

Close Reading and the CCSS

CLOSE READING DEFINED

Close reading is the methodical investigation of a complex text through answering text dependent questions geared to unpack the text’s meaning. Close reading directs students to examine and analyze the text through a series of activities that focus students on the meanings of individual words and sentences as well as the overall development of events and ideas. It calls on students to extract evidence from the text as well as draw non-trivial inferences that logically follow from what they have read.

This sort of careful attention to how the text unfolds allows students to assemble — through discussion and in writing — an overarching picture of the text as a whole as well as grasp the fine details on which that understanding rests. It prepares students for the kinds of detailed reading tasks they will encounter after graduation. It motivates students by rewarding them for reading inquisitively and discovering the meaning and insight within the text that makes it worthy of attention. The ultimate goal of close reading is for students to be able to use close reading strategies independently in order to read and comprehend complex text proficiently.

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The **ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR READING** found in the Common Core State Standards prioritize the close reading skill of extracting evidence and making inferences (**STANDARD 1**) when reading complex text (**STANDARD 10**). All of the intervening standards (**STANDARDS 2-9**) call on students to answer specific text dependent questions — from determining the central idea or theme (**STANDARD 2**) to building knowledge by comparing two or more texts (**STANDARD 9**) — but each intervening standard critically relies on the core close reading skill of “citing specific textual evidence” when reading complex text to “support conclusions” (**STANDARDS 1 AND 10**). This text dependent approach is one of the key shifts embodied in the CCSS, and moving students and teachers towards understanding and embracing close reading when appropriate is a key step to implementing the CCSS.

ELEMENTS OF CLOSE READING INSTRUCTION

- Focuses on those portions of a text (from individual words and sentences up to several paragraphs) that pose the biggest challenge to comprehension, confidence, and stamina
- Asks text dependent questions and assigns tasks that are neither overly general nor schematic, but rather direct students to carefully examine the unique text in front of them for evidence
- Not only poses questions about specific ideas within the text but also asks students to make inferences based on evidence beyond what is explicitly stated
- Helps students become aware of nuances in word meaning as well as acquire knowledge of general academic vocabulary to aid in understanding a wide range of complex texts
- Directs students to pay close attention to a variety of text structures, from the syntax of single sentences to the design of paragraphs or even pages of text
- Channels student focus on a sequential integrated line of inquiry directed at “unpuzzling” the text while keeping them actively engaged with what they read
- Stresses that students should synthesize the evidence they have gathered in an organized fashion and demonstrate their understanding both orally and through writing