Close Reading and Reader Response

FEATURE
Closer Reading for Deeper Comprehension: Uncommon Sense About the Common Core
by Carol Jago

VIGNETTES
Shifting Gears: Changing the Way We Think About What Students Read in School
by Char Shryock

Moving from Books to E-readers—Implications for Secondary Content Instruction
by Michael P. French

Breaking the Code of Academic Reading
by Pamela Adams Smith

FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF
Books by Gallagher and by Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman
by Carol Brown Dodson

FROM THE ORC COLLECTION
More Resources for “Closer Reading and Reader Response”
Adolescent Literacy In Perspective
November 2012

by Carol Jago

Closer Reading for Deeper Comprehension: Uncommon Sense About the Common Core

English teachers seem to have a penchant for taking good ideas and turning them into bad practice. I’m not pointing a finger at you but at myself here. I know I have done it time and again, for example making graphic organizers—potentially wonderful tools for teaching students how to organize their thinking—into fancy fill-in-the-blanks worksheets. We need to take care to prevent the Common Core call for more close reading from turning into similar bad practice.

Eighty to ninety percent of the Common Core State Standards in reading require text-dependent analysis. What does this mean? Should we be asking more literal questions about what happens or what color is the horse in a piece of literature? Not at all. What the call for close reading suggests in terms of instruction is that the questions we pose to students should focus first on what a text says before we begin asking what it means and why it matters. Too often we pose queries that allow students to skirt the reading altogether, discussing how they feel and recounting personal details without reference to what they have (or should have) read.

Let me offer an example. I observed a class of tenth graders who were reading Shakespeare’s Macbeth. That day the teacher had planned for students to discuss Lady Macbeth’s “Out, damned spot” soliloquy. She opened class by asking students, “Have any of you ever had a spot on your hand that you couldn’t get out? Turn to a partner and talk about what you did.”

Such questions, while they certainly get students talking, have little to do with Shakespeare’s play and provide no help whatsoever with learning to analyze the text. Instead teachers should prepare students for a close reading of Lady Macbeth’s speech by asking them to reflect on the nature of guilt and how it is that one transgression can make the second easier to commit. Just having students talk isn’t enough. They need to be talking about the text. Too often we value student participation so highly that, without meaning to, we encourage a kind of cheating. Students, especially quick thinkers, learn that they don’t actually have to do the homework reading in order to contribute to class discussions.

Prereading, whether asking students to make self-to-text connections or building background knowledge, has come in for a lot of criticism of late. Education Week reporter Catherine Gewertz interviewed a host of reading experts for the article “Common Standards Ignite Debate over Student ‘Prereading’ Exercises”—P. David Pearson, Tim Shanahan, Kelly Gallagher, David Coleman, and Karen Wixon among others. But what seemed to get lost in the debate is common sense. I employ prereading when needed for preparing students to comprehend a complex text. I don’t use it when the prereading activity simply keeps students busy—as in the case of students talking about spots on their own hands.

The architects of the Common Core, Achieve, Inc., have developed a free guide (http://www.achievethecore.org/steal-these-tools/text-dependent-questions) to creating text-dependent questions that offers a powerful model for the kinds of questions that encourage close reading and lead to deeper comprehension. The first step is for teachers to determine what in the text is likely to pose challenges for students. Instead of explaining a difficult passage—which only demonstrates what good readers we are and contributes to students’ feelings of incompetence—teachers should draw students’ attention to troublesome words, phrases, and concepts and ask questions that help readers unpack the lines for themselves. Let’s use act 5, scene 1, from Macbeth as an example.
I ask students to recall what has happened up to this point in the play and then have them reread Lady Macbeth’s lines closely, underlining words that might be clues to her state of mind. Students write for a few minutes, explaining how these phrases affect the scene’s meaning, and share what they have written with a partner. I then invite three students to take the roles of Lady Macbeth, the doctor, and the gentlewoman and read the scene aloud in front of the class. Text-dependent questions help guide our discussion:

- What do you think “afeard” means? What familiar word does it sound like? Who is Lady Macbeth addressing when she says “a soldier, and afeard”?
- What is suggested by the question “What need we fear who knows it”? Who is included in the word “we”? Can you rephrase this line into familiar language? What does Lady Macbeth mean when she says, “none can call our power to account”? Is this an accurate statement? Why or why not?

