Complex Reading in the Common Core: My Kids Can’t Do This!

Robin Fogarty
robin@robinfogarty.com
IAASE Winter Conference
February 2013

Author of:
A School Leaders Guide to the Common Core
Solution Tree Press (Spring 2013)
How to Teach Thinking Skills Within Common Core: Seven Key Student Proficiencies of the New National Standards
Solution Tree Press
Differentiating Instruction A Professional Learning Communities Approach
Solution Tree Press
The Other Side of Reading-Narrative Text

“If words remain words and sit quietly on the page; if they remain nouns and verbs and adjectives, then we are truly blind. But if words seem to disappear and our inner most self begins to laugh and cry, to sing and dance and finally to fly…if we are transformed in all that we are, to a brand new world, then…and only then…can we READ.”

Joe Wayman

R-S-V-P-E
• Reading Task
• Syntax Task
• Vocabulary Task
• Purpose Task
• Expressive Task

1. RSVP E: Reading Task!
1 - Independent
2 - Teacher-Led
3 - Buddy Reading
4 - Choral Reading
5 - Echo Reading
6 - Bluetooth Reading
Respond to Text- Discussion Questions

2. RSVP E: Sentence Syntax Task
Cite a complex sentence and analyze and clarify.

3. RSVP E: Vocabulary Task
Select a key word and write a text dependent question.

4. RSVP E: Purpose Task
Cite the text to show evidence of author's purpose or point of view.

5. RSVP E: Expressive Task
Write a paragraph paraphrasing the selected text excerpt as evidence of deep understanding
**RSVP E: Close Reading-Narrative**

**Writing Text-dependent Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excerpt: The Other Side of Reading-Joe Wayman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. **RSVP E: Reading Task!**

2. **RSVP E: Sentence Syntax Task**

3. **RSVP E: Vocabulary Task**

4. **RSVP E: Purpose Task**

5. **RSVP E: Expressive Task**
A Guide to Creating Text Dependent Questions for Close Analytic Reading

Text Dependent Questions: What Are They?
The Common Core State Standards for reading strongly focus on students gathering evidence, knowledge, and insight from what they read. Indeed, eighty to ninety percent of the Reading Standards in each grade require text dependent analysis; accordingly, aligned curriculum materials should have a similar percentage of text dependent questions.

As the name suggests, a text dependent question specifically asks a question that can only be answered by referring explicitly back to the text being read. It does not rely on any particular background information extraneous to the text nor depend on students having other experiences or knowledge; instead it privileges the text itself and what students can extract from what is before them.

For example, in a close analytic reading of Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address,” the following would not be text dependent questions:

• Why did the North fight the civil war?
• Have you ever been to a funeral or gravesite?
• Lincoln says that the nation is dedicated to the proposition that “all men are created equal.” Why is equality an important value to promote?

The overarching problem with these questions is that they require no familiarity at all with Lincoln’s speech in order to answer them. Responding to these sorts of questions instead requires students to go outside the text. Such questions can be tempting to ask because they are likely to get students talking, but they take students away from considering the actual point Lincoln is making. They seek to elicit a personal or general response that relies on individual experience and opinion, and answering them will not move students closer to understanding the text of the “Gettysburg Address.”
Good text dependent questions will often linger over specific phrases and sentences to ensure careful comprehension of the text—they help students see something worthwhile that they would not have seen on a more cursory reading. Typical text dependent questions ask students to perform one or more of 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 when they do
- Note and assess patterns of writing and what they achieve
- Consider what the text leaves uncertain or unstated

Creating Text-Dependent Questions for Close Analytic Reading of Texts

An effective set of text dependent questions delves systematically into a text to guide students in extracting the key meanings or ideas found there. They typically begin by exploring specific words, details, and arguments and then moves on to examine the impact of those specifics on the text as a whole. Along the way they target academic vocabulary and specific sentence structures as critical focus points for gaining comprehension.

While there is no set process for generating a complete and coherent body of text dependent questions for a text, the following process is a good guide that can serve to generate a core series of questions for close reading of any given text.
Step One: Identify the Core Understandings and Key Ideas of the Text

As in any good reverse engineering or “backwards design” process, teachers should start by identifying the key insights they want students to understand from the text—keeping one eye on the major points being made is crucial for fashioning an overarching set of successful questions and critical for creating an appropriate culminating assignment.

