COMMON CORE LESSON SET: A Close Reading of “Living Like Weasels” by Annie Dillard

* **Grade Level:** 11th – 12th grade
* **Text Type:** Non-fiction/informational
* **Course:** ELA
* **Length:** 5 lessons
* **Common Core standards addressed:** RI.11-12.1, RI.11-12.2, RI.11-12.3, RI.11-12.4, RI.11-12.5, RI.11-12.6; W.11-12.2, W.11-12.4, W.11-12.5; SL.11-12.1, SL.11-12.4; L.11-12.1, L.11-12.2, L.11-12.4, L.11-12.5, L.11-12.6.
* **Learning Objectives:** Students will increase understanding and appreciation of Annie Dillard’s meditation on the tension between living in the moment and living self-consciously. Students also develop college- and career-ready reading skills, by engaging in a close reading with text-dependent questions and journaling.
* **Assessment:** 6 text-dependent questions with annotated answer key

**LESSON SET SUMMARY**

**DAY 1 The Natural and the Manmade**

* Teacher or skillful reader reads aloud the while students follow along.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* Students complete a text-dependent journal entry on what makes a weasel wild.
* Students answer text-dependent questions regarding the first seven paragraphs, exploring the juxtaposition of the natural environment with the evidence of human presence.

**DAY 2 Stunned into Stillness**

* Students are re-acquainted with the paragraphs eight through thirteen of the text.
* Students answer text-dependent questions about Dillard’s interaction with the weasel.
* For homework, students complete a journal entry describing the effect of the encounter.

**DAY 3 Forgetting How to Live**

* Students are re-acquainted with the text’s final paragraphs, fourteen through seventeen.
* Students answer text-dependent questions regarding these paragraphs, deepening their understanding of Dillard’s concept of” living in necessity.”
* For homework, students complete a journal entry examining Dillard’s concluding image.

**DAY 4 Craft and Composition**

* Students discuss text-dependent questions and complete their final journal entry on the connection between Dillard’s content and her choice of language.
* Teacher leads a discussion on students’ journal entries.
* Culminating writing assignment may be done in class or for homework.

**DAY 5 Mini-Assessment**[[2]](#footnote-2)

(optional)

* Students re-read a portion of the original excerpt used for instruction and independently answer 6 text-dependent questions that illustrate CCSS assessment expectations.

**Annie Dillard - “Living Like Weasels” - Grades 11-12 *(updated with Mini-Assessment)***

**Learning Objective**: The goal of this four-day exemplar, with a mini-assessment on day five, is to give students the opportunity to use the reading and writing habits they’ve been practicing on a regular basis to discover the rich language and life lesson embedded in Dillard’s text. By reading and rereading the passage closely and focusing their reading through a series of questions and discussion about the text, students will be equipped to unpack Dillard’s essay. When discussion is combined with writing about the passage, students will learn to appreciate how Dillard’s writing contains a deeper message and derive satisfaction from the struggle to master complex text.

**Reading Task***: Rereading is deliberately built into the instructional unit. Students will silently read the passage on a given day—first independently and then following along with the text as the teacher and/or skillful students read aloud. Depending on the difficulties of a given text and the teacher’s knowledge of the fluency abilities of students, the order of the student silent read and the teacher reading aloud with students following might be reversed. What is important is to allow all students to interact with challenging text on their own as frequently and independently as possible. Students will then reread specific passages in response to a set of concise, text-dependent questions that compel them to examine the meaning and structure of Dillard’s prose.*

**Vocabulary Task**: *Most of the meanings of words in this selection can be discovered from careful reading of the context in which they appear. Teachers can use discussions to model and reinforce how to learn vocabulary from contextual clues, and students must be held accountable for engaging in this practice. Where it is judged that use of context is not possible, underlined words should be defined briefly for students in a separate column or glossary whenever the original text is reproduced. At times, this is all the support these words need. At other times, particularly with abstract words, teachers will need to spend more time explaining and discussing them. In addition, for subsequent readings, high value academic (‘Tier Two’) words have been listed in Appendix A on pg. 22 of this document. Given how crucial vocabulary knowledge is to students’ academic and career success, it is essential that high value words be discussed and lingered over during the instructional sequence.*

**Sentence Syntax Task**: *On several occasions in this text, students will encounter particularly difficult sentences to decode. Teachers should direct students to read such sentences closely to help discover how they are built and how they convey meaning. While many questions addressing important aspects of the text double as questions about syntax, students should receive regular supported practice in deciphering complex sentences. It is crucial that the help they receive in unpacking text complexity focuses both on the precise meaning of what the author is saying and why the author might have constructed the sentence in this particular fashion. That practice will in turn support students’ ability to unpack meaning from syntactically complex sentences they encounter in future reading.*

**Discussion Task***: Students will discuss the passage in depth with each other and with their teacher. The goal is to foster student confidence when encountering complex text and to reinforce the skills they have acquired regarding how to build and extend their understanding of a text. A general principle is to always reread the portion of text that provides evidence for the question under discussion. This gives students another encounter with the text, reinforces the use of textual evidence, and helps develop fluency.*

**Writing Task***: Students will paraphrase different sentences and sections of Dillard’s text, complete a series of journal entries, and then write an informative essay detailing why the author chose the title “Living Like Weasels.” Teachers might afford students the opportunity to rewrite their essay or revise their in-class journal entries after participating in classroom discussion, allowing them to refashion both their understanding of the text and their expression of that understanding.*

**Independent, Mini-Assessments for Students:** *Students will have the opportunity to independently answer six questions that assess their ability to use evidence to make inferences from the text. The six questions are aligned to the CCSS for Reading Informational Text, Iisted below. These questions were created to provide valuable information on students’ progress on the CCSS Reading Standards to students, teachers, and instructional leaders. The assessment may take students less than a full period to complete, but teachers are encouraged to allow students the time needed to read closely within one class period, and allow students additional time later if needed.*

**Text Selection:** This selection, “Living Like Weasels,” is an essay from Pulitzer Prize-winning author, Annie Dillard’s book *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters.*  The text richly contrasts the world of nature to world mankind’s self-conscious awareness.

Teachers will find the essay by using the following citation: “Living Like Weasels” from *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, published by HarperCollins (1998, 2008, or 2013 editions), pages 65-71. Editions published earlier than 1998 contain the text, “Living Like Weasels,” but on different pages than listed here.

Teachers may purchase or preview this text here: <http://www.amazon.com/Teaching-Stone-Talk-Expeditions-Encounters/dp/0060915412/> or through a variety of other book vendors.

