

**Close Reading: A Necessary, but Definitely *Insufficient*, Way to Read**  
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### **History of Close Reading**

- The term *close reading* was originally associated with the work of New Critics, eg. Cleanth Brooks, I. A. Richards, and Robert Penn Warren.
- In these writings, close reading referred to an objective, distanced type of reading that places the reader as discoverer of meaning and the text as a self-contained, aesthetic object that holds the meaning to be discovered.
- In addition to uncovering the theme, the New Criticism required readers to look for paradox, ambiguity, irony, and tension to help establish the single best and most unified interpretation of a text.

### **So Really, What is Close Reading?**

- Close reading is a focused way of reading with a specific purpose, task, or perspective.
- Close reading is designed to produce a coherent representation of what the text says.
- Close reading of text moves readers away from their dependence on background knowledge in order to apply critical thinking skills and develop a logical argument in response to their reading.
- Close reading entails the formulation of arguments and the presentation of evidence to support one's claims.

### **Close Reading & the CCSS**

- As stated in the CCSS, close reading is used to determine what a text says explicitly - *careful examination of the text itself*.
- As stated in the CCSS, students are to use text-based evidence to support claims that *squares with all the evidence in the text*.
- CCSS suggests readers *focus on what lies within the four corners of the text*.
- As stated in the CCSS, students are asked to read closely to *make logical inferences from their interactions with a text*, and *cite specific textual evidence* when writing to support conclusions drawn from the text.

### **3 Things to Focus On (PARCC)**

- Complexity: The standards require regular practice with complex text and its academic language.
- Evidence: The standards emphasize reading and writing grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational.
- Knowledge: The standards require building knowledge through content rich non-fiction.

## **PARCC Tasks**

*There will be questions that require students to:*

- do something – write an essay or create a model, draw a graph
- select a response from options – not always 4 choices
- provide an answer
- interact with technology – drag and drop
- focus on *the meaning* of words as presented in the text

## **Teaching Close Reading**

*Demonstrate...*

- How one approaches a text
- How to make margin notes for furthering analysis
- How to analyze language and textual features
- How to focus on specific vocabulary
- How to cite evidence to support an argument
- How to attend to and analyze various elements of literature
- How to identify archetypes used in creating stories
- How symbols and other types of figurative language are used
- How to identify key ideas and supporting details
- How to identify and construct themes from a literary text

## **Close Reading: Written Texts**

So What Might You Do?

Consider the text itself

Read through it once to get a gist of it

Look at the author's name

Think about the genre of poetry

Think about your previous experiences with poems and texts like this

Consider the setting, character, and other literary elements

Consider metaphor and figurative language

Draw inferences from the language of the text

Relate text based items with your experiences

## **How Do We Demonstrate This?**

Read through the text aloud once

“Mark Up” the text with initial noticings and thoughts

Discuss any ambiguous language

Make connections to experience, other texts and the various elements of the poem

Create initial interpretations

Consider initial interpretations in comparison to other interpretations

Organize written response – including textual evidence and supporting details

## Close Reading: Visual Images

So What Might You Do?

- Look at the Image
- Consider the Content of the Image
- Relate the Image to previous experiences
- Consider the context of the image
- Consider the compositional elements of the image
- Consider basic art elements – color, shapes, patterns, lines
- Consider visual metaphors – “visual figurative language”
- Construct initial themes or interpretations
- Reconsider initial interpretations in light of new evidence

## How Do We Demonstrate This?

- Talk about what you initially notice in the image
- Create a noticing / meanings chart (perceptual inventory)
- Name various elements of the image
- Discuss possible meanings of visual elements
- Color, shape, line, pattern, size, position
- Share and discuss possible motifs, symbols, visual metaphors (tropes)
- Construct overall interpretations
- Prepare written response

## Going Beyond the Text: 3 Analytical Perspectives

**Perceptual** - Noticing, Navigating, and Naming Visual Elements of visual images and multimodal texts

**Structural** – Considering Visual Grammar, Composition, and Design Elements of visual images and multimodal texts

**Ideological** – Considering the Socio- Cultural, Historical and Political contexts of the production and reception of visual images and multimodal texts.

## Rethinking Texts

Perceptual Dimension - Text as Multimodal Object

Structural Dimension - Text as Semiotic Ensemble

Ideological Dimension - Text as Cultural Artifact

## Questions for a Multimodal Object

What do you notice?

What objects, actors, elements are available?

Where are things positioned?

What do the different modes do? Image? Design? Text?

What Basic Art Elements are used? Line, shape, pattern, color, etc.

### **Questions for a Semiotic Ensemble**

What are the meaning potentials for the various elements? What might they mean?

How does position, color, size and other visual elements suggest meanings?

What possible symbols and motifs are included?

How does this image contribute to the overall meaning of the ensemble?

How does design affect meaning potential?

Are different meanings available across different modes?

### **Questions for a Cultural Artifact**

What might the author / illustrator / publisher be trying to say about the world?

How does this story / image relate to your life or experiences?

Who is represented? Not represented?

How is gender, race, ethnicity etc. represented?

What themes can be constructed with these images or this story?

### **Close Reading in the Reading Workshop**

- Teachers need to help students:
- set purposes for reading
- focus on noticings more than connections
- develop a perceptual inventory
- use initial noticings as foundation for inquiry and discussion
- promote connections to previously read texts
- review key ideas and details
- answer text-dependent questions
- expand their interpretive repertoire
- identify archetypes, themes, and structures in literature
- analyze the various elements of a text in more depth

### **Some Challenges**

Close reading may be an objective, disinterested, disembodied process designed to get more stable, consensual answers on standardized tests.

We cannot forget that the CCSS are political, as well as economic manifestos.

The CCSS emphasize they do not directly dictate instructional approaches, however the creators of the CCSS have provided publishing guidelines for the creation of resource materials which will influence (control) teaching.

The CCSS documents will be defined primarily by the assessments.

**Readers make sense of the multimodal texts they encounter, not by staying within the four corners of a text, but by using their background knowledge, their previous experiences with written text, visual images and design elements, the context of the text's production, dissemination and reception, intertextual references, *and* the text itself to construct meaning.**