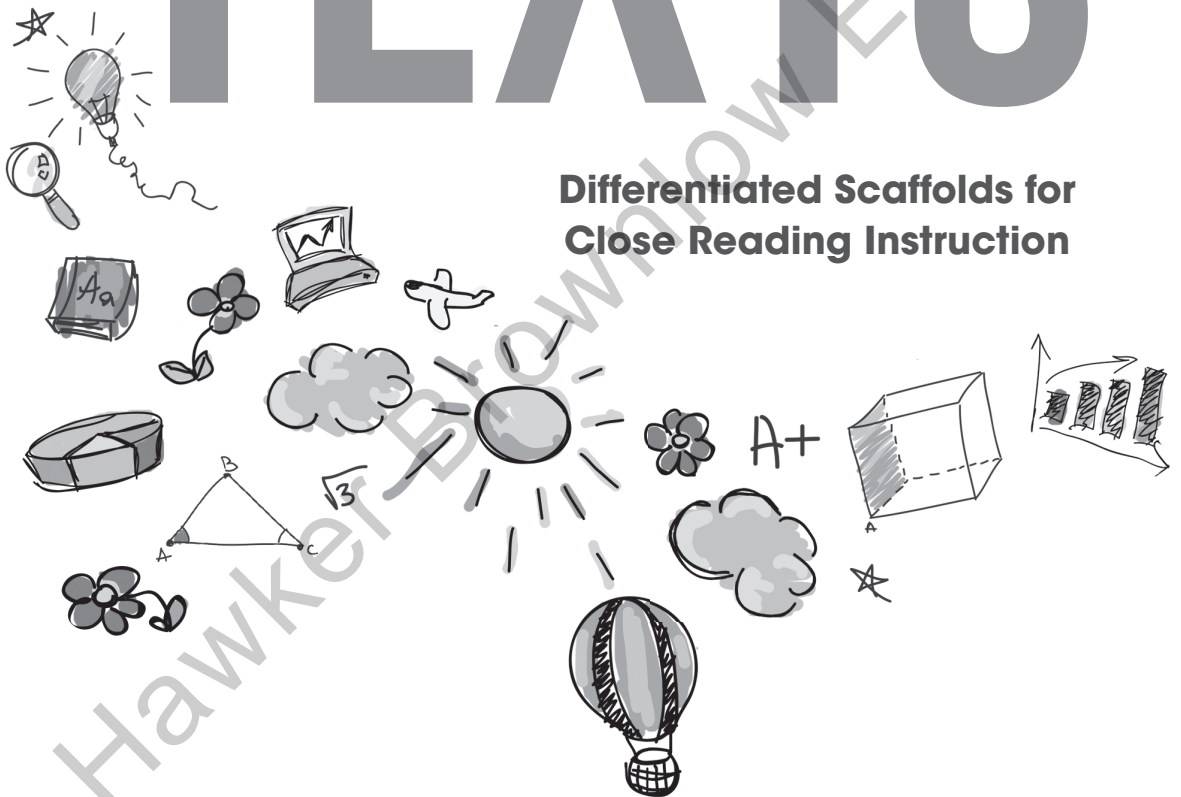


Turning the Page on

Complex TEXTS

Differentiated Scaffolds for
Close Reading Instruction



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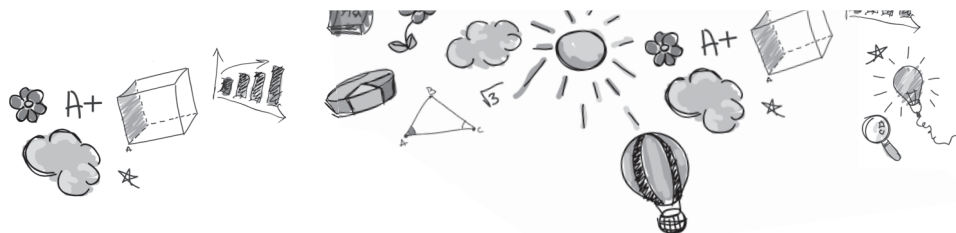
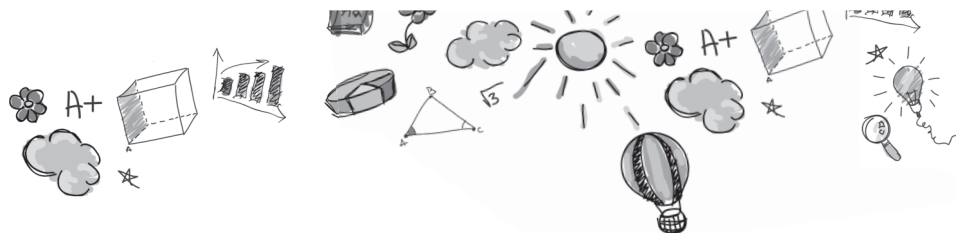


