CONTINGENCY
TEACHING
DURING CLOSE
READING

Douglas Fisher • Nancy Frey

What happens when close reading fails? How can teachers provide guidance with complex texts without telling students what the text means?

Close reading is hot; there’s no doubt about it. The sheer number of books that have been published in the last year alone attests to the fact that close reading is once again on teachers’ radar. This time, it’s not only teachers of adolescents and college students but also elementary educators who are paying attention to this instructional routine. It seems that everyone wants to know how to do close reading (Boyles, 2013). It is also clear that there are some concerns about the use of close reading (e.g., Serafini, 2013). Clearly more information is needed if this practice is going to be implemented well in classrooms around the world.

General Understanding of Close Reading
The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) require that students “read closely to determine what the text says explicitly, to make logical inferences from their interactions with a text, and cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 10). Notice that it says “read closely.” That’s a habit that teachers cultivate. As Dalton (2013) noted, “In the broadest sense, close reading is a focused rereading of a text in which you go beyond a basic understanding of the text. It may involve a passage or key quotation from a text or an entire text, depending on the length. We may reread with a general purpose, such as trying to analyze how the author uses language to evoke an emotional response” (p. 643). No matter whether you reside in a place that has adopted the CCSS, encouraging students to go beyond surface-level understanding is critical for students’ literacy development, and teachers should be open to any approach that allows them to accomplish this.

For the purpose of our work, we have adopted the definition of close reading proposed by the Aspen Institute (Brown & Kappes, 2012):

Douglas Fisher is a professor at San Diego State University, California, USA; e-mail dfisher@mail.sdsu.edu.
Nancy Frey is a professor at San Diego State University; e-mail nfrey@mail.sdsu.edu.
Close reading of text involves an investigation of a short piece of text, with multiple readings done over multiple instructional lessons. Through text-based questions and discussion, students are guided to deeply analyze and appreciate various aspects of the text, such as key vocabulary and how its meaning is shaped by context; attention to form, tone, imagery and/or rhetorical devices; the significance of word choice and syntax; and the discovery of different levels of meaning as passages are read multiple times. (p. 2)

One aspect of close reading that has garnered a great deal of attention is the support that teachers can and should provide for students. In general, there has been a recommendation that teachers avoid front-loading as part of close reading lessons. As Pearson (2013) notes, while “[a]s a profession we have overindulged at the trough of prior knowledge, the remedy is to balance its role, not eliminate it” (p. 257). How, then, do we balance this? And what types of supports should be used when students are encountering complex texts? More specifically, we were interested in finding out the answers to two important questions:

- How do you support students during close reading?
- Are there actions you take when students don’t understand the text?

Asking Teachers Who Use Close Reading

To answer the question about appropriate scaffolds during close reading, we interviewed 12 teachers, two each from grades 3 to 8 inclusive. These teachers were purposefully selected because they were widely recognized as leaders in close reading implementation. They had either provided professional development and peer coaching on close reading, been the subject of a professional video about close reading, or written about close reading. We decided to use purposeful sampling because we were interested in talking with people who had the experience to answer our questions. As Miles and Huberman (1994) note, purposeful sampling allows for a deeper understanding of an issue or phenomenon because the participants have extensive experience with the issue under investigation.

Before each interview, we observed a close reading lesson in each teacher’s classroom. As part of the observation, we collected field notes detailing the flow of the lesson and students’ responses to the instructional event. As Creswell (2012) notes, field notes are effective when they are combined with other sources of data and when the researcher tracks both descriptive and reflective data. Within two weeks of each interview, we returned to observe a second close reading lesson in each classroom.