Note how I “tricked” students into rereading the passage several times during the course of the lesson. It is not possible to understand a rich piece of literature after a single cursory scan of the page. Too often we pepper students with questions before they have had time to digest, query, and think through what they have read. Artful teachers guide students through a text, helping them draw inferences and make connections for themselves.

Curiously, the best prereading strategy is, in fact, reading!

References


Carol Jago has taught middle and high school in Santa Monica, California, for 32 years. She is past president of the National Council of Teachers of English and author of With Rigor for All: Meeting Common Core Standards for Reading Literature, 2nd ed. (Heinemann, 2011). She served on the initial feedback committee for the CCSS and on now sits on the technical advisory panel for ELA for PARCC. She can be reached at www.caroljago.com.
Shifting Gears: Changing the Way We Think About What Students Read in School

by Char Shryock

Shift. On its own, this word is not very intimidating, but include shift in a sentence about changing the way teachers teach, and it can initiate debates, trigger anxiety, or promote creative thinking. There are three reading shifts that need to occur in all classrooms. First, teachers need to teach students close reading strategies. Second, teachers need to think about text complexity when selecting materials for students to read. Third, teachers need to work on closing the vocabulary gap in their classroom by teaching Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary in context.

Close Reading

Starting in elementary school, students need to be given opportunities to read literary and content-based materials. The shift is in how, as teachers, we “tee up” this reading experience for our students. Instead of giving students a summary of the reading before they read it, we should offer up some “essential questions” to help guide their reading. This allows students to struggle with the reading to begin to build their own understanding of the content. Instead of asking students to take notes on the reading, we should model how to identify patterns in the text, question what the author intended by including a passage or word in the text, and make inferences based on prior knowledge. This is a shift from the teacher as interpreter to the teacher as moderator in the discussion between the author and the student. The kinds of questions that we ask about the text also need to shift away from questions that encourage students to draw on their own opinion or personal experience without making any direct connection to the text and instead shift to questions that require students to go back into the text to support their answer.

Guiding questions for shifting to close reading might include:

- What essential questions or guiding questions can I give my students before they start to read the material?
- How can I model close reading to my students?
  - Think about reading to the class and doing “thinking out loud” to model questioning the author, wondering about word choice, inferring possible meaning, or making a connection to a prior reading or prior knowledge.
- What changes do I need to make in my assessment items to make them more text dependent?

Text Complexity

Many teachers share a passion for reading. Many of the students they teach may not share that passion. Students need to be surrounded by books of all lengths, genres, and points of view. They need to read blogs, magazines, and news articles. Teachers need to stop and think about what kind of reading students do in a typical day. Reading worksheets, chapters in a textbook, an occasional news article, or a chapter in a novel is very much like looking at the night sky with the naked eye. A few bright stars are visible, maybe a familiar constellation, the moon, but not much else. This is especially true in the city, where lights block all but the brightest stars from view. People who grow up never experiencing the night sky in the country or through a telescope have a very limited exposure to all the millions of stars and galaxies there really are in the night sky. Students who are given less complex reading materials may only focus on obvious, surface-level ideas and will build a working set of very limited vocabulary words. They miss the opportunity to wrestle with more sophisticated ideas, connect content to existing background knowledge, learn new vocabulary, and make new insights into material.

Guiding questions for text complexity might include:

- How will I determine what content-area reading materials will challenge the diverse learners in my classroom?
- How will I provide access to a variety of reading materials?
- What resources do I have available to me to help me assess my students’ comprehension of complex texts?
Vocabulary

Traditionally, vocabulary words are found in lists to be copied onto flash cards, memorized, and restated on an end-of-the-unit test. This kind of rote vocabulary instruction does not help to increase the working vocabulary that students can access when reading content-specific texts or more difficult literature.

