

CHRISTOPHER LEHMAN & KATE ROBERTS

*Falling*  
*in Love*  
*with Close*  
*Reading*

Lessons for Analyzing Texts—and *life*

Foreword by **DONALYN MILLER**

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# Foreword

The first book I fell in love with was *The Velveteen Rabbit*, Margery Williams' tender story about a stuffed rabbit whose owner loves him so much that the toy becomes real. I read and reread my copy until the pages wore down and the spine split. Eventually, I didn't need the book anymore—committing so many lines to memory that I could revisit the little rabbit whenever I wanted. Even now, 40 years later, I can call up the Skin Horse's explanation of how you become real:

*“Real isn't how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real.”*

*“Does it hurt?” asked the Rabbit.*

*“Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. “When you are Real you don't mind being hurt.”*

Although I read many books when I was small, *The Velveteen Rabbit* was the first book I read that I felt was telling me something important. The first book that evoked tears. The first book that became a part of me, and remains a part of me still.

We never forget our first love. Thankfully, no one thinks you're fickle or wanton if you fall in love with book after book. I have loved scores of books over my long reading life and each one holds memories that remain forever linked to what I read. Inspired by Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House books, my sisters and I played homestead in our backyard—harvesting crops and tying our St. Bernard to our wagon. Bennie wasn't convinced he was an ox, but we were. We named the orb weaver who lived over our kitchen screen door Charlotte. I watched her weave for hours. She never spelled a word, but the bold zipper stripe she stitched down her web every night fascinated me.

I collected book friends throughout my childhood—Paddington Bear, Henry and Beezus, Meg and Charles Wallace, Mowgli, and many others. Endless hours sailing pirate ships and taming unicorns, new words like *periwinkle* and *metamorphosis* tasted and saved for later, libraries plundered and dark forests crossed—my childhood was richer because I loved to read.

Although I left my childhood decades ago, it never left me. I can still visit my ten-year-old self every time I open *Black Beauty* or *The Borrowers*. As Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. said,

“Where we love is home. Home that the feet may leave, but not our hearts.” Every book I read provides another place for my heart to reside, another home, and I am grateful for it.

As a teacher, I expect my students to read widely, explore what written language offers, and build capacity for reading by analyzing, evaluating, and discussing lots of texts. I also want my students to find reading enjoyable and meaningful throughout their lives—to love reading. There is some debate about whether we can teach students to love reading at all. According to Alan Jacobs, Distinguished Professor of Humanities at Baylor College, you can’t. In his book *The Pleasure of Reading in an Age of Distraction* (2011), Jacobs claims that “the idea that many teachers hold today, that one of the purposes of education is to teach students to love reading—or at least appreciate and enjoy whole books—is largely alien to the history of education. And perhaps alien to the history of reading as well.” Our sole charge, many educators claim, is to ensure that our students possess the literacy skills needed to succeed in the workforce. It’s vital that students graduate from high school with the reading skills they need for college and career success, but I want more for them. I hope our students find relevance in their lives, forge deep connections with others, create art, appreciate the world’s mysteries, and possess spiritual and emotional stores that sustain them in dark times. Reading shows us how to be better human beings, not just successful worker bees.

Teaching students how to read well and helping them discover a love for reading aren’t disparate goals. I believe we must guide students toward both. As teachers around the country work to implement Common Core State Standards in their schools, however, many express increasing concern about changes in reading instruction that dismiss students’ aesthetic connections and engagement with what they read. CCSS emphasize close reading—the reading, rereading, and analysis of text for the purpose of interpreting it. Teaching students to examine texts deeply, evaluate author’s craft and purpose, and develop an understanding of greater themes and ideas are important reading skills that students need in order to comprehend and appreciate text.

Unfortunately, because of limited training and misinterpretation of the new standards, many administrators and teachers have an inconsistent, incomplete, or incorrect understanding of what close reading is, how to teach it, or how close reading can fit into research-proven reading pedagogy.

As I travel the country working with teachers, many feel that their entire reading program must shift to endless close reading events using difficult texts. Once confident teachers now feel inadequately prepared to teach reading. Rushed to realign instruction with CCSS, teachers feel pressure to abandon independent reading, read alouds, comprehension strategy work, and other instructional components proven to increase students’ reading confidence and competence. We cannot throw out what we know our students need. We must develop



reasonable, functional tools for teaching close reading that align with best practices. Students deserve instruction that moves them forward as readers and thinkers and values their unique experiences and needs.