**Outline of Lesson Plan**: This lesson can be delivered in four days of instruction with an optional fifth day for the mini-assessment and reflection on the part of teachers and their students. Reasons for extending the discussion of “Living Like Weasels” might include allowing more time to unpack the rich array of ideas explored in this piece, taking more time to look closely at academic vocabulary and figurative language employed by Dillard, or participating in a writing workshop to strengthen students’ writing pieces.

**Standards Addressed:** The following Common Core State Standards are the focus of this exemplar: RI.11-12.1, RI.11-12.2, RI.11-12.3, RI.11-12.4, RI.11-12.5, RI.11-12.6; W.11-12.2, W.11-12.4, W.11-12.5; SL.11-12.1, SL.11-12.4; L.11-12.1, L.11-12.2, L.11-12.4, L.11-12.5, L.11-12.6. For full text of the language of the standards, please see page 26 of this document.

# Table of Contents

Lesson Set Summary…………………………………………………………………….………………………………………..……………1

[Table of Contents 4](#_Toc53143059)

[Day One: The Natural and the Manmade 6](#_Toc53143060)

[Day Two: Stunned into Stillness 9](#_Toc53143061)

[Day Three: Forgetting How to Live 11](#_Toc53143062)

[Day Four: Craft and Composition 13](#_Toc53143063)

[Day Five: Mini-Assessment 15](#_Toc53143064)

[Appendix A: Comprehensive Vocabulary List 23](#_Toc53143070)

[Appendix B: Additional Vocabulary Resources 27](#_Toc53143071)

[Appendix C: Text of Standards Addressed in this Lesson Set 28](#_Toc53143072)

[Appendix D: Information for Teachers about Text Complexity 29](#_Toc53143073)

[Appendix E: Additional Resources for CCSS Implementation 31](#_Toc53143074)

[Appendix F: Knowledge-Building Resources 32](#_Toc53143075)

# Day One: The Natural and the Manmade

**Summary of Activities**

* (BEFORE Day One) Teacher introduces the essay with minimal commentary and has students read it for homework.
* (ON Day One) Teacher or skillful reader reads the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text.
* Teacher asks the class to complete an introductory journal entry and discuss a set of text-dependent questions.
* For homework, teacher asks students to complete another journal entry.

**Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students**

**1. Read the essay out loud to the class as students follow along in the text.**

Asking students to listen to “Living Like Weasels” exposes them to the rhythms and meaning of Dillard’s language before they begin their own close reading of the passage. Speaking clearly and carefully will allow students to follow Dillard’s essay, and reading out loud with students following along improves fluency while offering all students access to this complex text. Accurate and skillful modeling of the reading provides students who may be dysfluent with accurate pronunciations and syntactic patterns of English.

**2. Introduce journaling and have students complete their first entry: In your journal, write an entry on the first paragraph of Dillard’s essay describing what makes a weasel wild.**

Students will be keeping a running journal charting their ongoing exploration of critical moments in the text. The process of journaling brings to the fore the tension that Dillard is exploring in her essay—choosing to live like a weasel (in the moment and unreflective) while writing about that choice (in a highly reflective and self-conscious way).

Students should consistently be reminded to include textual evidence in their journals to back up their claims and avoid non-text based speculation (i.e., no answers of the sort “Weasels are wild because they live outdoors and are not pets”). Below is some possible evidence that students may include in their first entry:

* “sleeps in his underground den”
* “he lives in his den for two days”
* “he stalks”
* “dragging the carcasses home”
* “Obedient to instinct”
* “he bites his prey
* “ splitting the jugular vein at the throat”
* “crunching the brain at the base of the skull”

**3. Ask the class to answer a small set of text-dependent guided questions and perform targeted tasks about the passage, with answers in the form of notes, annotations to the text, or more formal responses as appropriate.**

As students move through these questions and reread Dillard’s “Living Like Weasels,” be sure to check for and reinforce their understanding of academic vocabulary in the corresponding text. A recommended vocabulary list, with notes is included in Appendix A. At times, the questions themselves may focus on academic vocabulary.

**(Q1) What features of a weasel’s existence make it wild? Make it violent?**

This question harkens back to the journal entry students wrote and helps to emphasize the alien nature of a weasel’s existence. The teacher should be sure to highlight specific examples from the text if students overlook them:

* “sleeps in his underground den”
* “he lives in his den for two days”
* “he stalks”
* “dragging the carcasses home”
* “Obedient to instinct”
* “he bites his prey”

**(Q2) What instances in the text show a display of weasels being “obedient to instinct”?**

The following stories vividly illustrate the instinctual nature of weasels to hold on no matter what, hinting at the final paragraphs, where Dillard encourages her reader to live like a weasel and choose a life that is worth holding onto.

* “he had to walk half a mile to water, the weasel dangling from his palm, and soak him off like a stubborn label”
* “a man shot an eagle…and found the dry skull of a weasel fixed by the jaws to his throat”

**(Q3) At what point does the author start speaking about herself? What is the focus of her observations?**

Once students find this section (“I would like to have seen that eagle from the air”), they can be led in a discussion of the markedly different tone it sets, as well as identifying Dillard’s concerns (not the callous death of the eagle, but imagining different outcomes regarding what happened to the weasel attached to the eagle’s neck). The appearance of her voice at this juncture foreshadows how Dillard will move later in the essay from factual descriptions to speculative observations (and finally to admonition).

**(Q4) Why is this shift to first person important? What significance do these observations hold?**

The shift to first person happens in the middle of the paragraph, almost as if the author was stealthily slipping into the conversation. It becomes apparent with her continued presence, however, that she is here to stay, and her involvement with and ideas on the weasels, the environment, and eventually herself are central to her overall message.

**(Q5) What features of Hollins Pond does Dillard mention?**

This sets the stage for the introduction of the human and man-made in paragraphs 5 and 6.

“a remarkable piece of shallowness”

“the water lilies”

“covers two acres… with six inches of water and six thousand lily pads”

“In winter, brown-and-white steers stand in the middle of it”

**(Q6) What evidence is there in paragraphs 5 and 6 regarding a human presence at the pond?**

* “a 55 mph highway at one end”
* “Under every bush...a beer can”
* “motorcycle tracks… motorcycle path”
* “Two low barbed-wire fences”

This question requires students to methodically cite evidence to completely answer the question. It also highlights the emphasis that Dillard is putting on this human involvement in the natural setting she just took the time to describe in paragraph 4.