It also does not help to close the vocabulary gap that may exist between different student subgroups in the classroom. Stop and think for a minute about the disadvantage of having a limited vocabulary as a student moves through school. It becomes harder to really understand the content words of a text (Tier 3 words) if you are struggling to understand the basic vocabulary (Tier 2 words). Writing papers and stories becomes more difficult. Making connections between new ideas and prior knowledge becomes harder if a student is lacking the varied word experience of her peers. Imagine being asked to draw a picture of a springtime garden or a sunrise over the ocean. You are given a brown crayon and a red crayon. The person sitting next to you is given the Crayola 64 color box . . . with sharpener. You will both be able to draw a picture, but the person with 64 colors to choose from will certainly have more options. You begin to see how important a varied vocabulary is to all students. This gap has some significant impact on the success of students in the classroom.

And so it is our challenge as teachers to provide opportunities for all our students to add words to their vocabulary toolbox. Here are some vocabulary strategies that do just that:

• **Living word wall.** The key word is placed in the middle of the working area. Students then add pictures, sentences, and related words to the wall. The teacher refers to the wall often and encourages the students to use the word in their classroom work.

• **Frayer model.** This is a graphic organizer that puts the key word in the center. In the top left corner of the paper are definitions—both from the dictionary and in the students’ own words. In the top right corner, students jot down characteristics related to the word. In the bottom left corner, the students can draw a picture or provide examples to go with the word, and the bottom right corner is usually used to include words or pictures to show what is not the word . . . or provide connections to other words or concepts they already know. Maybe include using it in a sentence. Once students have made a Frayer model—have them think-pair-share to exchange ideas or do a gallery walk to allow them to see and comment on other students’ interpretations. (For more about think-pair-share, a strategy developed by Frank Lyman in 1981, see [http://pzweb.harvard.edu](http://pzweb.harvard.edu).

• **Marzano note card.** Similar to a Frayer model, but more portable, the note card starts with the word in the middle. The top left corner is the dictionary definition. The top right corner is the student’s definition. The bottom left corner is a diagram or picture—this works especially well with science terms. The bottom right corner is a list of other related terms. On the back, the student writes two sentences that not only use the word, but make a connection to other terms in the content area or a real-world situation.

• **Two in one.** In this strategy, students must write sentences using the vocabulary words for a unit or for the week. The twist—they must use two words in one sentence. The students may change the form of the word if necessary.

As for guiding questions for vocabulary, try these:

• What domain-specific (content-specific) words will my students need to understand in context to be able to access my course materials?
• What common vocabulary words will my students need to understand in context to be able to access my course materials?
• What will be the most effective strategy to introduce and reinforce my vocabulary?
• How can I work with other teachers at my grade level or in my department to make sure we are all introducing the same vocabulary?
• What formative instructional strategies can I use to help measure my students’ vocabulary usage?

No shift is easy. When we work together as educators to share best practices and innovative ideas that work, the shift becomes more manageable.
Bibliography


Char Shryock is the director of curriculum and instruction for the Bay Village City Schools. She is also an Ohio Resource Center Ambassador and Thinkfinity.org trainer. You can read more about the shifts to the Common Core and find additional resources at her blog, http://iteachbay.blogspot.com. She can be contacted at char.shryock@bayschoolsohio.org.
Moving from Books to E-readers—Implications for Secondary Content Instruction

by Michael P. French

I did not develop a positive attitude about researching new information until much later in my career—well into graduate school and beyond. At first I hated going to libraries, searching for books that were often checked out, checking out entire books even though I needed text from small selections, and keeping them organized so that they might be returned on time. Later, it became a challenge to find resources first for my own research and then for my graduate students.

In recent years, online databases have provided a more streamlined interaction with the stacks; there’s no need to sit on the floor of the stacks looking through books, and no more stacks of books teeter on the dining room table.

Now, all my searching is done with two tools that never leave my side—my iPhone and my iPad. These are the two main tools I use for doing my foundational reading—for writing this article, for teaching lectures, and for gathering other bits of everyday research a professor needs.

In many respects, the proximity of these new tools has been a real benefit. I have almost immediate access to a wide variety of sources. I can sample books through Amazon and Google Scholar just like in the stacks; and should I wish to purchase a book (which looking at my MasterCard statement I do often), I have the immediate gratification of knowing that I have my book right now.

