



Type: Journal Article

Curiously Unique: Joseph Smith as Author of the Book of Mormon

Author(s): Brian C. Hales

Source: *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*,
Volume 31 (2019), pp. 151-190

Published by: The Interpreter Foundation

Abstract: The advent of the computer and the internet allows Joseph Smith as the “author” of the Book of Mormon to be compared to other authors and their books in ways essentially impossible even a couple of decades ago. Six criteria can demonstrate the presence of similarity or distinctiveness among writers and their literary creations: author education and experience, the book’s size and complexity, and the composition process and timeline. By comparing these characteristics, this essay investigates potentially unique characteristics of Joseph Smith and the creation of the Book of Mormon.

INTERPRETER



A JOURNAL OF LATTER-DAY SAINT
FAITH AND SCHOLARSHIP

Volume 31 · 2019 · Pages 151 - 190

Curiously Unique: Joseph Smith as Author of the Book of Mormon

Brian C. Hales

Offprint Series

© 2019 The Interpreter Foundation. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

ISSN 2372-1227 (print)
ISSN 2372-126X (online)

The goal of The Interpreter Foundation is to increase understanding of scripture through careful scholarly investigation and analysis of the insights provided by a wide range of ancillary disciplines, including language, history, archaeology, literature, culture, ethnohistory, art, geography, law, politics, philosophy, etc. Interpreter will also publish articles advocating the authenticity and historicity of LDS scripture and the Restoration, along with scholarly responses to critics of the LDS faith. We hope to illuminate, by study and faith, the eternal spiritual message of the scriptures—that Jesus is the Christ.

Although the Board fully supports the goals and teachings of the Church, The Interpreter Foundation is an independent entity and is neither owned, controlled by nor affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or with Brigham Young University. All research and opinions provided are the sole responsibility of their respective authors, and should not be interpreted as the opinions of the Board, nor as official statements of LDS doctrine, belief or practice.

This journal is a weekly publication of the Interpreter Foundation, a non-profit organization located at InterpreterFoundation.org. You can find other articles published in our journal at Journal.InterpreterFoundation.org. You may subscribe to this journal at InterpreterFoundation.org/annual-print-subscription.

CURIOSLY UNIQUE: JOSEPH SMITH AS AUTHOR OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

Brian C. Hales

Abstract: *The advent of the computer and the internet allows Joseph Smith as the “author” of the Book of Mormon to be compared to other authors and their books in ways essentially impossible even a couple of decades ago. Six criteria can demonstrate the presence of similarity or distinctiveness among writers and their literary creations: author education and experience, the book’s size and complexity, and the composition process and timeline. By comparing these characteristics, this essay investigates potentially unique characteristics of Joseph Smith and the creation of the Book of Mormon.*

Historically, many critics have dismissed the Book of Mormon by classifying its creation as remarkable but not *too* remarkable. As naturalist Dan Vogel explains: “The Book of Mormon was a remarkable accomplishment for a farm boy While Smith continued to produce religious texts, the Book of Mormon remained his most creative, ambitious work in scope and originality.”¹ Like Vogel, skeptics commonly assume that human *creativity*, *ambition*, and *originality* can produce texts like the Book of Mormon and imply that past authors have used those abilities to produce similar volumes. Despite such assumptions, no attempts to duplicate his effort or to actively compare Joseph Smith to other authors have been published.

Admittedly, devising a scheme for comparison can be tricky. Multiple variables could be chosen, each detecting a potentially useful parallel or nonparallel. This essay will compare six criteria regarding the author, the book, and the composition process:

1. Author Age
2. Author Education
3. Book word count
4. Book complexity
5. Composition timeline
6. Composition methodology

Each of these elements represents an observable characteristic that can be generally, if not specifically, measured. Other criteria, like authors' writing experience, book genre, intended audience, language, etc. might have been included and hopefully can be explored in future analyses.

I should point out that none of these criteria seems very useful if isolated from the others. In other words, Joseph Smith recited the Book of Mormon when he was in his mid-twenties, but many other authors of similar age and younger have written impressive novels. Similarly, his schooling was minimal, but limited education has not stopped other authors from writing their manuscripts. The Book of Mormon is long, but thousands of writers have equaled or eclipsed that word count. The complexity of the Book of Mormon is not particularly singular, and many books have been written in short periods of time.

Determining whether the Book of Mormon creation was unique in any observable way requires contrasting multiple characteristics simultaneously. Diagramming all six variables at the same time is not possible, but convergences and divergences can be detected by charting several of the characteristics together.

Joseph, the Book, and the Composition Process

Before attempting any comparisons, details regarding Joseph Smith's age and education, the Book of Mormon's length, complexity, and the composition process must be understood.

Joseph Smith's Age and Education

Born December 23, 1805, Joseph Smith was 23 when he dictated the Book of Mormon and 24 when it was published. Precisely how much education he had acquired by that time is controversial. In 2016, scholar William Davis wrote that Joseph Smith's "overall estimated time ... in formal education" was "equivalent of approximately *seven full school years*."² While Davis's research is useful, his conclusions seem incomplete for several reasons. First, Davis assumes Joseph attended school without documenting that he actually did. Several reminiscences report he frequently did not show

up for classes.³ Second, the vast majority of recollections from individuals who knew Joseph Smith described him as ignorant⁴ or illiterate.⁵ Isaac Hale recounted in 1834: “I first became acquainted with Joseph Smith, Jr. in November, 1825 . . . His appearance at this time, was that of a careless young man — not very well educated.”⁶ Lastly, we are not told how “seven full school years” of frontier schooling might compare to modern standards. It would probably be much inferior to a seventh-grade education in the United States in the twenty-first century.

Joseph Smith’s recollection that he was “deprived of the benefit of an education” seems accurate. His statement: “I was merely instructed in reading, writing and the ground rules of arithmetic”⁷ would place him with about a third-grade education in modern Western schools.⁸

The Book of Mormon Word Count and Complexity

The 1830 Book of Mormon word count (from computer calculation) is 269,528.⁹ However, when used to compare to other books, this total could be justifiably modified. Twenty-six chapters in the Book of Mormon closely resemble chapters in the King James Version of the Bible.¹⁰ In all, 15,527 similar words could be subtracted, representing approximately 5.8% of the Book of Mormon total. In contrast, Joseph Smith dictated many additional words comprising the Book of Lehi, which were lost by Martin Harris as part of the 116 pages. Since the total number of missing words is unknown, the 1830 Book of Mormon word count (269,528) will be used without modification in this article.¹¹

The complexity of the Book of Mormon can be assessed through general observations, as well as technical measurements. The text mentions the activities of more than 175 individuals and groups who existed in at least 125 different topographical locations.¹² Found within the narrative are 337 proper names, of which 188 are unique to the Book of Mormon.¹³ The chapters reference more than 425 specific geographical movements.¹⁴ Also included are 430 identifiable chiasms, with more than thirty being six-level or greater.¹⁵ Throughout the Book of Mormon Joseph Smith used more than 100 different names for deity.¹⁶ The storyline includes complex words that BYU Professor Roger Terry finds surprising to have been in “Joseph’s ‘available vocabulary’ in 1829.”¹⁷ Examples include:

abhorrence, abridgment, affrighted, anxiety, arraigned, breastwork, cimeters, commencement, condescension, consignation, delightful, depravity, derangement, discernible, disposition, distinguished, embassy, encompassed, enumerated, frenzied, hinderment,

ignominious, impenetrable, iniquitous, insensibility, interposition, loftiness, management, nothingness, overbearance, petition, priestcraft, probationary, proclamation, provocation, regulation, relinquished, repugnant, scantiness, serviceable, stratagem, typifying, unquenchable, and unwearyingness.¹⁸

Measuring the Readability and Complexity of the Book of Mormon

The specific characteristics mentioned above of the Book of Mormon are essentially impossible to directly compare to other books. Yet multiple analytic calculations have been used for decades to determine text readability and complexity.¹⁹ The outcomes of such evaluations can be compared easily. Submitting the text of the 1830 Book of Mormon to the most widely used of these computerized tests reveals a span of recommended reading grades (see appendix):

Scale	Book of Mormon	
	Score	Suggested Reading Grade
Coleman Liau index	7.92	8
ATOS	9.6	8
Lexile	1150	8 (6–11)
Fry Graph	9–10	9
Dale-Chall Adjusted Grade Level	8.4	11–12
SMOG	12.55	12
Flesch Kincaid Grade Level	15.74	High School plus 2 years
Gunning Fog index	17.69	Post-Graduate year 1
Automated Readability Index (ARI)	17.50	Post-Graduate year 1

Averaging these scores places the Book of Mormon reading level around the *eleventh* grade (high school junior) but with a range from the sixth to post-graduate.

An additional measure of complexity is the Flesch Reading Ease Scale, where the Book of Mormon scores 51–56, which correlates to “Fairly difficult to difficult to read.”²⁰ To put this in context, “Low scores indicate text that is complicated to understand For most business writing, a score of 65 is a good target, and scores between 60 and 80 should generally be understood by 12 to 15 year olds.”²¹

Score	School Level	Notes
100–90	5th grade	Very easy to read. Easily understood by an average 11-year-old student.
90–80	6th grade	Easy to read. Conversational English for consumers.
80–70	7th grade	Fairly easy to read.
70–60	8th & 9th grade	Plain English. Easily understood by 13- to 15-year-old students.
60–50	10th to 12th grade	Fairly difficult to read.
50–30	College	Difficult to read.
30–0	College graduate	Very difficult to read. Best understood by university graduates.

