

FROM THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS  
TO TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM:  
A SERIES OF RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

# SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN CLOSE READING

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# CLOSE READING OF TEXT

The goal of close reading is to enable students to deeply engage with challenging and high quality text. Eventually, through close reading, students will be able to read increasingly complex text independently, relying only on what the author provides in the text to support their comprehension and evaluation of the text.

The CCSS Anchor Standard 1 in Reading states that students:

*Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. (2010, p. 10)*

Furthermore, according to the National Education Association (NEA, 2013), “80-90 percent of the [CCSS] reading Standards in each grade require text-dependent analysis” (p. 18). Therefore, students’ successful and meaningful engagement with text necessitates teachers’ careful planning of close reading.

Teachers and students have specific roles in close reading, which are described below.

## TEACHER ROLES

- (1) Select challenging and appropriate text
- (2) Analyze the text’s content and language ahead of time
- (3) Anticipate potential challenges the text may present for certain students (e.g., English Learners, students reading far above or below grade level)
- (4) Write text-dependent questions that engage students in interpretive tasks
- (5) Lead rich and rigorous conversations (through the use of text-dependent questions) that keep students engaged with the text’s deeper meaning
- (6) Ensure reading activities stay closely connected to the text

## STUDENT ROLES

- (1) Read the text more than once
- (2) Persevere in reading and comprehending challenging text
- (3) Analyze the text for purpose and/or levels of meaning
- (4) Use evidence from the text to ask and answer text-dependent questions
- (5) Increase comprehension of a text through multiple re-readings
- (6) Participate in rich and rigorous conversations about a common text

Lessons based on close reading of text have several distinct characteristics.<sup>2</sup>

- Close reading often entails a multi-day commitment to re-reading a text. Each re-reading has a different purpose.
- Close reading focuses on short, high-quality text that is appropriate for reading several times (e.g., a text with complex ideas and structure). Text can be excerpted from a longer piece of work.
- Instruction for close reading involves scaffolding students' meaning-making with the text. Students need to make sense of the text, engaging in productive struggle when necessary. To support this, teachers provide only a minimal amount of background knowledge or explanation to students prior to reading the text. For example, teachers might pre-teach some vocabulary that may otherwise block students' access to the text or tell students something about the text genre (e.g., that it is a memoir or science article).
- A major role for teachers is to ask text-dependent questions. Text-dependent questions can only be answered by referring explicitly to the text. Answering these questions does not rely on any particular background information outside of the text. The questions engage students in interpretive processes, guiding them in how to think about the texts and enabling them to practice the type of attentive reading and thinking called for by the CCSS. (See section on Text-Dependent Questions on page 17 for more information.)
- Lessons created for close reading of text usually include a culminating task related to the core understanding, key ideas, or theme of the text. This task can help students consolidate their learning and demonstrate their understanding of the text. A culminating task will often engage students in a combination of ELA domains, such as reading, writing, and listening and speaking (e.g., giving an oral presentation to the class or writing an exposition about the text).

Timothy Shanahan, an expert in literacy, teaching, and curriculum, recommends at least three readings of a text, in which the main purpose for each reading is aligned with the three main categories of the ELA Anchor Standards for Reading: Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas. The guide, *More on Planning for Close Reading & Text-Dependent Questions*, in the "Tools and Exemplars" section of this resource provides a synopsis of Shanahan's approach.

In close reading, teachers minimally introduce the text with the goal that students read and make sense of what the text says for themselves. However, Catherine Snow, a leading researcher in the field of literacy, cautions against what she calls cold close reading in which students read a text without any introductory activity that warms them to a topic or task, orients them, or cultivates enthusiasm. Snow (2013) writes that a "collapse of motivation" occurs when the selected text is too hard, too long, too full of unknown words or an unknown topic, and the reader "quickly exhausts his or her initial willingness to struggle with it...the reality of reading a text too hard is that it often results, not in productive struggle, but in destructive frustration" (p. 19). Teachers will need to provide some motivator for students and an appropriate level of support (e.g., not too much, not too little) so as to engage them in close reading of challenging text.

<sup>2</sup> For more information, visit Timothy Shanahan's blog at [www.shanahanonliteracy.com](http://www.shanahanonliteracy.com).

# TEXT-DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

Text-dependent questions are a central component of close reading. When developing text-dependent questions, teachers should draw on the knowledge they have gained from completing the previous tools in this resource: *Selecting Text*, *Text Annotation Protocol*, and *Text Cover Sheet*.

