

- Is there a message or main idea? What in the text led me to this conclusion?
- How does this sentence/passage fit into the text as a whole?

Students who learn to ask themselves such questions are reading with the discerning eye of a careful reader. We can also teach students to read carefully with the eye of a writer, which means helping them analyze craft.

How a text is written is as important as the content itself in getting the author's message across. Just as a movie director focuses the camera on a particular detail to get you to view the scene the way he or she wants you to, authors play with words to get you to see a text *their way*. Introducing students to some of the tricks authors use opens students' minds to an entirely new realm in close reading. Figure 1 on p. 39 provides a list of craft techniques to which we might introduce students to encourage close reading, along with questions that might help students explore how an author uses each craft in a text.

**FIGURE 1. Craft Techniques and Related Questions for Close Reading**

Craft Technique	Possible Questions
Imagery, including comparisons: Similes Metaphors Personification Figurative language Symbols	<p>What is being compared?</p> <p>Why is the comparison effective? (typically because of the clear, strong, or unusual connection between the two)</p> <p>What symbols are present? Why did the author choose these symbols?</p>
Word choice	<p>What word(s) stand out? Why? (typically vivid words, unusual choices, or a contrast to what a reader expects)</p> <p>How do particular words get us to look at characters or events in a particular way? Do they evoke an emotion?</p> <p>Did the author use nonstandard English or words in another language? Why? What is the effect? Are there any words that could have more than one meaning? Why might the author have played with language in this way?</p>
Tone and voice	<p>What <i>one</i> word describes the tone?</p> <p>Is the voice formal or informal? If it seems informal, how did the author make it that way? If it's formal, what makes it formal?</p> <p>Does the voice seem appropriate for the content?</p>
Sentence structure Short sentence Long sentences Sentence fragments Sentences in which word order is important Questions	<p>What stands out about the way this sentence is written?</p> <p>Why did the author choose a short sentence here? (for example, so it stands out from sentences around it, for emphasis)</p> <p>Why did the author make this sentence really long? (for example, to convey the "on and on" sense of the experience.)</p> <p>Why did the author write a fragment here? (for example, for emphasis or to show a character's thoughts)</p> <p>Based on the order of the words in this sentence, which word do you think is the most important? Why? What was the author trying to show by placing a particular word in a certain place?</p>

Getting students to ask themselves the four general questions and the more specific questions about content and craft is a long-term goal. If we want to create close readers who are also independent readers, we need to explicitly teach how to approach a text to uncover its multiple layers of meaning. In the meantime, we'll need to come to class prepared to ask important text-dependent questions when students' own questioning fails to produce a deep understanding. But those questions need to be more than "text-dependent"; they need to represent the full range of the Common Core standards.

College and career readiness begins in the primary grades. With the right tools, we can build close reading skills even with our youngest readers.

## References