Section 1:
Close Reading Introduced

A Short Scenario

In Mrs. Marquand's fourth grade classroom, students are tackling a standard that involves looking at energy and fuels derived from nature and natural resources. Mrs. Marquand selects a section from the text, *The Next Wave: The Quest to Harness the Power of the Oceans* (Rusch 2014), to use for a close reading. In most circumstances, this text might have students rolling their eyes and putting their heads down. For example, a sentence such as "Despite these overwhelming challenges, the work of these ocean energy pioneers is finally reaching a crest, with an array of amazing machines proving their worth in the water" could easily lose students' attention. After all, this sentence includes technical language (ocean energy), academic language (despite these overwhelming challenges), and even a pun (use of the term *crest*, which is both a high point in the research discussed and a part of wave anatomy).

How can a teacher guide students to notice and comprehend such subtle yet important intricacies of text? That's the question asked by thousands of teachers as they sit down to craft meaningful lessons that involve reading complex texts.

Fortunately, there is an answer to this question—an effective, thoughtful, research-based means of implementing close reading that can be personalized to meet the needs of any teacher's students. The key is to guide students to unlock meaning through strategically crafted text-dependent questions.

Let us return to Mrs. Marquand's fourth grade class to see how she does this.

Mrs. Marquand begins by asking students to read the two paragraphs she has designated for this close reading and to think about the question *What is this text about?* Students are also instructed to use the annotation markings of their choosing to note key words and ideas, confusing concepts or questions, and connections between elements.

> **Annotations:** symbols, notes, comments, and other markings that help readers remember their thinking. For more information about annotations, see Table 3.2 (page 61).

Fourth graders David and Max feel confident in their skills. They have practiced with Mrs. Marquand for weeks now. Following the first close reading, the students chat and share their thoughts, first as partners, then as a whole group.

> **Max:** I think this is about how hard it has been to get energy from the ocean.
>
> **David:** Yeah, because the ocean is strong and has big waves and stuff.
>
> **Max:** Right. Also, I was confused about some of the words, like *harness*. Do you know what that means?
>
> **David:** Uh-uh. I don't know what *harness* means either.
>
> **Mrs. Marquand (to the class):** Focus on the sentence that has this phrase, "It must *harness* the power of the waves and convert it into electricity." What clues does the author provide to help you understand that sentence?

As she teaches the close reading lesson, Mrs. Marquand uses student annotations and partner talk to guide her next steps. She offers appropriate text-dependent questions to help students unlock meaning for themselves. She guides students by strategically directing their attention to specific areas in the text. In doing so, she empowers them to use their insights and those gained from conversing with their peers. Her instruction includes close assessment of student performance, fostering independence, and building self-esteem. This is evident as Max and David continue to talk after Mrs. Marquand's questioning.

> **Max:** So, there are two parts to that sentence. It has to harness power and then convert it.
>
> **David:** It says harness the power *of the waves*. So, maybe it means *get*, like *get the power*.
>
> **Max:** Right, it has to get the power from the waves and then change it into electricity.
>
> **David:** That makes sense. We figured it out!

As this scenario illustrates, students begin to feel capable when they learn to read complex texts on their own, which is a teacher's dream. This book serves as a guide to teachers as they follow Mrs. Marquand's lead—teachers like you, who are teaching students to closely read complex texts by challenging them with appropriate text-dependent questions that build reading skills, deepen comprehension, and foster independence.

The Close Reading Approach

Compare today's modern, dynamic classrooms to the educational system in place 50 years ago, and it is obvious that huge improvements have been made in the teaching profession. As a frontline educator, you have never before been so well positioned to serve the ever-evolving needs of an increasingly diverse student body, but there are still areas that need attention. Every year, new techniques and buzzwords swirl around, each one promising to open the world of knowledge and critical thought to your students. Some live up to their promises, and some fizzle, only to be replaced by the *next big thing* the following year. You must carefully evaluate new techniques to ensure that they will be of actual benefit to students. No one denies that students need strong preparation for college and future careers. The question is, and always has been, *how* can we best provide students with the skills they need to lead productive, successful lives? The close reading approach described in this book is a terrific place to start.

Close reading is a powerful, useful, and successful approach for teaching reading comprehension and critical-thinking skills. The lessons and strategies described in this book have been piloted and refined by classroom teachers, are backed by current pedagogical research, and are aligned with college and career readiness standards from around the country. Using the close reading approach simply means building upon current practices. Table 1.1 lists useful definitions for terms used in the close reading approach.

