CLOSE AND CRITICAL READING

A close reading is a careful and purposeful reading. Well actually, it's rereading. It's a careful and purposeful **rereading** of a text. It's an encounter with the text where readers really focus on what the author had to say, what the author's purpose was, what the words mean, and what the structure of the text tells us.

Effective readers engage in close reading to extract the most meaning from complex text. Close reading is a process that entails reading and rereading multiple times, each time with a different purpose and focus. Close reading is micro-reading. It is the attentive reading of a text: a finely detailed, very specific examination of a text. For some students, this examination may require teachers to break text into smaller segments. If the text is short, the entire text lends itself to a close read. If, however, the text is lengthy, specific text segments may be selected for a close read and then relate those segments to the whole work.

Close reading assists students with:

- understanding the purpose in reading;
- seeing ideas in a text as being interconnected;
- looking for and understanding systems of meaning;
- engaging in a text while reading;
- getting beyond "surface" reading or skimming;
- formulating questions and seeking answers to the questions while reading.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Select text worthy of close reading, and study the text to plan the lesson.
2. Make close reading and rereading of texts central to lessons.
3. Provide scaffolding that does not preempt or replace text.
4. Craft text dependent questions from a range of question types.
5. Emphasize that students support their answers based upon evidence from the text.
6. Provide extensive research and writing opportunities (claims and evidence).
7. Offer regular opportunities for students to share ideas, evidence and research.
8. Offer systematic instruction in vocabulary.
9. Ensure wide reading from complex text that varies in length.
10. Cultivate students' independence.

SOME WAYS TO INTERACT WITH THE TEXT

Chunk the text.

When faced with a full page of text, reading it can quickly become overwhelming for students. Breaking up the text into smaller sections (or chunks) makes the page much more manageable for students. Students do this by drawing a horizontal line between paragraphs to divide the page into smaller sections.

At the beginning of the year, group the paragraphs into chunks before handing out the assignment. Look at the paragraphs to see where natural chunks occur. In the directions say, “Chunk paragraphs 1-3, 4-5, 6-8, 9-12.” Paragraphs 1-3 may be the hook and thesis statement, while 6-8 may be the paragraphs where the author addresses the opposition. It is important to understand that there is no right or wrong way to chunk the text, as long as you can justify why you grouped certain paragraphs together.

By the end of the year, let go of that responsibility and ask students to chunk the text on their own. They number the paragraphs then must make decisions about what paragraphs will be grouped together.

Underline and circle… with a purpose.

Telling students to simply underline “the important stuff” is too vague. “Stuff” is not a concrete thing that students can identify. Instead, direct students to underline and circle very specific things. Think about what information you want students to take from the text, and ask them to look for those elements. What you have students circle and underline may change depending on the text type.

For example, when studying an argument, ask students to underline “claims”. We identify claims as belief statements that the author is making. Students will quickly discover that the author makes multiple claims throughout the argument. When studying poetry, students could underline the imagery they find throughout the poem.

Circling specific items is also an effective close reading strategy. Have students circle “Key terms” in the text. Key terms: 1. Are defined. 2. Are repeated throughout the text. 3. If you only circled five key terms in the entire text, you would have a pretty good idea about what the entire text is about. You can also ask students to circle the names of sources, power verbs, or figurative language. Providing students with a specific thing you want them to underline or circle will focus their attention on that area much better than underlining important information.

Left margin: What is the author SAYING?

It isn’t enough to ask students to “write in the margins”. We must be very specific and give students a game plan for what they will write. This is where the chunking comes into play.

In the left margin, ask students to **summarize** each chunk. Demonstrate how to write summaries in 10-words or less. The chunking allows the students to look at the text in smaller segments, and summarize what the author is saying in just that small, specific chunk.

Right margin: Dig deeper into the text

In the right-hand margin, direct students to complete a specific task for each chunk. This may include:

- Use a power verb to describe what the author is DOING. (For example: Describing, illustrating, arguing, etc..) Note: It isn’t enough for students to write “Comparing” and be done. What is the author comparing? A better answer might be: “Comparing the character of Montag to Captain Beatty.”

