Close Reading: Introduction
Third Grade, Fourth Grade
by Melissa Schwartz
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Help your students absorb the details of a text and make inferences about what they read with the strategy of close reading. By reading closely, students will become better able to understand complex themes and nuances in a text.

Learning Objectives
Students will be able to understand that close reading is a strategy that helps them read with a focus in order to deepen comprehension.

Materials and preparation
- Class set of the Sugar and Spice worksheet
- Interactive whiteboard or projector
- Notebooks (one per student)
- Fictional picture book that lends itself to strong examples of character description and development
- Five to 10 images of professional soccer players (images with variety that display intense emotions)

Key terms
- close reading

Attachments
- Sugar and Spice (PDF)
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Introduction (2 minutes)
- Begin by telling the class that today, they will be learning about close reading.
- Activate prior knowledge by asking students to think of a time they were doing something they did frequently, but weren’t really paying attention. For example, ask them to imagine they are riding in a car with other people.
  - What are those people doing?
  - Are they playing on their phones, watching television, or falling asleep?
- Explain that when people don’t pay attention to the details around them, they often miss out on small things. For example, if people in the car paid attention to scenery around them, they’d learn things about their destination, the road, and the world around them.
- Tell students that finding enjoyment in everyday things often comes from looking at the details, and this applies to reading.
- Explain that when the best readers read, they don’t do it on autopilot. Instead, they read carefully and absorb all of the small details that the author has to offer. These readers are close readers.
- Share that, by becoming close readers, they’ll be able to pay attention to details in the book, and pick up as much information as possible from the text.

Get more lesson plans at https://www.education.com/lesson-plans/
Beginning:

- Ask learners to draw a picture of something they do frequently without paying much attention. Have them label the important parts of the image.
- Allow ELs to recount their memory in pairs using either their home language (L1) or their new language (L2).

Intermediate:

- Have students discuss with a partner something they do frequently without paying much attention before sharing with the whole group.
- Define the following terms by giving student-friendly definitions and images, when possible: frequently, pay attention.

**Explicit Instruction/Teacher modeling (13 minutes)**

- Tell the class that they will be learning about the close reading strategy today. Describe close reading as a strategy used by readers, to help them view a text through a certain lens, which is used to find patterns in the text. Students can use these patterns to develop a deeper understanding of the texts they read.
- Show a collection of five to 10 images of professional soccer players. Tell students that you’d like them to “read” the images closely, and focus on the emotion each player portrays.
- Model "reading" the first image by focusing on the player's emotion. Point out the clues that guide you to your conclusion, such as facial expressions and body language.
- Engage students in a discussion about the emotions they see in the other images. Ask the following questions:
  - What emotions does this player have?
  - How can you determine these emotions?
  - What facial expressions does he have?
  - What do you notice about his body?
  - What tells you if he is sad/angry/upset/happy/excited?
- Create a T-chart on the board, and label the left side as "Emotions" and the right side as "Clues". Go through the images and record the emotions and clues on the chart.

**Guided Practice (15 minutes)**

- Create a new T-chart on the board, with columns labeled as "Character Observations" and "Clues".
- Display a fictional picture book and explain that your focus will be on learning about the main characters by looking at their thoughts, feelings, dialogue, and actions.
- Read aloud the text and point out instances where you learn more about the character. Record this information on the T-chart.
- Put students into small groups of three to four students, and guide the class through a second read aloud of the text. Stop periodically to allow for group discussion.
- Instruct the small groups to discuss additional information to put on the T-chart.

EL

Beginning:

- Give students a word bank of emotions and clues to reference as they participate in group discussion.
- Teach a pre-lesson about making inferences in pictures.

Intermediate: Provide a sentence frame for students to discuss and share out about the emotions and clues in the images: "I can tell that the player feels ___ because ___"

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• Gather ELs in a small, teacher-led group.
• Allow students to draw images on the left side of the T-chart and copy words directly from the text on the right side.

Intermediate:

• Put students into mixed level groups to allow for peer support during group discussion.
• Provide a sentence frame for group discussion: "The character is ___ because the text says ____.”

Independent working time (20 minutes)

• Direct students to create their own version of the T-chart in their Reading Notebooks.
• Distribute a copy of the Sugar and Spice worksheet to each student, and instruct them to read the text independently. Tell them to record their observations about the characters, based on thoughts, feelings, dialogue, and actions, on the T-chart. Remind learners to include a clue for each observation.
• Assist the students with their observations.

EL

Beginning:

• Provide a word bank of key terms and clues that apply to the text for students to use.
• Read aloud the text in a small-group to Beginner ELs.