Finding this balance is not impossible. We can teach our students how to read closely and fall in love with reading. Chris Lehman and Kate Roberts are lighting the way with *Falling in Love with Close Reading*. Smart educators who care about students and teachers, Chris and Kate offer a practical, manageable framework for teaching students how to read closely. Using lenses to focus readers' examination on one element of text such as characterization, word choice, or text structure, students collect information about what they read. Looking for patterns in a text, students evaluate the choices writers make and develop a deeper understanding of the text and its greater message. This sequence of lenses to patterns to understanding will be easy for teachers to use with a wide range of reading materials and a diverse group of learners. Simple. Effective. Adaptable. Brilliant.

Students will be able to practice and internalize this close reading sequence until it becomes a habit they can use forever—not just in English class. Kate and Chris understand how readers read. They know that artificial school-based reading tricks and tools don't help students become better readers over the long run. You won't find any gimmicks, acronyms, or special organizers here. You won't find laborious activities that crowd out meaningful reading, writing, and discourse, either. Kate and Chris know that students must spend most of their time reading—not filling out worksheets and answering questions. Throughout this book, you will find instructional moves and rituals that really teach our students how to read better and find greater appreciation and enjoyment for what they read. Instead of narrowing our students' reading lives to the boundaries of a page, Chris Lehman and Kate Roberts have liberated our students (and us).

*Falling in Love with Close Reading*, a resource-rich book, includes lesson plans, guiding questions, relevant texts that relate to our students' lives, and authentic examples that reveal students' thinking and development.

Beyond teaching our students how to read critically and effectively, Kate and Chris show how close reading skills transfer into life skills that help students navigate personal challenges and relationships. How does examining an author's point of view help students develop empathy for a friend's point of view? How does evaluating text structure help students evaluate the structure of their daily routines? Kate and Chris build relevance into every lesson—showing students that learning to read texts well helps them learn to read the world.


Through their sense of humor, wise advice, and positive message about teaching, Kate and Chris show their respect and regard for students and teachers every step of the way. They

are teachers at heart. You know it from the first paragraph. They understand our challenges and share our passion. They know what it's like to work with a wide range of student abilities and interests. And they anticipate and provide the suggestions and resources we need to extend or reteach students who need something more.

Whether you need a guide that leads you through a school year of close reading instruction or a menu of ideas that enhance your current teaching, *Falling in Love with Close Reading* is what you've been looking for. Follow Chris and Kate and the students in this book through a journey of learning and joy. I am a better teacher for reading this book. My students will be better readers because of what Chris and Kate taught me here.

We can never lose sight of our true purpose: teaching our students to love reading so much that it becomes real to them—forever. Unlike *The Velveteen Rabbit*, becoming a real reader should never hurt.

—Donalyn Miller  
July 2013



# Close Reading, A Love Story

*The unexamined life is not worth living.*

—Socrates

**T**hink of what you love most in the world: your children, spouse, family, and friends. Your home or a memento from a vacation. Your cat. That old sweater you have had forever. Now consider how well, how intimately, you know those things. How when your partner has a certain look on her face, you know she is feeling sweet on you. How, on lucky occasions, you can preempt your child's tantrum. How every thread on that sweater is as familiar as the fingers on your hands. Think of the first person you fell in love with. Think of the last.

We know, in our bones, that loving something or someone involves knowing that thing or person very well. Returning to it repeatedly, gazing at it for hours, considering each angle, each word, and thinking about its meaning.

Our connection to the written word can be as deep as a love affair. Think of those books, the ones you memorized every line of when you were young, like “In the light of the moon a little egg lay on a leaf,” you said over and over as a hungry caterpillar was just about to hatch, or “Goodnight stars, goodnight air, goodnight noises everywhere” filled your thoughts as a busy room, a moon, and *you* lay down for sleep (Carle 1979; Brown 1947). Think of the young-adult novel you came to know so well that you wanted to rewrite the ending. The songs you listened to as a teenager that played on repeat in your head. The first movie you memorized every line of. The television drama you feel you nearly inhabit.

