

### 3. Choose texts with word recognition and comprehension difficulty appropriate for the students' reading ability and the instructional activity.

Teachers should select text that is neither too simple nor too difficult for students. There are at least two aspects to text difficulty: textual/linguistic demands (e.g., decodability of the words, complexity of the sentences and text organization, clarity of the formatting), and content demands (i.e., how complex, abstract, or subtle the information is). These two aspects of difficulty can vary within the same text,<sup>98</sup> so teachers must be mindful of both. In the panel's experience, a text that is easy to decode may be too difficult for students to comprehend because the information might be complicated or particularly unfamiliar; similarly, a text that deals with concepts that are simple to comprehend may be too demanding with respect to word recognition.

Though the panel does not recommend choosing texts that are too difficult for students to read or understand, students should have opportunities to read somewhat challenging texts. Challenging texts may be most appropriate during activities where there is support available from the teacher, such as in shared reading time or guided reading experiences.<sup>99</sup> Student interest in and background knowledge of the text's subject may also increase their motivation to try to comprehend what they read (see Recommendation 5),<sup>100</sup> so teachers might choose a more challenging text when the topic is of interest or familiar to students.

### 4. Use texts that support the purpose of instruction.

The many purposes of reading comprehension lessons could include (1) improving students' application of reading comprehension strategies; (2) building their knowledge of specific genres, structures, and texts; or (3) developing their ability to engage in higher-order discussions about the text. Given the large variety of possible goals, the panel believes these points are important for teachers to consider when selecting texts to support the instructional purpose.

When the teacher is

- **Giving a lesson on text structure** → Begin with a text about a familiar topic in which the structure is easy to identify. Move to a text on a less familiar topic and with a somewhat more complex structure.
- **Introducing students to a strategy (such as summarizing)** → Select a text where the strategy is easily applied. Once

students have had time to practice, select a more challenging text.

- **Building a student's depth of understanding** → Avoid texts that only reinforce a student's knowledge of sound-letter relationships. These types of texts are more suitable for practicing decoding and word recognition.
- **Teaching students to make predictions** → Select a text that is unfamiliar to them, or one in which many outcomes are possible.
- **Reading with students (such as with a big book or digitally projected text)** → Select a text that is just above the students' reading level.
- **Reading to students (such as a read-aloud)** → Select a text that is well above the students' reading level but is at their listening comprehension level.