



3

Access Point Two

Close and Scaffolded Reading Instruction

Middle school English teacher Armando Perez invites his students to read a short story called “Eleven” by Sandra Cisneros (1991). He points out to them that they are still exploring the inner lives of characters and considering how those lives compare to their outward lives—the ones that others can see. The students read the text independently, making notes as they go. Fernando underlines several sections in the text and circles two. Following their independent reading, Mr. Perez reads the text aloud to students, pausing to think aloud in the three places that seemed to have caused them confusion. He is able to pinpoint these particular sections of the text because he walked around the classroom observing his students as they made their annotations. He could thus target his modeling on these areas of confusion.

At one point, he pauses his read-aloud and says,

They have a lot of years and numbers in this text, but this says that the sweater is maybe 1,000 years old. I’m

having a hard time believing that. I'm thinking that if it really were 1,000 years old, it would be in a museum. I'm thinking that this is an example of hyperbole that is being used to make a point.

Following his modeling, Mr. Perez asks his students to talk about a couple of questions, including "How is age like an onion, at least according to the author?" and "Why does she start crying when she has to wear the sweater?" The students talk with each other about these questions, often referring back to the text to locate specific information that they want to use in their responses.

Next, Mr. Perez asks students to talk with their team about Rachel's inner life, saying, "From what the author tells us, what can we surmise is going on inside Rachel's head when her teacher says that the sweater has to belong to someone?" The students focus on the words that the character Rachel uses to describe herself, such as "skinny," and on how the author refers to her "little voice." Jeremy says, "I don't think that Rachel has confidence because she stumbles on her answer to the teacher, and then it says that she's feeling like she is three again."

Mr. Perez continues inviting students to provide their arguments, with evidence, as they reread the text looking for examples. They talk with their groups often, and periodically are invited to share with the whole class. After having read the text at least four times, Mr. Perez asks his students to use their annotations to describe the inner life of one of the characters in the short story. He says, "You might select Rachel, but alternatively you could select Mrs. Price or Sylvia or even Phyllis. Just remember to describe the character's inner life using evidence provided from the text." As the students get to work, Mr. Perez meets with several who have struggled with tasks like this in the past, making sure that they are starting on the right track.

There are many different ways to engage students in reading. There are instructional routines that require extensive teacher support, such as shared readings, which are described in the previous chapters, and instructional routines that require extensive peer support, such as reciprocal teaching or literature circles, which are included in the next chapter. The Common Core State Standards have drawn increased attention to an instructional routine called *close reading*, known in some circles as *analytic reading*.

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Figure 3.1 Comparing Close and Scaffolded Reading Instruction

	Close Reading Instruction	Scaffolded Reading Instruction
Grouping	Large or small group; heterogeneous	Small, needs-based; homogeneous
Text Difficulty	Challenging, complex grade-level texts	Challenging but tailored to the instructional needs of the group
Teacher Supports	Text-dependent questions; annotation; repeated readings	Questions to check for understanding, prompts for cognitive or metacognitive work, cues to shift attention, and direct explanations as needed
Purpose	Expose students to content that stretches their thinking and reading skills	Advance student reading skill levels; practice comprehension strategies; uncover and address errors and misconceptions

In addition, scaffolded reading instruction in small groups is useful in providing students access to complex texts. A comparison between close and scaffolded instruction can be found in Figure 3.1.

► Accessing Complex Text Requires Close Reading

Close reading is not a new instructional routine; in fact, it has existed for many decades as the practice of reading a text for a level of detail not typically sought after in everyday reading (Richards, 1929). Close readings should be done with texts that are worthy and that are complex enough to warrant repeated reading and detailed investigation. As Newkirk (2010) noted, not all texts demand this level of attention. But some texts do.

In those cases, the reader has to develop a fairly sophisticated understanding of what the author actually said. A problem, as described by advocates for close reading, is that students are often encouraged to answer questions that take them away from the reading prematurely and lead them to thinking about their own experiences. Instead, as Rosenblatt (1938/1995)

Video 3.1



Close reading with sixth-grade English language learners.
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recommended, there must be a transaction between the reader and the text. Readers should develop an understanding of the author’s words and bring their own experiences, beliefs, and ideas to bear on the text. In her words, “The reader must remain faithful to the author’s text and must be alert to the potential clues concerning character and motive” (p. 11). Rosenblatt cautioned that readers might ignore elements in a text and fail to realize that they are “imputing to the author views unjustified by the text” (p. 11).

If students already knew how to do this, we would not be spending time focused on close reading. The problem is that students do not arrive already knowing how to interrogate a text and dig down into its deeper meaning. Teachers have to teach students how to do this, in both informational and literary texts. In other words, close readings are not exclusively for English teachers; close readings should be conducted in any class in which complex texts play a role, whether in science, social studies, auto mechanics, art, or physical education. Whatever the content may be, close readings of that content will always require the teacher to keep several important considerations in mind: the length of the selected text, the amount of time allocated for students to reread the text, the need to limit the frontloading of information when introducing the text, and the goal of having students annotate the text, ask text-dependent questions, and engage in text-dependent after-reading activities.

In the following section, we will describe in detail six close reading practices that guide students’ understanding of complex texts:

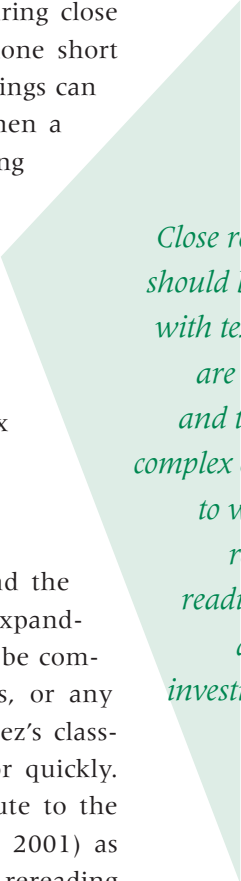
1. Short, worthy passages
2. Students rereading
3. Limited frontloading
4. Text-dependent questions
5. Annotation
6. After-reading tasks

Short, Worthy Passages

Because close readings can be time consuming, it is often best to select shorter pieces of text for instruction. These selections, typically between three and nine paragraphs in length, allow students to practice the analytic skills required of sophisticated readers. Longer, extended texts are also used to encourage



students to practice the skills that they have been taught during close readings. Close reading instruction is not limited to stand-alone short texts such as news articles, poems, or short stories. Close readings can be done with short passages from longer texts, especially when a section is especially challenging and is pivotal for understanding the larger message of the text. Of course, this requires that the teacher analyze the text for its complexity and determine which parts require close reading. Close reading is predicated of the notion that the text is well known to the teacher and deeply understood. This can be challenging for teachers of younger students, who might be tempted to view these passages rather simply and not mine them for their more complex elements.