Intermediate:

• Give students a partially completed T-chart.
• Have students finish the assignment for homework.

Related books and/or media

• *Falling in Love with Close Reading* by Chris Lehman and Kate Roberts
• Find [interactive books](https://www.education.com/resources) for each child’s level.

Differentiation

• **Enrichment**: Challenge students to use the T-chart to analyze multiple characters in their independent reading books. Encourage them to look at character motivations and relationships, in addition to thoughts, feelings, dialogue, and actions.

• **Support**: Arrange students who need extra help in a small group to work on their T-charts. Chunk the text for struggling readers on the Sugar and Spice worksheet.

Assessment (5 minutes)

• Ask students to discuss what patterns they observed in the text.
• Hand out a sticky note to each student and instruct them to copy one of the following questions on it that they wish to answer:
  • Why is close reading helpful?
  • What did you learn about a character in one of the texts you read today?
  • What did you like best about close reading?
  • How could close reading be helpful as you read nonfiction texts?
• Direct students to answer one of the questions and then put their completed sticky notes in a designated place in the classroom.

EL

Beginning:
• Provide students with a word bank of key terms and phrases to use as they answer a question on the sticky notes.
• Allow learners to read aloud their answer to you.

**Intermediate:**

• Have students discuss patterns they see in the text with a partner before sharing out with the whole group.
• Provide a sentence frame for each of the questions, such as "Close reading is helpful because ____.

**Review and closing (5 minutes)**

• Discuss student answers on the sticky notes.
• Explain that as close readers, students can read through the “emotion lens” of characters. Discussion questions include: What do you notice a character looks or acts like when he or she is happy? Disappointed? Excited? What causes these things? What type of things do characters say when they feel these emotions?
• Remind the class that good readers read closely, through different lenses. Encourage them to continue practicing reading through "character emotion" by questioning what characters think, feel, say, and do.

**EL**

**Beginning:**

• Have students demonstrate understanding of character emotions and clues by playing a matching game.
• Give them cards with an emotion listed on each and cards with situations/causes/examples of character behavior listed on each. * Allow them to work with a partner to match the cards.

**Intermediate:** Provide a sentence frame for class discussion, such as "When a character feels ____, they (say/do/feel) ____."
It was Saturday, and Mindy was getting ready for her birthday party. In just three hours, all of her friends would arrive with presents and excitement. Every year, Mindy and her mom made a cinnamon cake fresh on the day of her birthday party, and Mindy thought this year would be no different. Excited, she waited for her mom in the kitchen.

Mindy’s mother came into the kitchen and took her apron from a hook on the wall. Instead of putting it on, though, she lifted it over Mindy’s head. Surprised, Mindy stood as her mom tied the strings of the apron behind her.

“Mindy, I think you’re old enough to mix the batter yourself this year. I’m sure you can do it. Remember what we say?”

“Yes... Baking is just a little sugar and a little spice.”

“That’s right,” said Mindy’s mom. “Now, go ahead and start. I’m going to go blow up the balloons.” With that, she preheated the oven and left Mindy alone in the kitchen.

Maybe her mom was right; maybe there wasn’t much to it. Carefully, Mindy measured out the ingredients and poured them into a big bowl. Carefully, she mixed the batter until it was perfectly smooth. Carefully, she poured the batter into the cake pan. Then, she called to her mom.

“It’s ready to go into the oven,” Mindy said. Her mom put on oven mitts and popped the pan into the oven. Mindy had actually done it!

When the cake came out, though, something seemed wrong. Mindy tried to poke it with a toothpick, just as her mother always did. The toothpick wouldn’t go through. The cake was almost as hard as a rock!

“I did exactly what I was supposed to,” Mindy moaned. “I was so careful! I didn’t put the eggs in until last, and I measured the baking soda exactly.”

“Baking soda? Oh, dear. That’s the problem. You were supposed to use baking powder.”

Mindy began to cry. “I’m sorry, mom. I tried so hard.”

Mindy’s mom gave her a big hug. “I’m the one who’s sorry. I expected too much, and I was hard on you. I guess you could say I used too little sugar and too much spice!”

Mindy laughed, and her mom laughed, too.

“Now, let’s try again,” said Mindy’s mom. “This time, we’ll do it together!”
Comprehension Questions

1. Why do you think Mindy was nervous about mixing the batter by herself?

2. Why do you think Mindy’s mom thought Mindy could do it herself?

3. What did Mindy’s mom mean when she said she used “too little sugar and too much spice”?

4. How would you feel if you had to do a big project alone, like Mindy did?
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