**(Q7) Dillard is careful to place these opposing descriptions (of the natural and man-made) side-by-side. How does this juxtaposition fit with or challenge what we have already read? Why might she have chosen this point in the text for these descriptions?**

These questions push students to see the connection between the natural and the man-made. It also generates evidence for their HW journal entry and introduces them to these ideas in a class setting before they have to grapple with them on an individual level at home.

**Homework: In your journal, write an entry describing how Dillard connects the constructed world with the world of nature in paragraphs 5 and 6 of her essay.**

Good answers will identify the way in which natures uses humans and humans use nature; excellent answers will also include how Dillard, at the end of paragraph 6, employs “man-made” adjectives like “upholstered and “plush” when describing the natural world.

# Day Two: Stunned into Stillness

**Summary of Activities**

* Teacher indicates the day’s passage (paragraphs eight through thirteen) and students read it independently.
* Teacher or skillful reader then reads the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text.
* Teacher asks the class to discuss a set of text-dependent questions and to complete another journal entry.

**Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students**

**1. Introduce the day’s passage and ask students to re-read paragraphs eight through thirteen independently.**

Other than giving the brief definitions offered to words students would likely not be able to define from context (see Appendix A), avoid giving any additional background context or instructional guidance at the outset of the lesson while students are reading the text silently. This close reading approach forces students to rely exclusively on the text instead of privileging background knowledge and levels the playing field for all students as they seek to comprehend Dillard’s prose. It is critical to cultivating independence and creating a culture of close reading that students initially grapple with rich texts like Dillard’s novel without the aid of prefatory material, extensive notes, or even teacher explanations.

**2. Re-read these paragraphs out loud to the class as students follow along in the text.**

As noted above, repeatedly reading out loud serves both to bring this portion of the text to students attention as well as a non-intrusive intervention to build fluency and support struggling readers.

**3. Ask the class to answer a small set of text-dependent guided questions and perform targeted tasks about the passage, with answers in the form of notes, annotations to the text, or more formal responses as appropriate.**

Use the same technique explained above on previous days of the lesson set.

**(Q8) What comparisons does Dillard make to describe the weasel in paragraph 8? What is the effect of using this many comparisons instead of one or two?**

* “thin as a curve”
* “a muscled ribbon”
* “brown as fruitwood”
* “his face was fierce, small and pointed as a lizard’s”
* “he would have made a good arrowhead”

This analysis sets up a later question on similes and metaphors and helps to establish a tone of close reading for the day. Aside from this, it shows just how closely Dillard was tuned in to the weasel. She saw small subtleties, and she wants readers to “see” them too, for these are the details that will eventually bring her message together. Choosing one comparison would not have accomplished this feat.

**(Q9) Describe what is meant by being “stunned into stillness” drawing on evidence from paragraph 10.**

A close analysis of this passage will examine how Dillard moves from literal to figurative descriptions of the impact of seeing the weasel and being “stunned into stillness.”

**(Q10) When she sees the weasel Dillard says, “I've been in that weasel's brain for sixty seconds.” What did she find there?**

Students should notice that once the weasel disappears, Dillard’s mind is “suddenly full of data,” foreshadowing the fact that the brain of the weasel was a “blank tape” revealing only the “urgent current of instinct.” The discussion could go on to elaborate on Dillard’s reaction to the experience—her dismissal of psychological explanations in favor of describing it as “a sweet and shocking time.” Teachers could end the discussion by pointing out that while the weasel doesn’t think, it does keep a “journal,” segueing to that night’s homework assignment.

**Homework: In your journal, write an entry describing the effect of seeing the weasel. What experience does Dillard compare it to, and how is this an apt comparison?**

Some evidence that students might cite includes the following:

* “a clearing blow to the gut”
* “it emptied our lungs”
* “the world dismantled”
* “a bright blow to the brain, or a sudden beating of brains”
* “the charge and intimate grate of rubbed balloons”
* “It felled the forest, moved the fields, and drained the pond”
* “I retrieved my brain from the weasel's brain”
* “my mind suddenly full of data and my spirit with pleadings”
* “the weasel and I both plugged into another tape...Can I help it if it was a blank?”

# Day Three: Forgetting How to Live

**Summary of Activities**

* Teacher introduces the day’s passage (the final paragraphs, paragraphs fourteen through seventeen) with minimal commentary and students re-read it independently.
* Teacher or skillful reader then reads the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text.
* Teacher asks the class to discuss a set of text-dependent questions and to complete another journal entry.

**Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students**

**1. Introduce the day’s passage and students read independently.**

Use the same technique explained above on previous days of the lesson set.

**2. Read the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text.**

Use the same technique explained above on previous days of the lesson set.

**3. Ask the class to answer a small set of text-dependent guided questions and perform targeted tasks about the passage, with answers in the form of notes, annotations to the text, or more formal responses as appropriate.**

Use the same technique explained above on previous days of the lesson set.

**(Q11) What was the purpose of Dillard coming to Hollins Pond?**

“to forget… how to live”

“learn something of mindlessness”

“I would like to live as I should”

“the purity of living in the physical sense”

“open to time and death painlessly”

“the dignity of living without bias or motive”

* “noticing everything, remembering nothing”
* “choosing the given with a fierce and pointed will”

**(Q12) Find evidence for what Dillard means by “living in necessity” in paragraph 14, and put her ideas into your own words in a brief two or three sentence paraphrase**

“to forget...how to live”

“the purity of living in the physical sense”

“mindlessness”

“the dignity of living without bias or motive”

Insisting that students paraphrase Dillard at this point will solidify their understanding of Dillard’s message, as well as test their ability to communicate their understanding fluently in writing. Teachers should circulate and perform “over the shoulder” conferences with students to check comprehension and offer commentary that could lead to on-the-spot revision of their “translation” of Dillard’s ideas.

**(Q13) In paragraph 15, Dillard imagines going “out of your ever-loving mind and back to your careless senses.” What does she mean by “careless” in that sentence, and how is that reflected in the rest of the paragraph?**

On a literal level, Dillard means that living by one’s senses is to set aside human cares and concerns and merely live in the moment. On a figurative level, she seems to imply that one can see more by caring less. Advanced students would bring in evidence from before the quote, e.g., “I should have gone for the throat...I should have lunged” and “mute and uncomprehending.”

**(Q14) Dillard urges her readers to “stalk your calling” by “plug[ging] into” your purpose—yet she describes this process as “yielding, not fighting.” What message is she trying to convey with these words?**

By returning to the opening symbol of the weasel dangling from the eagle’s neck, Dillard illustrates the sort of tenacity she’s asking of her readers in pursuing their own purpose.