Close readings should be done with texts that are worthy and that are complex enough to warrant repeated reading and detailed investigation.

Students' Rereading

As part of a close reading, students must read and reread the selected text several times. This requires that students have expanding purposes for each repeated reading. These rereadings can be completed independently, with peers, with teacher think-alouds, or any combination thereof. As noted in the example from Mr. Perez's classroom, complex texts do not give up their meaning easily or quickly. In addition to improving fluency, repeated readings contribute to the comprehension and retention of information (Millis & King, 2001) as well as enjoyment (Faust & Glenzer, 2000). The practice of rereading carries into adult life, as noted by Smith (2000), who found that to be one of the most common strategies adults use to understand text. Of course, there are a number of ways to facilitate students' rereading of the same text. Unfortunately, most readers do not like to reread things a second or third time unless there is a specific reason for doing so. During close readings, the purpose for each reading is made clear, and often, those purposes are related to looking for evidence in response to a specific question. Importantly, rereading also reduces the need for extensive frontloading.

Limited Frontloading

When students read a piece of text only one time, the teacher has to do a lot of work to ensure their understanding. In other words, the teacher is doing the heavy lifting. When students read and reread a text multiple

Video 3.2



Students rereading and discussing a complex text in high school English.
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times and talk about the text with their peers, the teacher does not have to provide as much instructional support. The rereading, discussions, and text-dependent questions do some of this. During close readings, the teacher does not provide much in the way of pre-teaching or frontloading of content. The structure of the lesson itself is the scaffolding that was once delivered through frontloading.

As with inquiry, the goal of close reading is for students themselves to figure out what is confusing and to identify resources they can use to address their confusions. It is essential that they develop the metacognition needed to understand difficult texts. As with inquiry approach education (e.g., Donovan & Bransford, 2005), close reading is in part about discovering—in this case, discovering what the author meant and how to come to terms with the ideas in the text. For example, students were introduced to George Washington’s “Farewell Address” in their humanities class. Consistent with a close reading approach, students read and discussed this text several times, over several days, to fully develop their understanding of the text and what role it played, and continues to play, in history. Had their teacher provided a great deal of information in advance of this reading, students might have skipped the reading entirely and focused on what the teacher said.

Revealing the content of the reading in advance is different from stating the *purpose*. Purpose statements focus on the reasons for reading but do not provide the students with all the information about the reading. In the first lesson, the purpose was for students to identify Washington’s reasons for leaving office after his first term as president. However, he withheld the details of the content of the passage itself. In addition, had the teacher told students what to think about the text (a common problem with extensive pre-teaching), the investigative aspect would have been lost, and students would not have developed the thinking skills that they needed when encountering complex texts on their own. Through multiple readings, students were eventually able to identify the influential nature of the document on the Federalist Party development.

Close reading does not apply solely to informational texts. Consider the difference in the amount of student learning that would likely occur in following two scenarios: first, in a situation where students are told about the author’s life, his reason for writing, and the historical significance of a sonnet such as “The Long Love” by Sir Thomas Wyatt; second, in a case where students are given a chance to encounter the text and

Video 3.3



Close reading of historical information.
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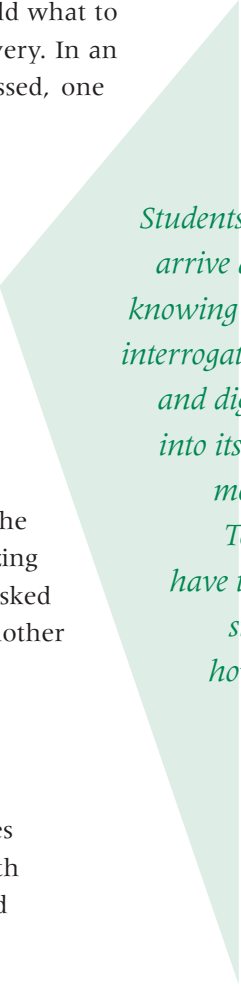
struggle with the meaning. In the former, students are often told what to think, whereas in the latter, students are guided in their discovery. In an eleventh-grade British literature class, as this poem was discussed, one student said to another,

The lines in this poem that stand out to me are “And in mine heart doth keep his residence,” and “And therein campeth, spreading his banner.” These lines stand out to me because they both are examples of how Wyatt uses love as a person, not just a feeling. Using the word “his” to refer to love as someone that is within him. It’s like he’s possessed with love.

Later in their discussion, the students were asked to consider the extended metaphors in the poem. They had experience analyzing the metaphors in the text, understood what they were being tasked with, and were able to apply this knowledge to the poem. Another student responded,

The major metaphor of the poem, I feel, is consistent because Wyatt talks about love as a thing living within him, within his heart and throughout the poem that does not change. At the end he even says, “But in the field with him to live or die?” Wyatt refers to love as his master and will follow him into the field.

The archaic language of the poem made this more complex, and it would have been tempting to teach students about the meaning of the poem in advance of their readings. But by allowing students to wrestle with, and ultimately discover, that the poet was writing about the all-consuming power of romantic love to turn a life upside down, these students were able to locate the poem’s meaning for themselves. Grounded in the text, they are now ready to extend their thinking about connections to themes in literature and in their own experiences. Too much frontloading, in this case, might have prevented this learning. However, the students didn’t come to these understandings simply through rereadings and through their teacher’s practice of limited frontloading. Their teacher relied on text-dependent



Students do not arrive already knowing how to interrogate a text and dig down into its deeper meaning. Teachers have to teach students how to do this.

Video 3.4



Close reading and text-dependent questions in upper elementary school.
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Close readings are not exclusively for English teachers; close readings should be conducted in any class in which complex texts play a role.

questions to provide students with expanding purposes for rereading, and to guide their thinking.

Text-Dependent Questions

As part of every close reading, students should respond to text-dependent questions that require them to provide evidence from the text rather than solely from their own experiences. For example, if a British literature teacher asked students the personal question, “Have you ever been in love?” he would have derailed the class discussion before it even began. Most of us can imagine the chaos that would have ensued as a roomful of 17-year-olds gleefully chomped down on this question. However, a commitment to fully understanding the text will still lead students to find answers to these sorts of questions as they begin to see themselves and the world within the words of another (you couldn’t prevent them from making these connections even if you tried!).

