FRAMEWORK FOR PREPARING, IMPLEMENTING, AND ASSESSING CLOSE READING LESSONS

Preparation:

- Find a text as closely related to the curriculum as possible. Use the three part system explained in Appendix A to determine complexity. Be sure to use the Supplement to Appendix A to determine the quantitative measures.
- Carefully read the text a number of times to determine the essential understandings you want students to come away with from working with this text. This will definitely take a number of careful readings.
- Write a culminating assignment you think will show you whether or not students have grasped the essential understandings.
- Determine what standards the essential understandings and the culminating assignment address.
- Determine which vocabulary words are essential to understanding the text and *cannot* be determined from context. Often there will be many of these words, and thus some should be taught before reading and some during the first read. See Vocabulary and the Common Core for how to best approach vocabulary instruction.
- Determine which vocabulary words, though perhaps not essential, are powerful words students should know and cannot be determined from context. See Vocabulary and the Common Core for help in how to select these words.
- Determine which vocabulary words essential to understanding the text can be learned from context. Prepare text dependent questions to help students learn these words. See Complete Guide to Creating Text Dependent Questions for examples of these types of tdq's.

First Phase: ("Phase" is used here rather than "first read" because one phase, especially with shorter more complex text may involve more than one reading). The goal of the first phase is for students to get a gist or basic comprehension of what the text is about. Close reading can involve much time spent on words,

phrases, sentences and smaller portions of text, thus it is easy for students to lose the forest for the trees. A clear sense of the gist of the text helps prevent this.

- Before reading it may be necessary to provide background knowledge essential to understanding the text. This should be as minimal as possible and care should be taken not to provide knowledge that can be learned from careful reading.
- Teach the vocabulary you have determined essential to comprehension that cannot be learned from context. This can be done before the first read, during one of the readings in the first phase, or both.
- Depending on the complexity of the text, you may want to read the text aloud during this first read while students follow along. This will support struggling readers and help develop fluency at the same time. Other than vocabulary, this first read should be as unencumbered as possible giving students the experience of absorbing independently what they can at this point from what a rich complex text has to offer.
- Again, depending on the complexity of the text and student ability, this can be followed by a second read where students read either independently or in pairs. This second read can ask students to respond briefly after reading with what they feel the gist is, or what this text is mostly about. This read can also include vocabulary in context text dependent questions for those words considered essential to understanding the text.
- This first phase should conclude with text dependent question(s) to insure that students have a gist of the text. You should not go on to the next phase until you are comfortable that all students have this. In some cases this may mean that you need to explain the gist, but this should only be after students have had the opportunity to determine this independently either individually or in groups.

Second Phase for Narrative Texts: The goal of the second phase is for students to develop what cognitive psychologists refer to as a "situation model" of the text. A situation model for narrative text is similar to a story line or plot; it frames how we understand narrative texts and therefore can be helpful in creating text dependent questions for students in this second phase to move beyond the gist.

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The elements of a situation model are time, space, protagonists, intentionality, and causality. Time and space are of course setting, protagonists are the characters in the narrative, not just who they are but their traits, intentionality is what they intend to do, and causality is what these intentions end up causing, whether intended or not. Students need to grasp the elements of the situation model before they can productively work with tasks addressing theme, craft, language, comparison, or evaluation. Questions in this phase are not necessarily literal or constrained. Questions about time and space or setting, for example, can also address how these influence events, characters' actions, or even motivations. Similarly, questions about characters can address their traits and how these interact with intentions or motivations. Questions about causality need not be limited simply to what happens but how it relates to traits, intentionality, or setting. Phase two should cement all of these interacting elements in students' minds allowing them to probe themes and address and evaluate craft in phase three without losing sight of the text. The following suggestions can help you create text dependent questions for this phase.

- Using the situation model as a guide, craft a series of text dependent questions. For each, write the proficient answer you are looking for. While doing this, keep in mind whether you would like these questions to be addressed individually or in groups.
- Look over your questions with an eye for whether or not they are moving students in the direction of being able to do the culminating assignment, keeping in mind that stage three is still to come.
- The questions in phase two should be gone over and students checked for understanding before moving onto phase three. Every effort should be made for students to master these questions individually or in groups. If this does not happen for all students, the teacher should be sure to cement these understandings either in whole class, small groups, or both. Explanations after students have wrestled with something are more likely to produce learning than when we do all the work for students. If students do not have the understandings that underpin the situation model addressing areas such as craft, theme, and language, phase three runs the

risk of becoming a dry, abstract exercise void of context, lack of appeal, and is likely not to stick.

- You should not wait for all students to answer all questions. As soon as all groups have finished the first one or two questions, bring the class together to address these. This is important as a check for understanding, but also because text dependent questions should be designed to help lead students to comprehend the text, and failure to grasp early questions, can make understanding later questions more difficult.

Second Phase for Non-narrative Texts: The situation model for non-narrative texts grow out of the structure of the text. Non-narrative texts generally fall into one of the following structures:

- Informational: what information does author want to convey and why
- Argument: what argument and counter argument is being made (if there is a counter argument), same for opinion
- Problem/Solution: what problem is presented, what solution is proposed, what obstacles must be overcome
- Goal/Action/Outcome: What goal is presented and why, what actions are proposed to meet the goal, what obstacles if any are presented, what outcome is desired
- Process: what process is being explained, what is its importance
- Descriptive: What is being described, why does the author want to describe it

Questions designed to help students unpack these texts would address each of the elements that constitute the situation model for that structure before going onto deeper analysis. Approaching it this way has the added advantage of helping students understand and use text structure which you should make clear in the process of working with each text. Similar to narrative texts, questions evaluating the effectiveness of an author's work, how it connects to what is being studied, use of language, what we learn from the text, and the validity or consistency of the ideas presented, are all more likely to be understood once students have a firm grasp of the situation model.

