

Study Guide



LITTLE READERS, Big Thinkers

Teaching
Close Reading
in the Primary Grades

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Summary

Young learners are full of questions and wonderings, so much so that sometimes they need a guide for their curiosity. With Amy Stewart’s manageable approach to close reading, you’ll be able to harness the big thinking we know is inside their inquisitive minds.

Stewart, a Chicago-based literacy coach and teacher, showcases ways that close reading can teach even the youngest students new ways to enjoy texts, think about them critically, and share that thinking with peers and adults.

With its description of the pillars of close reading, multiple lesson sequences for grades K-2, and real-life classroom scenarios, *Little Readers, Big Thinkers* offers a trove of insights:

- what close reading is (and is *not*)
- how to encourage students to “read like detectives”
- ways to weave close reading practices into your lessons
- how to cultivate *real* reading, organic thinking, and deep conversation
- which books invite amazing learning and thinking experiences

With Stewart as your guide, close reading will become your students’ stepping stone to a lifelong love of reading.

The following are suggestions to help groups of educators read, discuss, and extend the ideas from *Little Readers, Big Thinkers* into their classrooms. These ideas will come to life as teachers are given opportunities to put them into practice with students. With that in mind, we have developed discussion questions, pulled provocative quotes, and provided professional development ideas from each chapter that will enable participants to reflect on the text.

The format of the study guide is set up as a study group. It could be used as a study group with a group of teachers or could be used individually as a reflective structure for those reading the book alone. The suggestions offered in the guide are designed to foster collaboration, spark new thinking, and support the transfer of new ideas into the classroom.

Chapter 1: Little Readers, Big Thinking

A Case for Close Reading in K–2

Discussion/Sharing

- What is your thinking on close reading within the K-2 classroom?
- What role does talk have in your classroom?
- How do you support comprehension at the K-2 level?

Reading Excerpt

- Read the section, *What Close Reading Is . . . and What It Isn't* (pages 3–4).
- How is this description similar and/or different to your understanding of close reading?

Quotes Worth Discussing

“Close reading is a tool that helps us harness the big thinking we know is inside the little minds that fill our classrooms with brilliance each day.” – page 2

“When we think about close reading with young children, we are really thinking about teaching them how to engage and interact with text by demonstrating the practices of close reading and inviting students to practice using close reading strategies in a way that will move them forward as readers.” – page 3

“But the close reading that we experience with our young readers supports several aspects of their literacy development, especially comprehension, and makes it an essential component of literacy instruction, even in the first years of school.” – page 5

Putting Ideas into Practice

- What is one idea that you will continue to think about after today?
- What are your beliefs about the essentials of early literacy. Start to jot down your thinking.

Chapter 2: Getting Started

Setting Yourself and Your Students Up for Close Reading Success

Discussion/Sharing

- How might you embed close reading into what you are already teaching?
- What successes have you already experienced with close reading?
- What roadblocks do you anticipate as you move forward with close reading?

Reading Excerpt

- Read the section, *Guiding Principles of Annotation with Young Readers and Writers* (page 51).
- What do you notice? What do you wonder?

Toolbox

- Reference the section, *Reading Like Detectives* (pages 23–29).
- Try generating a chart of what a detective does using the first few pages from *Nate the Great* (pages 7–23).
- Identify what Nate does that detectives also do. Chart as a group what reading detectives do.
- Discuss how you might use this idea in your classroom to get started with close reading.

Quotes Worth Discussing

“The best close reading experiences are embedded in the content you are already teaching and the books you are already reading.” – page 21

“When students understand what a text is, they are more readily able to participate in close reading activities that require them to think about what a text says, does, and means.” – page 29

“Students noticing lends itself to authentic classroom discussion about how what we notice as readers contributes to our understanding of a text.” – page 30

Putting Ideas into Practice

- What is one idea that you will continue to think about after today and might try out in your classroom?
- Reflect and jot down tweaks you might make to promote the integration of close reading in the K-2 classroom.

Chapter 3: Moving Forward

Digging Deeper with Young Readers

Discussion/Sharing

- Think about your students. What topics excite them?
- What are your students' reading goals?
- What close reading opportunities can you provide students that will deepen their comprehension and allow it to be transferred to other learning experiences?

Reading Excerpt

- Read pages 61-65, *Choosing a Text*.
- What do you notice? What do you wonder?

Toolbox

- Explore some new books. Read through, identifying ones that you might want to use for close reading. Some of Amy's favorite choices are listed on page 64.
- Make a list of your old and new favorite books that would make strong selections for close reading.

Quotes Worth Discussing

"We teachers must expertly craft reading opportunities that will support our students as they learn to engage in text-centered critical thinking and discussions." – page 57

"This is where close reading comes into play; we capitalize on our students' love of reading and on their interests by guiding them to think critically and creatively about the topics those texts present." – page 58

"When we wrap close reading into the shared experience of a read-aloud, we make an otherwise inaccessible text one that students come to know and understand very well." – page 63

“With each reading of a text, we want to delve a little further into the minds of our young readers, pulling out and nurturing the great thinking we know is in there.” – page 102

Putting Ideas into Practice

- What is one idea related to close reading that you will continue to think about after today and might try out in your classroom?
- Between sessions, try one of the close reading strategies described in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Inside the Classroom

Close Reading Texts and Lessons

Discussion/Sharing

- How will your close reading plans reflect your students' lives and cultures?
- What are the reading needs of your readers? How can close reading support these needs?
- What aspects of close reading will move your students forward as a community of readers?

Reading Excerpt

- Read the start of the chapter (pages 103-105). This section outlines the rest of the chapter and the lessons presented by Amy.
- What do you wonder?

Toolbox

- Choose a close reading lesson sequence from the chapter that is most relevant to your needs.
- Explore the lesson(s) in pairs or as a group.
- What do you notice? What do you wonder?

Quotes Worth Discussing

“Close reading is so much more than read, annotate, ask text-dependent questions, repeat, yet it is very tempting to fall into this easy sequence.” – page 104

“To plan meaningful close reading opportunities, we must first know our students as readers, writers, and thinkers.” – page 104

“Christopher Lehman and Kate Roberts say it perfectly in Falling in Love with Close Reading: ‘Powerful close reading instruction must be designed in response to the strengths and needs of your students, not planned solely to match a book or fit a scope and sequence’ (2014, 5).”
– page 104

Putting Ideas into Practice

- What is one lesson idea that you explored today and that you might try out in your classroom?
- Take a few moments to reflect and write down your thinking around your next steps for implementing close reading in your classroom.

Chapter 5: Closing Thoughts

Discussion/Sharing

- Are the reading practices that you value reflected in your students' growth as readers?
- Do you provide readers with enough opportunities to notice, wonder, think, play, and talk while reading?
- Are we teaching students the skills that real readers use?

Reading Excerpt

- Read *Close Reading is a Balancing Act* (page 137).
- Reflect on this section. How do you see close reading working into your literacy program?

Quotes Worth Discussing

“Close reading should provide a platform through which students’ natural curiosity can be set free.” – page 134

“As you start to look at close reading through a new lens, don’t forget about all the reasons you love teaching young children to read in the first place.” – page 135

“Close reading strategies do not compromise all the other pieces of reading instruction that bring us so much joy. Rather, they weave a variety of reading skills and strategies into a cohesive framework with children in mind and a text at the core.” – page 137

Putting Ideas into Practice

- Now that you have finished the text, what do you see as your next steps?
- What are your new learnings from this experience? What would you like to try? What do you still wonder?
- Take a few moments to reflect on this experience and write down your thinking.