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Spotlight on...Close Reading—Components and Considerations

Chances are good that sometime over the past year, you have heard, used, and/or discussed, the term “close reading” in your professional conversations related to literacy. The focus of Maine’s English language arts (ELA) standards on analysis of both literary and informational texts naturally leads educators to consider close reading practices.

According to literacy experts Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey, close reading is an instructional routine in which students critically evaluate a text or segment of a text. Students analyze the deep structures of the text, such as the organization, the precise vocabulary used to convey and explain concepts, and the key details, inferential meanings, and arguments. Text dependent analysis expects readers to consider the author’s purpose and how the ideas advanced in the text connect with their own prior knowledge as well as knowledge conveyed by other texts. The use of close reading seeks to build students’ reading stamina and persistence with constructing meaning from complex pieces of text (Fisher and Frey, 2012). Teachers support the process by questioning, prompting, and facilitating conversations that promote examination of the text. Literacy consultant Sunday Cummins describes close reading as an active process in which readers grapple with text by applying critical thinking skills in order to evaluate the ideas and themes conveyed by the author (2013).

Close reading is a process characterized by several key components.

- Sufficiently complex texts are utilized—texts that require careful examination with supportive teacher scaffolding to build understanding. Texts should be analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively by teachers to determine what makes them complex.
- Shorter texts are commonly used—(e.g. picture books, passages, excerpts from longer texts, primary source documents, speeches, etc.) so that the text can be read repeatedly.
- Limited frontloading is provided and it usually focuses on

“A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies, said Jojen. The man who never reads lives only one.”

~George R.R. Martin



“We want them (readers) inside the text, noticing everything, questioning everything, weighing everything they are reading against their lives, the lives of others, and the world around them.”

~Robert Probst and
Kylene Beers

setting a purpose and clarifying key vocabulary. Students are expected to do the “heavy lifting” to figure out what the text is communicating through repeated readings and ongoing examination.

- Repeated reading of the text is expected, which builds both reading fluency and comprehension.
- Text annotating strategies are used, which enable students to focus attention, capture their thinking, note questions and points of confusion and identify evidence.
- Text dependent questioning strategies are used-this focuses students’ attention on critical aspects of the text from which they can construct understanding. These questions encourage students to return to the text in search of evidence or to explore a new element. Text dependent questions should encourage exploration of not only key details, but of vocabulary, text structure, author’s purpose, etc. Teachers should use them judiciously to advance students’ thinking or to dig more deeply. The ultimate goal is for students to question as they read so that their questions propel them into deeper thinking and understanding.
- Collaborative conversations are employed, which provide context in which students can advance claims, build on each other’s’ ideas and integrate textual evidence to support their thinking.
- Texts are linked to post reading tasks, such as debates and written responses. The close reading process enables students to draw on what they have read and discussed as they apply their understanding to a culminating task.

In the next edition of the Maine DOE’s Literacy Links, methods for engaging in close reading with elementary and secondary level readers will be shared.

Online Resources

The following online resources can support understanding of the close reading process as a tool for promoting student achievement of Maine’s ELA standards.

[Closing in On Close Reading](#)

The Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) published this article in December 2012/January 2013.



Upcoming Events

Maine Department of Education Training Calendar

To explore potential training sessions that may be of interest, be sure to check extensive list of professional development offerings at:

www.maine.gov/doe/calendar/



The author, Nancy Boyle, describes the significance of close reading instructional practices for the elementary grades.

[Implementing the Common Core State Standards: A Primer on “Close Reading of Text”](#)

The Aspen Institute published this article in 2012. The authors explore the process of close reading and its connection to the ELA standards. Facets of close reading as an instructional routine are explored as are considerations for using close reading with students across the K-12 span.

Professional Texts

Here are two professional texts that connect to the topic of close reading.

Book Love: Developing Depth, Stamina, and Passion in Adolescent Readers

by Penny Kittle (Heinemann, 2013)

The dirty little secret that every English teacher knows (but hates to admit) is that too many kids don’t read the assigned texts. But in college and the workplace, we need to be able to comprehend and analyze complex texts. In *Book Love*, Kittle acknowledges the hard truths and offers a variety of strategies to reach all students, no exceptions, to make every student a reader. *Book Love* is infused with the constant presence of students, real kids sharing their reading journeys.

Notice and Note: Strategies for Close Reading

by Kylene Beers and Robert Probst (Heinemann, 2013)

Struggling readers are often mystified by how to engage with a text. In *Notice and Note*, the authors model strategies that transcend title and provide readers with a road map for engagement. Students are taught how to notice patterns in writing like repetition (a.k.a. Again and Again) or expert opinion (a.k.a. Words of the Wiser) and note the purpose within the context of the text. The payoff is confidence and engagement with any text! While the strategies are modeled with literary texts, it is not difficult to see how each signpost strategy can be applied to non-literary texts.

Children’s Literature

As we reflect back on 2013, take time to explore some of the new children’s literature that was published in the past year. Several



“Be as careful of the books you read, as of the company you keep; for your habits and character will be as much influenced by the former as the latter.”

~Paxton Hood



helpful links to explore include the following:

[Diverse and Impressive Picture Books of 2013](#)

This review of over twenty picture books is conducted annually by the International Reading Association. Detailed descriptions of the books including bibliographic information are supplied.

[2013 Best Fiction for Young Adults](#)

Each year, the Young Adult Library Services Association presents the Best Fiction for Young Adults. In 2013, 102 books were selected. The books, recommended for ages 12-18, met the criteria of both good quality literature and appealing reading for teens. The list comprises a wide range of genres and styles, including contemporary realistic fiction, fantasy, horror, science fiction and novels in verse.

[2013 Young Adult Nonfiction Award](#)

The Young Adult Library Services Association also presents awards for the Best Nonfiction for Young Adults. Six books are honored annually. The 2013 awardees and links to past years can be found through the link provided above.

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The Maine Department of Education's mission is to provide leadership and to collaborate with educators and learning communities in order to ensure that every learner has the opportunity to be successful.

“But, how do you know if an ending is truly good for the characters unless you've traveled with them through every page?”

~Shannon Hale



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