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Introduction

The educational landscape has been shifting ever since 2006, when an influential ACT (2006) study analyzed the reading abilities of 568,000 eighth, tenth, and twelfth graders on three reading tests and concluded that only 51 percent of twelfth graders were college ready. They noted, “students who can read complex texts are more likely to be ready for college. Those who cannot read complex texts are less likely to be ready for college” (p. 11). The alarm was sounded, and what resulted was the development of the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers; NGA & CCSSO, 2010) and new state standards across the United States. These emphasized that students need to gain the skills and stamina to understand increasingly complex ideas shared in increasingly complex texts.

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers (n.d.a) note, “This finding is the impetus behind the Standards’ strong emphasis on increasing text complexity as a key requirement in reading” (p. 2). This emphasis is also reflected in Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS Lead States, 2013) and the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards (National Council for the Social Studies; NCSS, 2013), which call for all students to be able to engage in evidence-based civic and scientific reasoning. Doing so involves gleaning, weaving, contrasting, and informing from many sources in order to make sound, well-documented arguments. This retrieving and sharing of information involves the literacy skills of reading, writing, and communicating.

We believe that all of these national and state frameworks and standards documents are in alignment, with the goal being to prepare students for college and career success, which is of course the intention of every teacher we know.

The reality is, the texts students read at all grade levels are much less complex than they need to be if students are to be college and career ready. College and career texts are at Lexile (L) levels around 1350. (See chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of Lexiles.) Eleventh and twelfth graders typically read materials at a Lexile measure of 1220, suggesting a gap of 130 points between the materials students read in high school and those they need to be able to read in college (Williamson, 2006). While student reading materials in grades 4 and higher have gotten easier over time (Adams, 2010–2011), college texts have become

more difficult (Stenner, Koons, & Swartz, 2010). To close this text-complexity gap, new state and national standards recommend that students begin reading texts at higher Lexile measures in grades 2 and 3. Teachers are the critical factor in creating student success with these challenging complex texts; for students to read more complex texts, teachers will need to provide more and better instruction during close readings to ensure that every student will meet the state standards.

And what teacher wouldn't want to learn how to teach his or her students to closely read or think deeply about a complex text if that better prepares them for college and career experiences? Of course teachers want their students to be successful readers who love reading and are confident when taking on the challenging work of close reading. However, K–12 teachers are grappling with defining the term *close reading* and then attempting to develop instruction that enables all their students to gain proficiency with this practice. If you're reading this book, you might be like many teachers who have begun to engage students in the process of closely reading texts and are wondering what to do at the conclusion of the close reading experience when some students are unable to answer related text-dependent questions or engage in writing tasks that would indicate a high level of comprehension. You might even find yourself panicking after the initial reading as you wonder how to help all your students succeed with close reading. You might also be worried that teaching students to closely read texts could diminish their love of reading and their interest in self-selecting texts. Rest assured; you are not alone.

We, too, have asked what the next steps for each of our students should be after we've engaged them in close text reading. The short, quick answer is that the next instructional steps for each student must be scaffolded in ways that support his or her growing independence when reading increasingly complex texts. Close reading must be well balanced with other types of reading experiences, including guided reading, shared reading, and independent reading, with the goal being to produce proficient, independent readers who love to read. Close reading can also work in concert with independent reading. For example, effective teachers can engage students in reading interesting text excerpts that can provide a catalyst for students reading the entire book. A close reading can introduce readers to a compelling character, idea, or topic. This introduction can encourage students to read the entire book, which should be available to them in the classroom library. Learning how to closely read a text provides students with both motivation to take bigger risks as readers and the skills they need to succeed in their reading endeavors. They grow in independence because they know how to scrutinize textual information.