Love brings us in close, leads us to study the details of a thing, and asks us to return again and again. These are the motivations and ideas that built this book. In it, we argue that teaching readers to look at texts closely—by showing them how one word, one scene, or one idea matters—is an opportunity to extend a love affair with reading. It is also a chance to carry close reading habits beyond the page, to remind students that their lives are rich with significance, ready to be examined, reflected upon, and appreciated.

## What Close Reading Was, Is, and Can Be

Close reading developed from exactly this same place of deep love and study. It brings to mind ancient images of monks and scholars pouring over religious writings to try to divine an understanding of life’s mysteries. The term *close reading* draws its roots from a passion for talking and writing about texts.

As university students of literary criticism in the 1940s aimed to develop ways of studying texts and engaging in thoughtful conversations, professors took to studying and detailing methods of teaching these analytical skills. This all ignited an academic debate, as so often happens. Scholars began to discuss the *best* approaches for talking about the literature they studied. One style that emerged, “New Criticism,” argued that if you were going to talk about text, the conversation should be *only* about the text, not the time period, the author, or the reader’s own experiences or points of view (Ransom 1941; Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 1949; Wimsatt 1954). Reading closely, then, was the process of trying to tune out everything else while looking at the style, words, meter, structure, and so on, of a piece of writing—letting the text itself shine through.

Other styles of literary critique developed alongside, from, and sometimes in opposition to, New Criticism. Several prominent approaches suggested that reading is an interaction between a particular reader and how that person sees the text—that it is impossible to remove experience from understanding. Others believed that considering the time period, or what was known of the author, were beneficial when discussing written works (Rosenblatt 1938,

1978; Fish 1970; Veese 1989). In the late 1950s, the New Criticism style largely fell out of vogue at universities. Each approach, though varied in procedure and focus, involved reading closely and centered around the reader connecting deeply, intellectually, and passionately with making meaning from literature.

Today, the Common Core State Standards have brought the idea of close reading back into the educational landscape. As Lucy Calkins, Mary Ehrenworth, and Christopher Lehman describe in *Pathways to the Common Core* (2012), the Common Core State Standards' writers began with their vision of university reading and developed grade-level-specific expectations from there, meaning that the Standards across all grades inherently value "objective, close, analytical reading" and aim to move students in that direction. This careful meditation on texts is repeated throughout the language of the Standards:

- ◆ "read closely" and "cite specific textual evidence" (R.1)
- ◆ "analyze how . . . ideas develop and interact" (R.3)
- ◆ "interpret words and phrases" and "analyze how specific word choices shape meaning" (R.4)
- ◆ "analyze the structure of texts" (R.5)
- ◆ "assess how point of view" "shapes" a text (R.6)
- ◆ "analyze" "two or more texts" to build knowledge (R.9).

The CCSS even begins its introduction with a vision for students' potential at graduation, imagining that "students who meet the Standards readily undertake the close, attentive reading that is at the heart of understanding and enjoying complex works of literature" (p. 3).

Recently, the debate over New Criticism has been thrust back into the educational conversation after the adoption of the CCSS. Most likely this renewed focus came from the "Revised Publishers' Criteria" (2012), written by two of the lead writers of the standards, David Coleman and Susan Pimentel, after the Standards' adoption. In that document, and in various other commentaries, they suggest that students must make ideas *only* from within "the four corners of the text" and that prior knowledge should not be brought into discussions of text. The latter point, Timothy Shanahan noted, was removed from a revised version of their *Criteria* due to pushback from the educational research community (2013). Though the lead writers argue this as the way to meet the Standards, as many educators have found, if you remove the student from the process of reading, the reading goes, too. As Kylene Beers tweeted, "The Publishers' Criteria of the CCSS has assumed authority, not assessed. Don't do what you know isn't right" (@KyleneBeers April 21, 2013).

Instead of seeing this as a debate between two opposing sides, we believe there is a way to achieve both goals—to teach students to read more analytically, while also valuing their lives and experience. In fact, in this book we argue that by learning to read more closely, our lives and experience grow richer as well.

As we researched close reading practices, we looked for a way to define the approach that takes from the best of what is available. Figure 1.1 shows a vision for close reading that we have come to find effective for developing students' habits.