The most common of all complexity scales, with more than 300,000 books scored, is the “Lexile Framework for Reading.”²²

The Lexile Framework for Reading is a scientific approach to measuring reading ability and the text demand of reading materials. The Lexile Framework involves a scale for measuring both reading ability of an individual and the text complexity of materials encountered. The Lexile scale is like a thermometer, except rather than measuring temperature, the Lexile Framework measures a text’s complexity and a reader’s skill level.²³

Grade	Mid-percentile	Range 25th to 75th percentile
1	210	120–295
2	360	170–545
3	590	415–760
4	795	635–950
5	925	770–1080
6	1010	855–1165
7	1080	925–1235
8	1140	985–1295
9	1195	1040–1350
10	1245	1085–1400
11–12	1285	1130–1440

The Book of Mormon Lexile score is 1150,²⁴ which correlates to an *eighth*-grade reading level, with a range that includes some sixth graders and most in the eleventh grade:²⁵

Since many books have been analyzed and assigned Lexile scores, these can be used when comparing authors and their books to Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. Other popular books with an 1150 Lexile score include *Brothers Karamazov* (Fyodor Dostoyevsky, 364,153 words), *Moby Dick*, (Herman Melville, 206,052 words), and *Great Expectations* (Charles Dickens, 162,690 words).²⁶

As discussed above, even the most optimistic historical estimates of Joseph Smith's 1820s education assume seven years of upstate New York district schooling. When presented with this data, Don Bradley, author of a forthcoming book on the lost 116 pages, responded, "People have readily assumed the Book of Mormon was within Joseph Smith's *writing* ability, when it's actually questionable how well it was within his *reading* ability."²⁷

Composition Timeline

Several authors have calculated a productivity timeline for the full dictation of the original Book of Mormon.²⁸ The most recent chronology is from John W. Welch, who identified five anchor dates in 1829²⁹:

- April 7, when Oliver Cowdery began scribing in Harmony, Pennsylvania.
- May 15, the day corresponding to the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood by John the Baptist (D&C 13).
- May 31, when the Title Page of the Book of Mormon was translated.
- June 11, when Joseph Smith obtained the copyright from the Library of Congress.
- June 30, the established date for completion of the translation although it might have been a day or two earlier.

Within this framework, Welch starts with the 85 days between April 7 and June 30 and shows multiple distractions would have prevented Joseph Smith from translating every day. Welch approximates that 11 days were needed for travel, with another deduction of 16 for time spent farming, Sunday observance, doing business, visiting with guests, religious activities, performing needed chores, and other distractions. Another day is subtracted to account for 13 revelations received during those weeks. These reductions support that perhaps 57 days were all that were devoted to translation and writing of the original Book of Mormon manuscript.

Dividing the final word count by 57 days equals about 4,700 words per day. The average adult handwriting speed using a ballpoint pen or pencil is around 68 letters or 13.8 words per minute equating to translation times of just under six hours a day.³⁰ Several observations suggest the process could have taken much longer. Martin Harris asserted that after Joseph dictated a sentence and Martin would write it down, Martin would then say “written” before they would move on.³¹ In contrast, David Whitmer reported that the scribe wrote down Joseph’s words “exactly as it fell from his lips,” then “the scribe would then read the sentence written” back to Joseph to assure accuracy.³² While the details are less clear, it appears the scribe and Joseph spent additional time trying to assure the text was correctly recorded.³³

Also, using a quill and ink reservoir would likely have slowed the process (as compared to handwriting speeds using a pen or pencil). Issues of fatigue for continuous writing are common and might have further slowed the overall progress.³⁴ If breaks were taken for food and other distractions, the process could easily have extended to most of the waking hours.³⁵

David Whitmer recalled: “It was a laborious work for the weather was very warm, and the days were long and they worked from morning till night. But they were both young and strong and were soon able to complete the work.”³⁶ “Elsewhere Whitmer reported: “The boys, Joseph and Oliver, worked hard, early and late, while translating the plates. It was slow work, and they could write only a few pages a day.”³⁷

Composition Methodology

Multiple witnesses declared that Joseph Smith spoke the words of the Book of Mormon rather than personally writing them.³⁸ This observation separates him from more than 99% of all authors who ever published a book.

Historically, the composition technique taught in schools worldwide is called *creative writing* and comprises three general steps.

1. Pre-writing: choosing a subject, creating an outline, and performing the required research.
2. Writing: making the initial draft and combining sections.
3. Re-writing: revising, content-editing, and all subsequent drafts.³⁹

When dictating a book to a scribe (or stenographer), as Joseph Smith did, step one is restricted to memory, and step three is eliminated. There is no evidence Joseph engaged in step one in any discernable way,

although mental preparations would not be detectable. The manuscript went straight to press without step three enhancements.

Dictating a book without pre-writing or re-writing might be called *creative dictation*. The advent of smart phones and voice-to-text apps has facilitated cell phone users today to produce long manuscripts using creative dictation and thereby attempt to replicate Joseph Smith's efforts. The need for a scribe is removed by dictating text messages of 20 to 30 words each (the apparent word blocks Joseph spoke to his scribes⁴⁰) into the app. These are received in order and copied into an expanding document. Before hitting send, grammar and spelling can be corrected, but once sent, the sequence of the sentences cannot be changed.⁴¹ The author does not consult manuscripts or books while dictating.⁴² Repeat this process 10,000 times until a document of roughly 270,000 words is formed that can be sent to a publisher for typesetting and printing.

Creative dictation is more difficult than creative writing because, as Louis Brandeis, who served as an associate justice on the Supreme Court of the United States from 1916 to 1939 explained: "There is no good writing; there is only good rewriting."⁴³ Popular novelist and essayist Robert Louis Stevenson concurred: "When I say writing, O, believe me, it is rewriting that I have chiefly in mind."⁴⁴ This inherent limitation of creative dictation is probably why none of the authors in the comparisons charted below elected to recite their books from memory and then send them directly to the printer. Even genius-level intellects today pre-write, write, and rewrite their books prior to completion.⁴⁵

Throughout the remainder of this article, all the authors listed in the comparisons except Joseph Smith used creative writing techniques, rather than creative dictation, to produce their books. The possible significance of this distinction deserves additional study that is beyond the scope of this essay.⁴⁶

Automatic Writing

A possible exception to the near universal implementation of creative writing techniques, rather than creative dictation methodology, is "automatic writing." It occurs when authors produce their texts spontaneously through recitation or other types of communication.⁴⁷ Automatic writing has two forms. Shorter writings may be induced by psychologists (generally through hypnosis) to discover feelings and memories hidden in a client's unconscious mind. Psychologist Anita M. Muhl, author of *Automatic Writing*, explains: "The use of automatic writing in conjunction with psychoanalysis is invaluable in getting at unconscious processes quickly."⁴⁸

Naturalists may allege this process explains Joseph Smith's ability to dictate the Book of Mormon,⁴⁹ but multiple psychological studies demonstrate the unconscious mind lacks the ability to systematize memory elements or to perform complex cognitive functions.⁵⁰

A second and much older form of automatic writing is also called "spirit writing" or "channeling."⁵¹ Irving Litvag explicates: "One type of psychic activity, known as 'automatic writing,' began to attract attention through the activities of a group of mediums, mostly English, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Automatic writing involves the reception and transcription of various types of communications in written form. The medium claims to have no control over the writing that is produced."⁵² This latter form can produce very long manuscripts even lengthier than the Book of Mormon. Their authors universally attribute the words they produce to extra-worldly sources.⁵³

Since secular theorists disallow supernatural influences, they generally credit all the words generated by automatic writers to their unconscious minds⁵⁴ or charge them with deception (including self-deception).⁵⁵ No prospective scientific experiments have demonstrated that automatic writing can produce manuscripts like the Book of Mormon. All studies and conclusions are based upon retrospective analyses of existing manuscripts. Consequently, possible parallels between the Book of Mormon and automatic writings await reproducible data identifying the naturalistic methodologies ostensibly employed by the writers including Joseph Smith.

Comparing Young Writers

Throughout the remainder of this essay, the potential for one or more of the lists to be incomplete should not be ignored. Even with the information readily obtainable on the Internet, identifying all writers that are pertinent to each category below might not be possible. Acknowledging that hundreds of thousands of books have been printed in English over past centuries, the lists below compare more popular titles primarily because those are more publicly known. If any of the following compilations have missed a particular author who parallels Joseph Smith more closely, it is independent of my earnest attempts to be absolutely thorough. Scrutiny is encouraged and suggestions for expansion and modification are welcome.

Throughout recorded history, young writers have tried their quills, pencils, pens, typewriters, and keyboards at book-writing. Born

December 16, 1775, Jane Austen began in her twenties writing novels that are still popular today.⁵⁶

Author	Education at Time of Publication	First Book Title	Age when Published	Word Count	Lexile
Taylor Caldwell	Public schools	<i>The Romance of Atlantis</i>	12	73,320	n/a
Zlata Filipović	Public schools	<i>Zlata's Diary</i>	13	74,400	640
Alexandra Adornetto	Secondary school	<i>The Shadow Thief</i>	14	64,480	1060
Nancy Yi Fan	Secondary school	<i>Swordbird</i>	14	79,360	760
Flavia Bujor	Secondary school	<i>The Prophecy of the Stones</i>	14	124,000	830
Amelia Atwater-Rhodes	High school	<i>In the Forests of the Night</i>	15	54,560	900
Isamu Fukui	High school	<i>Truancy</i>	15	133,920	960
Malala Yousafzai	Private school	<i>I Am Malala</i>	16	114,080	1000
Beth Reekles	Secondary school	<i>The Kissing Booth</i>	16	138,880	780
Catherine Webb	Secondary school	<i>Mirror Dreams</i>	16	97,200	n/a
Pamela Brown	High school	<i>The Swish of the Curtain</i>	17	99,200	n/a
Gordon Korman	High school	<i>I Want to Go Home!</i>	18	57,040	n/a
Alex Harris	College	<i>Do Hard Things</i>	18	99,200	n/a
Percy Bysshe Shelley	Secondary school	<i>Zastrozzi</i>	18	101,600	n/a
Suresh Guptara	Secondary school	<i>The Conspiracy of Calaspia</i>	18	186,000	n/a

Author	Education at Time of Publication	First Book Title	Age when Published	Word Count	Lexile
S.E. Hinton	High school	<i>The Outsiders</i>	19	69,440	750
Arthur Rimbaud	Secondary school	<i>A Season in Hell</i>	19	106,020	1080
Georgette Heyer	High school	<i>The Black Moth</i>	19	120,900	n/a
Christopher Paolini	High School	<i>Eragon</i>	19	163,680	710
Esther Earl	High school	<i>This Star Won't Go Out</i>	20	138,800	960
Mary Shelley	Home tutoring	<i>Frankenstein</i>	21	51,460	900
Helen Oyeyemi	Secondary school	<i>The Icarus Girl</i>	21	109,120	n/a
Maureen Daly	High school	<i>Seventeenth Summer</i>	21	119,040	1130
Matthew Gregory Lewis	College	<i>The Monk</i>	21	128,960	990
Jessica Khoury	College	<i>Origin</i>	22	133,920	740
Samantha Shannon	College	<i>The Bone Season</i>	22	173,600	n/a
Eleanor Catton	Secondary school	<i>The Rehearsal</i>	23	106,160	n/a
Carson McCullers	College	<i>The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter</i>	23	114,080	760
F. Scott Fitzgerald	College	<i>This Side of Paradise</i>	24	53,940	1070
Zoe Sugg	College	<i>Girl Online</i>	24	109,120	720
Joseph Smith	Frontier school	<i>Book of Mormon</i>	24	269,528	1150

How does the length of the Book of Mormon compare to the first books published by other young authors in the past centuries? The names of writers of 24 years and younger (whom I have been able to identify), their educations,

books, word counts (for books of more than 50,000 words), publishing ages, and Lexile scores (when available) are charted above.⁵⁷

The chart indicates that Joseph Smith's education was less than that of any of the other authors except perhaps Mary Shelley. The word count of the Book of Mormon surpasses the next lengthy volume by more than 80,000 words, nearly a 50% increase.