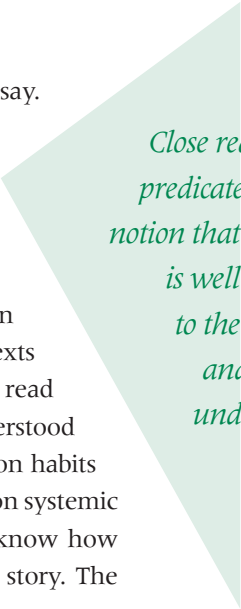
The types of questions students are asked influence how they read a text. If students are asked only recall and recitation questions, they learn to read for that type of information. If they are asked questions that require them to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate, they learn to read more closely and actively engage with the text. Unfortunately, many of the questions that students are asked are about personal connections, which may not even require them to have read the text at all. The architects of the Common Core State Standards in English language arts are challenging the practice of asking students questions that can be answered without reading the text. Instead, they are pressing for questions that require students to locate evidence within the text. These text-dependent questions require a careful reading of the text such that students can produce evidence in their verbal or written responses. This is not to say that personal connections should be avoided at all costs. After all, readers naturally compare the information they are reading with their experiences. However, the argument for text-dependent questions asserts that discussions (and writing prompts) should focus on the text itself to build a strong foundation of knowledge. This purposefully built foundational knowledge can then be leveraged by learners to formulate opinions and make connections that are meaningful and informed.

As an example, consider the following two questions a teacher *could* ask of her students who have been studying an essay from *Last Call at the Oasis* (Weber, 2012) titled “A Way Forward? The Soft Path for Water” by Peter Gleick:

- Has your family made any changes to reduce water consumption?
- What are the differences between soft and hard paths to water management?

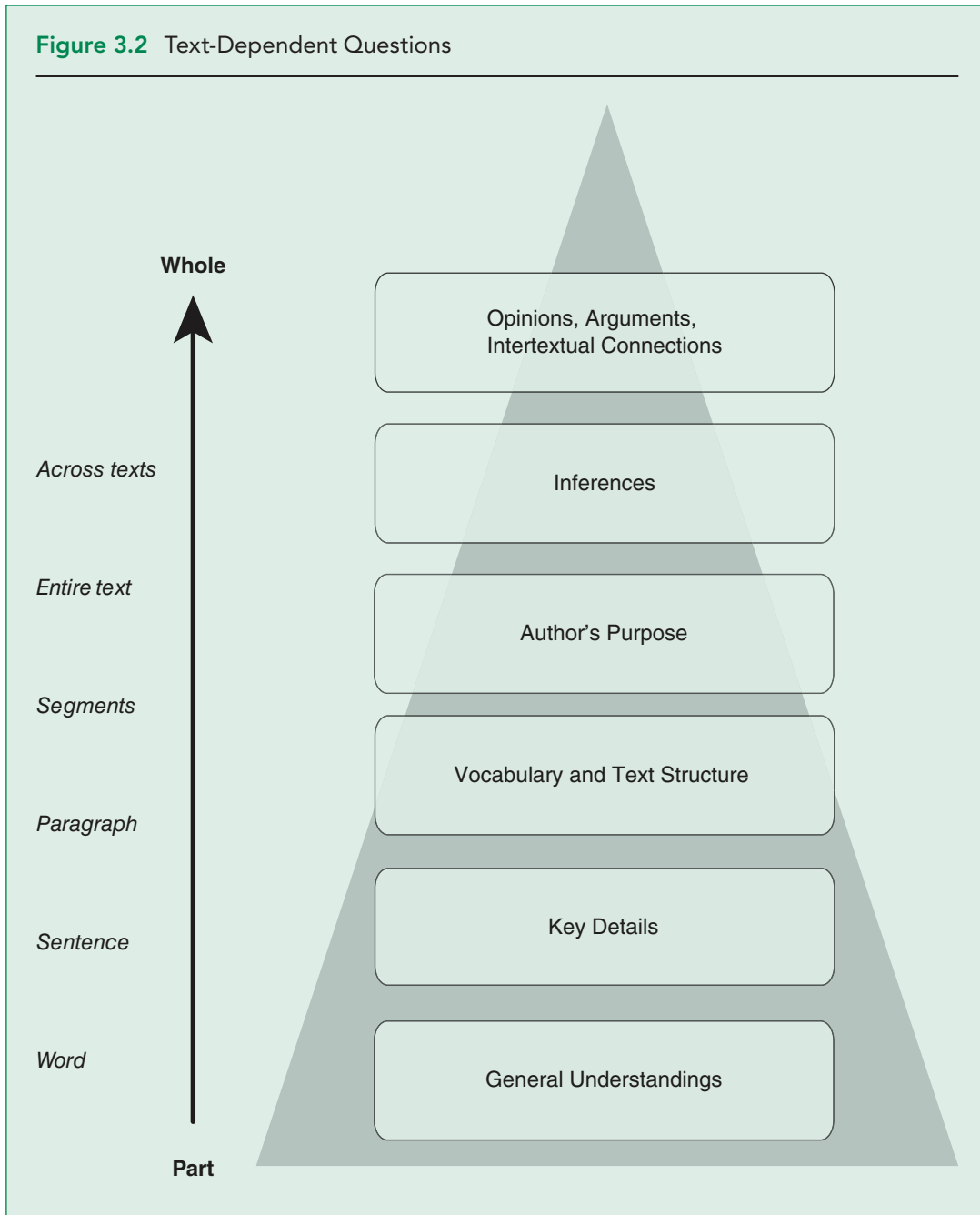
The first question can be answered without ever reading the essay. A conversation about the first question may be very animated and interesting, but it does not require that the students develop any level of understanding of the information presented by the author. If you were to observe this lesson, you might witness significant student engagement in a class discussion about the first question. But consider whether the actual text factored into the discussion or remained sitting on their desks unused. Accessing complex texts doesn't mean simply having them nearby—readers actually have to read them. Asking questions that require students to have read and understood the text is crucial. The first question about family water consumption habits is actually irrelevant within the context of this essay, which focuses on systemic water conservation methods. It is important that as teachers we know how to engage students, beyond simply asking them to tell a personal story. The content itself can and should be used to engage.

There are several ways to structure questions such that students return to the text to find evidence for their responses. We caution that these questions should not focus solely on recall. The emphasis should be on getting students to use explicit and implicit information from the text to support their reasoning. There are at least six categories of text-dependent questions that can be drawn from and structured into a progression that will move students from understanding explicit meaning to understanding implicit meaning, and from working at the sentence level to working across an entire text and even with multiple texts. As well, some of these question types may not be suitable for a particular reading; there is no requirement that all of these types need to be used with every piece of text. Figure 3.2 contains a graphic of these questions. Further, as students discuss a given text, they will likely cover many of the questions that could have been asked. When they do so, the teacher does not need to ask a prepared question. We like to think of the prepared text-dependent questions as a resource that the teacher has to scaffold students' understanding and hope that much of the classroom conversation addresses the content of the question. The question samples below are based on the water essay referenced above. Examples of text-dependent questions for texts at the elementary grade levels can be found in Figure 3.3.



Close reading is predicated of the notion that the text is well known to the teacher and deeply understood.