The data we collected included transcripts from each of the 12 interviews and observational field notes from each of the 24 classroom observations. We independently reviewed the data to identify themes using a constant comparative approach in which we recursively returned to the data for confirming evidence or alternative ideas. As we identified a theme, we discussed it and reached agreement about its name and located representative quotes. When we had finished our analysis, we invited four randomly selected teachers to participate in a member check. Member checks increase the trustworthiness of a study as the process allows for a discussion about whether or not the researchers have presented the phenomenon as the participants themselves see it (Neuman, 1997). In this case, the four participants agreed with the characterizations of their experiences and ideas and did not offer any substantive changes to the findings.

At the grand level, we noted that the data clustered into two major categories: scaffolds used as part of the close reading process and contingency teaching when students failed to reach deep understanding. Each of these categories contains several themes that are explained in the remainder of this article.

Scaffolds During Close Reading

The teachers in this study identified four scaffolds that were automatically used as part of their close reading instruction. As a fifth-grade teacher noted, “We used to rely on front-end scaffolds, you know, the front-loading and preteaching so that students would understand the text when they read it. Now we use scaffolds that are spread
CONTINGENCY TEACHING DURING CLOSE READING

out over the course of the close reading.” These distributed scaffolds include repeated reading, collaborative conversations, annotations, and text-dependent questions. A seventh-grade teacher commented, “The whole process of close reading includes a lot of scaffolds that are good for my students. It gets them into the reading and helps them make sense of the texts we are studying. It’s really a powerful way to check to see if students are applying the skills and strategies, and content, we are learning.”

Repeated Reading
One of the scaffolds that teachers identified as part of close reading instruction lies at the heart of this instructional approach: rereading the text. There is evidence that suggests that repeated reading of the same text is effective. For example, Samuels’ (1979) classic study of repeated reading demonstrated that word recognition, fluency, and comprehension improved when students read the same text. But even more importantly, when Samuels asked students to read new passages in the same text, selections that they had not read before, they displayed improved fluency and comprehension. In other words, digging deeper in one part of the text influenced students’ understanding of other parts of the text. Since that time, researcher reviews continue to suggest that repeated reading is a valuable aspect of instruction (e.g., Rasinski, Reutzel, Chard, & Linan-Thompson, 2011).

As teachers discussed this scaffold and we observed close reading lessons, we realized that they were not simply telling students to reread the text. It was more complex than that. Students were invited to reread the text in response to new questions that they formulated or that their teachers asked. Students reread the text when there was a new purpose introduced. And students reread the text when they needed to provide evidence for their responses. We found this to be an important aspect of close reading because we have been sensitive to the comments of Nichols, Rupley, and Rasinski (2009), who noted that “[c]ontinual reliance on repeated readings without appropriate guidance and support can lead to diminished student engagement and may not help students recognize that increased fluency provides for more focus on meaning” (p. 5).

As we observed lessons, it became clear that teachers were providing guidance and support in a number of ways, including the flow of the text-dependent questions and the conversations that students were having about the text. A third-grade teacher indicated, “I used to have students reread the text, but really that was just to get them a better score on DIBELS. It was all about fluency and flow. I didn’t really have them reread the texts for discussions, and it never really occurred to me that they could be rereading social studies and science texts. Now we do! And you know what? It hasn’t hurt their scores on DIBELS one bit. My class this year has great fluency scores, and they are much better at understanding the texts that we read.”

Text-Dependent Questions
As we discussed the various ways that teachers support students during close reading, it was clear that the questions they ask students are a critical part of the reading. One fourth-grade teacher said, “I have a lot of questions ready, but I don’t use most of them. These questions help students pay attention to specific parts of a text, or even a word, that will help them get to the meaning of the text.” Another fourth-grade teacher said, “I tend to ask a few questions at once so that different groups of students take on questions that appeal to them. Then I walk around listening to them talking to make sure that they are really getting it. If not, I can ask another question to support their thinking.”

We observed this in the classrooms as well. It was clear in each observation that teachers had a lot of questions ready and that they did not use them all. As we were told by a third-grade teacher, “I have the questions ready, but it doesn’t mean that I have to use them. They’re really more of a support for the discussions I want my students to have about the text. We spend a lot of time in our planning group to develop the questions so that we have them ready if they are needed.”