**Homework: Dillard revisits the opening image of a weasel dangling from the neck of an eagle in the final paragraph of her essay, but this time substituting the reader. In your journal, describe how that image contributes to your understanding of her overall message.**

# Day Four: Craft and Composition

**Summary of Activities**

* Teacher asks the class to discuss a set of text-dependent questions and to complete their final journal entry.
* Teacher leads a discussion on students’ journal entries.
* Culminating writing assignment may be done in class or for homework.

**Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students**

**1. Ask the class to answer a small set of text-dependent guided questions and perform targeted tasks about the passage, with answers in the form of notes, annotations to the text, or more formal responses as appropriate.**

Use the same techniques explained above on previous days of the lesson set.

**(Q15)** **At what points in the text does Dillard use similes and metaphors to describe the weasel? Why does she choose figurative language to do this?**

* “like a stubborn label“
* “a fur pendant”
* “thin as a curve”
* “a muscled ribbon”
* “brown as fruitwood”
* “his face...small and pointed as a lizard’s”
* “he would have made a good arrowhead”

Dillard’s point in describing the weasel through metaphors is two-fold; first, she cannot see what it is like to be a weasel, as there is no conscious mind there comparable to a humans; second, she wants to describe the weasel vividly in order to make her ultimate comparison of what it would be like to be a person living like a weasel.

**(Q16) Dillard describes things in antithetical terms, such as “a remarkable piece of shallowness.” How do phrases like this help advance her observations regarding what it is like to live like a weasel?**

“two lovers, or deadly enemies”

“very calmly go wild”

* “the perfect freedom of single necessity”

Examining how Dillard writes also serves the function of exploring the central paradox of the essay—choosing a life of necessity, or in Dillard’s particular case, reflectively writing about being inspired by the unreflective life of a weasel living by its instincts.

**(Q17) Dillard also employs reflexive structures such as, “I startled a weasel who startled me.” Identify an additional instance of this structure. What is the purpose of these sentences?**

* “I was looking down at a weasel, who was looking up at me” (paragraph 7)

These instances are a great way of introducing reflexive self-consciousness into the discussion. This is an advanced concept, so if students struggle, you may have to help them with a basic understanding: Seeing the weasel helps Dillard become more aware of her own presence and helps her to “see” herself in a new, and more transparent manner. It returns her to her own sense of self and provides a space for reflection—it “startles” her very self.

**(Q18) Paragraphs 12 and 13 contain several questions instead of statements. What is the effect of using questions rather than declarations at this point in the essay?**

Students should recognize that the questions are a way to trail off or to make things seem inconclusive. In this way, Dillard is pushing readers to consider these questions on their own—to ponder them and to come to some of their own conclusions—much like she wants her readers to do with their own lives.

**(Q19) Dillard provides a plot summary early and efficiently in paragraph 3 (“I have been reading about...”) and returns to the visions of the weasel in paragraph 7. These two paragraphs help to effectively bracket the description of Hollins Pond with mention of looking at the weasel. Why does she give readers this “bare bones” summation and why does she do so at this point in the text? In other words, what is the effect of bracketing the discussion of Hollins Pond with mention of the weasel?**

**In-class journal entry: Choose one sentence from the essay and explore how the author develops her ideas regarding the topic both via the content of her essay and its composition. If students struggle with locating a sentence, here are some examples:**

* “The weasel lives in necessity and we live in choice, hating necessity and dying at the last ignobly in its talons”
* “I remember muteness as a prolonged and giddy fast, where every moment is a feat of utterance received”
* “If you and I looked at each other that way, our skulls would split and drop to our shoulders. But we don't. We keep our skulls. So.”

**2. Teacher leads a discussion on students’ journal entries.**

With student journals providing a foundation, lead the students through a discussion of their answers to the prompt, drawing their attention to textual evidence which supports key insights.

**3. Explain the culminating writing assignment (may be assigned as homework or in-class).**

Having engaged in a thorough close reading of the text, students now have the understanding and knowledge they need to write an informative essay using evidence from the text.

| **Writing Assessment Guidance for Teachers and Students** |
| --- |
| **Students should write an adequately planned and well-constructed informative essay regarding the meaning of the essay’s title - “Living Like Weasels.” Why has the author chosen this title? Why is it significant? Students should include at least three pieces of evidence from the text to support their thoughts.**  Strong essays should explore the desire for humans to live (like weasels) by instinct and necessity. Students may also choose to describe the choice humans have to “latch on” to the life they choose and how Dillard symbolically represents that choice. Whatever avenue students choose, they must cite three pieces of textual evidence and clearly explain the connection between their evidence and their ideas on the essay’s title.  If teachers assign this essay for homework, they could have a writing workshop the following day, where students provide feedback to their classmates regarding their essay. Following this, students may be given the opportunity to revisit their essay for homework.  Teachers could also assign the prompt as an in-class essay, but also use the following day for peer-to-peer feedback. |

# Day Five: Mini-Assessment

**Summary of Activities**

* Teacher provides students with a flexible amount of time to take the assessment to allow for close reading of the text. For planning purposes, it is estimated that it will take students less than a class period to complete the assessment, but please allow additional time as needed to ensure time for close reading.
* Teacher has option to grade and/or discuss answers as a class.

**Information on CCSS Alignment**

**Grade 11 Literary Nonfiction Mini-Assessment: “Living Like Weasels” by Annie Dillard**

This grade 11 mini-assessment is based on the literary nonfiction text, “Living Like Weasels,” by Annie Dillard. Because literary nonfiction is classified as informational text in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), this assessment will address the Reading Standards for Informational Texts. The text is worthy of students’ time to read and meets the expectations for text complexity at grade 11. Assessments aligned to the CCSS will employ quality, complex texts such as this.

