

CLOSE READING EXAMPLES FOR SOCIAL STUDIES¹

To become college and career ready, students must be able to read sufficiently complex texts on their own and gather evidence, knowledge, and insight from these texts. These close reading examples model how teachers can support their students as they master the kind of careful reading the Common Core State Standards require. These examples are meant to be used in all types of classrooms with **ALL STUDENTS**.

Each of these exemplars features a complex and rich reading along with a series of text-dependent questions meant to foster deep understanding and assist students and teachers in remaining tightly connected to the text. Each focuses on the following: a short reading of highly engaging content in which students are asked to reread passages and respond to a series of text dependent questions; vocabulary and syntax tasks which linger over noteworthy or challenging words and phrases; discussion tasks in which students are prompted to use text evidence and refine their thinking; and writing tasks that assess student understanding of the text.

The close reading method modeled in these examples is a specific method with a designed purpose. The composition of these examples coincided with deliberate and regular practice of this method over a wide range of classrooms during 2012-2013. In that time, the composition group learned many important lessons. Without exception, teachers noted that ample time provided for students to talk with their peers about the text and the accompanying questions is paramount to the effective nature of these lessons. Because these examples include highly complex text for ALL students to access, heterogeneous grouping of students provided a safe arena for students to challenge themselves and collaboratively interrogate the text. Most importantly, teachers found that completing the method according to the steps outlined below ensured success for students of all reading abilities. On several occasions, teachers felt rushed and neglected some of the steps or assigned portions as individual work or homework. In all of these cases, student learning suffered. Based on this professional learning, these examples were designed, vetted, and modified to engage the whole class and small groups in learning to better navigate rich and complex text. The readings are all meant to be lesson features of larger units with the purpose of building a coherent body of knowledge.

The particular method of close reading that we studied in our classes has been found highly effective and can address many Common Core State Standards as well as content standards. That being said, using it with great frequency (daily or weekly) is not the intention. In this case, the quality of instruction and of readings is far more important than the quantity. We suggest implementing the close reading cycle of instruction once or twice per quarter in each content area with seminal and formative texts that provide a deep understanding of an aspect of the unit. In addition, we advocate for a balanced approach to literacy that includes intentional teaching of academic vocabulary, annotation of texts, and other research-based literacy strategies that complement the close reading method. Finally, we understand that these examples are not perfect, and as we grow in our practice, we will continue to modify and update this site. We welcome your feedback.

¹ Thank you to Student Achievement Partners (SAP) for inspiring this work. Some of the close reading exemplars used in professional development for teachers who later created these examples came from SAP ([acheivethecore.org](http://achievethecore.org)). Please contact Angela Orr (aorr@washoeschools.net) with any questions or suggestions for improvement.

CLOSE READING METHODOLOGY

Reading Methodology

Students will silently read the passage in question—first independently and then following along with the text as the teacher reads aloud. This order may be reversed depending on the difficulties of a given text and the teacher’s knowledge of students’ reading abilities. What is important is to allow all students to interact with challenging text on their own as frequently and independently as possible. Students will then reread specific passages in response to a set of concise, text-dependent questions that compel them to examine the meaning and structure of the author’s writing.

Vocabulary Methodology

Most of the meanings of words in the exemplar text can be discovered by students through a careful reading of the context in which they appear. Teachers will model and reinforce how to learn vocabulary from contextual clues, and will hold students accountable for engaging in this practice. When context clues are absent and the difficult word is essential to the meaning of the text, words are defined briefly for students to the right of the text. We have left many Tier 3, content-specific words, undefined so that teachers may use their discretion in teaching, explaining, and discussing them as they are used in context.

Sentence Structure Methodology

On occasion students will encounter particularly difficult sentences to decipher. Text dependent questions are composed to deliberately engage students in the work of examining these difficult sentences to discover how they are built and how they convey meaning. Students need regular supported practice in slowing down to decipher complex sentences. It is crucial that students receive help in unpacking complex sentences and dense sections of text so that they can focus both on the precise meaning of what the author is saying as well as the author’s craft.

