

**Resources:**

To read more about discussing the language of complex texts, see:

Fang, Zhihui, and Pace, Barbara G. 2013. "Teaching With Challenging Texts in the Disciplines: Text Complexity and Close Reading." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 57 (2): 104–108.

Schleppegrell, Mary J. 2013. "Exploring Language and Meaning in Complex Texts." *Perspectives on Language and Literacy*, 37–40.

To read more about discussing historical texts, see:

American Historical Association (<http://www.historians.org/>): Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct (<http://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/governance/policies-and-documents/statement-on-standards-of-professional-conduct>)

California History-Social Science Project: History Blueprint

Cal Humanities (<http://www.calhum.org/>): Searching for Democracy (<http://www.calhum.org/programs/searching-for-democracy>)

**Designated ELD Vignette**

Vignette 7.3 illustrates good teaching for all students, with particular attention to the language learning needs of ELs. In addition to good first teaching, ELs benefit from intentional and purposeful designated ELD instruction that builds into and from content instruction. Vignette 7.4 that follows illustrates how designated ELD can build from and into the types of lessons outlined in the ELA vignette. It also illustrates how teachers can show their students how to deconstruct, or *unpack*, the language resources in complex texts in order to understand the meanings in the sentences and how the language writers choose shapes these meanings.

**Vignette 7.4: Designated ELD Instruction in Grade Eleven  
Unpacking Sentences and Nominalization in Complex History Texts**

**Background:**

English learners from different eleventh grade English classes come together in Mr. Martinez's designated ELD class, designed to support ELs who are relatively new to English. The students are at a range of English language proficiency levels, from late Emerging through early Expanding, and have been in U.S. schools for about two years. Some students came from a newcomer school where they studied for their first year in an intensive program specifically designed for high school students learning English as an additional language. Other students were placed directly in mainstream classes and this designated ELD class. All EL students at the school have a *zero period* where they take an elective, thereby extending their school day, which ensures that ELs can receive targeted language instruction but do not miss out on any content classes and electives, such as art and music.

Many of Mr. Martinez's students are also in Ms. Robertson's English class (see the first vignette above), but some are in other English classes at the school. Mr. Martinez works closely with the English and other content area teachers to ensure he understands the types of reading, writing, and conversation tasks in which his EL students are expected to fully participate. He plans his instruction around understandings about English that apply to a variety of school tasks, and he also designs lessons that support his students to develop disciplinary literacy so that they will be able to interact more meaningfully

with texts and tasks in their content classes. He has asked the other teachers to provide him with information about the texts students are reading, writing, and discussing so that he can explicitly draw connections for students between the learning in his class and what they are studying in their other classes.

**Lesson Context:**

Mr. Martinez frequently addresses how authors intentionally make choices about language in order to convey meanings and “how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text” (RI.11-12.6). Paying particular attention to his ELs’ language learning needs, he uses the CA ELD Standards as the focal standards for instruction. His intent is to guide students to understand how writers can choose particular language resources to convey their opinions or attitudes, sometimes in ways that may not be immediately evident.

In today’s lesson, Mr. Martinez focuses on supporting students to *unpack* sentences so that they can understand them better and also see some of the language resources in them. He’s noticed that his students are often challenged by the complex texts they are asked to read in their content classes. These texts contain many complex sentences and long noun phrases that are densely packed with meaning. Mr. Martinez has noticed that many of the complex texts contain *nominalizations*, which are terms typically expressed (in everyday language) through verbs (e.g., destroy) or adjectives (e.g., strong) but in academic text are expressed as *things*, or nouns and noun phrases (e.g., destroy→destruction, strong→strength). He wants his students to have some tools for tackling some of the linguistic features that can make sentences difficult to read (e.g., complex sentences, long noun phrases, nominalizations), and so he plans to show them how they can unpack sentences for their meaning. The learning target and cluster of CA ELD Standards in focus for today’s lesson are the following:

**Learning Target:** The students will *unpack* long sentences and determine how nominalization can affect the author’s message or reader’s interpretation of a text.

**CA ELD Standards (Expanding):** ELD.PI.11-12.1 – *Contribute to class, group, and partner discussions, sustaining conversations on a variety of age and grade-appropriate academic topics by following turn-taking rules, asking and answering relevant, on-topic questions, affirming others, providing additional, relevant information, and paraphrasing key ideas; ELD.PI.11-12.8 – Explain how a writer’s or speaker’s choice of phrasing or specific words produces nuances and different effects on the audience; ELD.PI.11-12.12a – Use an increasing variety of grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific academic words accurately and appropriately when producing increasingly complex written and spoken texts; ELD.PI.11-12.7 – Condense ideas in a growing number of ways to create more precise and detailed simple, compound, and complex sentences.*

**Lesson Excerpts:**

In today’s lesson, Mr. Martinez shows his students how to *unpack* some of the sentences from *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* by Dee Brown, which most of the students have started reading in their English classes. Still, there are a few students who have not yet read the text as they are in other English classes, and he invites the students who have read excerpts to provide an overview for these students have not yet read it. As the students share their ideas in the whole group, he prompts them to elaborate and use more precise words, such as “Cherokee Nation,” the “permanent Indian frontier,” “removed.” This way, all of the students will have some background knowledge before delving into an analysis of the language in the text.