Figure 3.2 Text-Dependent Questions



Source: Fisher and Frey (2013b). Used with permission. From *Common Core English Language Arts in a PLC at Work* by Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey. Copyright 2013 by Solution Tree Press, 555 North Morton Street, Bloomington, IN 47407, 800.733.6786, solution-tree.com. All rights reserved.

Figure 3.3 Sample Text-Dependent Questions

Question Type	Questions From <i>Frog and Toad Together</i> (Lobel, 1971) in First Grade	Questions From Chapter 10 in <i>A Night to Remember</i> (Lord, 1955) in Sixth Grade
General Understandings	Retell the story using <i>first, next, then, and finally</i> .	Why would the author title the chapter "Go Away"?
Key Details	What ways did they try to solve the problem of eating too many cookies?	What are two things that could have prevented this tragedy?
Vocabulary and Text Structure	How did the author help us to understand what <i>willpower</i> means?	How does the chronological structure help the reader understand the events?
Author's Purpose	Who tells the story?	Whose story is most represented and whose story is underrepresented?
Inferences	Do you think Toad's actions caused the seeds to grow? Why?	Why would Mrs. Brown run lifeboat number 6 with a revolver?
Opinions, Arguments, Intertextual Connections	In your opinion, is Frog a good friend to Toad? Do you think this is a happy story or a sad one?	Compare this book with <i>Inside the Titanic</i> (Brewster & Marschall, 1997). What are the similarities and differences?

Source: Fisher and Frey (2012a).

Most readers do not like to reread things a second or third time unless there is a specific reason for doing so.

General Understandings

These questions get at the gist of the text. What does the author want us to know or understand from the text? Often, these questions focus on the main claim and the evidence used to support the claim or the arc of the story or the sequence of information. For the water essay, the teacher might ask,

“Which is the water path recommended by Gleick?”

Interestingly, this question is not directly addressed in the essay, and students will have to find clues from across the text to figure out his main claim. Alternatively, the teacher might direct students in this way:

“Discuss the ages of water and why Gleick believes we are headed into the third age.”

As implied in the structure of this directive, text-dependent work does not need to take place solely in a whole-class setting. Students can be encouraged to discuss their thinking with their peers. This particular exercise will lead students to a more clear-cut answer, but the act of engaging in the discussion is central to getting them to understand the essay and the key point that the author is trying to make.

Key Details

These questions focus on asking students about the important details that the author uses to inform the reader. Often these questions include who, what, where, when, why, or how in the stem. They can also include reference to the more nuanced details that must be understood to add clarity to the reading. For example, the following question is key to understanding Gleick’s perspective:

“What is the difference between water and water services?”

The teacher might also ask this:

“What is one method Gleick identifies for reducing water consumption?”

Key detail questions tend to focus on information presented directly in the text. Importantly, understanding this information should be critical to understanding the text; key detail questions should not focus simply on trivia. As well, these key details should be used to scaffold students' understanding as they respond to more complex questions.

Vocabulary and Text Structure

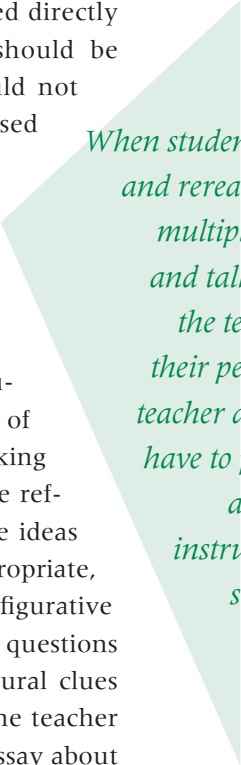
Some of the questions that students must consider revolve around the vocabulary used by the author, as well as the structure of the text itself. Text structure questions require that students consider the organization of the reading, such as the use of problem/solution or character dialogue to propel action. In asking questions related to vocabulary, teachers must be sure to make reference to both denotations (definitions) and connotations (the ideas or feelings that a word invokes) of words. In addition, as appropriate, the questions may focus on shades of meaning, word choice, figurative language, idioms, and confusing words or phrases. Finally, questions can provide students an opportunity to use context or structural clues to determine the meaning of unknown words. For example, the teacher might ask students about the three key ideas discussed in the essay about water:

“After reading this essay, how would you summarize the differences between productivity, efficiency, and supply?”

Alternatively, the teacher might ask students to determine the meaning of the word *ozonation* from the context clues or to discuss why the author chose the word emerged when talking about *Homo sapiens* over time. In addition, the teacher might ask students to comment on the structure of the essay and to note the differences between the parts in terms of tone and structure. Attentive students would notice those sections of the text with significant descriptions, with a reliance on problem/solution structures, and with a persuasive tone.

Author's Purpose

The genre of the text and the use of narration help students make sense of what they are reading. On the flip side, understanding the overall purpose of the text guides students in following the flow of the reading. Readers



When students read and reread a text multiple times and talk about the text with their peers, the teacher does not have to provide as much instructional support.

should understand if the text is meant to inform, entertain, persuade, or explain something to them. There are also situations in which the text has a specific bias or provides only part of the story. In these situations, students could be asked about the perspectives not explored in the text. For the water essay, some examples of questions related to the author’s purpose are as follows:

“How does Gleick attempt to convince readers that water is a worthy issue of discussion?”

“What is Gleick’s purpose in writing this? Is he trying to inform, entertain, or persuade? How do you know?”

“Is Gleick biased? What is your evidence?”

“Does Gleick acknowledge other perspectives? If so, what is the effect? If not, how does that influence your reaction to the piece?”

Inferences

Some of the questions that students need to think about require that they understand how the parts of a text build to a whole. Unlike the cognitive processes associated with inference at the local level, these inferences require students to consider the piece as a whole. They probe each argument in persuasive text, each idea in informational text, or each key detail in literary text, and anchor them to the central themes of the piece. Importantly, inference questions require that students have read the entire selection so that they know where the text is going and how they can reconsider key points in the text as contributing elements of the whole. In the Gleick essay, students might be asked questions like these:

“How does the information at the start of the essay, about the U.S. using less water today compared with 30 years ago, help Gleick make his argument for the third age of water?”

“How does Gleick use the six differences between hard and soft paths to build the case for water services?”

Opinions, Arguments, and Intertextual Connections

The final category of text-dependent questions should be used sparingly, and typically comes after students have read, and reread, a text several

Close reading is in part about discovering—in this case, discovering what the author meant and how to come to terms with the ideas in the text.

times to fully develop their understanding. Readers should have opinions about what they read, and they should be able to argue their perspective using evidence from the text and other texts, experiences, and beliefs that they hold. For example, while reading about water, the teacher might ask questions like these:

“Did Gleick make a convincing argument about the ages of water?”

