

# Implementing the Common Core State Standards: A Primer on Close Reading of Text

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## Close Reading Defined

**Definition:** Close Reading of text involves an investigation of a short piece of text, with multiple readings done over multiple instructional lessons. Through text-based questions and discussion, students are guided to deeply analyze and appreciate various aspects of the text, such as key vocabulary and how its meaning is shaped by context; attention to form, tone, imagery and/or rhetorical devices; the significance of word choice and syntax; and the discovery of different levels of meaning as passages are read multiple times. The teacher's goal in the use of Close Reading is to gradually release responsibility to students—moving from an environment where the teacher models for students the strategies to one where students employ the strategies on their own when they read independently.<sup>v</sup>

Close Reading does more than advance reading development; it is a mechanism for teaching about logical arguments and critiquing the reasoning of others, for gleaning evidence from text and applying critical thinking skills. Close Reading is as much a way of thinking and processing text that is emphasized throughout the Common Core as it is about a way of reading a singular piece of text. Close Reading cannot be reserved for students who already are strong readers; it should be a vehicle through which all students grapple with advanced concepts and participate in engaging discussions regardless of their independent reading level.

## Attributes of Close Reading Lessons

Close Reading strategies will vary depending on the content under consideration, the place in the curriculum, and the goals of the particular lesson. But most Close Reading lessons will share the following attributes:

1. **Selection of a brief, high-quality, complex text.** Limiting the length of the passage allows students the opportunity to apply new skills and strategies through multiple readings of the text.
2. **Individual reading of the text.** Students unable to read the text independently might engage in a partner read or a group read in lieu of an independent attempt.
3. **Group reading aloud.** A group read aloud might be teacher- or student-led. This practice supports the engagement of all students, especially those who struggle with reading the text independently, and reinforces the primacy of the text throughout Close Reading lessons.
4. **Text-based questions and discussion that focus on discrete elements of the text.** Questions and discussion may focus on the author's word choices and repetition, specific sentences, literary devices, academic vocabulary, or particular passages containing information that is key to the curricular objective.
5. **Discussion among students.** These discussions, either in small groups or across the whole class, will ensure that the text—as opposed to personal reflections—remains the focus as the reader explores the author's choices.
6. **Writing about the text.** Students may be asked to reflect on the knowledge gained through Close Reading in short or long written passages.