That all sounds great, but how exactly does it play out in real classrooms that may have anywhere from forty to ninety minutes available for close reading instruction and, in grades K–1, perhaps only fifteen to twenty minutes? Our intent in this book is to clarify exactly how you can differentiate the instruction that occurs during and after a close reading by identifying practical teaching strategies and scaffolds to create lessons that ensure success for every student. This book is intended to alleviate panicked feelings about what to do next after an initial reading by helping you understand how you can meaningfully identify individuals' strengths and needs and then design instructional scaffolds that enable every student to grow as a reader and learner.

Close Reading Instruction

The process of close text reading is so important to students' learning at all grade levels, and within all disciplines, that every teacher must address it. In fact, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) explain that, "Being able to read complex text independently and proficiently is essential for high achievement in college and the workplace and important in numerous life tasks" (NGA & CCSSO, n.d.a, p. 4). This proclamation has caused teachers to reaffirm their commitment to ensuring that no student slips through the cracks of reading instruction—unable to read well enough to be entertained, engage in a literary analysis, corroborate information from various historical sources, or classify and document information to support a claim.

Teaching students the practice of close reading can pay big dividends. The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC, 2012), one of the assessment consortia for the NGA and CCSSO's Common Core State Standards (CCSS), notes that a

significant body of research links the close reading of complex text—whether the student is a struggling reader or advanced—to significant gains in reading proficiency and finds close reading to be a key component of college and career readiness. (p. 7)

From our observations, most teachers agree that close reading can improve students' reading comprehension, but the deeper they get into the practice of close reading, the more they are asking what to do when it becomes obvious that texts within the grade-level band are too difficult for some students to successfully read. In prior years, we might have abandoned the original text, selected a less difficult one on the same topic, and felt secure in having those struggling students never return to the initial, more complex text. This can no longer be the case. We now must realize that this is as unacceptable as not providing every student the instruction that makes college a possible choice for them. Ensuring that students develop the language, communication, and reading skills needed to successfully read and discuss complex texts requires that teachers share a variety of instructional routines during a whole-class close reading. If some students do not initially have success reading the complex text, subsequent or contingent instruction must include the sharing of scaffolds that will move them toward a *continuous deepening* of their engagement with and comprehension of texts *at the upper levels of their grade bands*.

It is important to understand the general process around which we base this instruction. The practices we describe in this text are based on a rough progression that assumes the following. First, the teacher engages the whole class in an initial close reading of the text. There is no set number of times a text must be reread. The goal is that students investigate the text to identify its deepest meaning. This understanding generally occurs as students return to the text several times to answer questions their teachers pose that guide them to analyze the general meaning, language, structure, and author intent. During the

whole-class close reading and related collaborative conversations, it may become apparent that students need to respond to additional questions regarding language or structure in order to support their comprehension. Rather than telling them or front-loading the information, the layered questions the teacher asks serve as scaffolds in order to help students dig deeper and deeper to access the text. The teacher differentiates the questions based on students' responses, which indicate how well they are comprehending the text. Based on the teacher's observation and assessment of student responses to these questions, the teacher will identify any students who still struggle to access the meaning of the text and will provide additional differentiated scaffolds to smaller groups of students until they gain the knowledge and understanding necessary to deeply comprehend the complex text. In this smaller group configuration teachers have twenty to thirty minutes to both support and stretch students who do not have initial success. These more intense differentiated scaffolds are known as *contingencies*, in that they are contingent on students' need for more focused scaffolding. When contingency scaffolds are implemented to support learning, they are a means of differentiation.

Scaffolds are the resources and instruction that students need from teachers in order to learn new concepts or complete a new task. Teachers choose these strategies or tools to support specific, identified needs of individual students. Some scaffolds occur during the whole-class close reading, while other contingent scaffolds may need to occur for a smaller group of students at the conclusion of the whole-class reading. We use classroom scenarios throughout the text to paint the picture of how this process plays out in various grade levels and disciplines and as a reference for how you can support students in your own classroom. Teachers can share scaffolds as questions, cues, prompts, and direct explanations (Fisher and Frey, 2014a).