“Is there sufficient evidence presented that a soft path is the appropriate direction?”

“How do Gleick’s recommendations compare with those presented in the essay ‘In Our Lifetime: Deconstructing the Global Water Crisis and Securing Safe Water for All’ by Gary White?” (Weber, 2012)

These questions often result in deep and engaging conversations, especially when students have read and understood the text. Over time and with practice, students will begin asking themselves and their peers these types of questions, and the teacher will not be the only one who poses questions for discussion.

Annotation

In the last chapter, we recommended modeling annotation as a way to teach students how to interact with the text and how to interrupt the passive reading experience that can leave many of them struggling to find the meaning of a complex piece of text. Readers with a passive stance expect that the information will wash over them, and when it does not, they throw in the towel. Marking up the text allows them to witness their own growing understanding, and it encourages them to put into words what they do not yet understand. Annotation occurs first during their first or



Close reading does not apply solely to informational texts.

second pass at the text, but should also continue throughout subsequent discussion framed by text-dependent questions.

For example, in an eighth-grade unit of study on adolescence, humanities teacher Paula Brown used several pieces of text that allowed her students to practice their annotation skills. She had previously modeled annotation with several other pieces of text, print and digital, and felt they were ready to begin using it themselves. As she told her students,

Adolescence is a time when important decisions—some of them life changing—occur. It can be scary to think that some of the choices you make now can last a lifetime. In this unit of investigation, you will explore what a parent, a poet, and a psychologist have to say about making decisions that seem small at the time, but are big in hindsight. The purpose of this unit is to examine adolescent decision-making from three perspectives in order to locate central themes.

As part of this unit, students read and annotated an article titled “Psychologist Explains Teens’ Risky Decision-Making Behavior” (Iowa State University, 2007). For example, a section of Javier’s text was annotated in this way:

Gerrard said that the initial risk-taking experience will influence an adolescent’s intention to repeat the behavior in the future. They do consult their conscience over risk-taking, but not always in a classic “good vs. evil” way.

“From a kid’s perspective, if you’re operating in this more reasoned, thoughtful [experienced] mode—then you have the proverbial devil and the angel over your shoulder,” she said. “If you’re operating in the more experiential [impulsive] mode, you don’t even know the angel is there. Those things are not in your mind at all, and the devil’s only saying, ‘This could be interesting.’” EX

After their first couple of readings through the text, Ms. Brown engaged students in a discussion using text-dependent questions, which encourage them to reread, and to consult their annotations, to deeply comprehend the passage. As part of their discussion, Ms. Brown asked students to consider the following questions, requiring that they provide evidence from the text for their responses.

- **General Understandings:** *What is the main finding of Dr. Gerrard's research?*
- **Key Details:** *What role does image play?*
- **Vocabulary and Text Structure:** *How did you figure out what impulsive and reasoned mean?*
- **Author's Purpose:** *Why is this genre appropriate for the content? Who is the intended audience for this article?*
- **Inferences:** *How can you determine that this is a credible source?*
- **Opinions, Arguments, and Intertextual Connections:** *Let's compare this article to the first reading we did ("Who's Right?"). How does this informational article explain some of the conflict occurring between mother and daughter?*

Throughout the discussion, the teacher reminded her students to mark up their text because “we read with our eyes, our brains, our hearts, and our pencils.” She stated that the action of annotation gives them a sense of ownership and influence over the text and lowers the sense of intimidation that some readers feel when confronted with a difficult reading: “I want you to know that a reading shouldn’t ever boss you around. I want you to see evidence of your growing understanding of the text as we get further into the discussion.”

After-Reading Tasks

Rather than take students away from the text, post-reading activities should require them to return to the text. For example, students may write an argumentative piece in which they use evidence from the text. They may engage in a Socratic Seminar (see page 131) or debate a topic. After-reading tasks should help students consolidate the meaning of texts and deepen their comprehension far beyond what they would be able to accomplish on their own.

Having students create short written summaries of complex texts provides them with an opportunity to solidify their understanding and to develop a catalog of notes for comparing multiple pieces of text in the future. You will recall that Paula Brown’s unit on adolescence included three pieces of text. She noted, “It’s hard for them to make comparisons across documents when they don’t have meaningful notes, so I often have them do

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If students are asked only recall and recitation questions, they learn to read for that type of information.

some précis writing so they'll have useful writing to draw from later in the unit." Following their discussion on the article written by the psychologist, Ms. Brown asked her eighth-grade students to summarize their understanding of the text. She told her students, "Write a short summary of about 100 words that accurately summarizes the article. Be sure to include the name of the researcher and the findings. And remember to use your annotations to guide your writing."

Précis writings are summaries of a text or passage that require students to distill the main points but also involve them in the process of "selecting, rejecting, and paraphrasing ideas" (Bromley, 1985, p. 407). Teaching students how to compose précis writings develops their ability to understand the text more deeply and to learn essential content. These writing tasks do not contain the student's opinions or questions and should not include any information not discussed in the text itself. The students in Ms. Brown's class will later use these précis writings to produce a longer essay in which they address the topic of adolescent decision making from different perspectives.

Close readings are an important component of reading instruction, but they are not the only instructional routine that students need to experience to become successful readers. As literacy educators, you have to ensure that students are engaged in reading texts that are worthy of their time. You also have to ensure that students investigate the text sufficiently to really develop an appropriate level of understanding. Combined with shared, collaborative, and independent readings, close readings provide students the experiences they need to become skilled in analytic reading, a prerequisite for college and career success.

Close Reading for Young Readers

Thus far, the examples we have offered have involved older students, but if you are a primary teacher, you may be thinking, "How could this ever occur with my students?" K–3 students have an especially wide gap between the level of texts they can read on their own and those they can read with some adult support. In other words, they can understand narrative and informational texts that far outstrip their current reading levels. It is for this reason that the list of text exemplars in Appendix B on the Common Core State Standards document contains read-aloud examples for the primary grades. One example is the use of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 1900/2000) in kindergarten. No one would expect five-year-olds to read this book on their own, or even with adult support. Rather, the intention is to expose young

Video 3.5



Close reading in the primary grades.

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students to complex texts that challenge their thinking skills rather than their reading skills. Perhaps we should refer to this as *close listening*, because so much of this is about listening comprehension.