Questions aligned to the CCSS should be worthy of students’ time to answer and therefore do not focus on minor points of the text. Several standards may be addressed within the same question because complex texts tend to yield rich assessment questions that call for deep analysis. In this mini-assessment there are 6 questions that address the Reading Standards below. We encourage educators to give students the time that they need to read closely and write to sources. The questions align to the following standards:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **RI.11-12.1** | Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. |
| **RI.11-12.2** | Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text. |
| **RI.11-12.3** | Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text. |
| **RI.11-12.4** | Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10). |
| **RI.11-12.5** | Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging. |
| **RI.11-12.6** | Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text. |

**Directions for Teachers**

Please read the information below, including the following page explaining the mini-assessment, carefully before administering this assessment. In addition, please refer to the Appendix “Information for Teachers About Text Complexity” to understand why and how this passage was selected.

|  |
| --- |
| The assessment questions in this document align with the CCSS and reflect the instructional shifts implied by the standards. To learn more about these topics, please go to the following link:  [www.achievethecore.org](http://www.achievethecore.org) |

**Directions to Read to Students**

**Today you will reread the passage we’ve been studying in class, “Living Like Weasels” by Annie Dillard. You will then independently answer six questions based on the passage.** **I will be happy to answer questions about the directions, but I will not help you with the answers to any questions. You will notice as you answer the questions that some of the questions have two parts. You need to answer Part A of the question before you answer Part B, but you may go back to Part A if you wish to after answering Part B.**

**Take as long as you need to read and answer the questions. If you do not finish when class ends, come see me to discuss when you may have additional time.**

**Now read the passage and answer the questions. I encourage you to write notes in the margin as you read the passages.**

**Passage**

“Living Like Weasels” from *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, published by HarperCollins (1998, 2008, or 2013 editions), pages 65-71. Editions published earlier than 1998 contain the text, “Living Like Weasels” but on different pages than listed here.

*Teachers, because the publisher will not grant permissions for reprints, you will need to gain access to copies of the text.[[3]](#footnote-3)***Grade 11 Mini-Assessment – “Living Like Weasels”: Questions**

**1. What are two most likely reasons that Dillard begins the passage with paragraphs 1 and 2, rather than with her encounter with the weasel?**

1. To suggest that her own contact with the weasel is less significant than those described in the opening paragraphs
2. To provide the reader with background information on the natural tendencies of weasels
3. To persuade the reader that weasels often behave in an aggressive manner
4. To create a dark and ominous mood that foreshadows her meeting with the weasel
5. To capture the attention of the reader with vivid and perhaps surprising details
6. To prove that encounters with weasels are common and often result in learning

**2.** **The following question has two parts. Answer Part A and then answer Part B.**

**Part A: In paragraph 1 of the text, the author states that the weasel “was socketed into [the naturalist’s] hand.” What is the meaning of the word *socketed* in this paragraph?**

1. held inside
2. firmly embedded
3. crashed against
4. snuggled near

**Part B: Which two phrases from paragraph 1 best help the reader determine the meaning of *socketed*?**

1. refused to kill
2. deeply as a rattlesnake
3. could in no way pry
4. tiny weasel
5. had to walk half a mile
6. stubborn label

**3. The following question has two parts. Answer Part A and then answer Part B.**

**Part A: Which word best describes the tone of paragraph 7, which tells about the author’s first few minutes at Hollins Pond?**

1. discouraged
2. questioning
3. peaceful
4. enthusiastic

**Part B: Which two words in paragraph 7 provide the best evidence for the answer in Part A?**

1. relaxed
2. ensconced
3. tremble
4. dreamily
5. thrusting
6. inexplicably

**4. The details in paragraph 10 contribute to the overall meaning of the passage by**

1. enhancing the author’s credibility in her claims about the nature of the weasel.
2. explaining why the author dreams of living like a weasel in the wild.
3. conveying the power of the author’s experience with the weasel.
4. delineating a clear separation between the author and the weasel.

**5. The secluded natural setting in which Dillard becomes acquainted with the weasel is significant in that she *alone* establishes a connection with the animal. Draw a ring around a paragraph in the passage that serves to develop the feeling of seclusion in the setting.**

**6. The following question has two parts. Answer Part A and then answer Part B.**

**Part A: Which two statements best express the central ideas of “Living Like Weasels”?**

1. The simplicity of animals acting on instinct should provide a model for humankind.
2. Learning about one’s environment inspires one to take action to improve it.
3. Humans and animals are meant to comprehend one another.
4. Animals live in constant fear of their surroundings.
5. Pursuing one’s own purpose is imperative to one’s sense of being.
6. Humankind is encroaching on nature’s boundaries in a harmful way.

**Part B: Which two quotations from the passage provide the best evidence for the answers to Part A?**

1. I was relaxed on the tree trunk, ensconced in the lap of lichen, watching the lily pads at my feet tremble and part dreamily over the thrusting path of a carp.
2. The weasel was stunned into stillness as he was emerging from beneath an enormous shaggy wild rose bush four feet away.
3. I think I blinked, I think I retrieved my brain from the weasel’s brain, and tried to memorize what I was seeing, and the weasel felt the yank of separation, the careening splash-down into real life…
4. What goes on in his brain the rest of the time? What does a weasel think about? He won’t say. His journal is tracks in clay, a spray of feathers, mouse blood and bone: uncollected, unconnected, loose leaf, and blown.
5. That is, I don’t think I can learn from a wild animal how to live in particular—shall I suck warm blood, hold my tail high, walk with my footprints precisely over the prints of my hands?
6. The weasel doesn’t “attack” anything; a weasel lives as he’s meant to, yielding at every moment to the freedom of single necessity.
7. The thing is to stalk your calling in a certain skilled and supple way, to locate the most tender and live spot and plug into that pulse.

