

# Introduction

## Getting Closer

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The goal of this book is simple: to build an understanding of close reading and how to teach close reading well. It's a worthy goal, and not just because the Common Core tells us that close reading is good for our students. It's worthy because close reading truly does help students probe a text more thoroughly for deep comprehension—with or without new standards. Close reading is a process worth the time and energy it takes to understand it because when we take it back to our classroom and apply it, we will see right away that it works. This book goes well beyond a description of *strategies* to *apply* to close reading. Rather, it shows you how to *teach* the art of close reading—with each chapter designed to take you one step closer to that goal.

## Who Will Benefit From This Book?

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This book is for anyone who wants to help students develop deeper reading comprehension through close reading. It is aimed most directly at elementary classroom teachers of Grades 3 through 6, with exemplars and supporting materials aligned to practices at the intermediate level. But teachers from the early primary grades to those who teach seventh and eighth graders will find the instructional practices useful in moving close reading forward in their grades too. Likewise, teachers of specialized populations and English learners will find guidance here. The same is true for teachers of high-performing students. Perhaps the emphasis on critical thinking will offer these students the additional rigor that will stretch the limits of even their thinking.

Reading specialists, consultants, and coaches have an especially important role to play in the implementation of close reading. First, it will be these school literacy leaders who provide direct services to students who struggle to meet the challenges of the Common Core through regular (Tier 1) classroom instruction. A thorough understanding of the close reading practices described in this book will build the solid foundation they need as they scaffold their Tier 2 and Tier 3 close reading interventions. Furthermore, literacy coaches are charged with supporting not only

students but staff. With a clearer view of what to look for in standards-based close reading instruction, it will be easier for coaches to identify teachers' needs and to help address those needs.

Finally, this book is intended to guide building administrators who oversee their school's implementation of curriculum. Often, principals and assistant principals do not come to their roles via a route that includes current coursework in reading. It is difficult to guide and support what we do not understand. This book seeks to provide "helpful help" to busy administrators so they can hit the ground running with instructional leadership for close reading.

Whether you are a classroom teacher, a teacher who supports special populations of students, a school literacy leader, or a building administrator, this book will be a useful resource for reading thoughtfully and reflectively on your own or with other colleagues in your professional learning community. Each chapter ends with questions to aid you in such reflection.

## Finding Our Starting Point

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To reach our close reading destination, we need to set our personal navigation system from our current location: My starting point is now decades ago—as an elementary teacher of many grades. Even then, comprehension was the part I loved best about teaching reading. I remained in the classroom for many years despite the advanced degrees I eventually earned; I couldn't imagine a more meaningful place to be in education than right alongside children. When I moved to university teaching, comprehension was still my favorite part of the syllabus. Along the way, I have written several books, every one of them focused in some way on—you guessed it—comprehension. Additionally, I have the privilege of traveling about my state (Connecticut) and throughout the country, sharing my thoughts about comprehension at conferences, at institutes, and in district-sponsored professional development. Recently, of course, much of this conversation has turned to the Common Core and, in particular, close reading.

I am proud to say that my most cherished starting point remains the same as that of many of the educators who will hold this book: the classroom! I spend several days each week providing direct services to schools: doing model lessons, coaching teachers and literacy leaders, and meeting with school personnel to reflect on what works—and what doesn't—in powerful literacy instruction. Everything you read in this book I have tried personally in classrooms ranging from primary to middle school, within urban, suburban, and rural districts. These school visits keep me both honest and humble. I am gratified when kids and teachers thrive on a technique I have developed. Those strategies often find their way into a book. And then there are those "well, *that* didn't work" moments, where something that *sounds* really good on paper just doesn't make it in the classroom. You won't find any of those too-good-to-be-true great ideas here.

You have the Nancy Boyles pledge that the pages that follow don't just "sound good." The guiding principles, lesson, templates, charts, and other supports really

do position you and your students to thrive as apprentices of close reading. I believe that the close reading practices described in this book are *best* practices. That does not mean, however, that my way is the *only way*. You may hear about other approaches to close reading, and you will need to decide for yourself whether they meet the criteria for accomplishing the same depth and breadth of understanding described in the chapters that follow.

Whoever you are or wherever you teach, I am confident you are bringing more to this close reading agenda than you anticipate. I've noticed as I've visited classrooms that teaching close reading brings out the best in teachers. It feels natural. It's the way many of us *like* to teach. And when *we* are happy in our work, our students are happy in their learning. I'm smiling already thinking about the joy of the journey ahead.

Let our journey toward closer reading begin.