The use of text-dependent questions is intended to guide students in how to think about what's important in the text—in the message/information, in the style and structure, and how the text connects to other texts. Text-dependent questions are not simply literal questions about information and facts from the text. While these questions should be asked to ascertain students' basic comprehension, text-dependent questions go beyond just asking about the surface ideas and details by also tapping into the craft, structure, and theme/purpose of the text as well as students' evaluation and judgments of the text. Text-dependent questions require students to draw inferences from and make connections among the details and ideas of the text. Furthermore, it is important that text-dependent questions are based on important, not trivial, ideas from the text. According to the NEA (2013, p. 19), typical text-dependent questions will ask students to engage in the following tasks:

- Analyze paragraphs on a sentence-by-sentence basis and sentences on a word-by-word basis to determine the role played by individual paragraphs, sentences, phrases, or words
- Investigate how meaning can be altered by changing key words and why an author may have chosen one word over another
- Probe each argument in persuasive text, each idea in informational text, each key detail in literary text, and observe how these build to a whole
- Examine how shifts in the direction of an argument or explanation are achieved and the impact of those shifts
- Question why authors choose to begin and end as they do
- Note and assess patterns of writing and what they achieve
- Consider what the text leaves uncertain or unstated

As there is no single, best way to develop text-dependent questions, teachers should use and adapt a process that works for their purposes and contexts. The next section describes one process that can help teachers think about and create text-dependent questions for any given text.

## TEXT-DEPENDENT QUESTIONS GUIDE

There are various types of text-dependent questions that are aligned to different purposes in the close reading process. Here is an example of general text-dependent questions from Timothy Shanahan's *What is Close Reading?* article.<sup>8</sup> These questions can help guide teachers in creating more specific text-dependent questions for students to use during their close reading of a particular text.<sup>9</sup> A printable handout of these questions is available in the "Tools and Exemplars" section.

<sup>8</sup> See [www.shanahanonliteracy.com/2012/06/what-is-close-reading.html](http://www.shanahanonliteracy.com/2012/06/what-is-close-reading.html).

<sup>9</sup> For more detailed information, see the handout *More on Planning for Close Reading & Text Dependent Questions* in the "Tools and Exemplars" section.

<b>1<sup>st</sup> reading:</b> <i>What it says.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the text saying?</li> </ul>
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> reading:</b> <i>How it says it.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did the author organize it?</li> <li>• What literary devices were used and how effective were they?</li> <li>• What was the quality of the evidence?</li> <li>• If data were presented, how was that done?</li> <li>• If any visual texts (e.g., diagrams, tables, illustrations) were presented, how was that done?</li> <li>• Why did the author choose this word or that word? Was the meaning of a key term consistent or did it change across the text?</li> </ul>
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> reading:</b> <i>What it means.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does this text mean?</li> <li>• What was the author's point?</li> <li>• What does it have to say to me about my life or my world? How do I evaluate the quality of this work—aesthetically, substantively?</li> <li>• How does this text connect to other texts I know?</li> </ul>
<b>General follow-up questions for any of the text-dependent questions are:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you know?</li> <li>• What in the text tells you that?</li> <li>• What's the evidence?</li> </ul>

As noted earlier, when creating text-dependent questions, teachers should refer to their previously completed tools from this resource. The goals of the lesson (from the *Text Cover Sheet*) should guide teachers in creating a coherent set or sequence of effective questions that facilitate students' close reading.

## AN EXAMPLE

To illustrate the use of the *Text-Dependent Questions Guide*, an example is provided below with the narrative text, "Eleven" (Cisneros, 1991). Text-dependent questions for the first reading are based on key ideas and details of the text. For the second reading, the questions focus on the style and structure of the text. Lastly, in the third reading, the questions are based on the theme and the students' evaluation of the text. In this example, the teacher wrote down all the questions she thought could be used for this text. In a lesson, she may select a subset of the questions based on knowledge of her students, the context, and the purpose of the lesson. If the teacher needs more evidence of student thinking, she should ask one or more of the follow up questions listed above.

### Text-Dependent Questions – 1<sup>st</sup> Reading

What they don't understand about birthdays and what they never tell you is that when you're eleven, you're also ten, and nine, and eight, and seven, and six, and five, and four, and three, and two, and one. And when you wake up on your eleventh birthday you expect to feel eleven, but you don't. You open your eyes and everything's just like yesterday, only it's today. And you don't feel eleven at all. You feel like you're still ten. And you are — underneath the year that makes you eleven.

