

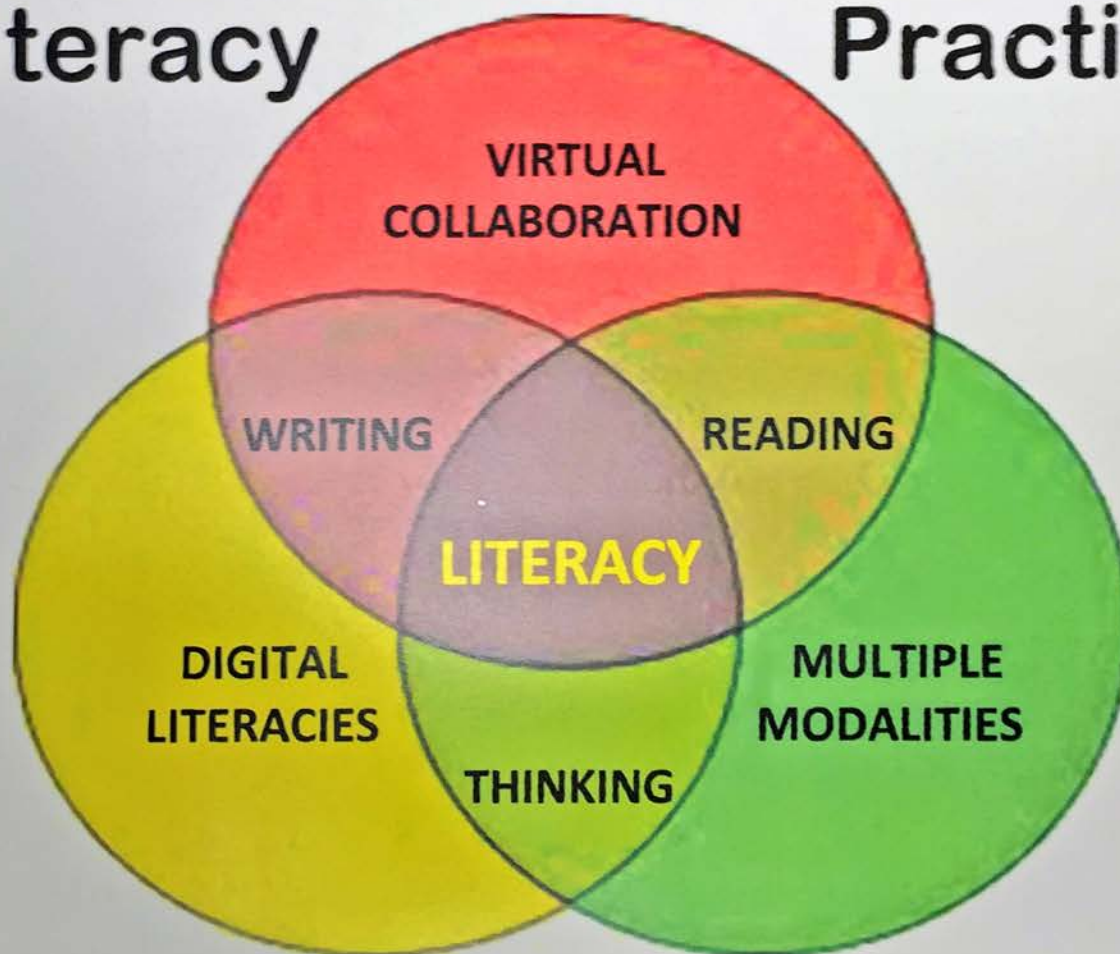
# Primer



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## A Calendar of Exemplary Literacy Practices

Massachusetts Reading Association



## Getting our Students CLOSER to the Text: What Are the Elements of a Close Reading Lesson?

By Shira M. Cohen-Goldberg and Leslie Laud

Nurturing dynamic relationships between our students and the written word is a primary goal of elementary school teachers. How can Close Reading support this goal? Close Reading empowers students to think critically about texts, reaching beyond literal understandings in order to develop higher-order inferences about texts.

What are the essential features of Close Reading, and what instructional activities support these features? The following mnemonic builds on and extends the work of Fisher & Frey (2012) to include insights gleaned from our classroom work throughout Massachusetts.

“CLOSER” Reading, Writing, and Speaking include:

- Complex Text
- Lessons Guided by Text-Dependent Questions
- Oral Discussion of Texts
- Selective Annotating
- Ending Culminating Task, Often Written
- Repeated Readings and Rigor

### Complex Text

“Complex Text” provides the backbone of Close Reading. Common Core State Standards (CCSS) ask that we consider qualitative and quantitative factors as well as reader ability in determining what texts might be appropriately complex. When doing Close Reading, students receive supports to enable them to understand text levels higher than those they might read independently. It is only with challenging texts that students can engage in the productive struggles that best stretch them and grow their understandings to deepen their critical thinking capacities.

### Lessons Guided by Text-Dependent Questions

Text-dependent questions serve as instructional tools that keep the conversations animated, making the text a participant in the dialogue. The questions are the conduit through which students have a dynamic discussion of the text. When well-crafted, they help to point students to the language, syntax, and structure that support the text’s central themes. Text-dependent questions “privilege the text itself,” and “do not depend on students having other experiences or knowledge”(“Guide”, n.d.). The bottom line: a text-dependent question cannot be answered unless students have actually read the text.

### Oral Discussion of Texts

Oral discussion is the primary mechanism for students to engage in careful thinking about complex texts. Students can be taught “Accountable Talk’ routines for discussions such as to regularly cite evidence from text and link comments to peers” (Resnick, Michaels, O’Connor, 2010).



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When facilitating discussions, teachers carefully balance ensuring accurate understandings while simultaneously enabling students to make discoveries. A teacher might ask, “Interesting, why do you say that?” instead of responding directly, prompting students to evaluate their own thinking. Students may talk collaboratively several times during a lesson, each time referring to text, as their understandings mature.

### Selectively Annotating

A pencil is a powerful tool for interacting with text. The main purpose of “marking up” is to focus student attention to the key aspects of a text. Teachers must carefully model, providing explicit direction in annotating to aid in the construction of student knowledge. Given the teacher’s clarity around the most important ideas in a text, she can provide direct guidance to students to recognize, then mark-up, key elements.

### Ending Culminating Task, Often Written

Common Core State Standards offer an unprecedented vision for the centrality of writing. Not only does CCSS specify the genres to be mastered, it elevates the importance of writing. Text-dependent questions may ask students to respond in writing, as writing provides not only a powerful formative assessment window into thinking, but an equally powerful tool for learning. Writing enables students to formulate, then crystalize, their thinking processes; it also deepens reading comprehension (Graham & Herbert, 2011).

### Repeated Readings and Rigor

With each repeated reading, students rigorously deepen understandings. The first read of the text should be to find the central ideas. Students first access the text through silently reading it, or via scaffolds such as hearing it read aloud, partner reading, or choral reading. Students summarize the big picture of the text or the “gist,” often in ten words or less (Klinger & Vaughn, 1999). Students then go on to read the text several times, each time with a new purpose. Teachers support the process with careful, targeted questioning.

Rigor is the final component of Close Reading. Close Reading is a full-brain workout where the teacher, with a light touch, helps the reader to power through a difficult text. Through this practice, we hope to stir in our students a passion for reading that leaves them uplifted, exhilarated and accomplished, and awaiting their next opportunity for discovery.

ED. NOTE: References for this article can be found opposite the inside back page.