With my iPhone, I can search anywhere. I can look up maps of the Holy Land while I’m in church (I know, not the most correct thing), I can look up recipes in restaurants, and even as I did at a Mud Hen’s baseball game, I can look up where certain players were born so that I might use this information to get a ball from them.

These tools have changed the way I approach fact-finding in many ways.

For teachers in secondary content classrooms, these tools will provide the same possibilities for their teaching, and possibly the same immediacy in learning for the students.

Some might say that this is really a good thing; it will increase student learning and provide more possibilities for classroom research and inquiry. However, as students use these new tools as everyday realities, I wonder what traditional learning skills and strategies might become obsolete.

One possibility is the ability to read deeply. There has been much concern over this particular reading skill. The ability to read deeply, to get below the surface of the text, is a requirement of the Common Core. Students will be expected to read both literary and informational text closely and with understanding. This requires the ability to maintain focus while reading. Although others have written about the cognitive aspects of deep reading—see Wolf’s *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*, for example—I would like to discuss this notion of maintaining focus while reading.

Reading with an iPad or iPhone is fraught with possibilities that can inhibit focus. While reading on my phone, I can get a call or I can get a text. In both cases, there is an immediate interruption of my reading. I could ignore the call or text, but more often than not, I respond. On the iPad, emails can intrude during reading as well. In addition to these outside interruptions, I have experienced more and more personal interruptions to my reading. Looking up a baseball score is too easy—just a touch here and I see how my team is doing. I can get sidetracked by news, the weather, and any number of bits of information not found in an actual book. Whereas the iPad provides a great resource, it takes me away from print reading in books. Further, where this may free students from carrying 8-pound anthologies, it will also take the place of a personal copy of the *Great Gatsby*. 
Another aspect of reading I fear for is the use of dictionaries and thesauruses in the reading-writing-learning process. When I was a high school English teacher earlier in my career, teaching the use of these tools was an important part of my curriculum. (Of course, whether or not students used these tools after my class I cannot say.) Now if I read a word I do not know, I simply hold my finger over it until a pop-up menu asks me what information I am looking for. For example, while reading Carl Hiaasen’s *Chomp*, I came across the word *migraines*. Holding down my index finger, I can Define the word, Highlight the word, Note the word, or Search for the word. Choosing Define, I am provided with the definition of the noun form, derivatives, and the origin of the word. Then I am given two other options: Search the Web or Search Wikipedia. For me, it is too easy to touch Search the Web, and off I go, further and further away from my reading assignment.

Further, by being able to simply select a word to define with my finger, I do not need to get my dictionary; I do not need to worry about locating guide words or using alphabetical order. What I once did with a dictionary, I do not do anymore. In fact, I am sad to say, I do not know where to find a dictionary in my home.

Like the dictionary, the thesaurus is just as endangered. I can get synonyms and antonyms from my word processor more easily than from another text.

These immediate tools disrupt reading flow and fluency when used. Further, due to the immediacy of information on the web and in Wikipedia, it is as if I am expecting my reading to be interrupted.

For many classrooms, as more and more students use electronic readers, reading books in print will become a less satisfying choice. As such, I fear that some students may balk at reading text in print—waiting for the iPads to be available.

These new realities will require teachers to work harder to help students have a relationship with printed books. This will require that teachers have printed books and use them on a regular basis. Else, it will be likely that reading a print book may join cursive writing as an endangered skill.

Finally, for those teachers who are using electronic readers in the classroom, it seems reasonable to establish rules of behavior. One way in which this might be done is to allot a limited amount of time to read a text electronically. Should students not finish, they can then be asked if they drifted away from the reading and why. By being held accountable for their time, we can hope students might become more focused on the assigned reading.

Without question, electronic readers are a reality that will not be going away. I would assume that, like the simple calculator, the cost of the electronic readers will become more accessible to more students. There will be more and more electronic texts available, and these will become the primary tool for teaching in secondary schools. And perhaps someday in the future, these same teachers will have discussions about antiquities of learning—the fountain pen, the typewriter, and the book.

