



Literacy Connects

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Close Reading: An Essential Skill for Understanding Complex Text

With the emphasis of the Common Core State Standards on increasing test complexity, teaching students to dig deeply into grade-level texts has become more important than ever. Close Reading--the careful, sustained interpretation of a brief passage--is a time-tested strategy that provides students of all ages and in all content areas with the tools to successfully navigate complex texts while teaching them how to annotate, question and analyze what they are reading. Close Reading places emphasis on the particular over the general, as it guides readers to pay close attention to individual words, syntax, and the order in which sentences and ideas unfold. Close Reading is the precursor to writing that involves an analysis of any text. Although specifics for Close Reading may vary depending on the type of text being read, the purpose of the reading, and the reading levels of the participants, following is a general description of how to conduct a Close Reading with students:

1. Choose a short piece of text at or above your students' reading levels. This can be an excerpt from a longer piece, a poem, a scene from a play, etc. The point is that the text chosen must be short, so students can complete all the steps involved without losing interest.
2. Students read the text a minimum of three times focusing on different aspects of the text with each read. Generally students move from comprehending the text, to noticing details, to developing broader generalizations and making assertions, and finally to finding evidence in the text to support their assertions.
3. During the **first read**, model the reading process. Preview the passage and make predictions. Read aloud while students annotate. Active reading strategies such as marking on text, asking and answering questions, paraphrasing, visualizing, and connecting should be emphasized during this stage. The purpose of this step is for students to comprehend the text (See *Literacy Connects I, XXIII, XXV and XXVII* for reading comprehension and think-aloud strategies).
4. The **second read** can be done individually, in pairs or small groups. During this read, students look for meaning beyond the obvious. It is helpful to pose a series of guided questions. These questions will vary depending on the text, the purpose of the reading and the reading level of your students; however, in general, students should pay attention to such features as language, both literal and figurative; the purpose; speaker, point of view and author; audience; how the text is organized; the sound and rhythm of words (alliteration, assonance, rhyme, etc); syntax; tone and attitude; theme(s); and the validity of arguments presented. Other, more critical questions, such as gender bias and representation of ethnicity, culture and historical context may also be examined (See *Literacy Connects XXVIII and XXXII* for more on asking critical questions). For struggling readers it may be best to group your questions from the second read into two parts and have them answer the harder questions during a third read.
5. During the **final read**, students look for the evidence to support what they identified during the second read. It is helpful to create a note-taking template where students can make a claim about any aspect of the text (rhetorical devices, themes, arguments, etc.), write the quote or paraphrase from the passage that supports their assertion, and then write a few sentences explaining WHY the quote they chose supports their assertion (commentary). Using this format is especially helpful for students when they start writing their analysis of the text.

[See RPDP.net-ELA-High School-Literacy Connect Resources](#) for an elementary, middle and high school lesson on Close Reading using exemplar texts from the CCSS.

Visit the RPDP website (www.rpdp.net) for a complete selection of *Literacy Connects*.