These questions are generally organized into three phases of complexity. Several of the teachers described an organizing framework they used to plan close reading lessons: What does the text say? How does the text work? What does the text mean? For example, the third-grade teacher provided us an example of the range of questions that her team

“Three phases: What does the text say? How does the text work? What does the text mean?”
developed for the book *Tops and Bottoms* (Stevens, 1995; see Figure 1). These questions begin with a fairly literal interpretation of the text and end up requiring students to form an opinion and compare the text with other texts they have read.

During classroom observations, we looked for these three phases. Interestingly, we did not see anyone link the number of times students read to the phases. In some lessons, students read or listened to the text twice before even beginning the discussion. In other classrooms, students read all or portions of the text three or four times to figure out how the text worked. In still other classrooms, students read the text several times based on the discussions they were having with their peers, with no instructions to do so from their teacher. As one of the teachers commented, “We watched this video from New York that was really good except that they kept saying that close reading was three reads. I was thinking that I was doing this wrong because my students often need more than three readings, or I have to tell them what to think. We have this newer model, with three parts, which makes a lot more sense to me. Really, it’s about supporting students with as many readings as they need to understand.”

**Collaborative Conversations**
In every classroom we observed, students discussed the complex texts they were reading. Close reading was not a silent or independent activity but rather an interactive and inquiry-based experience. The co-construction of knowledge was what was most important. In the majority of the classrooms, students asked each other questions and displayed argumentation skills as they agreed and disagreed with one another about the information contained within the text. In several classrooms, we saw posters with sentence frames on them that provided students with support for engaging in these collaborative conversations (see Figure 2 for an example).

As a fourth-grade teacher noted, “We have known for a long time that cooperative learning was a good thing. It really helps students take ownership and learn the content. Close reading just lets us use cooperative learning with complex texts. I don’t have to tell students what to think about the text. But I do have to guide their conversations with each other so they develop a new habit of figuring out what the text means.” Another teacher said of her sixth-grade students, “This has probably been the biggest change for me in my career. I wasn’t sure that I would like them all talking about the text because I was worried that they would give each other the wrong ideas, but that didn’t happen. It’s pretty great because they keep pushing each other for evidence from the text so they get to the understanding and I don’t have to be the one telling them what the text means.”

**Annotations**
A fourth scaffold identified by teachers was the direct marking students did with on the text, either in print or digitally. These annotations may relate to confusing parts of the text or allow students to identify central ideas. In
addition, the annotations should include written margin notes that contain questions, summaries, and inferences in the students’ own words. In every classroom we observed, students were marking the texts. Some were doing so in their own copy of the text, as was the case in a fifth-grade class that was reading *Where the Red Fern Grows* (Rawls, 1961). In other classes, students had photocopies of the text, and in yet other classes, they were marking the text on their tablets using an app called Skitch (www.evernote.com/skitch). Regardless of the classroom, we observed students interacting with the text, marking sections that they could use later, either for discussion or in response to writing tasks.

An eighth-grade teacher stated, “Annotations are really about getting students to slow down and pay attention to the text. There really isn’t much more to it than that. I see some teachers doing a lot of fancy annotations, which is fine. I just think that our focus should be on the support that the annotations can provide for students. Annotating a text causes students to use their comprehension strategies, such as monitoring, questioning, clarifying, and predicting.”

A third-grade teacher said, “I watch my students like a hawk when they annotate because I know they need to really pay attention to what the text is saying if they’re going to get to the logical inferences I want them to make.”

A seventh-grade teacher commented, “When we started this, the students would just annotate when they first got the text. And then, when they wrote about the reading, their evidence was always from their initial understanding. We talked about this as a class and I reminded them each time we read that they needed to update their annotations so that they could use them later. It’s been very helpful for them to have annotations from the whole close reading, not just their first readings. And their writing responses have really improved because it’s not just about the evidence they find, it’s also about their thinking about the evidence that I’m looking for.”

