

Text Complexity Analysis of *Diamond Willow* by Helen Frost

Qualitative Measures

Levels of Meaning:

The book's main metaphor compares the process of discovering the deep beauty in both the willow bark and also in our twelve-year-old main character, Willow. Something very precious can grow out of painful scars, as the skinned and polished stick shows. Not all middle school readers will understand this deeper-than-surface meaning. But the story will be very satisfying even without the understanding of the book's main metaphor.

Structure:

Complex format. This book is mostly poems in diamond form, each with a hidden message written in bold type. Told in first-person fictional narrative. Dialogue is written in italics. Simple chronological order of events. Interspersed sporadically are the observations from Willow's dead (& reincarnated) ancestors.

Language Conventionalty and Clarity:

Language is conversational and familiar. Willow's thoughts – frustration with authority, insecurity with peers – are universal. There are a few, but not many, domain-specific vocabulary words for this setting and culture, i.e. hypothermia.

Knowledge Demands:

Willow's grandparents represent the old Dinak'l ways in remote Alaska. Experiences (sled dogs) and beliefs (reincarnation) may be quite different from the average reader.

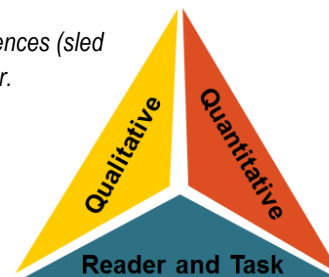
Quantitative Measures

*Various readability measures of *Diamond Willow* are largely in agreement that this is of appropriate complexity for grades 5 - 8. The ATOS formula (used with the Accelerated Reader program) identifies this title as having a book level of 4.3 . A Lexile measure for this novel is 670L.*

Reader-Task Considerations

These are to be determined locally with reference to such variables as a student's motivation, knowledge, and experiences as well as purpose and the complexity of the task assigned and the question posed.

Here in Kansas, educators might want to examine the following elements or issues: motivating students of both genders to become comfortable with the unique poems.



Recommended Placement

Diamond Willow is on the William Allen White 2010-2011 nominated list (6th- 8th-grade) for the state of Kansas. The book is also on many other state award lists. The author is a Michael Printz Honor winner for a previous book.