While not a specific criterion, only three of the books on the chart were published before the Book of Mormon: *The Monk* (128,960 words) by Matthew Gregory Lewis in 1796, *Zastrozzi* (101,600 words) by Percy Bysshe Shelley in 1810, and *Frankenstein* (51,460 words) by Mary Shelley in 1818. For that era, the Book of Mormon word count more than doubled the works of previous young authors.⁵⁸

Also, the Lexile score of the Book of Mormon is higher, although many books have no score available. The lower Lexile scores of young writers are generally unsurprising, since writers generally draw from their own life's experiences or from expansions of those experiences coupled with imagination. Most youthful authors will have limited and less mature material to reference. Their books are generally written for readers between grades 5–9 with science fiction, fantasy, and romance themes being common.

Prolific Young Writers

Several youthful writers, whose first books were much shorter than the Book of Mormon, immediately proceeded to write additional volumes. Their cumulative total word counts exceeded 269,528 by the time they reached 24 years, the age when Joseph Smith printed the Book of Mormon.

Catherine Webb published her first book, *Mirror Dreams*, by age sixteen and had almost a million words in print by age 24.⁵⁹ While none of her books have been assigned a Lexile score,⁶⁰ her early target audience seems to have been older elementary school children.⁶¹ On her personal website blog, she described some of her early writing experiences: "I actually won a prize for how much I used the library . . . I have written sizeable chunks of novels in numerous libraries, and been shushed for typing too loud."⁶²

Born April 16, 1984, Amelia Atwater-Rhodes began writing her first novel in May of 1997, completing her manuscript by the end of the year. After additional revisions, the 53,680-word *In the Forests of the Night* was published in 1999. With a Lexile score of 770, it targeted fourth and fifth graders. By her 24th birthday, Atwater-Rhodes had published more than 600,000 words.

Book	Year Published	Age	Word Count	Lexile
<i>In the Forests of the Night</i>	1999	15	53,680	770
<i>Demon in My View</i>	2000	16	58,560	820
<i>Shattered Mirror</i>	2001	17	107,360	790
<i>Midnight Predator</i>	2002	18	78,080	780
<i>Hawksong</i>	2003	19	78,080	930
<i>Snakecharm</i>	2004	20	53,680	940
<i>Falcondance</i>	2005	21	63,440	870
<i>Wolfcry</i>	2006	22	63,440	870
<i>Wyvernhaul</i>	2007	23	53,070	830
<i>Persistence of Memory</i>	2008	24	68,320	860
Total			677,710	

In a question-and-answer forum posted online, Atwater-Rhodes explained her early writing: “I started my first ‘novel’ in first grade In second grade I tried to co-write a novel called *The Hope to Get Out* with my best friend. Shortly after, my father allowed me the use of his computer and I began a story about people who lived on rafts I love to write; I tell the stories for myself, because I want to know how they go.”⁶³

A third prolific young author, Christopher Paolini, has become more famous than the others. Born in 1983, he authored his first book, *Eragon* in 2002 at age nineteen, which was made into a big-budget movie in 2006 that opened to mixed reviews.

Book	Year Published	Age	Word Count	Lexile
<i>Eragon</i>	2002	19	163,680	710
<i>Eldest</i>	2005	22	218,240	970
<i>Bresingr</i>	2008	25	248,000	1050
Total			629,920	

Homeschooled by his parents, by the age of three Christopher was “comfortably working at a first-grade level.”⁶⁴ When a teen, he entered public schools, earning his high school diploma at age 15. At that time, Reed College in Portland, Oregon, offered him a full college scholarship, but his father thought he was too young to enroll.⁶⁵ Instead, Christopher tried his hand at fictional writing, publishing *Eragon* four years later. His biographer explains the process:

Paolini had ideas swimming around in his head, but he realized that he knew very little about the actual art of writing — for example, how to construct a plot line. So he set out to do some research. He studied several books on writing, including *Characters and Viewpoint* (1988) by Orson Scott Card and Robert McKee’s *Story* (1997), which helped him to sketch out a nine-page summary. Paolini then spent the next year fleshing out his story, writing sporadically at first, but then picking up the pace. The task went much more quickly after he learned how to type....

Paolini spent the bulk of 2000 reworking his first draft, smoothing out problems and fine-tuning such things as language and landscape.... By 2001 Paolini had a second draft, but he was still not satisfied, so he turned the book over to his parents for editing. They helped him streamline some of the plot sequences, clarify some of the concepts, and pare back some of what Paolini called “the bloat.” ... In 2002 the Paolinis had *Eragon* published privately.⁶⁶

In the years that followed, Paolini continued to write consistently every day from his home. He told an interviewer: “I get bolts of inspiration about once every three months ... and between those bolts of inspiration the writing, while enjoyable, is definitely work. And I just treat it like a job. Every day I get up, I sit down, and I work on the book.”⁶⁷ Paolini encouraged aspiring authors: “Read everything you can get your hands on Reading is probably the single most important skill I’ve learned in my life.”⁶⁸

While the ages and literary productivity of these authors are impressive, when compared to Joseph Smith, divergences are detected regarding their levels of education, books’ complexities, and composition methods.

One Hit Wonders and Repeat Authors

As the author of only one lengthy book, Joseph Smith joined the club of one-hit-wonder authors or books that became popular but were not followed by additional books. The authors seemed satisfied with a single literary success:

One-Hit Wonder Authors Compared					
Author	Education	Book	Age	Words	Lexile
Anna Sewell	Elementary	<i>Black Beauty</i>	57	59,520	760
John Kennedy Toole	College	<i>A Confederacy of Dunces</i>	43	125,550	800
Arthur Golden	College	<i>Memoirs of a Geisha</i>	41	134,540	1000
Margaret Mitchell	College	<i>Gone with the Wind</i>	36	418,053	1100
Harper Lee	Law school	<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>	34	119,040	1120
Sylvia Plath	College	<i>The Bell Jar</i>	31	89,280	1140
Emily Bronte	Academy	<i>Wuthering Heights</i>	29	128,960	880
Joseph Smith	Frontier school	<i>Book of Mormon</i>	24	269,528	1150

Historically, a more common pattern for authors is to start their writing careers with shorter volumes that remain less known, only to later compose a book that might be considered their magnum opus:

Authors of Popular Books of More than 250,000 Words							
Author	Education	First Book	Age	Words	Popular Book	Age	Words
George Eliot	Middle School	<i>Adam Bede</i>	40	213,323	<i>Middlemarch</i>	52	316,059
Vikram Seth	College	<i>The Golden Gate</i>	34	99,200	<i>A Suitable Boy</i>	41	591,554
Ayn Rand	College	<i>We the Living</i>	31	143,840	<i>The Fountainhead</i>	38	311,596
Fyodor Dostoyevsky	Academy	<i>Poor Folk</i>	25	54,336	<i>Brothers Karamazov</i>	58	364,153
Leo Tolstoy	College	<i>Childhood</i>	24	40,783	<i>War and Peace</i>	37	587,287
Larry McMurtry	College	<i>Horseman, Pass By</i>	24	59,520	<i>Lonesome Dove</i>	49	365,712
Joseph Smith	Frontier Schooling.	<i>Book of Mormon</i>	24	269,528			

As the author of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith could have written sequels or prequels. Continuing to describe Lamanite activities after 400 AD would have been a natural second volume, maybe involving an unknown Nephite population. Or he may have afterwards penned

a narrative describing the journey of the Mulekites who left Jerusalem to come to the American continent where they were discovered by the Nephites.⁶⁹ While he produced no additional Book of Mormon genre manuscripts, his early death allows only speculations on what he might have composed later in life.

Books Written in Fewer than Nine Weeks

Several online sources have compiled lists of books written in four to six weeks.⁷⁰ This time span is shorter than the total translation days of the Book of Mormon of between 57 to 85 days. Even nine to 13 weeks is fast compared to the time generally required to write a lengthy manuscript. For example, Eleanor Catton related her speed in writing her 2008 debut novel, *The Rehearsal* (104,160 words): “I wrote the bulk of the novel in quite a short period of time – about eighty thousand words in eight months – and during that time I really immersed myself in the novel’s world.”⁷¹ She also explained her writing technique: “I spent a lot of time with my thesaurus.”⁷²

Comparing these writers shows that in each case, they were older and more educated than Joseph Smith. With one exception, their books are generally less complicated. Even doubling the word counts to compensate for the added time needed to create the Book of Mormon does not reach Joseph’s word production.

