawk Can Soar” will challenge many students to think far beyond their personal experiences to empathize with and learn about the author’s everyday struggles and epiphanies. We also felt it was important to include this selection in our “Hard-Won Liberty” unit to expand the unit’s topic beyond just political freedom. “The Briefcase,” which is also in “Hard-Won Liberty,” is a short story that tells the tale of an unnamed political prisoner in an unnamed country. The story is deliberately ambiguous about the setting and historical context, and the author layers on top of this complexity a literary conceit drawn from astronomy: the main character, who is running from the authorities, adopts the identity of a physics professor and repeatedly reflects on his plight by imagining his position relative to that of the Earth and Sun. Thematically and textually the piece is far more complex than its Lexile score suggests.

Grade 11

The Gr 11 course of *Into Literature* is an American literature survey, focusing over 6 units on the major American literary periods and historical movements, from the “discovery” of the New World to the present day. Reviewers singled out a handful of selections as “not support[ing] grade-level expectations”:

Unit 1. The short story “Balboa” by Sabina Murray (920L). We disagree with the assessment of the qualitative dimension for this text; it is not “significantly below grade level.” The story is not told in chronological order, and the text is used to teach complex aspects of plot structure: flashback, and flashforward. The story is also challenging from the perspective of background knowledge: it assumes a familiarity with the Spanish conquest of modern-day Central America. “The World on the Turtle’s Back,” an Iroquois myth (850L). We believe it’s important to include representation from Native American culture in our first unit (“Foundation and Encounters”), and we also feel that such a text is worthy of in-class analysis and study. Texts that come from an oral tradition can be deceptively simple.

Unit 3. Poe’s “The Pit and the Pendulum” (1020L). We acknowledge that the Lexile is a “little bit below the grade band,” but the text is quite complex nevertheless, especially when you consider the setting (the Spanish Inquisition), the genre elements (Gothic literature), and the confusion and agitation of the narrator. We also acknowledge that the excerpt from “Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl” by Harriet Jacobs, with its 860L Lexile, is less complex than the poem it is paired with, “Runagate Runagate” by Robert Hayden. But we feel that these two pieces together comprise a grade-appropriate lesson and rich opportunities for student response.

Unit 5. “To Build a Fire” by Jack London (970L). This particular story is used in the course to introduce two of the more important literary movements in American history, Realism and Naturalism (SE page 459). The text itself, especially on a quantitative level, is relatively accessible; but the lesson that we surround it with demands a lot of students. Students are asked to do independent research on Naturalism (SE page 478), and we focus on Author’s Tone (SE page 481).

Grade 12

The Gr 12 course in *Into Literature* is a British literature survey, focusing over 6 units on the major British historical periods, from *Beowulf* to modern day British literature. Reviewers singled out just two selections that “partially meet expectation of rigor”:

Unit 1. The short story “Chivalry” by Neil Gaiman (810L), described as “well below band.” The first unit of this book is already quite challenging, including excerpts from *Beowulf*, *The Canterbury Tales*, and *Le Morte d’Arthur*. For the Unit 1 EOU, task we selected “Write a Short Story,” so that students could start off the year with a review of this mode of writing (narrative) before moving on to more challenging modes (argument and expository) and because many of the selections in this unit are narrative in nature. We wanted to have an accessible prose short story that was in dialogue with the period but that could also serve as a model for a conventional short story.

Unit 2. “Speech Before the Spanish Armada” by Queen Elizabeth (1310L). We are happy to see the reviewers correctly point out that this speech is “within the stretch Lexile band for Grade 12.” While the text is very short, we feel that it’s worthy of inclusion in the course due to its historical importance and the rich opportunities it presents for close reading (“Also notice how in crafting her speech, Elizabeth took into account her audience’s views about women and the English monarchy.” [SE page 325].) Also, as noted in the review, we pair this speech with a modern news article about the first American women to graduate from US Army infantry training in 2017, inviting students to consider how views have changed (or not changed) over time.

2. Indicator 1d (“Materials support students' literacy skills (understanding and comprehension) over the course of the school year through increasingly complex text to develop independence of grade level skills (Series of texts should be at a variety of complexity levels)”).

Grades 9-12

This is a complex and multifaceted indicator, and we feel very confident that our materials are carefully calibrated for a full school year and that they push students toward independence. Overall, through our diverse cross-genre text sets, students are asked to apply grade-level appropriate skills to grade-level appropriate texts, from whole-class, small-group work, and through independent reading opportunities. Our selections and instructional supports push students to read more closely and more attentively as the year progresses. Across Gr 9-12, more challenging texts (e.g., full plays) and more complex assignments are found in the later units. Every text in our program is not followed by a more complex text and we do not believe that customers expect that or that a diverse set of teachers from across the country would necessarily agree on such a sequence.