Questions are the primary scaffold used during the whole-class close reading. These may consist of a next question, directing students to focus a bit more deeply on the language or structure of a specific passage, or to focus on a visual aspect in the material. This questioning can provide a hint by cueing the readers where to look for the needed information. A *prompt* reminds students of previous thinking that triggers a missing piece of information. After a whole-class close reading activity, smaller groups of students who have not deeply comprehended the text may need additional scaffolds, like *direct explanation*, that involve more detailed instruction.

The term *scaffold* was coined by Jerome Bruner (1966), who shared many of Lev Vygotsky's (1978) beliefs; Vygotsky describes what a student can do independently and with supports from an expert as the *zone of proximal development*. Teachers should remove scaffolds gradually as students gain the skills and proficiencies needed to function independently (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Independence in learning happens for students at different rates; some students may need only an initial scaffold, while others may need scaffolds throughout an entire lesson, and at the conclusion of the lesson there may still be a few students who need additional differentiated scaffolds before they become independent (Brush & Saye, 2002; Fisher & Frey, 2014a; Tharp, 1993).

Roland Tharp's (1993) plan for the management of scaffolds builds on Vygotsky's work and makes an allowance for a mismatch between the learner's actual zone of proximal

development and the teacher's estimate of it. Tharp advocates for the use of contingencies when the initial scaffolds are not sufficient to support the learner. Thomas Brush and John Saye (2002) advance this work by talking about hard and soft scaffolds. *Hard scaffolds* are those the teacher plans while constructing the initial lesson. *Soft scaffolds* are those a teacher shares with individuals or smaller groups when he or she recognizes a need for them during or after the lesson. We, like our colleagues Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey (2014b; Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2016), illustrate the use of soft, or contingent, scaffolds as subsequent scaffolds that are shared to differentiate instruction when the initial scaffolds are insufficient to promote the intended growth. We propose that contingent scaffolds be planned during the initial lesson construction so they will be at the teacher's fingertips if needed. This differentiated preparation is possible because teachers know their students well and can therefore anticipate in advance those who may need contingent scaffolds as they work individually, with partners, or in small-group configurations.

Deciding what scaffolds an individual or small group needs to succeed with a text involves a very close assessment of each student's performance while engaged in the close reading. This assessment begins by first asking yourself, What is causing this student to struggle with the text? or What information hasn't the student learned yet that is needed to support his or her comprehension of the text? Once you have the answer, you can plan appropriate next instruction. It is important to note that teachers should also invite students who have very good comprehension to participate in smaller-group scaffolded instruction on a regular basis. Every student deserves this very focused instruction to ensure they are becoming better and better at text analysis, and when small-group contingency instruction is a familiar and ordinary part of your grouping configuration, students do not view it negatively.

The ideas we share throughout this book are meant to help you gain skills in selecting complex texts and then plan both initial and next-step instructional scaffolds. The suggestions we offer assume that you have begun teaching your students how to closely read a selected text and now have new questions regarding how to ensure successful close reading for all students without damaging their love of reading. This book includes information and examples that we hope will alleviate your concerns.

Instructional Scenarios

Throughout this book, we include instructional scenarios spanning grades K–12 that illustrate teachers supporting students as they develop the ability to closely read a text. These scenarios model how to use formative assessment to plan for the initial close reading and then how to continue to support learning for all students, including those who are not initially successful. Success for students in each scenario occurs as teachers think about a text in relation to their students' abilities and note the areas that will be complex for them, including the author's use of language, discipline-specific vocabulary, layered levels of meaning, students' gaps in background knowledge, or an unfamiliar format or structure of the text. Once a teacher identifies the areas of complexity, he or she then decides how to address them and what text-dependent questions will cause students to carefully and deeply analyze the text. As students read and annotate the text, and partners

discuss it, teachers can easily see how well students comprehend the text's deep meaning. By focusing on the thinking, planning, questioning, and instructional interventions the teachers in these scenarios use, you'll gain insights about formative assessment in action. With these insights, you can plan the next instructional steps that must occur for all students—those who had initial success with the text and also those who need to revisit the text or receive additional scaffolded instruction, perhaps in a smaller group.