Books Written in Fewer than Nine Weeks					
Author	Education	Book	Age	Words	Lexile
Elizabeth Jenkins	College	<i>The Tortoise and the Hare</i>	49	89,280	n/a
Fyodor Dostoyevsky	Academy	<i>The Gambler</i>	46	39,060	1050
Ian Fleming	College	<i>Casino Royale</i>	45	58,280	n/a
Anthony Burgess	College	<i>A Clockwork Orange</i>	45	66,030	1310
Muriel Spark	College	<i>The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie</i>	43	49,600	1120
Mickey Spillane	College	<i>I, the Jury</i>	39	82,604	n/a
John Boyne	College	<i>The Boy In The Striped Pyjamas</i>	37	66,650	1010
Jack Kerouac	College	<i>On the Road</i>	35	90,830	930

Books Written in Fewer than Nine Weeks					
Author	Education	Book	Age	Words	Lexile
Graham Greene	College	<i>The Confidential Agent</i>	35	64,480	880
William Faulkner	College	<i>As I Lay Dying</i>	33	82,770	870
Charles Dickens	Academy	<i>A Christmas Carol</i>	31	28,944	920
Arthur Conan Doyle	Physician	<i>A Study In Scarlet</i>	28	35,340	1020
Joseph Smith	Frontier	<i>Book of Mormon</i>	24	269,528	1150

Charting Authors' Lifetime Productivity

An additional approach to compare authors plots their ages and productivity over time. Starting with Joseph Smith, his literary creations begin by first excluding the lost 116 pages, which are unavailable. His first written documents included two revelations, one dictated July of 1828, now Doctrine and Covenants section 3 (609 words) and possibly parts of section 10 (1937 words).⁷³ The text of the Book of Mormon followed the next year. Then, between 1829 and 1832, came the Book of Moses, along with dozens of revelations.

The Joseph Smith Translation (JST) began in early 1831 and was mostly completed by mid-1833. Determining a word count is difficult because the Biblical revisions were recorded at different times, in different ways, and on different types of paper.⁷⁴ The 1979 LDS scriptures includes Joseph's more significant changes to the King James Bible yielding 13,976 words of JST text. For simplicity, this number (split over the years 1831–1833) will be used in this study to represent the Joseph Smith Translation.

Beyond 1832, a few revelations were dictated during the remaining twelve years of his life, but no other book-length manuscripts were seemingly anticipated or produced. Charting Joseph Smith's published word counts (Figure 1) shows a rapid expansion of productivity between ages 23 and 24 that quickly diminished throughout the remainder of his life.

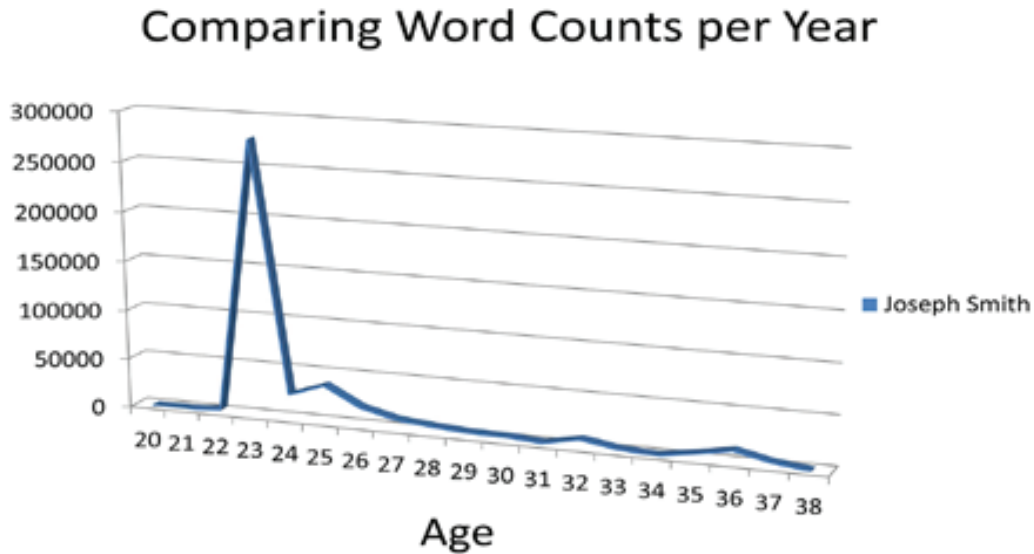


Figure 1. Joseph Smith's word counts, by age.

Comparing Joseph Smith to J. R. R. Tolkien

Joseph Smith has occasionally been compared to J. R. R. Tolkien who wrote the three-volume work, *The Lord of the Rings*.⁷⁵ While not complimenting either author or book, Yale Professor Harold Bloom wrote in 1999: "Sometimes, reading Tolkien, I am reminded of the Book of Mormon."⁷⁶

Similarly, the authors of the MormonThink essay titled "Could Joseph Smith have written the Book of Mormon?" (available online) list Tolkien's works as a parallel in complexity: "The Book of Mormon is no more complicated than other works of fiction, such as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and related works."⁷⁷ So if the complexity and word counts were similar, do other parallels also exist concerning the authors' ages and education or the composition process of the books?

Born in 1892, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien received a typical English education until age 19 when he enrolled at Exeter College, Oxford, graduating four years later. Technically, his first publication was *A Middle English Vocabulary* at age 30, but his first fantasy book came later after seven years of writing. The 97,364-word, *The Hobbit*, published in 1937 received wide acclaim.⁷⁸ Years later Tolkien finished the trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*.

Words	Age	Name
94,903	30	<i>A Middle English Vocabulary</i>
97,364	45	<i>The Hobbit</i>
44,640	57	<i>Farmer Giles of Ham</i>
177,227	62	<i>The Fellowship of the Ring</i>
143,436	62	<i>The Two Towers</i>
134,462	63	<i>The Return of the King</i>
94,240	70	<i>The Adventures of Tom Bombadil</i>
54,560	72	<i>Tree and Leaf</i>
49,600	75	<i>Smith of Wootton Major</i>
20,770	75	<i>The Road Goes Ever On</i>
9,920	82	<i>Bilbo's Last Song</i>

J. R. R. Tolkien's word count output over time contrasts with that of Joseph Smith, as shown in Figure 2. The chart shows that Joseph Smith's major book-writing occurred much earlier than that of Tolkien, who composed his well-known fairy tale after years of writing experience and academic activity.⁷⁹

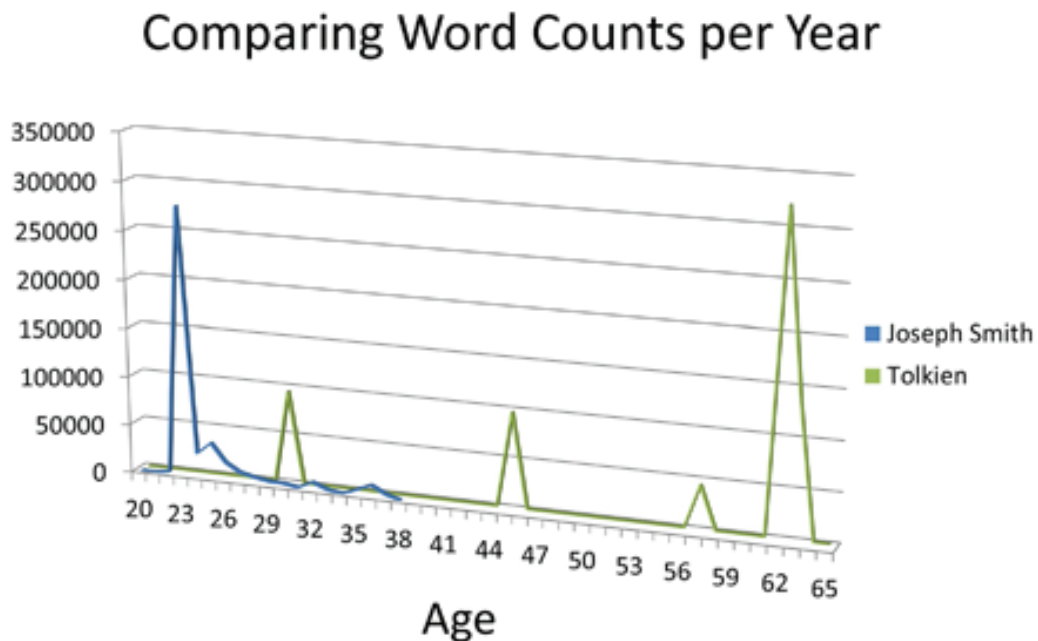


Figure 2. Word count comparisons, by age, for Joseph Smith and J. R. R. Tolkien.

Comparing Joseph Smith to William Shakespeare

Some critics reason that if Shakespeare, who started at a relatively young age, could write all the plays he did, then Joseph Smith could author the Book of Mormon. For example, the MormonThink essay also discusses “extraordinary accomplishments by others” and writes: “Shakespeare—need we say more?”⁸⁰ Perhaps a more detailed comparison would be helpful to discern whether a genuine parallel between the authors actually exists.

The most accepted date for Shakespeare’s birth is April 23, 1564. Little is documented concerning his youth, but scholars believe he attended a local grammar school where he would have encountered an emphasis on memorization, writing, and the Latin classics.⁸¹ Shakespeare wrote his first two plays at age 26, *Henry VI*, parts II and III, with a combined word count of 49,733. For the next 22 years with one exception, he produced between 16,633 words and 63,133 words each year:

Age	Word Count	Age	Word Count
26	49,733	38	23,009
27	21,607	39	0
28	43,979	40	48,230
29	41,798	41	43,269
30	63,133	42	24,905
31	38,934	43	44,710
32	42,063	44	18,529
33	50,268	45	27,565
34	47,276	46	24,914
35	61,230	47	16,633
36	52,402	48	41,758
37	26,089		

During his lifetime Shakespeare composed at least 38 plays and more than 150 short and long poems. His productivity and the complexity of his works are very impressive.

As demonstrated in Figure 3, Shakespeare’s play-writing abilities manifested themselves first at age 26. Then for the next two decades, new plays and poems flowed as a steady stream from his mind and imagination. At his death in 1616 (age 52), he had produced more than 850,000 words. In contrast, Joseph Smith’s lifetime literary output

was less, approximately 420,000 words. But more than 85% of them emerged from Joseph by the time he reached his 26th birthday on December 23, 1831. In other words, the vast majority of the Prophet's revelations, translations, and dictations were finished by the age at which Shakespeare had completed his first play.

