Risky Writing

We need to help students understand how to answer **text-dependent questions**. Providing evidence from the text as a way to justify an answer entails more than just finding a line in the text and copying it. Students need to locate the information they used when deciding on their answer and restate, in their own words, what in the text led them to that answer. After modeling how to do a close reading, teachers should also demonstrate how to use that information to write answers in a clear, concise way.

Bonkers for Books

Rigorous Reading: *5 Access Points for Comprehending Complex Text*
Nancy Frey & Douglas Fisher 2013

This book focuses on a 5 step instructional plan to teach students how to effectively "read closely." These steps include: purpose & modeling, close & scaffolded reading instruction, collaborative conversations, an independent reading staircase, and daily performance. Check out this book to find out how these steps can guide your instruction with complex texts.

Monthly Memoir

November is National Family Literacy month. This month would be a perfect time to invite parents into the classroom to share in the class' literary experiences. Parents can be invited in to share a favorite book, help with a literacy activities, or just to experience a literacy lesson. Another way to get parents involved is to provide them with literacy tips. The International Reading Association provides parents with all types of resources for improving children's literacy skills. You can find this information at:

http://www.reading.org/informationfor/Parents.aspx

Tipsy for Technology

NEWSELA.com is a new website to help students build comprehension with nonfiction daily news articles at their level. On this website you will find articles written at multiple levels of text complexity. NEWSELA is an excellent way to practice close reading and critical thinking skills. This website supports the Common Core State Standards as well. Always remember to preview each article before you use it as an instructional tool because not all content is 4th grade appropriate.

Working With Words

Close reading offers teachable moments for vocabulary instruction. As students engage in close reading, they examine a piece of text. During this examination they may locate and find meanings for new vocabulary words which will help them to better comprehend the text. Students can use background knowledge and context clues to determine meaning for the vocabulary words. Vocabulary knowledge is a corner stone to comprehending text. Use these moments during your instruction to help your students effectively learn how to look at vocabulary in a text and determine its meaning in order to better understand the selection.

This is one technique that can be used in the classroom to help extend students' vocabulary knowledge during literacy instruction.

Teacher Talk

As the holiday season approaches and with all the changes we have experienced this year, it is an excellent time to take a deep breath and reflect on our current teaching practices. What is working in our classroom? Is there anything we should change? How are our students doing as learners? How are we doing as teachers? Change can be scary but when we stop and look closely at all the instructional practices we are utilizing, we begin to realize that while things may be labeled with new name, they are still the same best practices we have always been using.

Collaborative Comprehension

More on Close Reading

Last month we talked about the basics in teaching close reading. This month we will focus on one of those basics: **Text-Dependent Questions.** The renewed interest in the types of questions students are asked is, in part, because some students can answer many questions they are presented with without ever reading the text. Text-independent questions are good for generating discussions and to ensure that students understand what they have read and that they can agree or disagree with the author's point of view.

Text-dependent questions require students to actively read the text, relying on evidence, rather than outside sources or personal connections. They extend beyond basic recall.

There are six different types of Text-Dependent Questions: General Understandings, Key Details, Vocabulary and Text Structure, Author's Purpose, Inferences and Opinions, Arguments, and Intertextual Connections.

When teaching Close Reading, choose a text (or passage in a text) and determine which type of questions fit best. Model how to read for information for the specific question and how to annotate that information. Remember that the same piece of text can (and should) be used to answer more than one type of question. As the students become more familiar with the text by rereading it, the level of questioning can increase, too.

Remember, not all text requires close reading. Sometimes we read for pleasure and entertainment. Other times, we need to understand the text at a much deeper level. It is in those cases that we need to give students the tools to understand these complex texts.