Discussion Methodology

Students will discuss the rich and complex text with their classmates and teacher as they answer text-dependent questions and formulate their ideas for the writing activity. The goal throughout the lesson is to foster student confidence when encountering complex text and to reinforce the skills they have acquired regarding how to build and extend their understanding of a text. A cooperative model using informal discussion with peers promotes this confidence. Returning to the text for evidence in the discussions provides students yet another encounter with the text, helping them develop the habits of mind necessary for reading complex text. Discussion of the text and the questions is equal to rereading in its pedagogical importance.

Writing Methodology

It is essential that students engage in writing about the text as a culminating activity. The assignment in these examples forces students to reach back yet again into the text to provide evidence for a position. Student writing can vary in length, with the expectation that all students are learning and practicing the skill of writing with textual evidence. Teachers might afford students the opportunity to revise their papers after participating in classroom discussion or receiving teacher feedback, allowing them to refashion both their understanding of the text and their expression of that understanding.

Outline of Close Reading Steps

Time needed for the various examples on this site ranges from 2-5 days of instruction, depending on the length of class time each day.

1. The teacher introduces the document without providing a great deal of background knowledge. This is a cold read, and the teacher should be aware that students will often encounter texts for which there is no one available to provide the context and a narrative of the text's importance or critical attributes. Because these readings will likely be completed in the midst of a unit of study, students will come with a certain amount of background, but the teacher should refrain from providing a parallel narrative from which the students can use details to answer questions rather than honing in on the text itself.
2. To support the historical thinking skill of sourcing a text, the teacher asks students to note the title, date, and author. The teacher points out that the line numbers will increase opportunities for discussion by allowing the whole class to attend to specific lines of text.
3. Students silently read their own copy of the document. *Note: Due to the varying reading abilities and learning styles of students, the teacher may need to end this silent reading time before every single student has completed the reading. Because students will hear it read aloud and reread the document many times, the necessity of maintaining classroom flow outweighs the need to ensure that all students have read the entire document.*
4. The teacher demonstrates fluency by reading the document aloud to the class as students follow along. *Steps 3 & 4 may be reversed based on teacher knowledge of student needs.*
5. The teacher reveals to the students only one text-dependent question at a time (rather than handing out a worksheet with questions). This could be accomplished through a smart or promethean board, an overhead projector, an ELMO, or chart paper. This focus on a single question promotes discussion.
6. The teacher asks students search the document for evidence to provide for an answer. Some questions refer to specific areas of the text for students to reread, while others allow students to scan larger areas of the text. In small peer groups, students discuss their evidence citing specific line numbers in order to orient everyone to their place in the text. *The time discussing the text in small groups should remain productive. Offering students too much time may cause them to wander from the text. Keep the pace of the class flowing.*
7. Then, the teacher solicits multiple answers from various groups in the class. During the whole group answer session for each question, multiple responses are expected. Each question provides opportunities to find answers in different words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs throughout the text. The teacher should probe students so they will provide sufficient support and meaningful evidence for each answer. We suggest that as students provide textual evidence, the teacher models annotation of the document, so that all students learn how to mark up the text, and so that all students are prepared for the culminating writing assessment.
8. **All questions and answers should remain tied to the text itself. The questions and answers are intended to build knowledge over the course of the reading.**
9. The reading is followed by a writing assignment. Students demonstrate a deep and nuanced understanding of the text using evidence in their writing. This allows the teacher to assess for individual understanding and formatively diagnose the literacy gains and further needs of students.
10. *TIP: Because rereading is of fundamental importance in accessing highly complex texts, one very effective way to reach struggling readers is to allow them access to the text ahead of time (especially with teacher support). However, we suggest that all students in the class encounter the questions on the text for the first time together, as the method provides for heterogeneous groups to tackle the difficult aspects of the text in a low-stakes and cooperative manner. In our experience, even struggling readers perform well with this method, as they can find evidence directly in the text rather than relying upon a wealth of prior knowledge and experiences.*