Comparing Word Counts per Year

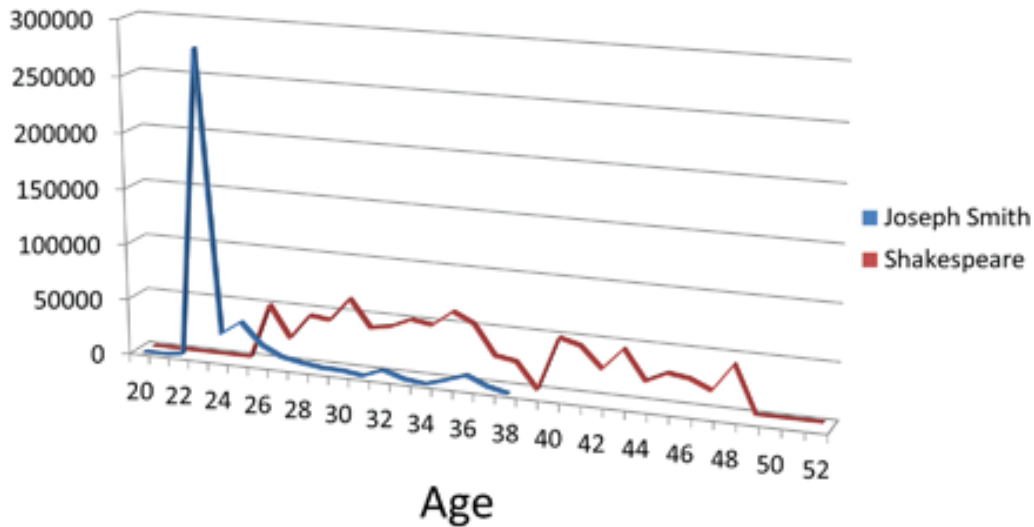


Figure 3. Word count comparisons, by age, for Joseph Smith and William Shakespeare.

To summarize, Joseph Smith was slightly younger, with less formal schooling, who completed most of his words in a shorter time span than Shakespeare.

Comparing Joseph Smith to J. K. Rowling

Another comparison to a more modern author would juxtapose Joseph Smith with J. K. Rowling, author of the popular Harry Potter series. Rowling published her first volume, the 77,325-word *Philosopher's Stone* at age 32. Other volumes soon followed. The graph of their word productions (Figure 4) shows both authors completed long complicated books, but their ages and productivity patterns differed.

Charting These Four Authors

While certainly not representing an exhaustive study, a snapshot of Joseph Smith, Shakespeare, Tolkien, and Rowling together, shown in Figure 5, shows that Joseph's early burst of creativity without subsequent productivity contrasts the writing patterns of the other authors. They

all started later in life with writing that continued steadily or increased over time.

Comparing Word Counts per Year

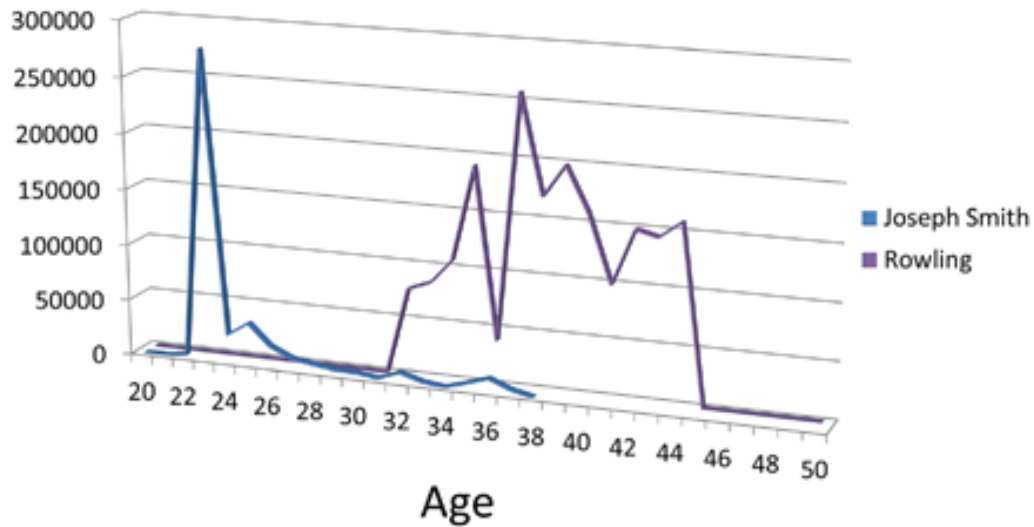


Figure 4. Word count comparisons, by age, for Joseph Smith and J. K. Rowling.

Comparing Word Counts per Year

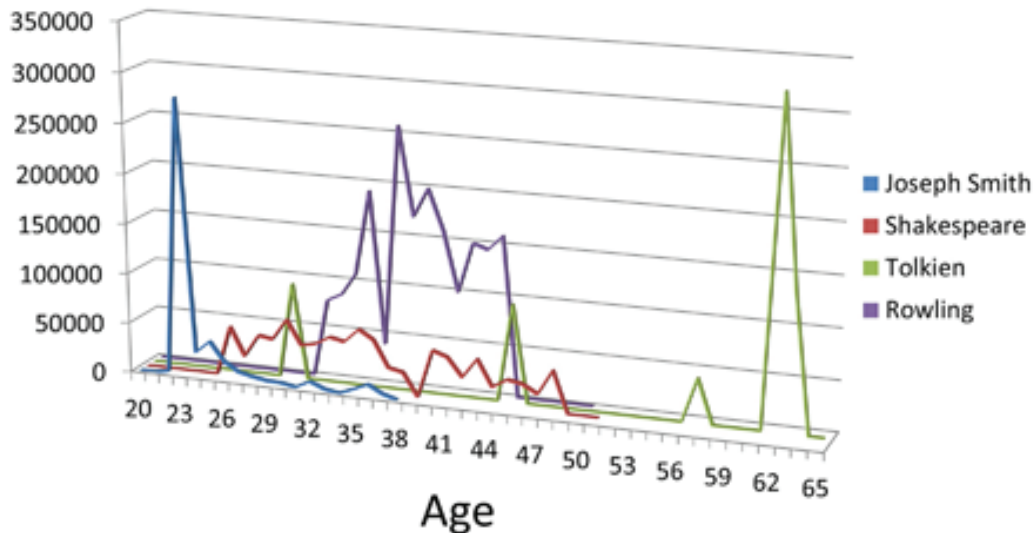


Figure 5. Word count comparisons, by age, for four authors.

Other differences can be identified in that all these writers had more education and wrote their words at a slower pace than that at which Joseph dictated the Book of Mormon text.

Comparing Joseph Smith to Orson Pratt

In 1835, Church leaders hired Joshua Seixas to teach Hebrew to 40 students over the course of seven weeks. In that class Joseph Smith's intellectual abilities were put to the test. While he apparently worked very hard, he was not the top student. BYU Professor Matthew Grey explains:

Joseph Smith was proud to be in a group of advanced students that included W. W. Phelps, Oliver Cowdery, Orson Hyde, and Orson Pratt who were singled out by Seixas to receive additional instruction Upon completion of the initial seven-week course, Seixas issued two certificates of Hebrew proficiency to Mormon leaders, one to Joseph, and one to Orson Pratt. It is sometimes claimed that Joseph was the best student of the class, but of the two, Orson Pratt's certificate qualified him to teach the language while Joseph Smith's indicated that "by prosecuting the study he will be able to become proficient in Hebrew."⁸²

Later in life, Orson Pratt wrote several complicated books and pamphlets allowing his literary accomplishments to be compared to Joseph's. The chart shown in Figure 6 is seemingly unremarkable but documents Pratt's beginning his writing career later in life. While Orson's ability to learn Hebrew surpassed Joseph Smith's, it is impossible to discover whether he bested the Prophet intellectually in any other area.

Joseph Smith: Curiously Unique

This examination of authors and their writings attempts to identify parallels to Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. By comparing authors' ages and education, the complexity and length of their books, and their composition techniques and timelines, single, double, and even triple parallels can be found. Yet overall, it appears that if Joseph Smith created the Book of Mormon from his own intellect, his efforts as an author stand out as curiously unique.

Comparing Word Counts per Year

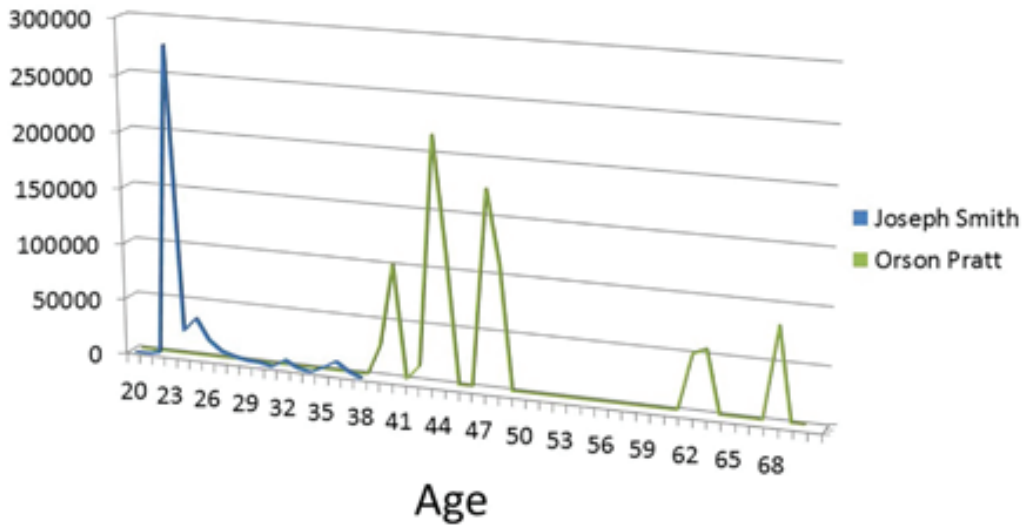


Figure 6. Word count comparisons, by age, for Joseph Smith and Orson Pratt.

Appendix: Readability and Complexity Scores of the Book of Mormon

While currently there are dozens of formulas to calculate complexity and readability of a text, a handful are more commonly used.⁸³ By evaluating a document's sentence length, word length, number of word syllables and presence of challenging words, a level of comprehension difficulty is calculated. Readability pioneer author Rudolf Flesch explains:

When you read a passage, your eyes and mind focus on successive points on the page. Each time this happens, you form a tentative judgment of what the words mean *up to that point*. Only when you get to a major punctuation mark — a period, a colon, a paragraph break — does your mind stop for a split second, sum up what it has taken in so far, and arrive at a final meaning of the sentence or paragraph. The longer the sentence, the more ideas your mind has to hold in suspense until its final decision on what all the words mean *together*. Longer sentences are more likely to be complex — more subordinate clauses, more prepositional phrases and so on. That means more mental work for the reader. So the longer a sentence, the harder it is to read.