Table 1.1 Useful Definitions for the Close Reading Approach

Term	Working Definition
annotation	the process of marking a text with information and questions for further study; may include highlights, symbols, notes, and comments
chunking	breaking a text into smaller pieces, or chunks, numbered for ease of reference and study
close thinking	a sister approach to close reading, where students think deeply about texts that are read aloud to them, as opposed to texts they read independently; is especially useful technique for when students do not yet have the decoding skills necessary to tackle a particular text
guided reading	a small-group reading approach in which a teacher supports developing readers through pre-loading and individualized scaffolding; is frequently used as an intermediate step between shared and independent reading
qualitative	unable to be defined numerically; factors include things such as student experiences with a topic, author purpose, and language features
quantitative	can be defined and assessed numerically, such as by grade level, number of words per page, and word length
scaffold	support for a student's learning; a tailored teaching practice used with the intent of helping the student achieve his or her learning goals
shared reading	an interactive reading experience in which the teacher models the skills of a fluent reader
text-dependent question (TDQ)	a question that is based on the text itself, rather than personal experiences, and can only be answered by someone who has read a particular text selection
text complexity	a measure of the level of challenge presented by a particular text selection for a student at a given level
thinking aloud	technique of speaking the thoughts that occur in the mind while approaching a particular reading challenge; a process that can be used to model or assess a particular skill

Frequently Asked Questions

What does the close reading of complex texts really mean?

When a fluent reader approaches a text, he or she does more than simply decode the words. The fluent reader thinks about a dozen different things before beginning to read: *What do I know about this? Who wrote this? What do I know about that person? When was it written? Is this a book, a pamphlet, an excerpt, a magazine article, a newspaper article, an advertisement, or some other kind of writing? What sort of font is being used, and what does that imply about the writing?* Once the reading begins, this mental questioning process continues, and the reader looks for answers within the text. The fluent reader may reread sections or, if the selection is very short, an entire passage, as understanding of the piece evolves. A truly rich and complex text may be revisited many times over a lifetime, with the reader making new and interesting discoveries with each rereading.

Close reading is a structured approach that enables all students, including English language learners and below-grade-level students, to develop this deep comprehension of complex grade-level texts. In close reading, students act as investigators, gradually uncovering the meaning of short pieces of literature or informational texts. Through the process of reading, questioning, focusing, and rereading the texts, students uncover the "bones," or main ideas, of the passage. Students return again and again to the text, becoming ever more adept at identifying and interacting with the language, context, structure, and layers of embedded meaning. This emphasis on returning to the same text repeatedly to gradually acquire a comfortable and deep relationship with it is at the heart of the close reading approach.

Why do today's standards require the close reading of complex texts?

Comprehension of complex texts is linked to success on high-stakes assessments of college and career readiness and to actual success in college and career. Today's standards require instruction and supported practice with close reading of complex texts.

A study by the college readiness testing company ACT (2006) evaluated the results of 568,000 ACT reading tests taken by eighth, tenth, and twelfth grade students. These test results were compared with a benchmark level of "college readiness," a standard meant to predict college acceptance, retention, and the achievement of a 3.0 GPA. Next, the researchers analyzed the student responses with the goal of identifying which factors were indicative of success. Students who were able to read and comprehend the most complex texts were the ones most likely to have high

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers determined that "A significant body of research links the close reading of complex texts—whether the student is a struggling reader or advanced—to significant gains in reading proficiency and finds close reading to be a key component of college and career readiness" (2011, 7).

scores on the college-readiness standard. The ACT researchers found that "Students who can read complex texts are more likely to be ready for college. Those who cannot read complex texts are less likely to be ready for college" (2006, 5).

Additionally, there is a significant gap between the complexity of texts being used at the twelfth grade level and those being utilized in career and college settings. In his 2006 study, Gary L. Williamson reported that there is a gap greater than 1.5 standard deviations between the level of these texts, a larger difference than that between typical fourth and eighth grade texts!

At what grade level should we begin using the close reading approach?

Today's reading standards require students of all ages to take a much more critical look at the texts they read. The earlier students begin to closely read, the better. The close reading approach should be introduced to even the newest readers. In this way, close reading will become a habit of mind when tackling challenging texts (Boyles 2012). Emphasizing the need to repeatedly return to a text in order to uncover evidence for perceived meaning is an essential skill, which can and should be applied in all areas of academic study. Introducing this concept as early as possible can improve students' academic performance throughout their careers.

Why should close reading replace tried and true reading approaches?

It shouldn't! There is nothing about close reading that precludes the use of other approaches that work well for you and your students. You can and should continue to use successful approaches, such as guided reading, shared reading, book study, and collaborative groups. Close reading is an approach that will support your students in deeply and critically analyzing all types of complex texts. It is not meant to be the sole approach or strategy for literacy development in your classroom. Think of it as an additional powerful tool in your teaching toolbox. As every craftsperson knows, it is important to use the right tool for each job. The close reading tool is exceptionally useful when teaching students how to approach, analyze, and deeply connect with complex literature and informational texts.