**A suggestion for using embedded dictionaries without interrupting reading flow:**

Assign the reading in two phases. In the first phase, students would be instructed not to stop reading for any reason. In the second phase, students would be expected to share one or more words they explored during this second round of reading. By having students select these words in a second round of reading, they are being taught to reread, to scan for particular words, and to use the embedded vocabulary tools responsibly.

**Reference**


Michael P. French is Professor and Director of Graduate Education and Professional Development at Lourdes University, Sylvania, Ohio. A former K–12 reading specialist, Dr. French has taught at several Midwest universities before Lourdes University. His expertise is in the area of neurolinguistics and diagnosis of learning problems.
Breaking the Code of Academic Reading

by Pamela Adams Smith

Mrs. Jackson’s fifth graders line up to enter the building on the first day of school. There is plenty of conversation and laughter among all the students. All the students live on the northeast side of the city. Most receive free or reduced-price lunches. One student is from Sierra Leone, and his home language is Krio. Two students are from Somalia. When they go home, they speak Somali with their family. On the playground, the children communicate with ease with the native speakers. How many of Mrs. Jackson’s students will need language support this school year?

Although academic language is the language of the classroom, textbooks, the curriculum, state standards, and the achievement tests, it is not the language used in most American homes. “Success in school is primarily contingent on learners’ willingness and ability to cope with academic language. More children fail in school, in the long run, because they cannot cope with ‘academic language’ than because they cannot decode print” (Gee, 2004). Students who lack academic literacy are less likely to experience success in school and therefore are less likely to graduate into higher education. The solution is rooted in meeting both the language and literacy needs of all the students in our classroom in content-area subjects (Johnson, 2009).

For all students for whom academic language is not familiar, reading technical text is a great challenge, and a major aspect of that challenge is linguistic. In order to understand this difficulty, one must understand the nature of academic writing.

First, students, especially ELLs, lack the specialized vocabulary encountered in academic texts. Academic words have Greek or Latin roots with prefixes and suffixes. Corson (1997) describes research that shows that children are exposed to specialized vocabulary with Greek and Latin roots more often when they are reading than while watching television or talking.

Second, in speech, there are gestures, pauses, and intonations that speakers use in order to create mood and convey meaning. Reading academic texts requires the reader to understand the words that indicate the writer’s perspective and mood.

And last, in reading academic text, students are expected to understand complex sentences using conjunctions that are not typical of informal conversations. Schleppegrell (2004) cites a study that found and to be the commonly used conjunction to connect clauses in speech; however, text structure does not of-
tend to use conjunctions, but rather it uses verbs, pronouns, or prepositions to add cohesiveness. So, students who are accustomed to connecting sentences with and when they speak must understand how sentences and ideas are connected in written text. For example, a student may say, “A monsoon blows rain and wind that comes from the ocean, and it leaves behind villages that are destroyed.” In text, the information reads, “A monsoon is a wind that blows in from the Indian Ocean, bringing very heavy rains and leaving behind villages crippled by its fierce blows.”

Implementing explicit instructional reading strategies that are recommended for ELL students at the classroom level in all content areas will benefit not only the ELL students but native speakers. It may seem that instruction for increasing skill in reading academic language is the same as general reading instruction, but there is a difference. Although instruction for the ELL students addresses the five components of reading instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension), reading instruction must go deeper if students are going to learn to manipulate the grammar of challenging text in ways that enable them to adopt the expected academic registers of the genre (Schleppegrell, 2004). In referring to the work of Schleppegrell and Oliveira, Freeman and Freeman (2009) discuss the need for teachers to learn and then teach their students to analyze text:

*When Schleppegrell and Oliveira observed classes, they noted that the teachers did a number of things to help their ELLs and struggling readers understand the lessons. These teachers built background knowledge. They showed students how to survey a chapter and focus on the layout and visual features that would help them understand the text. The teachers also used cooperative learning, graphic organizers, and other good techniques for making the content comprehensible. However, the researchers noted that “when it came to actually reading text and getting meaning from print, teachers had few strategies to employ.”*

To teach these strategies, the researchers worked with the teachers, showing them how to teach their students to analyze selected texts. They categorized the verbs, nouns, and noun phrases in the text by their function. They used their understanding of the verbs and their function to determine whose point of view was being presented. They examined conjunctions and prepositional phrases to clarify how the text was structured. Understanding how to analyze the text leads to a deeper understanding of complex text. The approach for analyzing text would be different in different content areas, but the methods are similar (Freeman & Freeman, 2009; Kamil & Bernhardt, 2004; Schleppegrell, 2004).