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Questions for this phase can follow the same guidelines as narrative texts using, of course, the different situation model. It is important to keep in mind that informational texts are often read, at least in part, to acquire knowledge, and thus there will likely be more literal questions for these texts. Literal, however, does not mean easy. Rich complex, informational texts will still require significant effort from students to address literal questions.

Third Phase for All Texts: Research has shown that the most proficient readers have what is called a high, standard of coherence where they expect to understand everything a text has to offer and work toward achieving that end. There are two steps needed to develop this habit of mind. First, students need to develop a sense of how much rich complex text, of any kind, has to offer. This can come about through our text dependent questions and activities we lead to see this in a variety of texts on a regular basis. Second, we need to develop students' ability to independently respond to these text dependent questions, and thus over time to see what these texts have to offer without the scaffold of text dependent questions. Close reading lessons need to work toward these goals. In this third phase, we go after the deepest learnings the text offers, address difficult portions of the text, focus on language, craft and theme, and finally stepping back to examine the skills which may have helped us do this. The following can help us craft questions for this phase:

- Devise questions addressing craft and literary techniques while being careful to connect these to meaning as opposed to entities in themselves
- Evaluate the effectiveness of these moves in terms of advancing the authors purpose, enhancing or clarifying meaning or tone, or even making the text more cohesive.
- Focus on language and especially on how word choices can affect meaning and tone. Keep in mind this is not asking for the meaning of the word, which if necessary should have been done in one of the previous phases, but rather why the author might have chosen this word or phrase, how it

contributes to tone and meaning, or how another word might change the meaning, tone or direction of the text

- Address questions to the most difficult portions of the text which may not have been addressed already. This should be done even if you feel these are not essential to understanding the text. Though there are many ways a text can be difficult, they are finite, and the more we call students attention to these the stronger they will become with complex text
- Review your questions once more to see if there is anything else you can mine from the text that you have not approached
- At this point, review all of your questions and see if when successfully addressed, they would support students success with the culminating assignment
- A close reading lesson that is thorough and deep should include text dependent questions that address all the standards other than 7 (the multi-media standard) and 9 (the multi-text standard) unless these were specific intended and included the right text or texts. So at this point, check to see that your text dependent questions do this
- Go back to previous questions that have already been fully addressed and ask students about the thinking that needed to be done to address these questions. This is especially helpful with the questions you felt were the most difficult. Point out to students that this type of thinking will help with similar questions reflecting similar features of a text and to keep this in mind when they run into trouble. This, of course, will bring up various skills and strategies; it is important however that students understand that when they read a text they are focusing on what the text says and not any one strategy, skill, or combination of these. When they are stuck, they should first carefully reread the relevant portion(s) of text to see if this addresses their lack of understanding. If this fails, they can try some of the skills, strategies, or types of thinking that might be helpful. The ones most likely to help are as follows:

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- Are there some words I don't know the meaning of that might be causing this problem, or that I think I know the meaning but maybe I am wrong, or the word is being used differently than it usually is
- Are there some very long sentences that I can carefully break down to be sure I know the meaning of the sentence and what role it plays in the paragraph
- Are they asking me to connect the part of the text I am looking at to something that came earlier in the text
- Is there a lot of information in this section of the text, and if so should I see if I fully understand each piece of information and how it connects to others

Fourth Phase all texts:

The fourth phase prepares students for the culminating assignment, administers it, and evaluates the results. A good culminating assignment should require students to find all the relevant evidence addressing the prompt. Be sure they understand it, and then organize it and present, usually in writing. This is a difficult four-part task and especially early on needs to be scaffolded by breaking it down. Although there is not one way to do this, the three column evidence guide can be very effective in that it addresses the first three parts making success in the fourth part far more likely.

At least one day should be devoted to working on the evidence guide to prepare students for the culminating assignment. At least the first few times students do this you should consider putting them in groups or pairs. You should also check students' work and review with the class before moving on to the culminating assignment. It is possible for students to do the evidence guide well and still have significant problems with the culminating assignment; a poor evidence guide, however, will essentially guarantee failure with the culminating assignment. Not insuring it is done well is setting students up for failure.

The culminating assignment to a close read offers a unique opportunity to determine if students understand any one or a number of standards. When reading a complex text for the first time, as in traditional assessments, students may not understand the text for a variety of reasons but most likely because of the related demands presented by unfamiliar vocabulary and background knowledge. Thus we don't know if a student's confusion reflects failure to understand the standard and demonstrate this understanding (as these are not the same), or rather that he or she did not comprehend the text. In other words, with a simpler text he or she may easily demonstrate understanding of the standards(s) involved. This potential confound is eliminated when standards are assessed through a culminating assignment following a close read. In this case, vocabulary has been taught and the topic is familiar to students as they have spent a number of days discussing it and addressing questions. Thus the culminating assignments following close reads are the only valid record of students' actual understanding of the standards.