Exactly the same thing is true of words. Some words are short and simple, others are long and complex. The complexity shows up in the prefixes and suffixes. *Take* is a simple, short word that doesn't present much difficulty to a reader. But *unmistakably* has the prefixes *un-* and *mis-* and the suffixes *-able* and *-ly* and gives the mind much more to think about than *tak*^{e.84}

Calculations derived from the text can be used to determine reading grade recommendations.⁸⁵ Besides counting words and characters, some scales also employ lists of difficult words to further distinguish reading difficulty for grade school students. The following tests have been applied to the Book of Mormon.

Scale	Book of Mormon	
	Score	Suggested Reading Grade
Coleman Liau Index	7.92	8
ATOS	9.6	8
Lexile	1150	8 (6–11)
Fry Graph	9–10	9
Dale-Chall Adjusted Grade Level	8.4	11–12
SMOG	12.55	12
Flesch Kincaid Grade Level	15.74	High School plus 2 years
Gunning Fog index	17.69	Post-Graduate year 1
Automated Readability Index (ARI)	17.50	Post-Graduate year 1

Coleman Liau Index: (Book of Mormon 7.92)

Rather than working with syllables per word and sentence lengths, “The Coleman Liau Index relies on characters and uses computerized assessments to understand characters more easily and accurately.”⁸⁶ The Book of Mormon’s score of 7.92 supports that a near-eighth grade education would be sufficient for understanding.

ATOS : (Book of Mormon 9.6)

ATOS is an acronym for Advantage/TASA Open Standard.⁸⁷ “ATOS takes into account the most important predictors of text complexity — average sentence length, average word length, and word difficulty

level.”⁸⁸ At 9.6, the ATOS score supports an eighth-grade reading level for the Book of Mormon.

Lexile Framework for Learning: (Book of Mormon 1150)

As discussed in the text, the Lexile score measures sentence length and word frequency as overall indications of semantic and syntactic complexity.⁸⁹ The proprietary system is widely used, but demands educational financial resources to implement. The Book of Mormon’s score of 1150 represents an eighth-grade reading level with a span between sixth and eleventh.

Fry Graph: (Book of Mormon 9)

The Fry Graph plots the number of sentences per 100 words (Book of Mormon is 2.56) against the number of syllables per 100 words (Book of Mormon is 131). The resulting point on the graph (see Figure 7) identifies a ninth grade reading level.

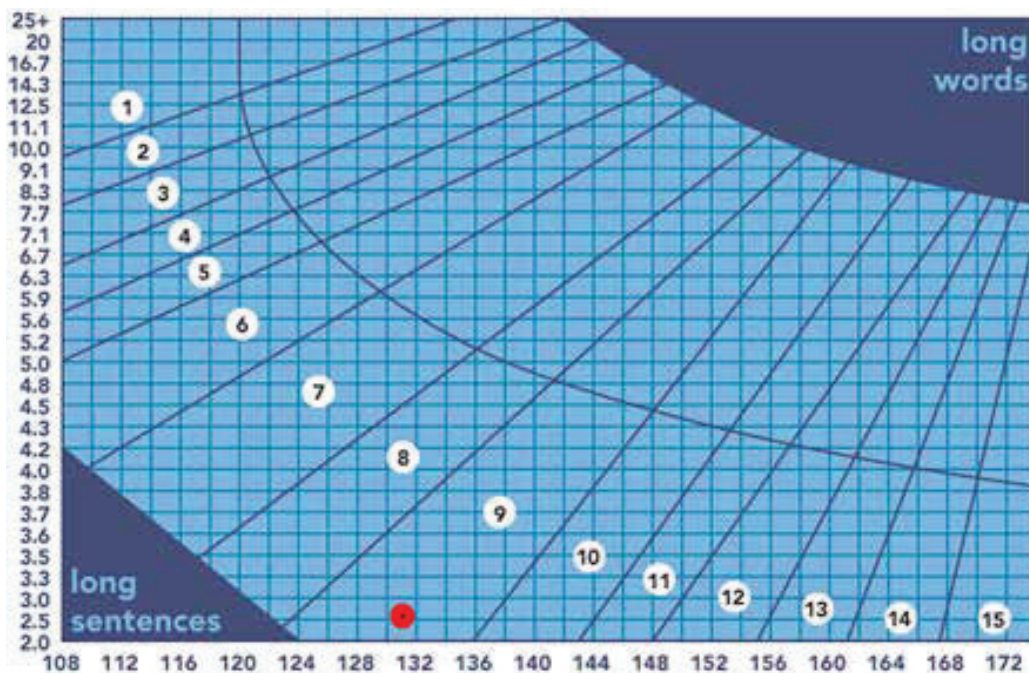


Figure 7. A rendition of the Fry Graph⁹⁰

Dale-Chall Readability Formula: (Book of Mormon adjusted 8.4)

The Dale-Chall Readability Formula employs a list of about 3000 words that would be in the vocabulary of up to 80% of fourth graders (around

age 10). Words not found on that list may be considered difficult and are included in the formula. The Book of Mormon adjusted score is 8.4, making it understandable to the average 11th or 12th grade student.⁹¹

SMOG: (Book of Mormon 12.55)

SMOG is an acronym for “Simple Measure of Gobbledygook.” The SMOG Index estimates the years of education a person needs to comprehend a piece of writing by assessing the sentence count and the number of polysyllabic (more than three syllables) words in those sentences.⁹² “The grades are supposed to be those which a reader needs to ensure complete comprehension.”⁹³ The Book of Mormon score of 12.55 correlates to the twelfth grade or having completed high school.

Flesch Kincaid Grade level: (Book of Mormon 15.74)

The Flesch Kincaid grade level readability formula is oldest and most widely used readability index. It is based upon the average number of words per sentence and the average number of syllables per word. After multiplying by predetermined coefficients, the final number is the grade recommendation in the U.S. education system. According to this scale, the Book of Mormon at 15.74 would be suited to college juniors and seniors.

Gunning Fog index: (Book of Mormon 17.7)

The Gunning Fog Index is calculated based upon the numbers of words, sentences and complex words, which are defined as having three or more syllables. The Book of Mormon’s score of 17.69 suggests that a person would need at least 17 years of formal schooling in order to “comprehend a passage of text on the first reading.” “A Gunning Fox Index score of 7 or 8 is ideal,” recommends an online source “Anything higher than 12 is too complex for most people to read. Popular magazines, such as *TIME* and the *Wall Street Journal*. average Gunning Fog scores of 11, while Shakespeare has a Gunning Fog Index of about 6.”⁹⁴

ARI (Automated Readability Index): (Book of Mormon 17.50)

The ARI combines calculations of the characters per word with the number of words per sentence to generate “an estimate of the U.S. grade level necessary to comprehend a passage of text.”⁹⁵ The Book of Mormon’s score of 17.5 supports that post-graduate education might be necessary to understand it.

Brian C. Hales, is the author of six books dealing with polygamy, most recently the three-volume, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy: History and Theology* (Greg Kofford Books, 2013). His *Modern Polygamy and Mormon Fundamentalism: The Generations after the Manifesto* received the "Best Book of 2007 Award" from the John Whitmer Historical Association. He has presented at numerous meetings and symposia and published articles in *The Journal of Mormon History*, *Mormon Historical Studies*, and *Dialogue* as well as contributing chapters to *The Persistence of Polygamy* series. Brian works as an anesthesiologist at the Davis Hospital and Medical Center in Layton, Utah, and has served as the President of the Utah Medical Association.

Notes

1. Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 466.
2. William Davis, "Reassessing Joseph Smith Jr.'s Formal Education," *Dialogue* 49, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 46.
3. See Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1867), 14–15; Perry Benjamin Pierce, "The Origin of the 'Book of Mormon,'" *American Anthropologist* 1 (October 1899): 677, 680; William Smith, *William Smith on Mormonism* (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Steam Book and Job Office, 1883), 6.
4. See George Peck ed., "Mormonism and the Mormons," *Methodist Quarterly Review* 25 (1843): 112; Orlando Saunders, William Van Camp, and John H. Gilbert, quoted in "The Early Days of Mormonism," *Lippincott's Magazine* 26 (August 1880): 198; John W. Barber and Henry Howe, *Historical Collection of the State of New York* (New York: S. Tuttle, 1841), 580–1.
5. Jonathan Hadley, "Golden Bible," *Palmyra Freeman*, (August 11, 1829); Daniel Hendrix in "Origin of Mormonism. Joe Smith and His Early Habits. How He Found the Golden Plates. A Contemporary of the Prophet Relates Some Interesting Facts," *San Francisco Chronicle* (May 14, 1893), 12; William H. Kelley, "The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon," *Saints' Herald* 28 (1 June 1881): 166.
6. Isaac Hale quoted in E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled: or, A Faithful Account of That Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time* (Painesville, Ohio: E. D. Howe, 1834), 262–63.