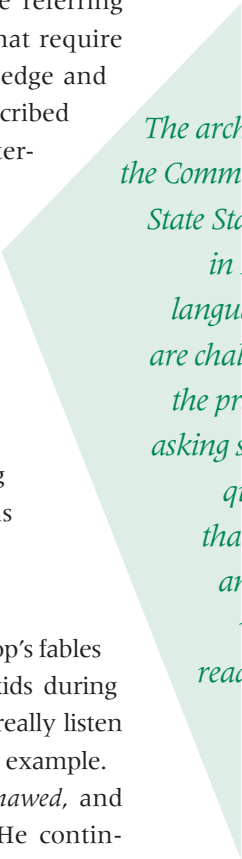
Read-alouds such as this should not be confused with the soothing after-lunch read-alouds teachers sometimes use. Being read aloud to plays an important role in reading for pleasure, and most of us have fond memories even decades later of read-aloud experiences such as this. We do not advocate that this practice be abandoned. However, we do advocate the addition of read-alouds that are designed to develop the critical thinking skills these students will use across their reading lives. We are referring to interactive read-alouds (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004) that require students to actively participate in the co-construction of knowledge and understanding in ways that are similar to the close readings described in the section above. Close listening (reading) lessons use an interactive think-aloud approach that draws from many of the same principles as those used for older students:

- Uses short, worthy readings that are complex due to structure, use of language conventions, levels of meaning, or knowledge demand
- Requires the text to be reread several times throughout the lesson
- Frames discussion and deepens student understanding of the text through the use of text-dependent questions
- Relies on after-listening tasks that require students to draw on knowledge of the text

Kindergarten teacher Mohamed Hassan uses readings from Aesop’s fables to promote close listening. “These short tales are great for my kids during the first few months of school,” he said. “They challenge them to really listen closely to get the details.” He cited “The Lion and the Mouse” as an example.

“The version I use has some tough vocabulary in it, like *gnawed*, and *plight*, and *bound*,” he said. “Great general academic words.” He continued, “So I give them an introduction, really just a reminder about what we already know about how these fables work, so we’re always looking for the moral of the story.” The story is less than 200 words long, and after reading it to them twice, he fosters a discussion using text-based questions:

- **General Understandings:** *What happened? Tell me the story using your own words.*



The architects of the Common Core State Standards in English language arts are challenging the practice of asking students questions that can be answered without reading the text.

- **Key Details:** *How did the lion help the mouse? How did the mouse help the lion?*
- **Vocabulary and Text Structure:** *What does the mouse mean when he says, “Perhaps I might be able to do you a turn one of these days?” (Mr. Hassan said that he rereads the story again to them after posing this question.)*
- **Author’s Purpose:** *What is the moral of the story that Aesop wants us to know?*
- **Inferences:** *Why is the lion so surprised at the idea that a mouse could help him? What does the lion say and do that helps you answer this question?*

Mr. Hassan uses students’ knowledge of the traditional telling of this tale, with its more difficult language structures, to introduce them to a wordless illustrated version of the story. “Sometimes I use an animation video with the sound turned off, and other times there is a print version available. Depends on the story,” he added. In this case, he used Pinkney’s (2009) *The Lion and the Mouse*. “Now they are retelling the story with each other using the illustrations, and it’s amazing to hear them use more sophisticated language in their oral retellings because they know the original version so well,” he said. “That use of oral language skills is so important in getting their reading off the ground.”

While annotation isn’t featured when using read-alouds, it can be a part of a shared reading experience that gives students visual exposure to the text. Poems on chart paper, projected readings, and texts that come in the form of big books all have a role in close reading in primary grade classrooms. Interactive SMART Boards have annotation features that are easily used by students, and low-tech items such as highlighting tape and reusable wax sticks work well in temporarily annotating large print items.

The first half of this chapter has been dedicated to close reading practices that guide students’ understanding of complex texts. A key feature of this type of instruction is the use of text-dependent questions that draw students back into the reading. It’s really the progression of the questions themselves that guides student thinking. But students are also developing their reading skills, and they need experiences with texts that are still complex but may not be as far up the proverbial staircase of complexity

This is not to say that personal connections should be avoided at all costs. After all, readers naturally compare the information they are reading with their experiences.

as the texts that are used in close reading. This needs-based practice, called *scaffolded reading instruction*, relies on questions, prompts, and cues to foster students' cognitive and metacognitive skills.

► Accessing Complex Text Requires Scaffolded Reading Instruction

In scaffolded reading instruction, small groups of students with similar learning needs are grouped together for a short time to receive specific instruction from the teacher using text that will require instruction and support. These materials may include leveled texts for students in the primary grades (K–2) and complex texts, textbooks, or other readings the teacher has gathered for students in grades 3 and beyond. The purpose of scaffolded reading instruction is to deliver customized lessons based on recent assessment information. These assessments may be collected during the scaffolded reading instruction lesson itself or at other times during the day.

Scaffolded reading instruction typically lasts between 10 and 20 minutes, depending on the needs and stamina of the students. Stamina is a legitimate consideration for scaffolded reading instruction because this intensive instructional time may be the most cognitively demanding time of the day for students. In secondary classrooms, where instructional periods are far shorter than the 120 minutes allocated in elementary classrooms for reading instruction, a teacher may meet with only one group each period. However, these meetings are not limited to students who struggle with reading. In fact, all students benefit from this responsive instructional arrangement that allows the teacher to provide scaffolds with precision when needed and to withhold them when they are not necessary.

In the following section, we will describe in more detail the principles and practices and that guide effective scaffolded reading instruction:

- The student, not the teacher, is the reader.
- Small groups help differentiate support.
- Students have similar strengths and needs.
- Grouping patterns change frequently.
- Using questions and providing prompts and cues guide learners.



We will also discuss why *whole-class* scaffolding reading instruction creates difficulties.

The Student, Not the Teacher, Is the Reader

Everything in a scaffolded reading instruction lesson is designed to lead to the student reading the text. Often, this is accomplished through silent reading. The teacher may designate stop points in the text so the group can discuss the reading and clarify misunderstandings. Not surprisingly, this is not realistic with emergent readers who do not read silently, or with early readers who are just beginning to do so. Therefore, it can be tempting to have each student take a turn and publicly read a portion of the text. This practice, called *round robin reading*, is an ineffective and potentially detrimental approach to reading instruction (Optiz & Rasinski, 2008).

Another practice, called *choral reading*, refers to the practice of having students read in unison. Choral reading can be an effective tool for building fluency through repeated readings, especially in reader's theater. It is also an appropriate strategy for dramatic performances such as the recitation of a poem. Its usefulness is limited in scaffolded reading instruction, however, because the purpose here is to provide more individualized support for students. There may be brief passages that lend themselves to choral reading, particularly alliterative sentences or rhyming passages that beg to be heard aloud. That said, the student-reading portion of the scaffolded reading instruction lesson should be devoted to the individual.

There are at least six categories of text-dependent questions that can be drawn from and structured into a progression that will move students from understanding explicit meaning to understanding implicit meaning.

Small Groups Help Differentiate Support

The purpose of holding scaffolded reading instruction groups to no more than six is to ensure that the teacher can provide more direct contact time with each learner. When group sizes grow beyond this number, management demands may take precedence over instruction. In addition, the small size of the group allows the teacher to observe each student up close in the act of learning. Insight into a learner's problem-solving skills can inform future instruction because the teacher gains an understanding of what the students do when they get to a "tricky part."