### The Success of Close Reading Scaffolds

The vast majority of close reading lessons resulted in students’ understanding complex texts as evidenced by...
The close reading lesson resulted in a much more sophisticated understanding about the text.”

The products they created. These products ranged from written responses to debates to discussions that mirrored the Socratic Seminar approach. For example, in a fifth-grade classroom, the students were reading the poem Casey at the Bat (Thayer, 1888/2000). At the outset of the lesson, the students had a hard time with the text and focused on the literal meaning, talking about a baseball game. Over the course of the lesson, the students focused on the sequence of events, specific vocabulary words, the role of the umpire, and the lessons that Casey learned. By the end of the lesson, the students had shifted their conversation to focus on the theme of the poem. Some of the students were focused on the idea that even a hero can fail, while others were discussing the fact that Casey’s overconfidence caused his failure. Regardless of the theme that they had identified, students could produce evidence from the text that supported their claims. In essence, the close reading lesson resulted in a much more sophisticated understanding about the text. The teacher said in a subsequent interview, “I’m not sure why I’m always surprised, and I guess I’ll get used to it, but they amaze me with their understanding of the text after close reading. I have really pushed up my expectations and the students are really doing well with it.”

As a seventh-grade teacher noted, “Most of the time, close reading works beautifully and the process just gets them there, to a great level of understanding of the text. But sometimes I have to do a little more work to make sure that the students really understand.” As we analyzed the responses from teachers and our observations of classrooms, we realized that the teachers had contingency plans in mind as students discussed the text and responded to the questions that were asked.

Contingency Teaching
Despite the scaffolds that were part of the close reading lessons, sometimes students failed to gain a deep understanding of the text. In these cases, the teachers used contingency plans to continue to support students. A fourth-grade teacher noted, “Close reading is a great process. We do it several times a week in my class. It gets students really into the text and guides their understanding. When I first started this, I would end up telling students answers or finding more information for them when they were confused. That’s really not what close reading should be, so I had to figure out other ways to support my students when it was just too much.” Our analysis of the responses from teachers and our observations of their instruction suggest that there are five contingency plans that teachers use: re-establishing purpose, analyzing questions to identify likely answer locations, prompting and cueing, modeling, and analyzing annotations.

Re-Establishing Purpose
One of the most common contingencies we observed in the classrooms involved teachers returning to the purpose of the lesson when students were unable to sufficiently respond or when their collaborative conversations faltered. As an eighth-grade teacher noted, “You can’t teach all of the standards at once. That was one of my early mistakes with close reading. I was trying to work on all of the standards at the same time. Now I know better. I can work on several standards, but I have to know what I want my students to practice and learn. And then, if they get confused or can’t get themselves through the text, I can remind them of the learning target for the day.”

We observed this in her classroom when students were reading The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass (Douglass, 1845/1995). They were very caught up in the text, but they were focused on the words in the text that they did not understand, such as chattel, pious, and precepts. Their conversations were not moving in the direction of understanding but rather focused on what they did not understand. At one point, she interrupted the groups and reminded them of their purpose, which was posted on the wall: “Recognize and explain the use and effectiveness of precise word choice, imagery, irony, and rhetorical appeals.”

The students immediately turned their attention away from the details to word choice. After a few minutes, the teacher asked them, “How does Douglass learn to read?” Students’ conversations focused on the boys that he meets in the streets and how he trades bread for some instruction. As they regained their understanding of the text,

“There are five contingency plans when students struggle with close reading.”
she posed a new question: “How does Douglass use irony to reinforce slavery’s dehumanizing influence?”

A third-grade teacher noted that she returned to the purpose of the lesson when students’ conversations drifted or when they could not resolve an issue. In her words, “Some texts are really complex and students aren’t sure what to do, so they get almost paralyzed. When that happens, I just remind them of what we’re learning. I ask them to just look for one or two things so that we can figure out what the author is saying. I think that going back to the purpose is helpful for them, but it’s really useful for me because I sometimes think that I’m trying to do too much. I try to remember that they are still trying to figure out how these texts work and the clearer I am with the purpose, and sticking to it, the better the lesson is.”