**Teacher Guide to the Mini-Assessment**

**Annotations of the Questions for Teachers**

| **Question Number** | **Correct Answer(s)** | **Standards** | **Rationales for Answer Options** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | B, E | RI.11-12.5, RI.11-12.1 | A. Dillard does not suggest her encounter is less significant, but just different, from those described in the opening paragraphs.  B. This is a correct answer. Dillard wants readers to have some basic knowledge of weasels to better allow them to understand her experience.  C. Dillard offers the first two paragraphs as informational, not persuasive, text.  D. Dillard does not use these paragraphs to create a dark mood or foreshadow her meeting, but rather to provide basic facts about the behaviors of weasels.  E. This is a correct answer. Dillard wishes to draw the reader into her experience by providing vivid and surprising details about the nature of weasels.  F. Dillard does not include the paragraphs to show how common weasel sightings are, but rather to provide basic background on weasels. |
| **2 Part A** | B | RI.11-12.4,  RI.11-12.1 | A. Although *held inside* offers a sense of connection between the weasel and the hand, *held inside* is not the same as *socketed*, which means *tightly attached*.  B. This is a correct answer. When the weasel is *socketed* in the naturalist’s hand, it is *firmly embedded.*  C. Although *crashed against* shows a strong sense of force on the weasel’s part, it is not the same as *socketed*, which means *tightly attached*.  D. Although *snuggled near* shows a connection between the weasel and the naturalist’s hand, *snuggled near* connotes a soft connection, not a sense of being *socketed* or *tightly attached.* |
| **2 Part B** | B, C | A. *Refused to kill* describes the feelings of the naturalist, not the connection between his hand and the weasel.  B. This is a correct answer. *Deeply as a rattlesnake* shows that the weasel has bitten into the naturalist’s hand, becoming embedded.  C. This is a correct answer. *Could in no way pry* demonstrates the strength of the physical connection between the teeth of the weasel and the flesh of the hand.  D. *Tiny weasel* simply describes the size of the animal, not how the animal is strongly connected to the hand.  E. *Had to walk half a mile* shows how determined the naturalist was to not injure the weasel after it had bitten him, but it doesn’t show how strong the connection was.  F. *Stubborn label* shows that the animal is stuck to the natural’s hand, but it doesn’t show that its teeth are embedded in his flesh. |
| **3 Part A** | C | RI.11-12.6,  RI.11-12.4,  RI.11-12.1 | A. Although one may seek nature when one is discouraged, the narrator is feeling peaceful about her experience rather than discouraged.  B. Although the author at first questions what she is seeing, she is simply surprised by the appearance of the weasel.  C. This is the correct answer. As the author soaks up the nature around her, she is feeling peaceful.  D. Although the narrator is excited about the encounter with the weasel, when she first arrives at Hollins Pond (paragraph 7) she is feeling peaceful. |
| **3 Part B** | A, D | A. This is a correct answer. The word *relaxed* shows that the author is feeling tranquil as she begins her experience.  B. While the author may feel *ensconced* in her environment, this word does not reinforce a tone of tranquility.  C. The author uses the word *tremble* to describe the lily pads, not to reinforce a tone of calmness.  D. This is a correct answer. The author uses *dreamily* to further establish a tone of tranquility.  E. The author uses the word *thrusting* to describe the movement of the carp, not to reinforce a tone of tranquility.  F. The author uses the word *inexplicably* to show her surprise when the weasel appears, not to reinforce a tone of tranquility. |
| **4** | C | RI.11-12.3, RI.11-12.1 | A. The details do not enhance the author’s credibility, but rather help convey what the experience means to her.  B. The details do not explain why the author dreams of living like a weasel in the wild, but rather help convey the significance of the experience.  C. This is the correct answer. The details, hyperbolic statements like *bright blow to the brain* and *felled the forest,* help illustrate how powerful the encounter with the weasel was.  D. The details do not delineate a clear division between the author and the weasel, but instead show how their joined experience has an impact on the author. |
| **5** | Paragraph 4 or 5 or 6 | RI.11-12.6, RI.11-12.1 | Paragraphs 4, 5, and 6 all help develop the setting as important by describing the small, isolated area around Hollins Pond and contrasting it with the surrounding suburban area. These paragraphs also show that the author experiences the encounter alone, which allows it to be more impactful by giving her time to reflect. |
| **6 Part A** | A, E | RI.11-12.2,  RI. 11-12.1 | A. This is a correct answer. Dillard admires the simple nature of the weasel and wishes human life followed that model insofar as possible.  B. Although there is some evidence of a connection to the environment, the text does not address the connection of learning about one’s environment to improving it.  C. Although the author might agree that humans and animals are not meant to comprehend each other, it is not a theme in this text.  D. Although there is some evidence that the weasel is fearful, that is not a theme in this text.  E. This is a correct answer. Dillard weaves a theme throughout the text that one must pursue one’s own purpose in life in order to have a sense of being.  F. Although the author shows some evidence of humankind encroaching on nature’s boundaries, it is not a theme in this text. |
| **6 Part B** | F, G | A. Although this option provides a plausible link for option F in Part A in that it shows a human in nature, it does not provide evidence of a theme of the text.  B. Although this option provides a plausible link for option D in Part A in that it shows that the weasel is surprised and perhaps frightened, it does not provide evidence of a theme of the text.  C. Although this option provides a plausible link for option C in Part A in that it implies a connection to the author trying to get into the weasel’s mind, it does not provide evidence of a theme of the text.  D. Although this option provides a plausible link for option C in Part A in that it shows the author trying to comprehend what is happening in the weasel’s brain, it does not support a theme of the text.  E. Although this option provides a plausible link to options B and C in Part A in that it mentions learning and stresses how people cannot be like animals, it does not support a theme of the text.  F. This is a correct answer. This sentence provides evidence of the simplicity of the life of the animal and how appealing that it is to author (option A in Part A).  G. This is a correct answer. This sentence provides evidence of the theme of following one’s calling to truly be in touch with one’s emotions and sense of being (option E in Part A). |

# Appendix A: Comprehensive Vocabulary List[[4]](#footnote-4)

**The role of vocabulary in this lesson set:**

The chart below lists the various academic vocabulary words teachers have identified in “Living Like Weasels.” **It is important to note the very high number of words recommended for instruction in these passages**, more than many of us have been used to teaching. This reflects the importance of vocabulary to comprehending the complex text called for by the CCSS. Students who are behind need to learn even more words. This can only happen if we can teach word meanings efficiently; devoting more time and attention to those words that merit it, and less to those that can be learned with less time and attention. Clearly, there will not be time in a four-to-five-day lesson set to explicitly teach all the words listed below. Many of the words, however, can be taught quickly, while others deserve explicit and lengthy examination. Teachers should make intentional choices based on professional judgment, the needs of students, and the guidance provide below.

**The organization of the charts below:**

Each vocabulary word below has been measured against two criteria:

1. Can students infer the meaning of the word from context?
2. How much time and attention does the word merit?
3. ***Can students infer the meaning of the word from context?***

The definitions of many words can be inferred in part or in whole from context, and practice with inferring word meanings is an integral part of instruction.

The words in the **first group** have meanings which **can be inferred from context** within the text. Words in this category are printed in **bold** below.

Words in the **second group** have meanings, or are being used in ways, which **cannot reasonably be inferred from context** within the text alone. These words are printed in underline, and their definitions are should be provided to students with the text during instruction.

1. ***How difficult is the word?***

**Left column** words are **quicker and easier to learn**—ones that are concrete, have only one meaning, or are limited to a specific topic area, such as fires or the ocean etc. These words should be addressed swiftly, when they are encountered and only as needed.