**What Is Close Reading?**

- ▶ It is an interaction between the reader and a text (Douglas Fisher in the online video interview, “Close Reading and the Common Core State Standards,” April 3, 2012).
- ▶ It is about making careful observations of a text and then interpretations of those observations (Patricia Kain for the Writing Center at Harvard University, 1998).
- ▶ It involves rereading; often rereading a short portion of a text that helps a reader to carry new ideas to the whole text (Kylene Beers and Robert Probst in *Notice and Note*, 2012).

**Fig. 1.1** What Is Close Reading?

Given these definitions, we set out to design a vision for close reading instruction that matches both the academic demands of the approach with the engagement needs of our students. As Staff Developers with the Reading and Writing Project at Teachers College, Columbia University, we have been lucky to work within schools across the country and around the world, and we've seen how educators like you pour your love and attention into developing students who share the same passion for reading as you have. From these experiences, we've identified some central tenets that we have come to believe must be true for any instruction to be effective and that should apply equally to teaching close reading practices (see Figure 1.2).

Put directly, close reading is something we should teach students *to do*, rather than something we just *do to* them. Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey suggest a similar caution, that “close reading doesn't mean that you simply distribute a complex reading and then exhort [students] to read it again and again until they understand it” (Fisher and Frey 2012, 8). We agree and believe that close reading takes clear, engaging, transferable, and responsive instruction. Close reading instruction must lead to students' own thoughtful reading.

Close reading instruction is most effective as a powerful piece of a large, robust, and responsive literacy curriculum. As Donalyn Miller describes in *The Book Whisperer*, “No matter how long students spend engaged in direct reading instruction, without time to apply what they learn in the context of real reading events, students will never build capacity as

### Powerful Close Reading Instruction

- ▶ must raise engagement and joy, not diminish it
- ▶ must lead to student independence, not dependence on teacher's prompting
- ▶ must be one piece of your reading instruction, not the only part of your instruction
- ▶ must allow time for students to read for extended periods and across many pages of text, not interrupt time spent reading with activities
- ▶ must be repeated across time and involve lots of opportunities for practice, not be a one-time, off-the-checklist activity
- ▶ 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.

**Fig. 1.2** Powerful Close Reading Instruction

readers” (2009). It is beyond the scope of this book to describe all parts of effective literacy instruction. For that we suggest turning to resources such as *The Book Whisperer*, Ellin Keene’s *Talk About Understanding* (2012—the book’s Appendix A is invaluable), Penny Kittle’s *Book Love* (2012), Nancie Atwell’s *The Reading Zone* (2007), Lucy Calkins, Kathleen Tolan, and Mary Ehrenworth’s *Units of Study for Teaching Reading* (2010), and Cris Tovani’s *Do I Really Have to Teach Reading?* (2004).

The approaches in this book are designed with these definitions and tenets in mind and aim to keep students at the center of our instruction, even as we focus more closely on the texts they are reading. In doing so, we write this book as a love letter. It is a love letter to the power and joy of reading and to supporting students in doing so with depth of thought and passion.

## What You Will Find in This Book

This book is written to help you plan instruction that supports the development of close reading practices. It is organized to help you make decisions to best support your students.

- **An emphasis on students talking and processing, so you can quickly see their needs and next steps:** You will see a focus on students talking, problem solving, and developing ideas together. While we demonstrate the strategies, we turn the main thinking back over to the students. These are active, challenging, student-driven lessons. These are not “one-right-answer” ways of thinking, but instead offer opportunities for students to think broadly and then refine their ideas through careful analysis of text. Students do most of the heavy

lifting here, so you can have what researcher John Hattie refers to as “visible learning,” an essential feedback loop in your classroom in which continual feedback from student work informs your next instructional steps (2008).

