

How Can ELLs Possibly Do This?: Close Reading

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Common Core Standards

- Close reading is not a teaching technique
- Close reading is a goal or a desired outcome: we want our children to be able to read text closely
- The term close reading is not really a term of art (it is widely used colloquially—and it is used somewhat differently by practitioners in a variety of fields)
- The term is most widely used in literary circles

So what is close reading?

- It starts with the Protestant Reformation 500 years ago (no, really)
- Martin Luther dueled with the Church about whether priests needed to read the Bible for us or whether we could read it ourselves
- Then, again, in the 1920s and 30s in English Departments
- Scholasticism: professors/teachers taught the meaning of text
- Reader Response (Louise Rosenblatt): The readers' feelings/meanings are what matters
- New Criticism (I.A. Richards, C. Brooks & R. P. Warren): The meaning is in the text and the text must be read closely to get it to give up its meaning

Synonyms	Not Synonyms
Deep reading	Careful reading
Analytical reading	Literal reading
Critical reading	

Close Reading

Many versions of close reading

- In all versions of close reading the meaning is hidden in the text and needs to be acquired through careful and thorough analysis and re-analysis (texts don't just give up their meaning)
- In some versions, there are “rules for reading” which dictate not only how to read, but which tools are acceptable and which are off limits (“the intentional fallacy”)
- LA version presented by David Coleman, the architect of the common core standards

Adler and Van Doren's Close Reading

- Great books (challenging books) need to be read and reread
- Each reading should accomplish a separate purpose
- The first reading of a text should allow the reader to determine what a text says
- The second reading should allow the reader to determine how a text works
- The third (or fourth) reading should allow the reader to evaluate the quality and value of the text (and to connect the text to other texts)

Close Reading

- All focus on text meaning
- Minimize background preparation/explanation (and text apparatus)
- Students must do the reading/interpretation
- Teacher's major role is to ask text dependent questions that guide student attention towards text points they should pay attention to (and that allows them to do the thinking)
- Multi-day commitment to texts
- Purposeful rereading (not practice, but separate journeys)
- Short reads

Why did CCSS go there?

- School reading has become focused on rituals rather than text-student negotiations, on general reading skill rather than sense making of particular texts
- Emphasis on prior knowledge and reader response has placed the attention on the reader instead of the text
- Teacher purpose setting has too often replaced actual reading

Planning for Close Reading

- Not all texts lend themselves to deep reading
- Select high quality text that is worth reading and rereading
- Teachers must read the text
- Necessary to determine why the text might be difficult

Pre-reading

What counts as pre-reading?

- Explorations of “prior knowledge”
- Teacher purpose setting
- Contextualizing the text
- Text previews

What doesn't count as pre-reading?

- Decoding preparation
- Vocabulary teaching*

What about Words?

- Teaching vocabulary or immediately relevant decoding skills is usually not a problem
- These can be examined without taking over the reading from the students
- Exceptions: words that are explicitly defined, or that can be interpreted from context, or giving away the tone of the piece

Pre-reading (cont.)

Rule 1: The candle has to be worth the game

- Pre-reading can be/seem endless
- Limit pre-reading
- It should be no longer than the reading itself

Pre-reading (cont.)

Rule 2: Let the author do the talking

- Try not to reveal too much information from the text
- If an idea is explained in the text, then it ought not to be in the pre-reading
- Students need to figure out what a text says by reading it and analyzing the information from the text

Pre-reading (cont.)

Rule 3: Give students enough information that they have a reason to read.

- A brief blurb or tease is not harmful especially if it does not repeat too much of the author's message or method

- Title: Profile: You Belong With Me by Lizzie Widdicombe

Blurb: Taylor Swift's teen angst-empire.

Caption: Swift hooked a previously unrecognized audience: teen-age girls who listen to country music.

- Title: The Obama Memos by Ryan Lizza

Blurb: The making of a post-post-partisan Presidency.

Caption: Hundreds of pages of internal White House memos show Obama grappling with the unpleasant choices of government.

Planning a First Reading

- It can help to plan the analysis of a text by developing your own questions through multiple readings
- Then you can decide better how many re-readings to use and how to order your questions

Questioning Schemes

Bloom's Taxonomy

Knowledge

Comprehension

Application

Analysis

Synthesis

Evaluation

QAR

Right There

Think and Search

Author and Me

On My Own

Text dependent questions

- Close reading requires close attention to the ideas expressed and implied by the author and to the author's craft
- Often comprehension questions allow students to talk about other things besides the text (How do you think people felt about the Emancipation Proclamation? If you were a slave how would you feel about it?)
- Questions are text dependent if they can only be answered by reading the text (the evidence must come largely or entirely from the text and not from elsewhere)

Text Dependent (cont.)

- Text dependent questions are not necessarily low level
- “Low-level” questions are little more than memory tasks—they ask readers to remember what the author has said explicitly;
- “High-level questions” ask for answers that require logic, inference, and/or analysis of the text information
- Text dependent questions can be low level or high level
- Past research indicates that a mix of question levels leads to better comprehension
- The Common Core encourages both low level and high level questions the answers of which depend on text evidence

Text dependent questions

- *How did Frederick Douglass' ability to read contribute to his emotional struggle for freedom? Cite examples from the text to support your answer.*
- *After reading Frederick Douglass' narrative, in what ways does America represent the hope for freedom that lived in the heart of Frederick Douglass?*

What does the text say?