**Informational Text**

Much of the language of academic texts is language that students only begin to encounter in the middle school years, with nominal exposure in their elementary grades. Freeman and Freeman (2009) write that long-term English language learners as well as native speakers have not received extensive exposure to informational books with academic language until middle school and that these students need to be reading expository text much earlier. The use of informational text is recognized as highly effective in igniting a desire to read and in developing academic language in speaking, reading, and writing, and yet a study by Nell K. Duke reveals that the students who need it most do not have adequate exposure to this genre.

Duke (2000) shares research that lists several benefits of using nonfiction literature to develop academic language in the primary grades:

- First, nonfiction text prepares young students for the type of texts they will encounter in later years. Many scholars have suggested that providing more experience with informational text in the early grades may help to mitigate the substantial difficulty many students have with this form of text in later schooling.
- Second, studies show that kindergartners after exposure to informational text were more knowledgeable about text structure, such as verbs used in the present tense and the use of nouns.
- Third, informational text offers opportunities for children to apply and further develop areas of expertise and provides valuable links to children’s outside reading.

If children’s experiences with text remain largely narrative, then they do not get exposure to and instruction about the unique sentence and paragraph structure and other features involved in nonnarrative informational text (Dreher & Voelker, 2004). Students can better cope with textbooks if they are frequently exposed to informational text at an early age (Freeman & Freeman, 2009; Duke, 2000).
Conclusion and Recommendations

Whether we teach native speakers who struggle with academic language or we teach ELL students, they should all be considered students of academic language as a second language. The classroom teacher cannot replace the necessity of an ELL coach; however, if the classroom teacher makes changes in his or her practice to bridge the gap between the student who is learning English as a second language and the content area, then the entire class will benefit. The process begins by considering the language needs of all your students and then creating language objectives in the lesson plan to attend to those needs. Let the students know what the language objectives are as well as the content objectives for the day’s lesson.

Frequent exposure to informational text at an early age can prepare students to handle textbooks with more complex language in their later school years. This exposure should include informational text on the classroom walls. And when students visit the school library, require them to choose one or more nonfiction books in addition to a fiction choice to check out, and provide time for them to share what they have learned from the books with their classmates.

Last, attending to the functional grammar of text will enable students to comprehend the text. Analyzing text with your students is even more crucial when the students are in middle and high school. Teach often then, using the assigned text in your content domain, how the writer is using nouns, verbs, tense, and conjunctions, as well as commas and other punctuation in the sentence and paragraph structure, to convey information.

So how many of Mrs. Jackson’s students need language support in the classroom? The research clearly shows that all her students will benefit from the same explicit language instruction in reading that addresses the needs of the ELL student.

References


Pamela Adams Smith has worked as a school librarian with Columbus City Schools for twelve years. She is currently teaching English as a second language.
For Your Bookshelf

Books by Gallagher and by Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman

by Carol Brown Dodson

Deeper Reading: Comprehending Challenging Texts, 4–12, by Kelly Gallagher (Stenhouse, Portland, ME, 2004)

Deeper Reading gives you a glimpse inside Kelly Gallagher’s classroom and lets you see the success his students have in comprehending challenging texts. Gallagher provides practical classroom strategies for teaching students to apply the concepts of close or deeper reading, an essential component of the Common Core State Standards. Although published prior to the development of the CCSS, the book is filled with ideas for supporting the comprehension that comes with close reading of texts. Gallagher shares his methods and specific strategies for teaching students to read a broad range of complex, challenging texts with deeper levels of comprehension.