Analyzing Questions
As a fourth-grade teacher noted, “Sometimes, I can clear up students’ confusion by reminding them that there is a relationship between the question and where they are likely to find the answer. Our school has done a lot with QAR, so I can use that to get students to go back and think about where they could find the answer. This can really help, especially when they need to think and search rather than look for a right-there response.”

Analyzing questions has a long history of effectiveness that should not be ignored as teachers implement close reading. We noticed that Question-Answer Relationships (QAR) posters (e.g., Raphael & Au, 2005) were posted in about half of the classrooms we observed. Right There questions contain wording that comes directly from the text, with an answer often found in a single sentence. Think and Search questions are also derived directly from the text, but the answer must be formulated across more than one sentence. Author and You is an implicit question that requires the reader to use both information learned in the text and his or her own background knowledge to answer. The final type of implicit question is On Your Own, which requires the reader to use prior knowledge to answer. The text may or may not be needed, and this type of question is rarely used during close readings.

For example, during the reading about Frederick Douglass, students were unable to answer the question, “What initially keeps Sophia Auld from treating Douglass as a slave?” No student that we observed had a margin note about this written on their text, and their conversations did not result in them finding the answer. Their teacher, noticing that they were having a hard time, pointed to the QAR poster and asked them where they thought they would find the answer to this question. Almost in unison they said, “Right there.” In response, she said, “Let’s see. Let’s go back to that paragraph and reread. We’re looking for a line that says something like ‘The reason that Sophia originally did not treat Douglass like a slave is...’” After some searching, a student raised his hand and said, “The answer’s not there. Maybe we should think and search.” As the groups began to review multiple lines of the text and write margin notes, they started talking about their answer. When we subsequently interview the teacher, she said, “Oh, yeah, I remember that. I really wanted to tell them the answer, but I gave our QAR work a try to see what they were thinking. It happens quite a lot, that they are looking for evidence and answers at the wrong level. I’m glad it worked, and I probably need to do a little more work with that so that they get better at thinking about options for where important information can be found.”

Prompting and Cueing
As a sixth-grade teacher noted, “Sometimes they just need a little hint to unlock the understanding of the text. I don’t tell them what I think anymore, but I do use some prompts and cues to get them back on track. When we first started close reading, I didn’t think that I was supposed to do that. But then I went to the district training and they talked about how close reading was a kind of guided instruction and that prompts and cues can be part of the lesson. I was like, whew, that’s good to know because I wasn’t sure what else to do when the students got stuck.”

Teachers described a wide range of prompts and cues that they found useful in responding to students who were not understanding the text. We observed several of these being used as contingencies when students were unable to respond to the questions asked of them or their group (Figure 3 contains a list of these prompts and cues):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Prompt or Cue</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background Knowledge Prompt</td>
<td>Reminding students about a previous experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Prompt</td>
<td>Asking students to pause and think about their thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heuristic Prompt</td>
<td>Developing an informal problem-solving procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Cue</td>
<td>Using voice to emphasize or highlight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gestural Cue</td>
<td>Directing students’ attention through the movement of the teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONTINGENCY TEACHING DURING CLOSE READING
CONTINGENCY TEACHING DURING CLOSE READING

- A fifth-grade teacher used a background knowledge prompt saying, “I’m thinking of the text we read last week and what it was we discussed about Native American folklore.”

- A seventh-grade teacher offered, “Look at the third paragraph near the bottom of page 83. Reread that section and then think about my question again.”