Although the group should not exceed six, it is acceptable for it to be as small as one student. This is especially true when working with students who struggle with reading. While it may be tempting to place all the lowest-achieving students in one group, it is likely that they require more

individualized instruction than their grade-level peers because their skill profiles are more idiosyncratic. In our experience, normally progressing readers tend to have a great deal in common with one another, whereas those who struggle tend to be unique in their patterns of strength and areas of need.

As we will discuss in the next chapter, the students who are not with the teacher in scaffolded reading instruction can be collaborating with their peers or working independently. Scaffolded reading instruction should not result in hours of independent work for the rest of the class.

Students Have Similar Strengths and Needs

Most commonly, teachers form scaffolded reading instruction groups based on similar literacy strengths and needs, called a *homogeneous group*. This is done for two reasons: practicality and peer support. It is practical because the teaching day simply does not have enough minutes in it to allow for individual instruction for each student. Small-group structures also capitalize on the power of peer influence on learning. Stated another way, students benefit from the questions and insights of their peers in a teacher-directed group.

Grouping Patterns Change Frequently

We have stated that students are grouped based on a number of considerations, especially student strengths and needs. It is also vital to remember that these grouping patterns should not be static. In other words, the scaffolded reading instruction group a child belongs to in September should not be composed of the same classmates in May. It is essential for students to benefit from numerous opportunities to learn with one another; flexible grouping patterns ensure this happens. It is equally critical that students see themselves as contributors to the learning of others; flexible grouping patterns ensure this happens as well. Of course, careful consideration about how students are grouped is only a small part of scaffolded reading instruction. These groups are formed to implement powerful forms of teaching in which questions, prompts, and cues are used to provide students access to complex texts.

Using Questions and Providing Prompts and Cues Guide Learners

Students need experiences with a range of complex texts—not just the ones highlighted for close reading, which are quite complex. During scaffolded reading instruction, teachers provide more support and guidance

Video 3.6



Teacher working
with groups
of students to
facilitate their
understanding.
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Video 3.7



Teacher using prompts and cues to guide learning.

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Gist questions focus on the main claim and the evidence used to support that claim.

than they do during close reading. This requires a teacher who can listen carefully to what students are saying to give them just enough support to let them find the answer. At the heart of scaffolded reading instruction lies the strategic use of questions to check for understanding, prompts to trigger cognitive and metacognitive thinking, and cues as needed to shift attention more overtly (Fisher & Frey, 2010b). In other words, rather than relying on text-dependent questions and repeated reading for the scaffolds—as is the case in close reading—the teacher provides support by attending to the misconceptions and errors that students make. Scaffolded reading instruction also provides students with practice applying comprehension strategies while learning to resolve their confusions.

Questions to Check for Understanding

The subject of questioning is critical to scaffolded reading instruction because questioning is the very core of the instruction. Once students have finished the reading for the lesson, teachers should pose literal and inferential questions to them. Retelling is a query at the *literal* level and is closely associated with comprehension. Teachers should invite students to retell and encourage them to use their books to support their retelling. Readers should return to the text as needed, and this should be considered an acceptable classroom practice. For instance, asking how the Big Bad Wolf disguised himself in *Little Red Riding Hood* is an example of a literal question.

In addition, ask questions that require students to *infer* meaning about the text, such as questions that ask about the main idea, or about the author's purpose for writing the book. An example of an inferential question for the same book is inquiring about why the wolf chose to disguise himself as an old woman and not a young man. Questioning may also probe students' reactions and opinions of the text. Asking a reader about his or her thoughts concerning talking to strangers encourages students to form an opinion and to provide evidence for their responses. Although every question you may ask cannot be anticipated in advance, it is useful to prepare literal and inferential questions to begin meaningful discussion with students.

Scaffolded reading instruction begins when the teacher poses a question to check for understanding. This is not the time to assess students but rather a time to uncover misconceptions or errors. Students should be asked a variety of questions to check their understanding, and teachers should be

Video 3.8



Teacher working with small groups of students to generate questions.

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continually on the lookout for misconceptions and errors.

For example, when Meghan Becovic asked a group of students to explain how they knew if something was living, she wanted to uncover their understanding of the scientific definition of life, a concept they had been reading about. When her students provided her with a number of correct responses, she changed direction asking, “So is evolution a characteristic of life?” When several students nodded positively, she knew that she had uncovered a misconception that she needed to address. There are a number of question types useful

in checking for understanding, such as *clarifying* and *elaboration* questions in which students are encouraged to add details and examples to their answers. When students are asked to clarify or elaborate on their responses, misconceptions, errors, and partial understandings will reveal themselves.

Prompts for Cognitive or Metacognitive Work

When errors or misconceptions are identified, the first step in resolving them is to prompt the student to engage in mental work, either cognitive or metacognitive. Unfortunately, in too many classrooms, when errors are identified, teachers skip the prompts and cues and instead provide the missing information for students. In this case, the student has not done any of the work and likely did not learn anything from the exchange. Teachers can prompt students’ background knowledge and experiences, the rules they have been taught, or the procedures commonly used to solve problems (Figure 3.4 contains a list of common prompts used during scaffolded reading instruction). For example, when Frank Acerno questioned his students about a science article they were reading, he uncovered a misconception about speed versus velocity. In prompting them, he asked, “Remember the animation we watched about driving to school? Velocity and speed have some things in common, but . . .” The students immediately responded with a quote from the animation, “velocity is speed with direction,” and their misconception was resolved.



Key detail questions tend to focus on information presented directly in the text. Understanding this information should be critical to understanding the text; key detail questions should not focus simply on trivia.