How does close reading differ from other familiar reading approaches?

Close reading focuses on short, complex texts or self-contained sections of texts that are visited and revisited multiple times. Before the reading, teachers *do not frontload information* for students. Unlike guided, shared, or read-aloud sessions, it is not recommended that teachers model skills and strategies or preteach background information before students read or listen to a text during the close reading. There is, however, nothing to preclude a teacher from inviting students to closely read a subsection of a text or a stanza of a poem that is already under study or, in the early years, that has been previously shared as a read aloud. However, during the actual close reading, students are encouraged to independently *have a go* at a text selected for its complexity and placement in their appropriate Lexile band. During the first reading, students should read or listen to uncover the big ideas and key details of the text. Students engage in repeated readings of the text to access deeper meaning, including how the text works, by scrutinizing the author's craft and the meaning of the text. Student annotations should illuminate their

thinking as well as their points of confusion, any unknown vocabulary, and other questions or points of interest they wish to pursue more deeply.

At every juncture, the main role of the teacher is to assess student performance and provide scaffolds to support text analysis. This happens, for example, while listening to conversations to determine the direction to take in the next read, asking students what they are looking for in the read, and reassessing student needs. The major scaffold teachers provide is through the continuous questions they ask: *What does the text say? What evidence can you find for that? How is the information conveyed? Can you find that in the text?* Purposeful questions help students resolve the complexity and uniqueness of each text.

Close reading lessons are also unique in planning. Preplanning of text-dependent questions is essential to the success of a close reading lesson. Unlike other reading instruction approaches, however, close reading cannot be completely preplanned. Although you may craft an initial set of questions before students begin reading the text, tailoring questions and dialog to the issues and questions that arise during students' reading is powerful and authentic. Close reading experiences occur organically and can never be recreated. Each encounter with the text should, however, push students to a deeper level of understanding.

What do I do after a close read?

Close reading experiences should conclude with performance tasks that encourage students to demonstrate their learning. These tasks may include writing, slide shows, reader's theater, art projects, or any other assessment activity designed to further extend students' learning and provide them with opportunities to share their mastery of the learning goals for the lesson. If students are still struggling or are unable to competently demonstrate their knowledge, reteaching may be in order. See pages 67–78 for assessment and reteaching ideas.

Close Reading Management

The easiest way to manage the scheduling of close reading is to encompass other literacy practices within the close reading session. For example, if you use shared reading regularly, try using a close reading approach, which involves a shared reading component. Similarly, close reading can be easily rotated into your guided reading lessons. As students' proficiency with close reading increases, it becomes easier to incorporate it throughout your curriculum.

Generally, we believe that students should have opportunities to engage in close reading on a daily basis. However, these experiences should ideally be spread out across all areas of study, not just with specified language arts lessons. A student might engage in close reading for a math lesson on Monday, a social studies lesson on Tuesday, and a language arts lesson on Wednesday. It is essential that students have ample opportunities to make close reading a deeply ingrained habit so that they can depend on these skills to propel them beyond surface reading for the rest of their lives.

The close reading approach is structured for whole-group instruction and partner work. However, when students struggle, small-group scaffolding becomes necessary. In those cases, a small group can be pulled together while the rest of the students are engaged in independent or small-group work that does not require teacher attention.

Table 1.2 illustrates how one teacher incorporated close reading in her classroom over the course of a week.

Table 1.2 Incorporating Close Reading

Content Area	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Language Arts	close reading: *Tom Sawyer* pp. 40–41	read aloud: *Tom Sawyer* chapter 5	close reading: *Tom Sawyer* p. 101	read aloud: *Tom Sawyer* chapter 6	read aloud: *Tom Sawyer* chapter 7
Science	lecture and shared reading: *Galileo and the Starry Messenger* pp. 4–6	close reading: *Galileo and the Starry Messenger* pp. 7–9	constellation activity	close reading: *Galileo and the Starry Messenger* pp. 10–15	build your own telescope activity
Social Studies	finish final project on the Dark Ages	groups present final projects on the Dark Ages	close reading: *The Italian Renaissance* (textbook chapter intro)	lecture and class discussion of Renaissance changes	Renaissance art
Mathematics	review: graphing	assessment: graphing	small-group work: graphing and measurement review	lecture: finding volume	close reading: *Count Like an Egyptian: A Hands-On Introduction to Ancient Mathematics* pp. 1–2
Other	practice for spring assembly performance	close reading: visual literacy lesson on Van Gogh's *The Starry Night*	practice for spring assembly performance	little buddy time with kindergarten partners	begin Renaissance stained glass art project

Organization of this Book

We have created this resource with some very specific goals in mind. First, we want to support other teachers in implementing close reading in ways that demonstrate intentional, explicit instruction. In other words, we want to take the guesswork out of the process and provide a research-supported approach that can easily fit into classroom lessons. Secondly, we want to provide instructional examples of close reading that demonstrate how it can be used to address other important classroom goals, such as general reading and writing goals, the development of academic language, inquiry learning, use of technology, deep thinking, and reading across disciplines.

