

**Twin Cities Area Reading Council (TCARC) – MRA Highlights Submission**  
**By Sarah Haskett-Rutledge, Maurina Rome, and Jill Maxe - August, 2018**

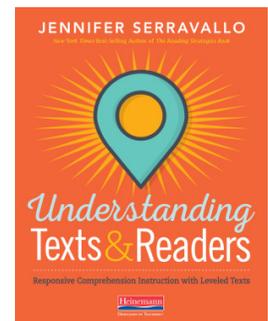
## **Complete Comprehension - An Evening With Jen Serravallo**

In May, the Twin Cities Area Reading Council [TCARC](#) had the privilege of hosting an evening with literacy guru, Jennifer Serravallo, with her presentation focused on *Complete Comprehension*. Jen has written many books in the area of literacy; and her newest book, *Understanding Texts and Readers*, (available in September 2018) helps educators connect assessment to instruction through an understanding of reader behaviors and text levels.

Those in attendance were both enlightened and entertained as Serravallo spoke about the importance of understanding reading behaviors and text levels to help guide instruction. Jen stressed the role of assessment as a necessary component to support students' growth in comprehension. In order to understand our students' reading behaviors and comprehension we first need to assess them. We need to hear kids read and engage them in dialogue that will elicit their understanding of the text. It is also important that we know what types of responses should be expected to show comprehension within various levels of text.

In order to know the types of responses necessary for true comprehension at various text levels we need to have a working knowledge of text complexity within those levels. When we understand what type of thinking is needed for comprehension at different levels of text complexity, we can then teach strategies that will help our students go deeper in their learning. An understanding of the subtle demands in comprehension across text levels can help us gain a better understanding of our readers' development and allow us to match them with the appropriate text that will provide that "sweet spot" for learning growth.

Serravallo also highlighted the importance of goal setting and how to help readers set meaningful goals during reading conferences. Often our goal setting for students is very generic. We don't intend it to be that way but sometimes we're unsure of how to really guide students to that next level of reading development. Serravallo spoke (and writes in her book) about how to truly understand student reading behaviors and responses along with text complexity in order to help students make meaningful goals. She offers the following framework (displayed below) that divides reading goals into a hierarchy that outlines a clear progression and differentiates between fiction/literature and nonfiction/information.



## Determining Where to Start: A Hierarchy of Possible Goals



In Jen's previous book, *The Reading Strategies Book*, strategies to teach students at various levels of reading were highlighted. Her newest book helps us understand readers' behaviors and responses so that we can accurately place them in a level of text that will promote the greatest growth. Serravallo's work places an importance on text levels, yet she pointed out that a text leveling system is meant to be an instructional tool for teachers. The intention was not to place limits on what students choose to read independently. As educators, with an understanding of text complexity and most importantly, our students, we can choose books and strategies that will best support our literacy learning during instruction.

During her talk, Jen discussed and showed examples of how plot, setting, character and theme change across levels and she highlighted what to expect of readers at various text levels. Serravallo also shared progressions across levels to support in planning for instruction. For example, when discussing characters with readers, we start looking for evidence of comprehension related to a single character trait. Next in the continuum, readers are able to support the chosen character trait with examples from the text. Describing the character using multiple character traits would show additional progress. The final stage would be achieved when the reader is able to demonstrate understanding (using text evidence) of the complexity of the character.

Our evening of learning with Jennifer Serravallo was indeed memorable. Jen's practical approach to teaching literacy is infused with experience and expertise gained from her work with colleagues in the Teacher's College at Columbia University and with students in classrooms in New York. If you are interested in learning more from Jen, be sure to check out her free 5-week summer "Writing Camp" that is archived with videos and posts in the Facebook group, *The Reading and Writing Strategies Community*. The group has more than 50,000 educators who are all intent on improving literacy instruction for their students.

Looking ahead to the coming school year, we hope you will join the Twin Cities Area Reading Council and Scholastic Education on the morning of Saturday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019, as we host Jan Richardson. Jan will be sharing additional resources and strategies for enhancing comprehension and will also share an overview of her newest book on small group intervention instruction. Jan will reference two of her books: *The Next Step Forward in Guided Reading* and *The Next Step Forward in Reading Intervention*. We look forward to seeing you soon!