A brief review of the chapter titles reveals how Gallagher shares effective strategies that enable your students to:

• Read challenging books
• Deepen their levels of reading with effective “first-draft” reading of the text
• Further deepen understanding through the use of “second-draft” reading
• Assess their understanding by monitoring their comprehension as they read
• Use meaningful collaboration to promote higher-level thinking in small-group settings
• Think metaphorically to deepen their understanding of text
• Use meaningful reflection to see the relevance the book holds for themselves and their peers

You will also discover help with planning lessons that include Gallagher’s strategies for teaching a deeper level of reading. Overall, Deeper Reading is a book that addresses the needs of classroom teachers.

Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Achievement, by Lucy Calkins, Mary Ehrenworth, and Christopher Lehman (Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH, 2012)

Pathways to the Common Core is one of those few books that should be read by everyone who deals with the Common Core. The authors successfully go through all the strands and let us know what is included in the standards and what is not in the standards. Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman remind us that the document says “repeatedly and in no uncertain terms that decisions about teaching are to be left in the hands of the professionals—of you, the teachers, and of other literacy experts” (p. 43). They further emphasize that the Common Core is focused on results rather than on the means for reaching those results. They deal with the exemplar texts, consisting of a strong dose of classics, by reminding us that the amount of time students spend reading is a key determiner of their success and improvement in reading. Students need to choose books they will read and be given large chunks of time to read without interruption. The writers do not question the standards, but they do suggest practices that accelerate student learning and achievement.

Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman dig into the CCSS to eliminate myths, find meaning, and offer needed guidance for each standard. They address each topic with its set of standards and translate each standard into meaningful classroom practice. Pathways to the Common Core establishes ways for teachers to help students improve their achievement in all the strands of English language arts. The book has been referred to as the GPS of the CCSS because it includes such a thorough analysis of the standards and gives teachers a path to follow as they strive to reach every student.

Carol Brown Dodson is ELA specialist and outreach specialist for the Ohio Resource Center. Dodson was an English language arts consultant for the Ohio Department of Education and is past president of OCTELA (Ohio Council of Teachers of English Language Arts). Dodson, formerly a high school English teacher, department chair, and supervisor of English language arts in Columbus Public Schools, serves on the Ohio Graduation Test Reading Content Committee.
From the ORC Collection

More Resources for “Closer Reading and Reader Response”

Lesson Plans
These lessons require close reading and analysis of texts.

ORC #11699
Modeling Academic Writing Through Scholarly Article Presentations
http://www.ohiorc.org/record/11699.aspx
In this lesson, students use an online database to access an appropriate article of literary criticism connected to a work of literature they have already read as a class assignment. Although links to various sites are supplied, students may need help in selecting their articles. Students do a close reading to prepare the article for presentation by highlighting key elements of its structure and content, and then they present the article to their peers. The instructional plan includes a sample annotated article as well as guidelines for annotating. This lesson can be used to introduce students to academic writing and discourse about literature. It is especially appropriate for college preparatory and AP students.

ORC #3805
Every Punctuation Mark Matters: A Mini-Lesson on Semicolons
http://www.ohiorc.org/record/3805.aspx
Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” demonstrates that even the smallest punctuation mark signals a stylistic decision, distinguishing one writer from another and enabling an author to connect with an audience. In this mini-lesson, students first explore Dr. King’s use of semicolons and their rhetorical significance, then apply the lesson to their own writing by searching for ways to follow Dr. King’s model and use the punctuation mark in their own writing. Class discussion provides an opportunity for students to analyze Dr. King’s letter, review rules of punctuation, and make connections to their own writing. While this lesson refers to the “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” any text which features the rhetorically significant use of semicolons may be used effectively with the procedures of this mini-lesson.

ORC #10656
Personal or Social Tragedy? A Close Reading of Edith Wharton’s Ethan Frome
http://www.ohiorc.org/record/10656.aspx
In this lesson, students are guided to use the strategies of “close reading” in order to understand Edith Wharton’s novel about an unhappy marriage set in rural New England. As they read, students keep a journal of annotated quotes that will help them provide evidence for a response to the lesson’s guiding question, “Is Ethan’s story a personal tragedy born of his indecision and personal failures, a social tragedy forecast by the oppressive New England setting, or both?” The lesson also provides background information on regionalism and asks students to consider the extent to which Ethan Frome is consistent with the typical regionalist novel.

