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Fitting it All In: “Finding Time” for Close Readings

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When “Common Core” became part of our educational vernacular, so too did “close reading.” Close reading is a topic we have written about frequently on this blog (we currently have 93 posts tagged “close read!”). Close reading is on the forefront of the educational conscience, as evidenced by the onslaught of new professional books with “close reading” in the title or subtitle. When unpacking the standards, it becomes clear that reading closely and carefully is a skill intrinsic to the Common Core Standards, but what does “close reading” really mean?

In our post, [Defining Close Reads](#), we note that close reading is a verb that means “rereading for the purpose of recognizing details and nuances of text that may go unnoticed during a cursory first read so that new understandings may reveal themselves.” Several readers weighed in to round out this definition by suggesting that we add ideas, such as “intentionality,” to our definition as it requires returning to the text with a purpose that allows readers to explore and discover new ideas. As the definitions of close reading evolve, we feel like it merits this question: How does close reading fit into our literacy block?

When we think about planning for a literacy block, our thoughts turn first to our students and their needs as learners. We ask, *As readers and writers, what do they need to work on?* Next we ask, *How will we teach them this?* As we think about this, we consider which instructional structure would best address the perceived need. *Should we read something aloud? Would it be more potent if we planned to do a shared reading? Would this need be best served in guided reading or in a strategy group?* However, since close reading has entered the literacy arena, teachers are thinking more and more that close reading, like read aloud and shared and guided reading and strategy groups and mini lessons, is a teaching structure. We don’t see it that way.

To us, close reading is reader action which involves the synthesis of a host of comprehension strategies, hence it is relevant in any teaching context. Because close reading is performed by the reader, it can be practiced within the context of all teaching structures. When we read aloud, we can reread and ask students to cite evidence and elaborate their thinking in ways that lead to new ideas about text. When students work with texts during guided reading, we can ask questions or lead discussions that require that students return to the story to carefully reread in ways that help them notice details that they didn’t see the first time around. If you have found yourself overwhelmed by close reading, wondering how you will fit yet one more thing into your already busy teaching day, fear not. Close reading can and should be gracefully woven into the fabric of all of the things we already do, offering many opportunities to habituate new ways of thinking about text.