7. Joseph Smith, “History, Circa Summer 1832,” in *Histories: Volume 1, Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844, vol. 1*, eds. Karen Lynn Davidson *et al.* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2012), 11 (spelling and punctuation corrected and standardized).
8. Davis, “Reassessing Joseph Smith Jr.’s Formal Education,” 10–11. Davis writes that Joseph’s school curriculum would have been “more accurately depicted” if he had included: “reading, writing, arithmetic, basic rhetoric, *composition*, geography, and history” (italics added). Despite this opinion, virtually all references to district school curriculums in the United States in the 1810s and early 1820s fail to include either rhetoric or composition. “The great majority of the one-room elementary schools which sprang up over America in the early nineteenth century” write R. Freeman Butts and Lawrence A. Cremin, “were simple institutions providing a simple educational fare Reading, spelling, writing, and arithmetic constituted the principle elements in the offering. (R. Freeman Butts and Lawrence A. Cremin, *A History of Education in American Culture* [New York: Henry Holt, 1953], 269–70.) Studying composition would have required Joseph to acquire paper and ink, expensive items in rural America at that time.
9. This Book of Mormon word count was calculated using Microsoft Word and the text from, “Book of Mormon, 1830,” The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December 21, 2018, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-mormon-1830/1>, after removing the witnesses’ testimonies, copyright page, and bracketed insertions.
10. Compare 1 Nephi 20–21 to Isaiah 48–49 (1654 words), 2 Nephi 7–8 to Isaiah 50–51 (1218 words), 2 Nephi 12–24 to Isaiah 2–14 (7548 words), 2 Nephi 27 to Isaiah 13 (611 words), Mosiah 14 to Isaiah 53 (392 words), Mosiah 15 to Isaiah 52 part (40 words), 3 Nephi 12–14 to Matthew 5–7 (2755 words), 3 Nephi 22 to Isaiah 54 (508 words), 3 Nephi 24–25 to Malachi 3–4 (801 words) for a total of 15,527 words.
11. A sidebar discussion asks why Joseph Smith would write such a long book. Book of Mormon scholar Grant Hardy observed: “If the primary purpose of the Book of Mormon were to function as a sign — as tangible evidence that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God — that mission could have been

accomplished much more concisely ... A longer tome might be more impressive to some, but it would put off other readers, in addition to offering a broader target for critics. In any case, the book represents a significant amount of work on the part of Joseph Smith and his scribes” (Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* [New York: Oxford, 2010], 5). The New Testament has 138,020 words and the Qur’an 77,701. A commonly accepted rule today recommends a 60,000 to 80,000-word range for general novels, allowing more than 100,000 words for thrillers or more complicated plots. Driving these numbers is public preference. Longer novels may discourage readers before they begin, especially for an author’s very first book.

12. See John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book*, (Provo, UT: FARMS), 217– 326.
13. Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Book of Mormon Names,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:186.
14. See Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book*, 217–326.
15. Modified from Donald W. Parry, *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns* (Provo, UT: FARMS., 1992); James T. Duke, *The Literary Masterpiece Called the Book of Mormon* (Springville, UT: CFI, 2004), 116.
16. Earl M. Wunderli, *An Imperfect Book: What the Book of Mormon Tells Us About Itself* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2013), 329–33.
17. Roger Terry, “The Book of Mormon Translation Puzzle,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 23, (2014): 182. Terry observes that most of these words “do not appear in the Bible.”
18. Emma Smith reported that, while dictating, when Joseph “came to proper names he could not pronounce, or long words, he spelled them out” (Quoted in Edmund C. Briggs, “A Visit to Nauvoo in 1856,” *Journal of History* 9 [October 1916]: 454.)
19. “Tests Document Readability: Readability Calculator,” Online Utility, accessed December 21, 2018, https://www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp; “ATOS for Text,” Renaissance, accessed December 21, 2018, <http://www1.renaissance.com/Products/Accelerated-Reader/ATOS/ATOS-Analyzer-for-Text>; “Readability Formulas,” Readability Formulas, accessed December 18, 2018, <http://>

- www.readabilityformulas.com/; “Free Lexile Analyzer,” Lexile Framework for Reading, accessed December 21, 2018, <https://la-tools.lexile.com/free-analyze/>.
20. “Tests Document Readability: Readability Calculator,” Online Utility.
 21. “Flesch-Kincaid,” Readability Test Tool, accessed December 21, 2018, <https://www.webfx.com/tools/read-able/gunning-fog.html>.
 22. “What Does the Lexile Measure Mean?,” The Lexile Framework for Reading, accessed December 18, 2018, <https://doe.sd.gov/octe/documents/WhatDoestheLexileMeasureMean.pdf>.
 23. “Understanding Lexile Measures,” Lexile Framework for Reading, accessed December 18, 2018, <https://lexile.com/about-lexile/lexile-overview/>.
 24. The Lexile Framework for Reading, Publisher Report, containing the certified Lexile score for the text of the 1830 Book of Mormon was issued August 17, 2017, commissioned by Brian C. Hales for LDS Answers, Inc. Due to the lack of an ISBN number for the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, the Lexile score is not included in the Lexile score database at Lexile Framework for Reading, accessed September 2, 2018, <https://lexile.com>.
 25. See “How Do Lexile Measures Relate to Grade Levels?” Lexile Framework for Reading, accessed September 2, 2018, <https://lexile.com/educators/measuring-growth-with-lexile/lexile-measures-grade-equivalents/>; See also Gary L. Williamson *et al*, “The Text Complexity Continuum in Grades 1–12,” (report, MetaMetrics Research Brief, October 1, 2012), https://metametricsinc.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Research_Brief-Text_Continuum_Grades_1-12_1.pdf.
 26. Scores can be obtained at “Book Results,” The Lexile Framework for Reading, accessed December 18, 2018, <https://fab.lexile.com/>.
 27. Don Bradley to author, December 19, 2018, used by permission.
 28. John W. Welch, ed., *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations 1820–1844*. 2nd ed., (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2017), 79–125. See also Elden J. Watson, “Approximate Book of Mormon Translation Timeline,” April 1995, <http://www.eldenwatson.net/BoM.htm>. John W. Welch, “How long did it take Joseph Smith to translate the Book of Mormon?” *Ensign*

- (January 1988), <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1988/01/i-have-a-question/how-long-did-it-take-joseph-smith-to-translate-the-book-of-mormon?lang=eng>. See also John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, “How Long Did It Take to Translate the Book of Mormon?” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1110&index=1>.
29. John W. Welch, “Hours Never to Be Forgotten: Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon,” YouTube video, 1:17:48, November 16, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RT4bF3g4yHA>.
 30. David Bledsoe, Jr., “Handwriting Speed in an Adult Population,” *Advance for Occupational Therapy Practitioners* 27, no. 22 (2011): 10, <http://rehab-insider.advanceweb.com/handwriting-speed-in-an-adult-population-30461/>. Another study measuring maximum handwriting speeds of 36 adults using a pen and paper reported an average speed of 97 characters per minute for one hour of the testing time. (R. A. Hardcastle and C. J. Matthews, “Speed of writing,” *Journal of the Forensic Science Society* 31, no. 1 [January 1991]: 25.) John W. Welch estimated between 15 and 20 words per minute. See Welch, “Hours Never to Be Forgotten.”
 31. Welch, *Opening the Heavens*, 149, 151.
 32. *Ibid.*, 166, see also 175.
 33. Royal Skousen, “How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998): 25–27.
 34. Hardcastle and Matthews, “Speed of writing,” 26–27.
 35. Skeptic Dan Vogel disagrees, writing that Joseph “averaged about 8 pages per day, which could be done in a few hours; he therefore had the rest of the day to think of what to dictate next, perhaps while praying in the woods or skipping stones with Harris” (Dan Vogel, email message to author, December 22, 2015). Vogel’s timeline appears too optimistic and contradicts several witnesses’ accounts.
 36. David Whitmer, quoted in James H. Hart, “About the Book of Mormon,” *Deseret Evening News*, March 25, 1884.
 37. E. C. Briggs, letter to the editor, *The Saints’ Herald* 31, no. 25 (June 21, 1884): 396.

38. The following men and women reported Joseph Smith dictated the Book of Mormon text while placing his face in a hat holding a seer stone: Martin Harris, David Whitmer, William Smith, Isaac Hale, Joseph Knight Sr., Emma Smith, Alva Hale, Elizabeth Whitmer Cowdery, Michael Morse, Joseph Lewis, and possibly Thurlow Weed. See Welch, *Opening the Heavens*, 126–227.
39. See Jean Wyrick, *Steps to Writing Well*, 12th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth, 2014).
40. Skousen, “How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon,” 25–27.
41. See Brian C. Hales, “Why Joseph Smith’s Dictation of the Book of Mormon Is Simply Jaw-Dropping,” *LDS Living*, November 10, 2018, <http://www.ldsliving.com/Why-Joseph-Smiths-Dictation-of-the-Book-of-Mormon-Is-Simply-Jaw-Dropping/s/89568>.
42. David Whitmer quoted in *Chicago Times*, October 17, 1881, cited in Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, UT: Grandin Books, 1991), 76; Whitmer quoted in *St. Louis Republican* (16 July 1884), as cited in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 139–40; Whitmer as quoted by J.W. Chatburn, in *The Saints’ Herald* 29, no. 12 (June 15, 1882) 189; Emma Hale Smith quoted in Welch, *Opening the Heavens*, 145; Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald* 26, no. 19 (October 1, 1879): 289–90.
43. The exact source of this quote is unknown.
44. Robert Louis Stevenson, quoted in Richard C. Hoefler, *Creative Preaching and Oral Writing* (Lima, OH: CSS Publishing, 1978), 152.
45. See Stephen Hawking, *My Brief History* (New York: Bantam Books, 2013), 93–94; Bertrand Russell, *Portraits from Memory and other Essays* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956), 195.
46. See Brian C. Hales, “Opening the Black Box: Applying a Dictation Model to a Popular Naturalistic Theory of the Book of Mormon ‘Translation,’” (presentation, The Book of Mormon Studies Association Conference, October 14, 2018, Utah State University).
47. See Brian C. Hales, “Automatic Writing and the Book of Mormon: An Update,” *Dialogue* 52, no. 1 (Spring 2019), forthcoming.

48. Anita M. Muhl, *Automatic Writing* (Dresden: Theodor Steinkopff, 1930), 96.
49. See Ann Taves, *Revelatory Events: Three Case Studies of the Emergence of New Spiritual Paths* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 248–62; Scott C. Dunn, “Automaticity and the Dictation of the Book of Mormon,” in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 25–44. For general support, see James H. Hyslop, “Apparent Subconscious Fabrication,” *The Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 1, no. 5 (1906): 208, 213.
50. See John A. Bargh and Ezequiel Morsella, “The Unconscious Mind,” in *Perspectives on Psychological Science: A Journal of the Association for Psychological Science* 3, no. 1 (2008): 73–79; Anthony G. Greenwald, “New look 3: Unconscious Cognition Reclaimed,” *American Psychologist* 47, no. 6 (June 1992): 775; Paul Campbell Young, “An Experimental Study of Mental and Physical Functions in the Normal and Hypnotic States,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 36, no. 2 (April 1925): 214–232; Joseph Barber, “Hypnosis and Memory: A Hazardous Connection,” *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* 19, no. 4 (October 1997): 311, 313; John F. Kihlstrom, “Hypnosis, Memory and Amnesia,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* 352, no. 1362 (December 1997): 1727–32; Steven Jay Lynn and Irving I. Kirsch, “Alleged Alien Abductions: False Memories, Hypnosis, and Fantasy Proneness,” *Psychological Inquiry* 7, no. 2 (1996): 151–5; Peter W. Sheehan, “Memory and Hypnosis — General Considerations,” in *International Handbook of Clinical Hypnosis*, ed. Graham D. Burrows, Robb O. Stanely, and Peter B. Bloom, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2001), 52; Graham F. Wagstaff, *et al*, “Facilitating Memory With Hypnosis, Focused Meditation, and Eye Closure,” *The International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* 52, no. 4 (2004): 434; Peter Farvolden and Erik Z. Woody, “Hypnosis, Memory and Frontal Executive Functioning,” *The International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* 52, no. 1 (2004): 19.
51. See Robert A. Rees, “The Book of Mormon and Automatic Writing,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 1 (2006): 5.