Finally, it is important to us that we provide a close reading toolkit that includes sample texts, sample student activities, sample performance tasks, and other supports teachers can use to create close reading lessons. A close reading resource is only truly useful if it includes the tools needed to incorporate the approach into every area of the curriculum. For this reason, we have decided to present the majority of this book in a format that supports your efforts to create close reading lessons for classroom use.

Digital Download

The planning templates, appendix resources, and sample lesson passages included in this book are available as Adobe® PDFs online. A complete list of the documents is on pages 273–274. Additionally, the file names are referenced throughout the book. To access the digital resources, go to http://www.tcmpub.com/download-files and enter the following code: 54740083. Follow the on-screen directions.

Guide to Book Sections

Section One has presented an overview of the close reading approach. In previous sections, the structure of close reading, useful terms, and frequently asked questions were reviewed.

Section Two presents the process for planning a close reading lesson. This is the section you should turn to as you are thinking about how to make initial planning decisions for a close reading session. Close reading requires careful preparation on the part of the teacher. There are several crucial decisions to be made. First, it is necessary to select an appropriate text. You will also decide which standard or standards to address and identify the areas of complexity for your students. Lastly, you will plan text-dependent questions and additional scaffold questions.

Digital Download
A digital download with planning templates, appendix resources, and sample lesson passages accompanies this book.

It is important to note that the text-dependent questions can and should evolve during the course of the lesson. You may anticipate that students will struggle with the main idea (and, therefore need additional scaffold questions), but upon viewing their first read annotations, realize that they instead struggled with a challenging vocabulary term. In that case, you might modify your initial text-dependent questions to include text-dependent questions that lead students to clarify the challenging term. Section Two will walk you through each of these steps explicitly.

Section Three presents the process for teaching a close reading lesson. This section includes detailed descriptions of how to scaffold the lesson for students of all reading levels. Throughout a close reading lesson, there are several more decisions that need to be made to determine how to scaffold the instruction for students. *Who will be doing the reading? How many times should students revisit the text? How will the lesson be chunked? What annotations should be used? What types of student resources are needed?* At every stage, remember that you may choose to "take back" the reading. If you find that students are struggling too much and becoming unfocused or frustrated, your choice for independent reading may be replaced by a new choice to read aloud and model the thinking and reading skills of a fluent reader. Each of these is addressed more fully in Section Three.

Section Four presents simple step-by-step techniques for assessing and extending close reading lessons. This section includes specific guidelines, activities, templates for anecdotal records and performance tasks, and suggestions on how to reteach information to students who have not fully grasped a lesson. The final set of decisions for a close reading lesson surround the specific ways to assess students' understanding. You should create and use both formative and summative assessments to determine what, if anything, must be retaught.

Section Five and **Section Six** present a collection of close reading lessons. For each grade level, there are three literary and three informational texts with corresponding lessons. These lessons address a range of college and career readiness anchor standards, specifically key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas.

Finally, the **Appendices** are designed to help you scaffold lessons for a diverse group of students. Appendix B is a glossary of reteaching ideas, and Appendix C lists the graphic organizers and templates that are provided in the **Digital Download**. For example, there is a character web graphic organizer and a plot chart to be used for teaching text structure. There is also a T-chart and a guide for identifying figurative language to assist with vocabulary development.

The sections of this book are organized around the decisions to be made at each stage of planning and teaching a close reading lesson. Table 1.3 provides an overview of the decisions made at each stage.

Table 1.3 Close Reading Stages and Decisions

Close Reading Stage	What Decision Must Be Made?
Preplanning	• Identify a standard and lesson purpose. • Select a text. • Determine the areas of complexity. • Create text-dependent questions.
Teaching	• Determine how to scaffold the close read. • Who is doing the close reading? • How many times do students revisit the text? • Does any minor frontloading need to occur after the first reading? • How should the text be chunked? • What types of annotations should be used? • What types of student resources are needed?
Assessing and Extending	• How do I assess student understanding? • How do I assess student understanding during the lesson? • How do I assess student understanding after the lesson? • What do I do for students who, at the end of close reading, have not totally comprehended the text? • What do I do to reteach the students who did not understand?

Try It! ✏️

Directions: Using Table 1.2 (page 13) as a model, identify potential places in which you can incorporate close reading into your instructional schedule. Write on the table below, or use a digital copy of the table in the Digital Download (incorporatingclosereading.pdf).

Incorporating Close Reading

Content Area	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Language Arts					
Science					
Social Studies					
Mathematics					
Other					