**Right column**  words **take more time and attention to master** —ones that are abstract, represent concepts unlikely to be familiar to many students, have multiple meanings, are a part of a word family, and/or are likely to appear again in future texts. These words require more instructional time.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Quicker to learn; meaning can be determined from context** | | | **Harder to learn; meaning can be determined from context** | | |
| **Para** | **Vocabulary Word** | **Definition** | **Para** | **Vocabulary Word** | **Definition** |
| 1 | **den** | place where a wild animal lives; lair | 1, 16 | **stalk, stalks** | to follow in order to hunt |
| 1 | **draped** | hung over | 1 | **obedient** | obeying the commands of |
| 1 | **carcasses** | dead bodies | 1 | **instinct** | natural or unlearned behavior; urges |
| 1 | **jugular vein** | one of two large veins in the neck that carry blood from the head to the heart | 2 | **supposition** | assumption |
| 1 | **naturalist** | a person who studies the natural world | 4 | **remarkable** | noticeable, unusual and special |
| 1 | **socketed** | plugged into | 4 | **shallowness** | the condition of being not deep |
| 1 | **pry** | to remove with a lever or tool | 5 | **alternating** | switching between two things |
| 1 | **dangling** | hanging loosely | 6 | **gratitude** | thankfulness |
| 1 | **stubborn** | unwilling to change | 7 | **ensconced** | hidden or covered for protection |
| 2 | **pounced** | jumped on | 7 | **thrusting** | pushing forcefully |
| 2 | **gutting** | tearing out the insides | 7 | **inexplicably** | unexplainably |
| 2 | **talons** | claws on the feet of birds | 9 | **stunned** | paralyzed by shock or surprise |
| 2 | **airborne** | flying | 9 | **emerging** | coming out of |
| 3 | **glance** | quick look | 10 | **charge** | energy |
| 4 | **quarry** | a mine or pit that stones are taken from | 11 | **enchantment** | feeling of being under a spell |
| 4 | **steers** | young bulls | 11 | **careening** | to move fast and unsteadily |
| 4 | **dampening** | getting wet | 11 | **urgent** | important to do fast |
| 4 | **hooves** | the feet of animals like cows & horses | 11 | **pleadings** | asking hopefully |
| 4 | **plodding** | to move ins slow, heavy way | 14 | **precisely** | exactly, specifically |
| 5 | **nesting** | plodding | 14 | **purity** | pure experience |
| 6 | **traced** | follow the lines of | 14 | **dignity** | belief in your own value or worth |
| 6 | **shoreline** | water's edge | 14 | **bias** | prejudice |
| 6 | **fallen** | something that fell | 14 | **motive** | itentions |
| 6 | **upholstered** | covered with padding, like a couch | 15 | **necessity** | the state of needing things |
| 6 | **thorny** | covered in thorns | 15 | **pulsed** | vibrate or beat regularly |
| 7 | **tremble** | shake | 16 | **yielding** | giving in |
| 8 | **underside** | the bottom; animal's belly | 17 | **seize** | grab hold of; take |
| 9 | **enormous** | very big |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Quicker to learn; meaning can be determined from context** | | | **Harder to learn; but meaning can be determined from context** | | |
| **Para** | **Vocabulary Word** | **Definition** | **Para** | **Vocabulary Word** | **Definition** |
| 10 | **unexpectedly** | suprisingly |  |  |  |
| 10 | **overgrown** | covered with plants |  |  |  |
| 10 | **clearing blow** | punch that knocks the wind out of you |  |  |  |
| 10 | **grate** | unpleasant friction from rubbing |  |  |  |
| 11 | **yank** | hard pull |  |  |  |
| 12 | **muttering** | speaking under your breath |  |  |  |
| 15 | **lunged** | jumped towards |  |  |  |
| 15 | **mute** | silent; not talking |  |  |  |
| 15 | **tangled** | knotted, twisted up |  |  |  |
| 15 | **prolonged** | extended; long |  |  |  |
| 16 | **chastity** | not having sex |  |  |  |
| 17 | **limp** | floppy |  |  |  |
| 17 | **aloft** | high above the ground |  |  |  |
| 17 | **shreds** | tiny pieces |  |  |  |
| 17 | **unhinge** | disconnect |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Quicker to learn; meaning cannot be determined from context** | | | **Harder to learn; meaning cannot be determined from context** | | |
| **Para** | **Vocabulary Word** | **Definition** | **Para** | **Vocabulary Word** | **Definition** |
| 2 | swiveled | twisted | 4 | nonchalance | indifference |
| 2 | pendant | decoration that hangs from a necklace | 6 | plush | luxurious |
| 4 | terra firma | solid earth | 14 | ignobly | without dignity |
| 4 | tremulous | shaking | 15 | fast | to go without basic needs for time |
| 6 | jetty | structure that juts out over the water |  |  |  |
| 7 | lichen | soft moss |  |  |  |
| 15 | utterance | something said |  |  |  |
| 15 | giddy | silly, happy; or dizzy |  |  |  |
| 16 | supple | flexible |  |  |  |

## **Appendix B: Additional Vocabulary Resources**

**Hungry for more vocabulary? Check out the Academic Word Finder.**

The words in the list above were selected by an expert teacher as valuable to teach **in the context of this lesson**. But these are just some of the *many* words you could draw from this passage to help your students build their vocabulary. If you are interested in a tool which can quickly help you identify more of the high-value, Tier 2 academic vocabulary words that appear in this passage, visit the free **Academic Word Finder** at <http://achievethecore.org/academic-word-finder/> (registration required).

***Please note: Some of the words you will find with this tool will not overlap with those listed above.***This is a good thing, because it points out even more words that can help your students! The list above focuses on words crucial to understanding the key points of the passage and includes both Tier 2 and Tier 3 words, whereas the Academic Word Finder focuses on high-frequency Tier 2 words which will be valuable to your students across a variety of texts, (but which may not be particularly central to the meaning of this passage). These words often have multiple meanings or are part of a word family of related words. In addition the **Academic Word Finder** provides multiple related words and the variety of shades of a word’s meaning all in one location, so teachers can see the depth and diversity of word meanings they can teach around a word. Teachers then decide how and when to expose students to different word senses to promote their vocabulary growth.

Both sources of words are valuable, but for different purposes. Ultimately you will have to rely on your professional judgment to determine which words you choose to focus on with your students.

**Eager to learn more about how to select and teach vocabulary? Check out *Vocabulary and The Common Core* by David Liben.**

This paper includes a summary of vocabulary research and practical exercises to help you learn to select and teach vocabulary. Written by classroom veteran and literacy researcher David Liben, the exercises will help you hone your professional judgment and build your skill in the vocabulary teaching crucial to success with the Common Core State Standards.