52. Irving Litvag, *Singer in the Shadows: The Strange Story of Patience Worth* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 8.
53. Examples include Pearl Curran and *The Sorry Tale* (from deceased spirit Patience Worth), Catherine-Elise Müller and *From India to the Planet Mars* (from Martians via trances while sleeping), Geraldine Cummins and *The Scripts of Cleophas* (from a spirit-guide name “Astor”), Helen Schucman and *A Course in Miracles* (from an inner voice she identified as Jesus), Jane Roberts and *The Seth Material* (from an energy personality named “Seth”), John Ballou Newbrough and *Oahspe: A New Bible* (from “Jehovih,” “The Great Spirit”), an unidentified author and *The Urantia Book* (from Celestial beings), Levi H. Dowling and *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* (transcribed from the Akashic records).
54. Morton Prince, “The Unconscious,” *The Fundamentals of Human Personality, Normal And Abnormal* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 15–48.
55. See Irving Litvag, *Singer in the Shadows: The Strange Story of Patience Worth* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 65–85; Robert Todd Carroll, s.v. “Automatic Writing (Trance Writing),” *The Skeptic’s Dictionary*, accessed November 14, 2018, <http://skepdic.com/autowrite.html>.
56. Wikipedia, s.v. “Jane Austen,” last edited January 12, 2019, 11:26, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane_Austen. Austen’s works were not published until she was in her thirties, so they are not included in this study. Her novels and word counts are: *Sense and Sensibility* (114,080), *Pride and Prejudice* (148,800), *Mansfield Park* (121,520), *Emma* (158,720), *Northanger Abbey* (89,280), and *Persuasion* (46,500).
57. Data is compiled from multiple websites. Word counts are primarily from <http://www.readinglength.com/>, which uses a calculation based upon page count and may not be strictly accurate.
58. The next young authors publishing after 1830 are Jean Nicolas Arthur Rimbaud who published *A Season in Hell* (106,020 words) in 1873 and Taylor Caldwell who wrote *The Romance of Atlantis* (73,320 words) in 1912.
59. See the books listed on the author’s website, “About Claire North/Kate Griffin,” Claire North, accessed December 16, 2018, <https://www.kategriffin.net/about/>.

60. The absence of a Lexile score for any of Webb's books is puzzling. It is possible her publisher did not want to pay the evaluation fee or that her books did not meet a Lexile requirement.
61. The LoveReading website recommends her early books to "11+ readers." See "Catherine Webb – Author," LoveReading 4 Kids, accessed December 12, 2018, <https://www.lovereadings4kids.co.uk/author/1602/Catherine-Webb.html>.
62. Catherine Webb, "My local library," Claire North, accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.kategriffin.net/2018/12/13/my-local-library-2/>.
63. Amelia Atwater-Rhodes, "FAQ, About the Author," *Larmaen Nyeusi: a genolaahar* (blog), January 22, 2009, <http://nyeusiwiki.blogspot.com/2009/01/faq-about-author.html>.
64. Encyclopedia of World Biography, s.v. "Christopher Paolini Biography," accessed August 18, 2017, <http://www.notablebiographies.com/news/Ow-Sh/Paolini-Christopher.html>.
65. Lisa Wade McCormick, *Christopher Paolini* (New York: Rosen Publishing, 2013), 22.
66. Encyclopedia of World Biography, s.v. "Christopher Paolini Biography,"
67. McCormick, *Christopher Paolini*, 78–80.
68. *Ibid.*, 80–81.
69. Mulek, a Book of Mormon character, son of Zedekiah, escaped the sack of Jerusalem (587 BC) and went with others to a place in the Western Hemisphere that they called the land of Mulek (Helaman 6:10; see also Mosiah 25:2).
70. Jill Harness, "6 Famous Novels Penned in Under a Month," *Mental Floss*, October 31, 2011, <http://mentalfloss.com/article/29126/6-famous-novels-penned-under-month>; "AfsheenF," "10 Novels Written in About a Month," *Bookstr*, November 4, 2015, <https://www.bookstr.com/10-novels-written-in-about-a-month>, Hillary Kelly, "6 Great Works of Literature Written in 6 Weeks or Less," *The New Republic*, November 1, 2013, <https://newrepublic.com/article/115441/6-great-books-written-6-weeks>.
71. Eleanor Catton: "I am still astonished and a little bit suspicious that *The Rehearsal* has even been published' — An Interview with Eleanor Catton," interview by Annie Clarkson, *Bookmunch* (blog), August 4, 2009,

- bit-suspicious-that-the-rehearsal-has-even-been-published-an-interview-with-eleanor-catton/.
72. Ibid.
 73. Michael Hubbard MacKay et al, *The Joseph Smith Papers: Documents Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 6–9, 37–44.
 74. F. Henry Edwards, ed., *Joseph Smith’s “New Translation” of the Bible* (Independence Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1970), 15.
 75. See for example “Could Joseph Smith have written the Book of Mormon?” MormonThink, accessed September 17, 2017, <http://www.mormonthink.com/josephweb.htm>; Bill McKeever, “Is J.R.R. Tolkien Also Among the Prophets?” Mormonism Research Ministry, accessed January 3, 2018, <http://www.mrm.org/tolkien>.
 76. Harold Bloom, ed., *J. R. R. Tolkien’s Lord of The Rings (modern Critical Interpretations)* (New York: Chelsea House Publications, 1999), 2.
 77. “Could Joseph Smith have written the Book of Mormon?” MormonThink.
 78. David Doughan, “J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biographical Sketch,” The Tolkien Society, accessed December 25, 2018, <https://www.tolkiensociety.org/author/biography/>.
 79. See Katie Behrens, “J.R.R. Tolkien’s Epic Quest: Writing The Lord of the Rings,” *Books Tell You Why* (blog), December 16, 2014, <https://blog.bookstellyouwhy.com/jrr-tolkiens-epic-quest-writing-the-lord-of-the-rings>.
 80. “Could Joseph Smith have written the Book of Mormon?” MormonThink. This essay reports numerous alleged parallels between Joseph Smith’s authoring of the Book of Mormon and other artists, geniuses, musicians, and scholars and their creations. Absent from the lists is an author of Joseph’s age and education who produced a book as complex and lengthy as the Book of Mormon by dictation in a compressed timeline.
 81. “Shakespeare’s Life,” Folger Shakespeare Library, accessed December 19, 2018, <http://www.folger.edu/shakespeares-life>.
 82. Matt Grey, “‘The Word of the Lord in the Original:’ Joseph Smith’s Study of Hebrew in Kirtland,” in *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, eds. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Religious

- Study Center, 2015), 266, <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/approaching-antiquity-joseph-smith-and-ancient-world/word-lord-original-joseph-smith-s>.
83. Shixiang Zhou, Heejin Jeong, and Paul A. Green, “How Consistent Are the Best-Known Readability Equations in Estimating the Readability of Design Standards?” *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* 60, no. 1 (March 2017): 97–111.
 84. Rudolf F. Flesch, *How to Write Plain English: A Book for Lawyers and Consumers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 21.
 85. Several popular scales were not used to evaluate the Book of Mormon. The *Powers-Sumner-Kearl Readability Formula* calculates reading difficulty based on sentenced length and number of syllables, but it is not considered ideal for assessing readability “for children above the age of 10 years.” (“The Powers-Sumner-Kearl Readability Formula,” Readability Formulas, accessed December 23, 2018, <http://www.readabilityformulas.com/powers-sumner-kear-readability-formula.php>.) The *Spache Readability Index* is similar to the Dale-Chall Readability Formula. While Spache was designed to access the readability of primary texts through the end of third grade, The Dale-Chall is ideal to gauge the readability of more advanced texts — i.e., fourth grade and above. And the *Linsear Write Formula* was designed for detecting the readability of Air Force manuals and is less applicable to the Book of Mormon.
 86. “Coleman Liau Index,” Readability Test Tool, accessed December 21, 2018, <https://www.webfx.com/tools/read-able/coleman-liau-index.html>.
 87. ATOS analytic software is available jointly from Advantage Learning Systems and Touchstone Applied Science Associates.
 88. “Text complexity, ATOS, and Lexile® Measures,” Renaissance, accessed December 18, 2018, <https://www.renaissance.com/products/practice/accelerated-reader-360/atos-and-text-complexity/>.
 89. Sheida White and John Clement, “Assessing the Lexile Framework: Results of a Panel Meeting,” (paper, National Center for Education Statistics, August 2001), <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/200108.pdf>.
 90. Wikipedia, s.v. “Fry readability formula,” last edited February 2, 2018, 06:33, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

Fry_readability_formula. The original figure has been modified to show the plot point for the Book of Mormon.

91. “The New Dale-Chall Readability Formula,” Readability Formulas, accessed December 18, 2018, at <http://www.readabilityformulas.com/new-dale-chall-readability-formula.php>. If the number is over 4, then 3.6365 is added to determine adjusted score to determine grade level.
92. “SMOG Index,” Readability Test Tool, accessed December 21, 2018, <https://www.webfx.com/tools/read-able/smog-index.html>.
93. Harry Mc Laughlin, “SMOG Grading-a New Readability Formula,” *Journal of Reading* 12, no. 8 (May 1969): 645.
94. “Gunning Fog Index,” Readability Test Tool, accessed December 21, 2018, <https://www.webfx.com/tools/read-able/gunning-fog.html>.
95. “Automated Readability Index (ARI),” Readability Test Tool, accessed December 21, 2018, <https://www.webfx.com/tools/read-able/automated-readability-index.html>.