He tells the students that they’re going to be looking very intensively at the excerpt and that the first time they read it, it may seem quite challenging, but that they’ll be reading the same text multiple times, and each time, the meanings will become increasingly clearer. He also shares that he’s going to show them a helpful method for unpacking the meanings in tricky sentences they encounter in texts. He briefly explains some terms from the excerpt the students will analyze, terms that he anticipates will be

particularly challenging for them (e.g., *stages, decade, permanent, blotted out, rounded them up*). Next, he reads the excerpt aloud as students read along silently in their handout. This way, the students can hear a model of what the text sounds like, including the pronunciation Mr. Martinez uses, where he pauses, where his voice rises and falls, etc. The excerpt he uses is provided below:

The decade following the establishment of the “permanent Indian frontier” was a bad time for the eastern tribes. The great Cherokee nation had survived more than a hundred years of the white man’s wars, diseases, and whiskey, but now it was to be blotted out. Because the Cherokees numbered several thousands, their removal to the West was planned to be in gradual stages, but the discovery of Appalachian gold within their territory brought on a clamor for their immediate wholesale exodus. During the autumn of 1838, General Winfield Scott’s soldiers rounded them up and concentrated them into camps. (A few hundred escaped to the Smoky Mountains and many years later were given a small reservation in North Carolina.) From the prison camps they were started westward to Indian Territory.

After he reads aloud, he invites the students to briefly discuss at their table groups what meanings they understand so far. Most of the students have already read this same excerpt in their English class, and this brief discussion allows Mr. Martinez to listen in and observe what students know and what language they are able to use to convey their knowledge. After the brief discussion, he answers a few clarifying questions the students have, using the students’ primary language(s), when appropriate and possible (he speaks Spanish and some Portuguese). Next, he has the students read the excerpt aloud with him chorally. This time, he asks them to be thinking about the literal meanings of the text.

Mr. Martinez: Who thinks this text is challenging? I also find it challenging, but I’m going to show you a way of attacking a complex text like this. First of all, let’s talk a little bit about why this text is so challenging. Even in this short excerpt the sentences have a lot of information packed tightly into them. For example, let’s just look at this long noun phrase: *The decade following the establishment of the “permanent Indian frontier.”* Wow! That’s a lot of information crammed into a small amount of space. The main noun, or thing, in that phrase is *decade*, which means ten years, and everything around that word is telling more about decade.

Mr. Martinez then shows his students a technique for unpacking tricky sentences that contain long noun phrases such as the one he just highlighted. He uses the following procedure:

<b>Sentence Unpacking Teaching Process</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Choose a sentence from a text students have already read, <i>a sentence that’s critical for understanding the key meanings of the topic in the text.</i></li> <li>2. Model, through thinking aloud and using natural language, how to unpack the meanings of the sentence, teasing apart the information that’s densely packed into the sentence.</li> <li>3. Then, put the meanings back together (condense) in your own words, and compare that with the original sentence.</li> <li>4. Talk about the language resources used in the original sentence and how they convey particular meanings.</li> <li>5. Talk about how the sentence is structured and how this structure affects meaning (e.g., connects, condenses, combines, enriches, or expands ideas).</li> <li>6. Return to the core meaning of the sentence to make sure students don’t lose that as the central focus.</li> </ol>

Mr. Martinez has prepared a chart for students to use when they “unpack” sentences:

<b>Sentence Unpacking</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unpack the sentence to get at all the meanings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What’s happening?</i></li> <li>• <i>Who or what is involved?</i></li> </ul> </li> </ol>

- *What are the circumstances surrounding the action (when, where, in what ways)?*
2. Repackage the meanings into your own words:
- *What does this sentence mean in my own words?*
  - *How can I condense my words to make the sentence more compact?*
3. Think a more deeply about the original sentence:
- *What do I notice about the language the author chose to use?*
  - *How does this language make meanings in specific ways?*

He displays the sentence he will unpack on the document reader. He splits the sentence into its more meaningful chunks of meaning, clauses. Then, he proceeds to write all the meanings he sees in the sentence in bullet points, all the while “thinking aloud” his process of unpacking. The students watch and listen, and he invites them to ask questions when they are unclear about the language he uses for his unpacked meanings.

