

A Parent's Guide to the Common Core:

A Closer Look at Close Reading

Close reading is not a new strategy for Gwinnett County students. However, with the alignment of GCPS' AKS curriculum with the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, it's a learning strategy that's getting a lot of attention, and for good reason! Close reading is used by students to dig deeply into a text that requires analysis. For many books, poems, stories, and articles, we can read the piece just once and understand pretty quickly what it is we need to know. At other times, when the text is particularly important or perhaps more complex, one reading is not sufficient. When we read a text closely, we read it multiple times to expose the meanings of the text. In a close reading, we pay very close attention to both *what* the author says and *how* the author says it.

So, what does close reading look like in our schools? Check out some examples of how students read, analyze, and annotate their reading as they work to understand what they read.

Close Reading of a Literary Text ▲

A close reading of a literary text is a complex and active process in which a student draws conclusions and inferences from a work in order to construct meaning, form connections, and develop critical-analysis skills. A student might note a writer's use of language, elements of craft and style, literary devices, and the structure of a text to support an analysis. In this high school example, the student forms a personal connection, both to the text and with the speaker. This connection leads the student to infer what might have led the speaker on a journey based on textual evidence in the poem. The student considers the tone of the poem to determine a possible purpose, noting the symbolism throughout the analysis. This exercise in close reading shows the value of exposing students to rich text and equipping them with skills that allow for intellectual interaction with what they have read.

The Journey
by Mary Oliver

Speaker and Audience: the speaker in the poem uses 2nd person point of view ("you") to address the reader directly; the constant repetition makes it feel as if it's a private talk between the speaker and each individual reader

Tone: I would characterize the tone as: strident, confident, determined, almost conspiratorial; the speaker wants me to listen carefully to the message before I set out on my own journey... which will be different than hers, of course.

Occasion: the speaker may have been prompted by an actual walk down a road during a storm and used that experience to create a metaphor for difficult journey, one with distractions and obstacles

Purpose: the speaker seems to be saying that the hardest journey of all may be to listen to your own inner voice, especially when there is a "storm" of other voices advising you otherwise.

Subject: It's clear the poet feels that I need to pay attention to my own journey, my own vision of who and what I am and what my journey is all about as I stride "deeper and deeper into the world." Only when I listen to my own voice and chart my own course will the stars burn through and guide me safely inside to who I am—

One day you finally knew what you had to do, and began, though the voices around you kept shouting their bad advice— though the whole house began to tremble and you felt the old tug at your ankles. "Mend my life!" each voice cried. But you didn't stop. You knew what you had to do, though the wind pried with its stiff fingers at the very foundations, though their melancholy was terrible. It was already late enough, and a wild night, and the road full of fallen branches and stones. But little by little, as you left their voices behind, the stars began to burn through the sheets of clouds, and there was a new voice which you slowly recognized as your own, that kept you company as you strode deeper and deeper into the world, determined to do the only thing you could do— determined to save the only life you could save.

Source: Vancouver (B.C.) School District, Canada
Pre-Advanced Placement English (9th Grade)

Words Matter:

Terminology in Language Arts

Informational Text communicates information. Informational text may include newspaper and magazine articles, digital information, non-fiction, reference materials, and more.

Literary Text is primarily fiction, which includes short stories, fables, folktales, fairy tales, novels, myths, drama, poetry, and more.

Close Reading requires students to read a text multiple times. In a close reading, students will analyze the text to determine what it says, how it says it, and what it means.

Text-Based Questions require students to read a text closely to gain deep understanding. These questions cannot be answered without a close reading of the text and will require students to apply information directly from the text rather than simply recalling information from the text.

Academic Vocabulary are the words traditionally used in academic conversation and text. Often, these are the words that are not used in daily conversation, but they are the words we encounter when reading. For example, a small amount of research might be referred to as a *modicum* of research. Instead of a claim being false, it can be a *fallacy*. It's important for students to know the academic variations of these and other words.

Increased **Text Complexity** is about ensuring that students read a wide range of texts that are not *too* easy and not *too* hard. Students will be asked to read more difficult texts, but their teachers will support them as they work to read and understand texts that are at or slightly above their reading levels.



ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS
GWINNETT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- Directions:
1. Mark your confusion.
 2. Show evidence of a close reading. Mark up the text with questions and/or comments.
 3. Write a one-page reflection on your own sheet of paper.

Secrets of the Most Successful College Students

Source: Annie Murphy Paul/March 13, 2013/Time.com

College admission letters go out this month, and most recipients (and their parents) will place great importance on which universities said yes and which said no. A growing body of evidence, however, suggests that the most significant thing about college is not where you go, but what you do once you get there. Historian and educator Ken Bain has written a book on this subject, *What The Best College Students Do*, that draws a roadmap for how students can get the most out of college, no matter where they go.