Step Two: Start Small to Build Confidence

The opening questions should be ones that help orientate students to the text and be sufficiently specific enough for them to answer so that they gain confidence to tackle more difficult questions later on.

Step Three: Target Vocabulary and Text Structure

Locate key text structures and the most powerful academic words in the text that are connected to the key ideas and understandings, and craft questions that illuminate these connections.

Step Four: Tackle Tough Sections Head-on

Find the sections of the text that will present the greatest difficulty and craft questions that support students in mastering these sections (these could be sections with difficult syntax, particularly dense information, and tricky transitions or places that offer a variety of possible inferences).

Step Five: Create Coherent Sequences of Text Dependent Questions

The sequence of questions should not be random but should build toward more coherent understanding and analysis to ensure that students learn to stay focused on the text to bring them to a gradual understanding of its meaning.

Step Six: Identify the Standards That Are Being Addressed

Take stock of what standards are being addressed in the series of questions and decide if any other standards are suited to being a focus for this text (forming additional questions that exercise those standards)

Step Seven: Create the Culminating Assessment

Develop a culminating activity around the key ideas or understandings identified earlier that reflects (a) mastery of one or more of the standards, (b) involves writing, and (c) is structured to be completed by students independently.
How Close Reading Increases Student Access into Complex Text As Expected in the ELA Common Core State Standards
Thommie Piercy, Ph.D. 09/08/2011

The ELA Common Core State Standards provide enormous opportunities for all students while creating challenges for instruction. With Standard 10 establishing the high expectation that all students read and understand complex text, the key word receiving much attention is, “all.” Yes, the expectation is for every student to independently read complex texts with understanding from Grade 2 through Grade 11 and into College and Careers. Currently, the most frequently asked questions revolve around Standard 10. These questions include, “How can I provide instruction to support my students' capacity to read complex text?” Also, “Specifically, how can I support my students, who entered my classroom not reading on their enrolled grade level, to read such difficult texts in my content area, (including History/Social Studies, Science/Technical Subjects, Mathematics, and English Language Arts?)”

In addition to providing student access to complex text by providing text-dependent, discipline-specific questions, as described in an earlier blog, guiding students to improve their close reading of text increases their understanding of complex text. Questions which focus directly on the text require students to practice close reading.

**What is Close Reading?**

Close Reading is keeping your eyes on the text to read the content very carefully, paying attention to details. Being quite different from a summary or the big idea, close reading requires active thinking and analyzing of the content to make decisions. You can see how text-dependent, discipline-specific questions support the need for students’ to incorporate close reading of their text because they must cite evidence directly from the text. This is a skill that will remain one of the students’ most practical literacy skills throughout their college and careers. Few disciplines do not benefit from students’ close reading to achieve understanding. The majority of career paths depend on close reading to remain current in the particular field. For this reason, close reading is a skill that supports students’ comprehension in different disciplines. Elementary, Middle, and High School students benefit from the close reading of complex texts in different content areas.
**Close Reading - Text Dependent Questions**

**How Close? How Dependent?**

“RSVP E”: Respondez, s’il vous plait Express!

- **R Reading Task**
- **S Structure Task**
- **V Vocabulary Task**
- **P Purpose Task**
- **E Expressive Task**

**R Reading Task** – Read silently; teacher reads; read along with teacher; reread for fluency and meaning

**S Structure Task** - Unpack difficult sentences; talk about compound, complex, confusing sentences

**V Vocabulary Task** - Teach explicitly; note context clues; linger over for deeper meaning; word choice

**P Purpose Task** - Determine source, author purpose, point of view, tone and tenor, validity and credibility

**E Expressive Task** - Reread for evidence; discuss; paraphrase in writing; explain for clarity, write to know
What is Close Reading?

Close Reading is keeping your eyes on the text to read the content very carefully, paying attention to details. Being quite different from a summary or the big idea, close reading requires active thinking and analyzing of the content to make decisions. You can see how text-dependent, discipline-specific questions support the need for students’ to incorporate close reading of their text because they must cite evidence directly from the text. This is a skill that will remain one of the students’ most practical literacy skills throughout their college and careers. Few disciplines do not benefit from students’ close reading to achieve understanding. The majority of career paths depend on close reading to remain current in the particular field. For this reason, close reading is a skill that supports students’ comprehension in different disciplines. Elementary, Middle, and High School students benefit from the close reading of complex texts in different content areas.