Figure 3.4 Types of Prompts

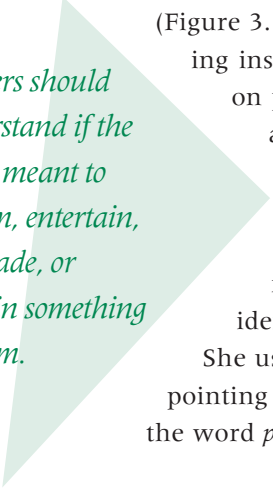
Type of Prompt	Definition/When to Use	Examples
Background knowledge	Used when there is content that the student already knows, has been taught, or has experienced but has temporarily forgotten or is using incorrectly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of a science passage about the water cycle, the teacher asks, "What do you remember about states of matter?" • When reading about a trip to the zoo, the teacher asks, "Remember when we had a field trip to the zoo last month? Do you recall how we felt when it started to rain?"
Process or procedure	Used when established or generally agreed-on rules or guidelines are not being followed and a reminder will help resolve the error or misconception.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student is saying a word incorrectly, and the teacher says, "When two vowels go walking. . . ." • When the student has difficulty starting to develop a writing outline, the teacher says, "I'm thinking about the mnemonic we've used for organizing an explanatory article."
Reflective	Used to encourage students to be metacognitive and to think about their thinking, which can then be used to determine next steps or the solution to a problem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student has just read something incorrectly, and the teacher asks, "Does that make sense? Really think about it." • When the student fails to include evidence in her writing, the teacher asks, "What are we learning today? What was our purpose?"
Heuristic	Used to help learners develop their own way to solve problems. These are informal problem-solving procedures. They do not have to be the same as others' heuristics, but they do need to work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the student has difficulty explaining the relationships between characters in a text, the teacher says, "Maybe drawing a visual representation of the main character's connections to one another will help you." • When a student gets stuck and cannot think of what to write next, the teacher says, "Writers have a lot of different ways for getting unstuck. Some just write whatever comes to mind, others create a visual, others talk it out with a reader, and others take a break and walk around for a few minutes. Will any of those help you?"

Source: Adapted from Fisher and Frey (2013a).

Figure 3.5 Types of Cues

Type of Cue	Definition	Example
Visual	A range of graphic hints that guide students through thinking or understanding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highlighting places on a text where students have made errors• Creating a graphic organizer to arrange content visually• Asking students to take a second look at a graphic or visual from a textbook
Verbal	Variations in speech used to draw attention to something specific or verbal attention getters that focuses students thinking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “This is important . . .”• “This is the tricky part. Be careful and be sure to . . .”• Repeating a student’s statement using a questioning intonation• Changing volume or speed of speech for emphasis
Gestural	Teacher’s body movements or motions used to draw attention to something that has been missed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pointing to the word wall when a student is searching for the right word or the spelling of a word• Making a hand motion that has been taught in advance such as one used to indicate the importance of summarizing or predicting while reading• Placing thumbs around a key idea in a text that the student was missing
Environmental	Using the surroundings, and things in the surroundings, to influence students’ understanding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keeping environmental print current so that students can use it as a reference• Using magnetic letters or other manipulatives to guide student’s thinking• Moving an object or person so that the orientation changes and guides thinking

Source: Adapted from Fisher and Frey (2013a).



Readers should understand if the text is meant to inform, entertain, persuade, or explain something to them.

Cues to Shift Attention

If prompts fail to resolve the error or misconception, teachers can assume a more directive role through the use of cues. Cues should shift students' attention to something they've missed or overlooked (Figure 3.5 contains a list of common cues used during scaffolded reading instruction). A simple cue might be, "Take a look at the figure on page 112. Does that help?" There are a number of cues that are effective, including gestural, verbal, visual, physical, environmental, and positional. Of course, teachers use these cues regularly in their initial teaching, but often fail to use them when students are stuck. While reading an article on migration during the U.S. westward expansion, Terri Goetz identified an error that was not resolved through prompting. She used her voice and a gesture to shift students' attention. While pointing to a graph, she said, "Population PER thousand," emphasizing the word *per* with her voice.

Direct Explanations

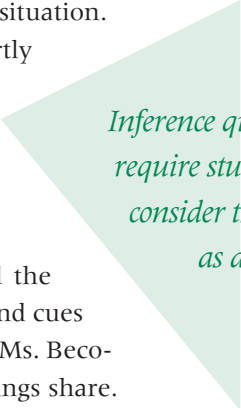
Sometimes, prompts and cues do not resolve the errors or misconceptions that students have. In those cases, students cannot be left hanging. Teachers must ensure that students have a successful learning experience, even if that means providing a direct explanation and giving the student the answer. Importantly, direct explanations should come after prompts and cues to increase the likelihood that students can connect this new information to a thinking process in which they were engaged. Following the direct explanation, the teacher should monitor students' understanding by asking them to repeat the information back in their own words or asking the original checking for understanding question again. In this way, students are accountable for the information and for processing the experience with their teacher.

The Trouble With Whole-Class Scaffolded Reading Instruction

The process we outlined above works best with small groups of students. It's a difficult process to put into place in a whole-class setting. While checking for understanding can be done effectively with the whole class, when the teacher moves to prompt or cue, some students disengage. Some students don't need the information that their teacher is providing right now, either because it's not relevant or because they already understand the concept. When some students disengage, they distract others.

Improving classroom management, however, won't improve this situation. Unless scaffolded reading instruction is done quickly and expertly and all of the students have a task to do while the teacher prompts and cues those who need it, some students will lose focus. It's just human nature. It's better to address misconceptions or errors with small groups of students or individually, especially while students work collaboratively or independently.

Returning to the life science teacher, Meghan Becovic, and the students' misunderstanding of the definition of living, prompts and cues were used to ensure their eventual understanding. At one point, Ms. Becovic asked her students to identify the characteristics all living things share. Part of their conversation follows:



*Inference questions
require students to
consider the piece
as a whole.*

- Jamal:** One thing for life is breathing.
- Teacher:** Do all things breathe? Think about that.
- Mubarik:** Yes. We have to breathe or die.
- Teacher:** So, I'm thinking about plankton.
- Anais:** No, some things don't breathe.
- Mubarik:** Oh, yeah, I forgot. But there is a word for what I'm thinking.
- Jamal:** Is it metabolism?
- Mubarik:** Yeah, that's it. To be alive you have to have metabolism.
- Anais:** Yeah, that was in the book. I remember now.
- Teacher:** Is metabolism the same as evolution?
- Jamal:** No, but living things have to evolve or die.
- Anais:** Wait a minute. We said that before, that they will die.
- Teacher:** Take a look on this page [pointing to a website displayed on a computer].
- Mubarik:** It says that living things have to reproduce. It doesn't say nothing about evolution.
- Jamal:** So, maybe things don't have to evolve to be alive. Maybe that's more long term, not if the thing is alive right now.

As their conversation continued, the students in this group reached greater understanding of the content because their teacher did not simply

tell them the missing information but rather scaffolded their understanding through prompts and cues. We have to be sure we provide this type of support for students who are stuck. When this is not provided, students become dependent on adults for information. When this support is provided, students become independent thinkers and learners who thrive inside and outside of the classroom.

► Summary

Close reading and scaffolded reading instruction establish critical access points to complex texts because they begin the shift of responsibility to the learner. Through the process of close reading, students are learning to stay close to the text to gain knowledge. These close reading lessons can be done in whole-group or small-group settings, and it is the text itself that is the predominant source of information. But students are also acquiring the skills of reading, and they need practice in drawing on their own cognitive and metacognitive resources as they read. This is achieved through scaffolded reading and requires the teacher to offer supports that encourage students to use what they already know as well as what the text has to offer.