As Bain details, there are three types of learners — surface, who do as little as possible to get by; strategic, who aim for top grades rather than true understanding, and finally, deep learners, who leave college with a real, rich education. Bain then introduces us to a host of real-life deep learners: young and old, scientific and artistic, famous or still getting there. Although they each have their own insights, Bain identifies common patterns in their stories:

1. **Pursue passion, not A's.** When he was in college, says the eminent astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, he was "moved by curiosity, interest, and fascination, not by making the highest scores on a test." As an adult, he points out, "no one ever asks you what your grades were. Grades become irrelevant." In his experience as a student and professor, says Tyson, "ambition and innovation trump grades every time."
2. **Get comfortable with failure.** When he was still a college student, comedian Stephen Colbert began working with an improvisational theater in Chicago. "That really opened me up in ways I hadn't expected," he told Bain. "You must be OK with bombing. You have to love it." Colbert adds, "Improvisation is a great educator who fails. There's no way you're going to get it right every time."
3. **Make a personal connection to your studies.** In her sophomore year in college, Eliza Noh, now an American studies at California State University-Fullerton, says she "realized that learning could be about me as much as it was about the world." Noh told Bain, "I didn't just listen to lectures and take notes. I was going to get it right every time."

Source: "Secrets of the Most Successful College Students" by Annie Murphy Paul for Time.com
 Located on <http://kellygallagher.org/resources/articles.html>

college not where but what

Surface = little

Strategic = grades

Deep = real

I get asked about grades a lot!

better to focus on not just grades

this makes sense

I am going to do it!

Not in my house

Close Reading at the Elementary Level

When examining this elementary school sample, you may notice that the student is interacting with the text in many ways. First, notice how certain words stick out in the student's mind. He writes a more common or familiar word near the "tricky" word in the text, a word that may not be part of his everyday vocabulary. In addition, the student is asking questions about what he has read and making comments at specific points that have captured his interest. Several comments made by the reader are connected as he moves through the text. The act of reading closely causes the reader to read and re-read passages as he annotates or "marks up" the text.

Close Reading of an Informational Text— In reading informational text, it's important for the student to identify and analyze the main points of the text, looking for the facts that support these main points. We ask students to "read like a detective" and to be prepared to write as if they are a "conscientious investigative reporter" who can cite specific facts to back up what they write. In this middle school example, the student underlined important ideas and made notes in the right margin about them. Paragraphs are numbered so the student can make quick reference in producing facts or observations to support what she's read. Unknown vocabulary words are circled, and the student has tried to guess the meaning of words, based on clues in the sentence (contextual clues). The student makes personal observations in the left margin. Based on this close reading, the student should be able to answer text-based questions, citing specifics from the text to reinforce her points in writing.

The Text: DiCamillo, Kate. *Because of Winn-Dixie*

Exemplar Text

I spent a lot of time that summer at the Herman W. Block Memorial Library. It's just a little old house full of books, and Miss Franny Block is in charge of them all. She is a very small, very old woman with short gray hair, and she was the first friend I made in Naomi. It all started with Winn-Dixie. He couldn't go inside, too. But I showed him how he could stand up on his hind legs and look in the window and see me in there, selecting my books; and he was okay, as long as he could see me. But the thing was, the first time Miss Franny Block saw Winn-Dixie standing up on his hind legs like that, looking in the window, she didn't think he was a dog. She thought he was a bear. This is what happened: I was picking out my books and kind of humming to myself, and all of a sudden, there was a loud and scary scream! I went running to the front of the library, and there was Miss Franny Block, sitting on the floor behind her desk. Miss Franny sat there fumbling and shaking. "Come on," I said. "Let me help you up!" It's okay," I stuck out my hand and anything at all. Once she was standing on her feet, she started acting all embarrassed, saying how I must think she was a silly old lady, mistaking a dog for a bear, but that she had a bad experience with a bear coming into the Herman W. Block Memorial Library a long time ago, and she never had quite gotten over it. "When did it happen?" I asked her. "Well," said Miss Franny, "it is a very long story." "That's okay," I told her. "I am like my mama in that I like to be told stories. But before you start telling it, can Winn-Dixie come in and listen, too? He gets lonely without me." "Well, I don't know," said Miss Franny. "Dogs are not allowed in the Herman W. Block Memorial Library." "He'll be good," I told her. "He's a dog who goes to church." And before she could say yes or no, I went outside and got Winn-Dixie. Yes ma'am." I told her. "He has a large heart, too." "Well," Miss Franny said, "She bent over and gave Winn-Dixie a pat on the head, and I was just a little girl no bigger than you, my father, Herman W. Block, told me that I could have anything I wanted for my birthday. She named in close to me. "I don't want to appear proud!" she said, "but my daddy was a very rich man. A very rich man. So I told him, I said, 'Daddy, I would most certainly love to have a library for my birthday, a small little library would be wonderful.'" "Daddy, I would most certainly love to have a library for my birthday, a small little library would be wonderful."

how much time?

how did?

He must go with her everywhere

she is very friendly and kind!

she is trying to decide if the dog can come in!

she is a polite girl!

she is still trying to decide if he can stay!

like I am bragging that is BIG!

she did love books a lot!

the author wrote that 2 times! He was rich!!

I wonder how she got there?

that must be the town not a name of a person

pretty beautiful

she was afraid the 1st time!

she was very afraid!

shy? quiet?

oh No!

the dog must really love the little girl

breath - I can't believe he was so good!

that is a good sign

the old lady is telling her story!

the library was named after her father! Wow!!

Vocabulary

Source: Excerpt from *Because of Winn-Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo
 Candlewick Press, March 2000
 Located on <http://www.definingthecore.com>

