

Catcher in the Rye Close Reading Framework

Close reading is a key skill for sophisticated readings of literature and college readiness.

Accordingly, the Common Core State Standards have three different standards that directly relate to close reading

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4 that focuses on the impact of words and phrases on tone

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5 that looks at how structural and grammatical elements of texts relate

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6 that emphasizes the impact of a text's purpose on its content and style

In order to succeed in this class and in college, you will need to be able to perform close readings that hit on all three of these standards. Because I'm awesome, I've broken them into six stages that, if you follow, will result in a fuller understanding of any piece of text.

Stage 1: Find the literal meaning of each line or sentence

- In order to begin interpreting a passage, you must have at least a cursory understanding of what it is literally saying.
- In this step, you will either paraphrase, summarize or unpack the most basic plot of your chosen section.

Stages 2-4 consist of two parts.

1. First, you must identify where the details of note occur. For instance, in stage 2, you must find which words are interesting before you begin to analyze them.
2. Next, you must use a variety of resources to contextualize and interpret your findings.

Stage 2: Analyze interesting words

- Note the author's use of verbs, nouns and adjectives.
- Find words that you think are essential to the meaning of the passage or that feel out of place.
- To analyze interesting words, first look them up in a dictionary
 - Identify primary, secondary and slang meanings of the word
 - Choose which you think is at work in your sentence and why
 - Discuss why the author might have chosen a word with those specific secondary meanings
 - What do these features do to your understanding of the passage and of the narrator's state of mind?

Stage 3: Analyze interesting phrases

- Note the author's use of phrases
- Find phrases that you think are essential to the meaning of the passage or that feel out of place
- To analyze interesting phrases, answer each of the following questions
 - Do the words naturally fit together? What does that do to the meaning?
 - How do the various phrases fit within the structure of the sentences? Are the sentences streamlined or do they meander? Where do your phrases appear? What does all this tell you about the meaning of the passage?
 - Discuss why the author might have placed your phrases in that specific sentence
 - What do these features do to your understanding of the passage and of the narrator's state of mind?

Stage 4: Analyze grammar, punctuation, and tense

- Punctuation
 - Note
 - the length of the sentences
 - how the author uses commas, periods, semicolons or quotation marks
 - any misspelled words that might appear
 - Discuss
 - What do these features do to your understanding of the passage and of the narrator's state of mind?
- Grammar
 - Which pronouns are being used?
 - Are there proper nouns?
 - What do these features do to your understanding of the passage and of the narrator's state of mind?
- Tense
 - Which tense is this in? Does it switch at different points in the text?
 - How does this change how we understand where the narrator is as opposed to the main character in the section in question?
 - What do these features do to your understanding of the passage and of the narrator's state of mind?

Stages 5 and 6 are tricky to differentiate and even trickier to determine. However, they are key for identifying the larger significance of your passages.

Stage 5: Explore how larger themes of the novel make us understand this excerpt better

- No passage in a text exists in a vacuum. In this part, you will think about how a major theme in the novel impacts your understanding of your chosen passage.
 - For example, in *As I Lay Dying*, the passage where Dewey Dell discusses her little tub of guts and Peabody's big tub of guts is understood very differently when we understand it as an extension of the theme of the animosity between parents and children.
- Think about what themes your passage falls into
 - How do those themes change your reading of this passage?
 - Does the theme undermine the reliability of the narrator's commentary in this passage?
 - Does it make you understand this specific passage differently?

Stage 6: Identify how this passage contributes to the major themes in the novel as a whole

- This stage is the inverse of stage 5. Now, look at your specific passage and think about what implications it has on the rest of the literary text.
- Think about what work your passage is doing in this novel
 - Does it change how you think about the characters, the plot or the narrator?
 - Does it complicate or reinforce a pre-existing theme?
 - Why might the author have included it?