Download the paper and exercises here:

<http://achievethecore.org/page/974/vocabulary-and-the-common-core-detail-pg>

# Appendix C: Text of Standards Addressed in this Lesson Set

The following Common Core State Standards are the focus of this exemplar:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **RI.11-12.1** | Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. |
| **RI.11-12.2** | Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text. |
| **RI.11-12.3** | Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text. |
| **RI.11-12.4** | Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines *faction* in Federalist No 10). |
| **RI.11-12.5** | Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging. |
| **RI.11-12.6** | Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text. |
| **W.11-12.1.a** | Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence. |
| **W.11-12.2** | Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content. |
| **W.11-12.4** | Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.) |
| **W.11-12.5** | Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. |
| **SL.11-12.1** | Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues,* building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. |
| **SL.11-12.4** | Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization,  development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a  range of formal and informal tasks. |
| **L.11-12.1** | Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking. |
| **L.11-12.2** | Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing. |
| **L.11-12.4** | Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on *grades 11–12 reading and content*, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies. |
| **L.11-12.5** | Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. |
| **L.11-12.6** | Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression. |

# Appendix D: Information for Teachers about Text Complexity

Regular practice with complex texts is necessary to prepare students for college and career readiness. “Living Like Weasels” has been placed at grade 11 for the purpose of this exemplar. This section of the exemplar provides an explanation of the process that was used to place the text at grade 11, illustrating why this text meets the expectations for text complexity in Reading Standard 10. Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards and the Supplement to Appendix A: *New Research on Text Complexity* lay out a research-based process for selecting complex texts. According to Appendix A of the CCSS, the first step in selecting grade-level appropriate texts is to place a text within a grade-band according to a quantitative text complexity score.

The quantitative data for “Living Like Weasels” is below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| “Living Like Weasels” | **Quantitative Measure #1** | **Quantitative Measure #2** |
| Flesch-Kinkaid: 6.6 | Lexile: 1040 |

After gathering the quantitative measures, the next step is to place the quantitative scores in the Conversion Table found in the Supplement to Appendix A ([www.coresetandards.org/resources](http://www.coresetandards.org/resources)) and determine the **grade band** of the text.



To find the **grade level** of the text within the designated grade-band, engage in a systematic analysis of the characteristics of the text. The characteristics that should be analyzed during a qualitative analysis can be found in Appendix A of the CCSS. ([www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org))

**Sample Qualitative Analysis of “Living Like Weasels”:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Notes and comments on text, support for placement in this band** | Where to place within the band? | | | | | |
|  |  | **NOT suited to band** | Early | end 11- early 12 | Mid-end  12th | CCR | **NOT suited to band** |
| **Structure: (**story structure or form of piece or sentence demands if notable) | The structure of this text is fairly straightforward: Basic information is provided in the first two paragraphs and then setting is established in the next few paragraphs while the author describes an encounter with a weasel. After that come her reflections on the experience. |  | | | | | |
| **Language** Clarity and Conventions (including vocabulary load) | The vocabulary in the text is quite sophisticated, in use of both academic and figurative language. The sentences are also complex, requiring careful analysis and close reading. |  | | | | | |
| **Knowledge Demands** (life, content, cultural/literary) | There are some very advanced concepts developed in the text and some abstract adult themes. Students familiar with the stresses of adult life will be advantaged when uncovering themes. The subject of the weasel itself is not problematic, as the author provides background information and sufficient detail to aid understanding, even if a student has never seen a weasel. |  | | | | | |
| **Levels of Meaning/ Purpose** | There are several levels of meaning within the text, some rather obscure and others rather obvious. The text will be difficult for students who must synthesize information to infer rather than just rely on stated themes, although there are a couple that are very clear. The purpose is fairly simple to infer: This is an experience that inspired reflection. |  | | | | | |
| **Overall placement:** | **Justification (what trumped)**  **Despite low readability data, this text is quite complex. The numerous themes and difficult vocabulary and use of rhetoric push this text into the 11-12 grade band.**  Assessment Level: |  | | | | | |

# Appendix E: Additional Resources for CCSS Implementation

**Shift 1 - Complexity**: *Regular practice with complex text and its academic language*

* See Appendix B for examples of informational and literary complex texts <http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf>
* See the Text Complexity Collection on <http://achievethecore.org/page/642/text-complexity-collection>

**Shift 2 – Evidence**: *Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational*

* See Close Reading Exemplars for ways to engage students in close reading on <http://achievethecore.org/page/752/featured-lessons>
* See the Basal Alignment Project for examples of text-dependent questions <http://www.achievethecore.org/basal-alignment-project>

**Shift 3 – Knowledge**: *Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction*

* See Appendix B of the Common Core for examples of informational and literary complex texts <http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf>
* See Knowledge-Building with a Model Lesson for this text

<https://achievethecore.org/content/upload/Model%20Lesson_Living%20Like%20Weasels.pdf>

# Appendix F: Knowledge-Building Resources

**Looking for ways to support all students in accessing complex text? Check out the Knowledge-Building Quad Text Sets.**

A high-leverage, evidence-based strategy to support students in accessing complex text is to anchor that text in a conceptually coherent set of resources that build needed knowledge and vocabulary. This work is particularly critical for students not yet reading at grade level. The knowledge-building resources follow a quad text set model developed by Comprehensive Reading Solutions and based on the article by Sarah Lupo and colleagues, “[Building Background Knowledge Through Reading: Rethinking Text Sets](https://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/jaal.701).” In a quad text set model, three to five texts are selected that help students develop knowledge critical to the complex text at the center of the close-reading lesson. Each of these supplemental texts is paired with a lightweight text-dependent task to support students’ comprehension and knowledge-building work. Implementing these knowledge-building texts and tasks can be done in a variety of ways; they are lightweight enough to be done either during short portions of class or as homework.

Download the Knowledge-Building Quad Text Set for this lesson here:

<https://achievethecore.org/file/5663>

1. Before day one, the teacher introduces the essay with minimal commentary and students read it for homework*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Teachers are encouraged to allow students to take the time that they need within a class period to read closely. If students do not finish when class ends, teachers are encourage to give them the opportunity to have additional time later. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The text is not included in this document due to permissions denial for web rights. *The user is solely responsible for any permission that may be necessary to reproduce, distribute, or publicly display the text for purposes of the assessment*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Please note: The meaning of the words in the list below should be clarified during instruction only,* ***not during assessment****.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)