- First reading
- Questions should help guide students to think about the most important elements of the text (the key ideas and details)
- Stories are about significant, meaningful conflicts (between man and nature, with others, and with oneself)
- Human nature and human motivation are central to the action and the meaning
- Questions should also clarify confusions (in this case, confusions about what the text says)

The Big Orange Splot by Daniel Pinkwater

What was the street like at the beginning of the story?

How did everybody feel about that? What did they want?

What happened to Mr. Plumbean's house?

How did the neighbors feel about the splot?
Why?

What did they do about it?

How did they think Mr. Plumbean felt about
it? Why did they think that?

But what did he do?

Why does he do this?

How did his neighbors react?
Why?

--

The neighbors were upset... so
what did Mr. Plumbean do?

Why did the neighbors pretend not
to notice?

When the neighbors asked him what he had done, what is his response?

What does that mean?

Why was the man there?

What happened?

Why did the man do that?

What happened to him?

What do the people say about the man?

What happened then?

What was the street like at the end of the story? How had the street changed? What changed it?

Conclusion of First Reading

- My questions focused on key events and motivations (particularly events that I thought might be confusing)
- The discussion led by these questions should lead to a good understanding of what the text said and this discussion should be coherent (aimed at developing a strong memory for what happened)
- A good follow up would be to tell/write summaries or retellings of the “story”

Story Map

Setting :

Main Character:

Problem:

Internal Response:

Attempt:

Outcome:

Reaction:

Theme:

How does the text work?

- Second reading
- Stories are written by people to teach lessons or reveal insights about the human condition in aesthetically pleasing and powerful ways
- Questions should help guide students to think about how the text works and what the author was up to (craft and structure)
- Awareness of author choices are critical to coming to terms with craft and structure

The Big Orange Splot by Daniel Pinkwater

--Why is the setting important in this story and what is important about it?

(Settings are not always important, but in this case it helps establish the conflict—the street is a certain way at the beginning and it is going to be altered in important ways that instigate actions on the parts of the characters—the author uses it to tell WHY the actions take place, not just WHERE it takes place).

-----What was he thinking?

(The conflict starts here, but the author doesn't beat you over the head with it... Plumbean has decided something or is about to.)

How did he say this... bright and happy?
Reluctantly?

(There is more going on here than is on the page. When is Plumbean transformed—when does he decide to be different?)

Why does the author explain why he painted at night?

(Character motivation is important. Was he painting at night so he could get it done before anyone saw it or was he beating the heat? He is a different kind of man depending on what you think is happening?)

How does the author describe Plumbean's house? Why does he compare it to a rainbow, a jungle, an explosion?

(The author describes the house three times... each time in colorful metaphorical language, a technique he uses throughout the story when he wants to emphasize the feelings of the neighbors?)

What do you notice here?

Why does the author tell you the neighbors' feelings in this way?

(I want to make sure the students see the repetition of this literary device and that they try to make sense of it.)

What's going on here?

(The repetition of this literary device should be evident by now. By saying the same thing over and over again with colorful language we get a sense of how strong the emotions are).

The author describes Plumbean differently here than in past pages. What's the change and how does the author reveal it?

(Plumbean has been silent and non-committal up to now. He doesn't describe the change, but shows it through Plumbean's own words. To me this shows that Plumbean has no grand plan, he is feeling his way along not trying to dictate to everyone else. The author's choice here makes Plumbean more sympathetic).

Why didn't the author reveal this conversation?

(I think not showing this leaves Plumbean a bit ambiguous... if he tried to convert the man we might not like him. However, if he just had Plumbean tell about his own transformation that might have been enough to pull the man along. Plumbean leaves this up in the air and we have to collaborate with him as a result—what could be said that would move you to action?.)

What did you notice about how the man expressed himself? Why would the author have him say it this way?

(Although the man claims to be unique—and he is in terms of the specific dream he is pursuing—but ultimately he states his individualism in a way that mimics Plumbean's.)

Why does the author have the people say this?

(The whole neighborhood is now caught up in Plumbean mania. They are pursuing their individual versions of their dreams, expressing themselves identically to Plumbean. They wanted conformity at the beginning and they end up with conformity at the end).

Conclusion of Second Reading

- My questions focused on why and how the author told his story (particularly focusing on literary devices, word choices, structural elements, and author purpose)
- The discussion led by these questions should lead to a good understanding of how the text works and to a deeper understanding of its implications
- A good follow up would be a critical analysis of the story or some aspect of the story (Mr. Plumbean changes from the beginning to the end. Do the neighbors? Compare and contrast how Plumbean and the neighbors change?)

Multiple Perspectives

Setting:

Main Character:

Problem:

Internal Response:

Attempt:

Outcome:

Reaction:

Theme:

Setting:

Main Character:

Problem:

Internal Response:

Attempt:

Outcome:

Reaction:

Theme:

What does the text mean?

- “Third” reading
- Questions should help guide students to think about what this text means to them and how it connects to other texts/stories/events/films
- Stories relate to other stories and to our lives
- Evaluations of quality (placing a text on a continuum based on quality standards) and connecting to other experiences is an essential part of the reading experience

Striving for Meaning

- What did the story mean to you? What does it say about how you should live your life?

Evaluation & Synthesis

- Do you know other stories like this? (e.g., *The Butter Battle Book*, *Ferdinand*) How were those stories similar and different?
- Which of these stories did you like best? Why?
- What did you think about how the author used literary devices? How effective were these?

Conclusions

- Readers need opportunities to make sense of big ideas from a range of high quality texts
- Reading lessons based upon the idea of close readings requires that teachers do more to focus student attention on reading, interpreting, and evaluating text (and less on themselves and on the teacher's interpretation)