**Modeling**

On several occasions, teachers modeled their own thinking for students during the close reading lesson. In essence, they pulled back from the close reading in response to students’ lack of understanding or need for deeper discussions. Importantly, they did not tell students what to think. Instead, they shared an example of their own thinking and in each case noted that there were several other ways to think about the text. We came to see this as a contingency plan because thinking is invisible and modeling allowed teachers to get students unstuck. As Duffy (2003) pointed out, “The only way to model thinking is to talk about how to do it. That is, we provide a verbal description of the thinking one does or, more accurately, an approximation of the thinking involved” (p. 11).

As a third-grade teacher commented, “I used to model before my students read. I would model my own comprehension and my own word solving. During a close reading, I don’t do that. I only model in response to their needs. I still do shared readings with my students nearly every day. But when we do close readings, I want them to try this on and apply what they’ve learned. I hold back on the modeling so that I can be responsive to what they really need from me rather than my generic modeling. I mean, I still do generic modeling because I think that they still need to learn all of those skills and strategies. But now, I’ve added a new twist and sometimes only model based on the times that they are confused.”

We observed some form of modeling accompanied with thinking aloud in 74% of the classroom observations we conducted. However, the modeling was of a different intention than the ones we had observed during a study of shared reading practices (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2008). In that study, teachers modeled primarily to teach comprehension strategies. In this study, teachers used three approaches, based on the evidence that students had encountered a problem that stymied them:

- **Model that which is difficult for students.** When modeling occurred, it was not at the beginning of a lesson (proactive); rather, it happened after questions, prompts, and cues had failed to move students’ understanding forward. For instance, a sixth-grade teacher teaching with a passage from *Out of the Dust* (Hesse, 1997) entitled “The Path of Our Sorrow” thought aloud about how she traced a chain of historical events using an impromptu sketch. “I’m visualizing how these events are linking together,” she said, as she annotated her notes using the document camera.

- **Model ways to resolve problems.** This action most commonly occurred in response to students’ inability to solve unknown words and phrases. The students in a seventh-grade class had difficulty figuring out what *commodious* meant in a passage about New York’s Flatiron building (Mackay, 1987). Despite the teacher prompting students about the use of contextual clues to determine the meaning, they were not able to do so. The teacher read the paragraph containing the word, then underlined the phrase “the best of light” (p. 37). “That’s a context clue that is helping me to begin to understand what the term means. I’m able to infer that means the room is light and pleasant. Now I’d like you to dig down further in the passage. How do the terms commodious, the best of light, and all the details about the dimensions of the rooms relate to each other?”

- **Model how you interact with text.** Reading complex text requires an active stance. However, novice readers adopt a passive one, expecting that the text will somehow be understood—or not. Observed teachers frequently modeled annotation, not only when teaching the behavior but also as a way to trace the discussion. A fifth-grade teacher said, “I’ve had good success with teaching them to annotate during early readings, but the practice dries up when they start discussing. I’ve prompted them to add [information] when someone makes an important point, but I noticed that they don’t know how to translate discussion into notes. So lately I’ve been modeling how I add to my notations to reflect the ideas that are surfacing. I think it’s helping them track developing ideas.”

“In some cases, teachers modeled their own thinking for students during close reading lessons.”
Analyzing Annotations

On a few occasions, the teacher discontinued the close reading lesson, collected the annotations, and moved the students onto a new topic. A fifth-grade teacher said, “I had a breakthrough when my principal said that I could stop the lesson and re-group. That was huge for me. But, duh! Sometimes I need to stop the lesson and figure out what went wrong. And then I can bring it back later with fresh ideas for [students] to engage with the text. It’s way better than telling them what to think to save a lesson.”

A third-grade teacher said, “Sometimes, if they really aren’t getting it despite what I’m doing, I call ‘time-out’ and tell them that we’ll come back to this text later. I thank them for their efforts and collect their annotated texts. I always have a back-up idea when I do close readings, just in case. We move on, but I review their annotations to see where their thinking went astray. This gives me a chance to do my investigative work and plan the text again. I’m looking for areas that they missed in their annotations as well as if they failed to use their comprehension strategies or word solving approaches. Then I’ll know what to teach before they attack the text again.”