ORC #2784
Critical Reading: Two Stories, Two Authors, Same Plot?
http://www.ohiorc.org/record/2784.aspx
Many students often lack critical thinking skills to be able to analyze what they read. This lesson encourages students to read and respond critically to two different pieces of literature with the same title. Students make predictions about the stories and analyze the story elements (i.e., characters, plot, conflict, and resolution). Working in small groups, students compare and contrast the different stories, distinguish between fact and opinion, and draw conclusions supported by evidence from their readings.

ORC #1296
Letters from the Frontier: Reading and Writing Primary Documents
http://www.ohiorc.org/record/1296.aspx
Using a collection of historical letters, students demonstrate skills in reading and interpreting primary documents, within their original cultural context, through class discussion and written composition. Students examine the ways in which language, syntax, and the author’s viewpoints impact the objectivity of historical documents. This lesson provides several activities to guide a close reading and analysis of primary documents. Links to historical documents are available at the website.
Professional Reading

Text-Dependent Question Professional Development Module
http://www.achievethecore.org/steal-these-tools/professional-development-modules/text-dependent-questions-module
Student Achievement Partners has created this PD module for text-dependent questions. Documents may be downloaded, revised, and reproduced for individuals, teams, or districts.

Tim Shanahan’s Literacy Blog
http://www.shanahanonliteracy.com/
Tim Shanahan, literacy expert, blogs about topics related to changing reading instruction including close reading, pre-reading, and text-dependent questions.

Resources from Nancy Frey and Doug Fisher
http://www.fisherandfrey.com/?page_id=20
This page links to many videos, presentations, and handouts from Frey and Fisher’s recent work within the Common Core Standards. Specifically, the “text complexity close reading blog” contains help for creating text-dependent questions.

Digging Deeper into the Common Core: Text Complexity
Also, the April 2012 issue of *In Perspective* is devoted to text complexity.

Classroom Videos
Watch deep reading in action in this video curated from the Internet.

Text Complexity—Principal Leadership, January 2012
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWYceSEPC-8#
The teacher in this video orchestrates multiple readings of “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost.

Free Reading Apps

Subtext
http://subtext.com/
Subtext allows teachers to create questions within a text on iPads. Students can then answer questions as they read. Be sure to see the *In Perspective* blog post (http://communities.ohiorc.org/adlit-in-perspective/2012/06/26/using-subtext-an-ipad-app/) for information on getting started.
Each issue of *Adolescent Literacy In Perspective* highlights a topic in adolescent literacy. Here you can read teacher-written articles, see what experts in the field are saying, gain insight from students, and find resources for classroom use.

### What Is AdLIT?
Advancing Adolescent Literacy Instruction Together (AdLIT) is designed to address the unique literacy needs of adolescent learners by promoting and supporting effective, evidence-based practices for classroom instruction and professional development activities in Ohio’s middle and secondary schools.

### About the Ohio Resource Center
The Ohio Resource Center works to improve teaching and learning among Ohio teachers by promoting standards-based, best practices in mathematics, science, reading, and social studies for Ohio schools and universities. The Center’s resources are available primarily via the web and are coordinated with other state and regional efforts to improve student achievement and teacher effectiveness in K-12 mathematics, science, reading, and social studies. To learn more about ORC, visit the website at [www.ohiorc.org](http://www.ohiorc.org).

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**AdLIT Staff**

**Director, ORC** Nicole Carter Luthy  
**Associate Director, ORC** David Majesky  
**Managing Editor** Judy Duguid  
**Web Developer/Graphic Designer** Constance Buckley  
**Contributing Editor** Carol Brown Dodson  
**Contributing Editor** Christina Hank  
**Contributing Editor** Sheila Cantlebary  
**Senior Systems Manager** Richard Huggins

**Affiliated Staff**

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**21st Century Education Specialist** Edward Hill  
**Program Manager** John Croyle  
**Administrative Support** Gale Martin  
**Assistant Business Manager** Marilyn Yeamans

**Project AdLIT**

**Ohio Resource Center**  
1929 Kenny Road  
Columbus, Ohio 43210-1079

**Hours** Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.  
**Telephone** (614) 247-6342  
**Fax** (614) 292-2066  
**Email** web@ohiorc.org