- Because the Cherokees numbered several thousands,  
their removal to the West was planned to be in gradual stages,  
but the discovery of Appalachian gold within their territory brought on a clamor for their immediate wholesale exodus.
- Numbered - There were lots of (several thousand) Cherokee Indians.
  - Their removal - Someone was supposed to be removed from their lands. (the Cherokees?)
  - Gradual stages - They (the government?) were supposed to take the Cherokees to the West slowly over time.
  - Because – There were several thousand Cherokees, so they were supposed to move them slowly.
  - The discovery - People (the government?) discovered Appalachian gold on Cherokee land.
  - Appalachian gold - People (the government?) wanted the gold from Appalachia.
  - A clamor - People made a lot of noise about something.
  - Immediate wholesale exodus – People (who?) told the government to move all the Cherokees off their land right away, now.

Mr. Martinez: So, you can see that there’s a lot *packed in* to that one sentence. When I’m reading a sentence like this, in my head, I’m *unpacking* the meanings in my own words so I can understand it. Obviously, I’m not writing all of this down, but I wanted to show you what’s going on in my head. After I’ve unpacked the sentence, I put all of those meanings back together so I can get to the real meaning the author was trying to convey. I think that what this sentence is saying is that people found out that there was gold on the Cherokee’s land, in the Appalachian mountains, and they wanted the gold, so the people wanted them out fast. Even though there were thousands of Cherokees, and they were supposed to move them off of their land slowly, some people complained and made sure that all of the Cherokees moved off their land right away.

Eugenia: But, that’s not what it says. It’s not saying it the same way. The author has other words.

Mr. Martinez: You are right, and that’s what’s interesting here. What are some of the differences between the way it’s written and the way I just used my own words to unpack it?

Victor: You use a lot more words!

Mr. Martinez: Yes, I did use a lot more words, but I can *condense* what I unpacked even more and still use my own words: The U.S. government was supposed to move the Cherokee Indians off of their land slowly, but the government discovered gold on the Cherokee's land, so people wanted the Cherokees to leave faster. One of the things you have when you write is time, and when you have time, you can condense your ideas, make them more compact.

After some more discussion, where Mr. Martinez clarifies students' understandings about the process of unpacking sentences, he guides his students to unpack another sentence with him, and this time, he has them tell him what to write, prompting them when they are stuck. Next, he asks his students to work in pairs to unpack the remaining sentences of the section, using the same sentence unpacking process, their English dictionaries and thesauruses, and/or their bilingual dictionaries. He requires the students to agree on the words they will use to unpack and then repackage the meanings, and he also requires them both to write. As students work together, he listens in on their conversations. One student, Suri, has noticed that there are some words that are making it difficult to see who is doing what (e.g., *their removal, the discovery, a clamor, an exodus*).

Suri: So the word, like *removal*. It say "their removal to the West," but it no say who is removing. When he unpack it, he say people, some people remove them. But who? Who remove the Cherokee Nation?

Fayyad: Maybe we can look here (pointing to the text). Here, it says it "was planned ..." Huh. That doesn't tell who.

Mr. Martinez takes note of the students' conversations so that he can address their questions and *noticings* with the whole group. When, he pulls the students together to debrief, he asks them to report on their discussions. Each pair takes turns using the document reader to explain how they unpacked one of the sentences and then condensed them into their own words. They also share what they noticed about the language the author used.

Suri: It's hard to know who was doing it.

Mr. Martinez: Can you elaborate on that?

Suri: There are all these words - *removal, discovery, clamor*. We don't know who is doing that. We don't know who is removing or who is discovering. I think it the soldiers because then it say, "*General Winfield Scott's soldiers rounded them up.*"

Mr. Martinez: That's a great observation, Suri. What you're noticing is that writers can condense a lot of information in sentences by packing the things people *are doing* into *things*, like *removal* or *discovery*, which are represented by nouns. So, instead of saying "the army removed the Cherokees from their ancestral lands to the West," or "the white settlers discovered gold," the author can just write "their removal to the West," and "the discovery of gold." That packs in more information into a sentence, and it also makes it hard to see who is doing the action, who the agent of the action is. When people do things, they're the *agents*. So, one of the things nominalization does is hide the agent doing the action, or hide *agency*. These types of words—things that are usually verbs, or sometimes adjectives and are then turned into nouns, or things—is called *nominalization*. There are lots of reasons *why* an author would *choose* to do that, and we're going to look at some of those reasons today.