Exercises for Explicit Teaching of Close Reading

R Reading Task - Read silently; teacher reads; reread for fluency and meaning

Select at least two reading strategies for the text on Close Reading:
Independent Reading, Read-Aloud, Buddy Reading, Echo Reading, Choral Reading, Round Robin Reading, Reader’s Theater, Taped Read-Along, Blue-tooth Reading

S Structure Task - Unpack difficult sentences; ID compound, complex sentences

Find evidence in the text on close reading that explains what “keeping your eyes on the text” means? Isn’t that the only way to read? What kind of decisions do readers make?

V Vocabulary Task - Teach explicitly; note context clues; linger over for deeper meaning

Why did the author choose the words: “career paths”? What are “test-dependent questions”? Give one new example using this paragraph on close reading.

P Purpose Task - Determine source, author purpose, point of view, credibility.

What is the author’s motivation and intent for writing about close reading? Justify.

Expressive Task - Reread for evidence; discuss; paraphrase; write for clarity

Explain how the author contrasts close reading to a summary or big idea? Paraphrase your understanding of close reading.
Common Core State Standards: Vocabulary in Three Tiers

- **Tier One Words: Everyday Words**
  
  *Words used in speech* usually learned in the early grades, albeit not at the same rate by all children. They are not considered a challenge to the average native speaker, though English language learners of any age will have to attend carefully to them. While Tier One words are important, they are not the focus of this discussion.

- **Tier Two Words: General Academic Word**
  
  *Words far more likely to appear in written texts than in speech.* They appear in all sorts of texts: informational texts (words such as relative, vary, formulate, specificity, and accumulate), technical texts (calibrate, itemize, periphery), and literary texts (misfortune, dignified, faltered, unabashedly). Tier Two words often represent subtle or precise ways to say relatively simple things—saunter instead of walk, for example. Because Tier Two words are found across many types of texts, they are highly generalizable.

- **Tier Three Words: Domain - Specific Words**
  
  *Words specific to a domain or field of study* (lava, carburetor, legislature, circumference, aorta) and key to understanding a new concept within a text. Because of their specificity and close ties to content knowledge, Tier Three words are far more common in informational texts than in literature. Recognized as new and “hard” words for most readers (particularly student readers), they are often explicitly defined by the author of a text, repeatedly used, and otherwise heavily scaffolded (e.g., made a part of a glossary).
**Science Text Excerpt - 7th Grade**

Photosynthesis is the chemical change that produces food. In photosynthesis, carbon dioxide gas and water are combined to produce sugar and oxygen. The sugar may be changed to starch. Sunlight is necessary for photosynthesis. It supplies the energy for chemical change. This energy becomes locked in the sugar and starch molecules that are produced.

Becoming a Nation of Readers-1984

**R-S-V-P-E**

- Reading Task
- Syntax Task
- Vocabulary Task
- Purpose Task
- Expressive Task

**1. RSVP E: Reading Task!**
1. Independent
2. Teacher-Led
3. Buddy Reading
4. Choral Reading
5. Echo Reading
6. Bluetooth Reading

Respond to Text - Discussion Questions

**2. RSVP E: Sentence Syntax Task**
Cite a complex sentence for students to analyze in some way.

**3. RSVP E: Vocabulary Task**
Select a key word and write a text dependent question for students.

**4. RSVP E: Purpose Task**
Ask students to show evidence from the text of author’s purpose or point of view.

**5. RSVP E: Expressive Task**
Require students to write a paragraph, paraphrasing the selected text excerpt as evidence of deep understanding or ask them to compare and contrast two parts etc.
### RSVP E: Close Reading-Informative Text

**Writing Text-dependent Tasks for Close Reading**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Excerpt:</strong> Photosynthesis-Becoming a Nation of Readers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>RSVP E:</strong> Reading Task!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>RSVP E:</strong> Sentence Syntax Task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>RSVP E:</strong> Vocabulary Task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>RSVP E:</strong> Purpose Task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <strong>RSVP E:</strong> Expressive Task</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>