As we've worked with colleagues in grades K–12, it has become obvious that the practice of close reading differs as one moves from the primary grades to the intermediate grades and beyond. While we realize that it is quite an undertaking to attempt to cover this grade-level span, we wanted to include primary grades because it is in these early years that young students learn to closely think about texts. This close thinking lays the groundwork for later close reading success. Students are simultaneously learning to decode and gain automaticity that will support their comprehension as they later read more deeply across disciplines and genres. In addition to elementary teachers, this is also a book for middle and high school science, social studies, music, art, and mathematics teachers who are considering how to support students as they read, write, and communicate about texts related to these disciplines. They are experts in their disciplines, and no one can teach a student how to read and communicate about science, history, mathematics, art, music, and technical subjects better than the teachers of these disciplines. In the middle and high school years, students read a myriad of text types throughout the school day. Because of these differences, we share close reading examples that highlight grade-level and disciplinary practices from scientists, historians, musicians, artists, and mathematicians as well as rhetoricians.

In these scenarios, we'll share a plan that involves:

- **Selecting** an appropriately complex text that supports an identified learning target
- **Identifying** the areas of complexity as related to the students who will be reading the text
- **Realizing** that these areas of complexity are exactly where instruction is needed—these are the teaching points or areas needing instructional focus
- **Creating** text-dependent questions that focus attention on what the text says, how it works, and what it means
- **Introducing** the text without front-loading the vocabulary and concepts
- **Observing** students as they engage with reading, annotating, and talking about the text in response to the questions the teacher asks
- **Assessing** who is comprehending the original text and who isn't
- **Identifying** what is causing a student to have difficulty with the text
- **Planning** the scaffolds that will further support *each* student's extended learning
- **Teaching** in ways that promote extended learning for each student

For your convenience, appendix A (page 151) identifies the grade-level instructional scenarios shared in this text, where to find each, and the instructional focus that is being emphasized.

To support your teaching, we also provide tools to help you identify areas of complexity in a text and to record students' behavior and responses as they read the text. (Visit go.hbe.com.au to access material related to this book.) We illustrate how to use each tool while planning and observing close reading. At first glance, you might feel that using these tools is complex. We felt exactly the same way when we began using them, but through the examples we've included, our goal is to illustrate that while your initial apprehension is warranted, close reading—like any other instructional approach you've implemented—grows less complex as you become familiar with it. To support you, we've also included ideas regarding the next steps for instruction for all your students—those who initially succeed and those needing a bit more instruction. Our goal is to support your instruction as you engage all your students in purposeful tasks that promote their increasing proficiency in close reading and in using information they learned from their reading to create new understanding.

Overview of Chapters

To support teachers at every grade level and discipline, we begin this text with a review of what's involved for readers and their teachers during a close reading. We have wrestled with close reading as we have taught it to students and as we have discussed the approach of close text reading with colleagues at all grade levels and in all disciplines. Based on these collective insights, we offer a plan for what we've found works best for our students during and after close reading.

We also review how to identify the complex areas of a text and then how to ask text-dependent layered questions that support students interrogating the text. Since close reading is often initially a whole-class activity that involves all students reading the same text, we ask what happens when some students are unable to successfully read the text. To answer this question, we share instructional scenarios illustrating how teachers first identify the problem areas causing confusion for the student and then how they make the text more accessible through word work, focused rereading, analysis of the layers of the text, and targeted discussion that occurs within both whole-group and small-group configurations.

Throughout the text, we emphasize that you will have to design differentiated scaffolds for many students who may not arrive at the deepest meaning of a text at the same rate as their peers. Because of limitations in background knowledge, language, and other skills, some students may need a bit more support than can be provided through the initial question scaffolds regarding the text's meaning, language, structure, and knowledge demands. They may need additional or contingency scaffolds to support their analysis of the text. We believe that with very focused differentiated scaffolds these students will be able to read the initial complex text and participate in related extension tasks.