Mr. Martinez writes a student-friendly definition of nominalization on a piece of chart paper, which he will later post for the students' future reference:

<b>Nominalization</b>	
<p><b>What is it?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turning one part of speech into nouns or noun groups.</li> <li>• Usually verbs: construct <input type="checkbox"/> construction</li> <li>• Sometimes adjectives: different <input type="checkbox"/> difference</li> </ul>	<p><b>Why use it?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In history texts, nominalization is often used to make actions people (v.) do or qualities (adj.) into <i>things</i>.</li> <li>• This lets the writer interpret and evaluate the <i>things</i> and say more about them.</li> <li>• It also hides the <i>agents</i> (the people doing the action).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Examples:</b></p> <p>I <b>destroyed</b> (v.) the car. <input type="checkbox"/> The <b>destruction</b> (n.) of the car ...</p> <p>They <b>removed</b> (v.) the Native Americans. <input type="checkbox"/> The <b>removal</b> (n.) of the Native Americans ...</p> <p>I am exhausted (adj.). <input type="checkbox"/> My exhaustion prevented me from enjoying the party.</p>	
<p>As Mr. Martinez discusses the chart, he explains what he’s writing and asks the students questions about the terms and examples.</p> <p>Mr. Martinez: So, if you write, “The destruction of the car ...”, that hides who did it. Why would you want to do that?</p> <p>Amir: (laughing) Because you don’t want the police take away your driver license!</p> <p>Mr. Martinez: Right, if I say it like a thing, “the destruction of the car,” we can’t tell who did it—me! That one was pretty easy. If you write “The removal of the Native Americans ...”, that also hides the agent. Why would the historian want to hide agency here? Talk for a minute with the person sitting next to you first.</p> <p>Selena: If you hide the agent, the people who do it, we think it just happen. But we don’t know who do it. Or we have to think hard to see who did it.</p> <p>Katia: And I think it show that the Native Americans do not make the decisions themselves. Someone forced them to leave their land. But if you don’t say who force them, then it makes it softer or seem not so bad.</p> <p>Elois: We don’t know who <i>planning</i> to remove the Cherokee, and we don’t know who <i>removing</i> them.</p> <p>Mr. Martinez: Right, and how do we know someone is removing them?</p> <p>Nadia: It say, “their removal.” But they are not removing themself.</p> <p>Mr. Martinez: Good observation. Notice this word: removal. It’s related to the verb remove, right? But is it a verb here?</p> <p>Amir: That’s passive voice.</p> <p>Mr. Martinez: That’s a great connection your making. This is like passive voice, but it’s a little different. The thing that’s the same is that you don’t know who the agent is when you use passive voice or nominalization. But what’s different is that passive voice is still in the verb form. So, you might say something like “The Cherokees <i>were removed</i>.” However, nominalization turns the verb into a noun phrase or a “thing.” Instead of seeing were removed, you’d see “their removal.”</p> <p>Mr. Martinez writes the following examples of what he explaining on the white board:</p>	

Active Voice	Passive Voice	Nominalization
The U.S. government <b>removed</b> the Cherokees.	The Cherokees <b>were removed</b> .	<i>Their removal ...</i>
<i>verb form – can see agent</i>	<i>verb form – can't see agent</i>	<i>noun form – can't see agent</i>

He then guides the students to find the nominalizations in the text. They read the sentences together, and at the end of each sentence, he asks them to see if they can find any nominalizations in it. Then, the class decides together if the words are nominalizations, highlight them, and then discuss what questions they should be asking themselves when they read. Finally, Mr. Martinez asks the students to *translate* the part of the sentence that contains the nominalization into a sentence using the more typical verb form of the word. A portion of the chart the class generates is below:

Nominalizations	Questions about Agency	Verb form translation
<b>the establishment</b>	Who established the “permanent Indian frontier?”	The U.S. government <b>established (made)</b> the “permanent Indian frontier.”
<b>their removal</b>	Who is removing the Cherokees?	The army <b>removed (took away)</b> the Cherokees to the West.
<b>the discovery</b>	Who discovered the gold?	The U.S. government <b>discovered (found)</b> gold.
<b>a clamor</b>	Who is clamoring for their exodus?	The white settlers <b>clamored (made a lot of noise)</b> for the Cherokee people to leave.

#### Next Steps:

For the rest of the year, Mr. Martinez will expand his students’ understandings of nominalization and other language resources by drawing their attention to instances of nominalization and facilitating discussions about the meanings of the words and possible reasons why the author chose to use them, including author’s perspective. In the next collaborative planning session, Mr. Martinez discusses the approach of sentence unpacking with his colleagues. The science teacher notes that this would be a very useful technique for his classes since the science texts he uses have a lot of densely packed sentences. Together, the teachers look at one of the sentences from a science text students are currently reading, and they unpack it together, using Mr. Martinez’s technique.

#### Sources:

Brown, Dee (1970). *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West*. New York: Holt Rinehart Winston, 1970.

CA ELD Standards, Chapter Five, Learning About How English Works

#### Resources

For further reading, see:

Fang, Zhihui, and Mary J. Schleppegrell. 2010. “Disciplinary Literacies Across Content Areas: Supporting Secondary Reading Through Functional Language Analysis.” *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 53 (7): 587–597.