- Represent the information with a picture**.** This is a good way for students to be creative to visually represent the chunk with a drawing.

Ask questions.

When modeled, students can begin to learn how to ask questions that dig deeper into the text. These questions can be used as the conversation driver in Socratic Seminar.

Text Dependent Questions:

What is the author *telling* me here?
Are there any hard or important *words?*
What does the author want me to *understand?*
How does the author play with *language* to add to meaning?

What word(s) stand out? Why? (typically vivid words, unusual choices, or a contrast to what a reader expects)
How do particular words get us to look at characters or events in a particular way? Do they evoke an emotion?
Did the author use nonstandard English or words in another language? Why? What is the effect?
Are there any words that could have more than one meaning? Why might the author have played with language in this way?

Is the voice formal or informal? If it seems informal, how did the author make it that way?
If it's formal, what makes it formal?
Does the voice seem appropriate for the content?
What stands out about the way this sentence is written?

Paideia Discussion Structure:

Opening questions are intended to put the possibilities in the text into play quickly and should thus be quite general and "open ended." Ideally, opening questions should elicit the greatest variety of responses and work best with maximum participation. Some good opening questions:
What might be another good title for this text?
What do you think is the main idea?
What do you notice first about this text?

Core questions will require critical interpretation on the part of the student, and thus responses will likely vary. Because core questions are intended to foster a close reading of the text, however, it is important for students to understand that any interpretation needs to be supported by evidence within the text itself. Some other core questions:
How does the beginning of this text relate to the end?
What tensions do you notice in the text?

Closing questions are intended to help students examine the rhetorical import of the text within the larger frameworks of local and global experience.

How can the message of the text be applied to your/our current situation?
What action, if any, does the text request of the reader?
What would happen if readers complied with that request?

CLOSE AND CRITICAL READING

Name of Text: _____

Author: _____

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?	NOTES and EVIDENCE
Guiding Questions for Summary/Restatement/Retelling • How would you summarize or determine a shortened version of the text containing only the main points? • What is the gist/central idea? • What is the specific textual evidence used to support the central idea? • What are the most important ideas/events? • What are the ideas in order of importance or presentation? • What ideas might the author be suggesting rather than directly stating?	
HOW DOES THE TEXT SAY IT?	**NOTES and EVIDENCE**
Guiding Questions to Determine Craft and Structure of the Text • How is the information organized (e.g. time, topic, cause/effect, compare/contrast, persuasion) • What genre does the selection represent? • Whose voice did the author choose as narrator? • From what point of view/perspective is this written? • What are the sources of information? • What language is used—technical, dialect, variant spellings, archaic words, etc.? • What are the style, mood, and tone? • What word choice, imagery and figures of speech (e.g. simile, metaphor, alliteration, irony, repetition, personification, etc.) does the author use?	

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?	NOTES and EVIDENCE
Guiding Questions to Determine What the Text Means • What is the central idea/thesis/theme of the text? • How does the author support the central idea, thesis, or theme with ideas and details? • What is the author's stance/perspective towards the topic? • How does the author use point of view, style, mood, tone, text features, imagery, figures of speech to achieve his/her purpose (author's intent)? • Why does the author choose the method of presentation? • What are the concepts that make the reasoning possible, what assumptions underlie the concepts, and what implications follow from the concepts? • What does the author want the reader to believe? • What is the quality of information collected; are the sources sufficient, relevant, credible, and current? • Who or what is not represented? Why?	
WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN TO ME?	**NOTES and EVIDENCE**
Guiding Questions for Application • What does this remind me of in my life? • What is this similar to in my life? • How is this different from my life? • Has something like this ever happened to me? • How does this relate to my life? • What were my feelings when I read this? • How does this apply to the world? • What does this remind me of in another book I've read? • How is this text similar to other things I've read? • How is this different from other books I've read? • Have I read about something like this before?	

SUMMARY OF PASSAGE