Like some days you might say something stupid, and that's the part of you that's still ten. Or maybe some days you might need to sit on your mama's lap because you're scared, and that's the part of you that's five.

And maybe one day when you're all grown up maybe you will need to cry like if you're three, and that's okay. That's what I tell Mama when she's sad and needs to cry. Maybe she's feeling three.

Because the way you grow old is kind of like an onion or like the rings inside a tree trunk or like my little wooden dolls that fit one inside the other, each year inside the next one. That's how being eleven years old is.

You don't feel eleven. Not right away. It takes a few days, weeks even, sometimes even months before you say Eleven when they ask you. And you don't feel smart eleven, not until you're almost twelve. That's the way it is.

*Who are they?*

*Who does "you" refer to?*

*Why doesn't the narrator feel like she's 11?*

*What makes the narrator feel like she's still 10?*

*What makes the narrator feel like she's 5?*

*When does the narrator think that you act like you're 3?*

*What does the narrator think being 11 is like?*

*When does the narrator feel like she's really 11?*

*How does the narrator feel about turning 11?*

### Text-Dependent Questions – 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading

What they don't understand about birthdays and what they never tell you is that when you're eleven, you're also ten, and nine, and eight, and seven, and six, and five, and four, and three, and two, and one. And when you wake up on your eleventh birthday you expect to feel eleven, but you don't. You open your eyes and everything's just like yesterday, only it's today. And you don't feel eleven at all. You feel like you're still ten. And you are—underneath the year that makes you eleven.

Like some days you might say something stupid, and that's the part of you that's still ten. Or maybe some days you might need to sit on your mama's lap because you're scared, and that's the part of you that's five.

And maybe one day when you're all grown up maybe you will need to cry like if you're three, and that's okay. That's what I tell Mama when she's sad and needs to cry. Maybe she's feeling three.

Because the way you grow old is kind of like an onion or like the rings inside a tree trunk or like my little wooden dolls that fit one inside the other, each year inside the next one. That's how being eleven years old is.

You don't feel eleven. Not right away. It takes a few days, weeks even, sometimes even months before you say Eleven when they ask you. And you don't feel smart eleven, not until you're almost twelve. That's the way it is.

*Why does the author use "they" without telling you exactly who "they" are?*

*Why does the author use "you" throughout the text?*

*Why does the author use the word "and" to begin these sentences?*

*Why is "and" used so many times?*

*What's the purpose of using this "like" at the beginning of the sentence?*

*How is the word "like" being used in Para. 4?*

*What's the author's purpose in using "tree trunk" and "wooden dolls"?*

*Why does the author sometimes write short sentences here (and elsewhere in the passage), then sometimes write really long sentences?*

<p>Text-Dependent Questions – 3<sup>rd</sup> Reading</p> <p>What they don't understand about birthdays and what they never tell you is that when you're eleven, you're also ten, and nine, and eight, and seven, and six, and five, and four, and three, and two, and one. And when you wake up on your eleventh birthday you expect to feel eleven, but you don't. You open your eyes and everything's just like yesterday, only it's today. And you don't feel eleven at all. You feel like you're still ten. And you are — underneath the year that makes you eleven.</p> <p>Like some days you might say something stupid, and that's the part of you that's still ten. Or maybe some days you might need to sit on your mama's lap because you're scared, and that's the part of you that's five.</p> <p>And maybe one day when you're all grown up maybe you will need to cry like if you're three, and that's okay. That's what I tell Mama when she's sad and needs to cry. Maybe she's feeling three.</p> <p>Because the way you grow old is kind of like an onion or like the rings inside a tree trunk or like my little wooden dolls that fit one inside the other, each year inside the next one. That's how being eleven years old is.</p> <p>You don't feel eleven. Not right away. It takes a few days, weeks even, sometimes even months before you say Eleven when they ask you. And you don't feel smart eleven, not until you're almost twelve. That's the way it is.</p>	<p>What are the themes of this text?</p> <p>What does this last sentence mean? How do you know that?</p> <p>How does this paragraph support the themes?</p> <p>How does the use of similes support the themes?</p> <p>What does being "smart" or "stupid" have to do with growing up?</p> <p>Do you agree with this point that the author makes?</p>
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## TEXT-DEPENDENT QUESTIONS COVER SHEET

For teachers who would like to have all their text-dependent questions organized together, they can write their questions on the *Text-Dependent Questions Cover Sheet*. A printable template of the cover sheet is provided in the "Tools and Exemplars" section. An example of an informational text using the *Text-Dependent Questions Cover Sheet* is also provided in that section.