Figure 4 contains a sample checklist that was used to provide students with feedback about their annotations and for teachers to look for trends across their students. A fifth-grade teacher noted, “Reviewing annotations is a great formative assessment tool. Like, when we were reading The People Could Fly (Hamilton, 1993), my students were stuck at what the text says. I couldn’t really get them beyond the details, so I collected their annotations and gave them a look. I noticed that they weren’t focused on the internal structures we’d been learning. I also saw that they didn’t have many margin notes about the conflict in the text, so I decided that I would start again by asking them how the setting impacts the conflict.”

Similarly, a seventh-grade teacher noted that he had to stop a recent close reading lesson because the students were only making personal connections to the short story “Eleven” (Cisneros, 1991). He said, “They were really into this text. I had never taught it before, and the personal connections that they could make were pretty obvious. I mean, they had all been all of those ages, but I wanted more. They got the similes and talked about that. But I wanted them to get to the major themes, especially illusion versus reality. I wasn’t sure how to get them there right in the lesson, so I let them know that we’d come back to this text again the next day and I collected their notebooks. Later, when I was reading through them, I noticed that they weren’t seeing how the point of view was important, so I decided to start there to see if I could get them to understand the perspective of the character so that they could get to the major theme. They totally did. I think coming back to the text again helped because I was ready and they had a chance to think about it overnight. What I was

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 4</th>
<th>Annotation Checklist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes targeted annotation symbols/marks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>Writes numbers to track the sequence of ideas/events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>Circles keywords/phrases that are confusing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__</td>
<td>Attempts to use context clues and/or word parts for resolving confusing words or phrases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___</td>
<td>Underlines the central idea or major points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___</td>
<td>Places symbols in the margin to note key ideas, questions, or summaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___</td>
<td>Writes page numbers to show where related ideas can be found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____</td>
<td>Includes margin notes that explain the meaning of the symbols/marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____</td>
<td>Includes margin notes that indicate use of comprehension strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____</td>
<td>Includes margin notes that reveal personal comments/questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____</td>
<td>Includes revised or new annotations based on rereading and/or collaborative conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____</td>
<td>Annotations are legible and useful for future oral or written tasks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:  

TAKE ACTION!

1. Select a text worthy of close reading. It should be complex enough to support multiple readings and discussions.
2. Analyze the text and list its qualitative factors of complexity, then keep that list near you as students read and discuss the text.
3. Engage students in a close reading of the complex text using the scaffolds outlined in this article. Make sure to clearly state the purpose for reading, as you may need to return to that purpose later.
4. Observe students closely to determine whether they are making sense of the text. If not, try any of the contingency plans outlined in the article.
5. Irrespective of whether or not the students understood the text or if you needed to provide contingencies, collect and analyze students’ annotations to determine what “next steps” instruction they need.
CONTINGENCY TEACHING DURING CLOSE READING

really impressed with was that by the end of class, they even got to the irony in the story, that as we get older we want to experience being young, but when you’re young you can’t wait to get older.”

Conclusions
Close reading of complex, but short, texts has potential to build students’ reading habits, as noted by each of the teachers we interviewed. It’s a complex process and one that can be integrated into the literacy block. Close reading lessons need to be planned, and teachers would be wise to consider a range of contingencies because students’ responses to complex text may not unfold as expected. Several scaffolds are used during a close reading lesson, including rereading, annotations, collaborative conversations, and text-dependent questions, and teachers can implement a range of supports for students who do not understand the text even with those scaffolds. Many of the contingency plans are already within teachers’ repertoires and it may be that they need permission or guidance on using those contingencies when their students fail to respond to the initial scaffolds. Importantly, both the scaffolds and contingent teaching strategies allow students to do the work of reading the text rather than having teachers explain the texts to them.

REFERENCES

LITERATURE CITED