- **Lessons written for a variety of contexts: texts, media, and life:** While close reading is indeed academic and often focused on written texts, you will find that we carry these strategies beyond the page and organize them as tools for living more reflective lives. Powerful literacy strategies tend to be powerful life strategies as well, and we aim to draw those extensions clearly for students. When you look carefully at characters in books, you learn to listen more carefully to the characters in the TV shows you are watching and to the people in your life. When you study how an author’s words are chosen for effect, you can pay attention to words used in advertisements and learn to more carefully choose your own words with others. Every chapter is organized across these contexts:
  - ▶ a lesson centering around familiar media, from popular music to television shows
  - ▶ a main lesson analyzing one text type, informational or literature
  - ▶ a variation on the main lesson for the other text type
  - ▶ suggestions for ways to study the close reading skill in life, from the words students’ peers use to how they structure their personal time.
- **Chapters organized from fundamental close reading skills to more complex applications:** The chapters then repeat these lessons across a variety of close reading skills. The first three chapters we see as fundamental skills: reading closely for text evidence (Chapter 2), word choice (Chapter 3), and structure (Chapter 4). Then later chapters suggest ways to combine these skills to do more advanced study: looking for point of view and argument (Chapter 5) and reading closely across texts (Chapter 6). Chapter 7 suggests a vision for students using these skills interchangeably, as well as ways you can organize your instruction to meet the needs of your students.
- **Extensions to support differentiation:** Each chapter ends with a section of additional lessons, organized as supports for students who need additional practice and instruction and extensions for students who are ready to move ahead.
- **Samples of grade-level lessons, charts, and student work from classrooms around the world:** While we find that these skills can be taught across years of schooling, we indicate specific grade levels for some lessons



simply to provide context for our text choices and the language used. Each chapter includes sample charts to support students' skill development, as well as examples of students' work that came from the lessons and application to their own independent reading.

- **Book and media suggestions for lessons:** Throughout the chapters, we offer suggestions for best-loved texts and media, all culled from classrooms around the world. We have also placed QR codes throughout the book to help you connect directly to some of this media. There are many QR scanner apps available, most for free, for use with your smartphone or tablet.
- **Connections to the Common Core State Standards:** It is important to plan with goals in mind. One set of goals is your state's standards. As many states have adopted the CCSS, we provide descriptions of the Standards that connect to the central work of each chapter.

### *Teaching Within a Close Reading Ritual to Build Independence*

We present a central structure that ties all of these lessons and chapters together. Much like a few key behaviors make up baseball (swing, hit, run) or cooking (chop, heat, stir), we have seen that by giving students a structure—or a ritual—to follow, they quickly become more independent. Structure can lead to habits, and habits can lead to independence. Our ritual for teaching students to read closely developed into three steps, steps that are connected and that help students navigate this complex skill set in more approachable ways:

1. First, read through **lenses**: Decide what you will be paying attention to while reading and collect those details.
2. Next, use lenses to find **patterns**: Look across all of the details you have collected and find patterns. As Dorothy Barnhouse and Vicki Vinton discuss in *What Readers Really Do* (2012), details alone do not mean much until you begin to see relationships across them.
3. Finally, use the patterns to **develop a new understanding of the text**: Consider these patterns in light of what you have already learned from the text. Put these together to develop a new understanding of the text or a deeper, evidence-based interpretation.

This ritual, then, can be the container for a wide range of teaching. Just as a baseball player learns variations and techniques to “hit” (bunt, line drive, grounder) and a chef can

more artfully craft a meal as she develops ways to “heat” (steam, *sauté*, *sous vide*), throughout this book your readers will learn many ways to read with a lens, to find patterns, and to develop powerful understandings.

## Falling in Love with Close Reading

We believe that, as human beings, we already know how to read something closely. Just think back to those loves at the beginning of this chapter; the details you study closely from that sweater you love or from that person you fell in love with. The patterns you find in how your child acts or how authors you admire write. Think about the ideas you develop about each of these things, and more so the ideas you develop about how they fit into your life.

You may not always realize you are doing these things, but that is just the point—we already know how to study what we love closely, it is a process, a method, of falling in love. The work, then, is to transfer this human ability to the texts we are reading, the texts that surround us, and to some of the areas of our life that may have gone unnoticed. That is the work of this book. It is our hope that you will fall in love with the potential of close reading as much as we have, and that your students will follow your lead.

So, let’s begin. Grab your notebook, a pen, some best-loved books, maybe some colleagues, and let’s go into your classroom together.

# Additional Samples

*Pages 9–12 from Chapter 2, **The Essence of Understanding:  
A Study of Text Evidence***

*Pages 120–123 from Chapter 7, **I Believe in You: A Vision  
of Independence***

# The Essence of Understanding

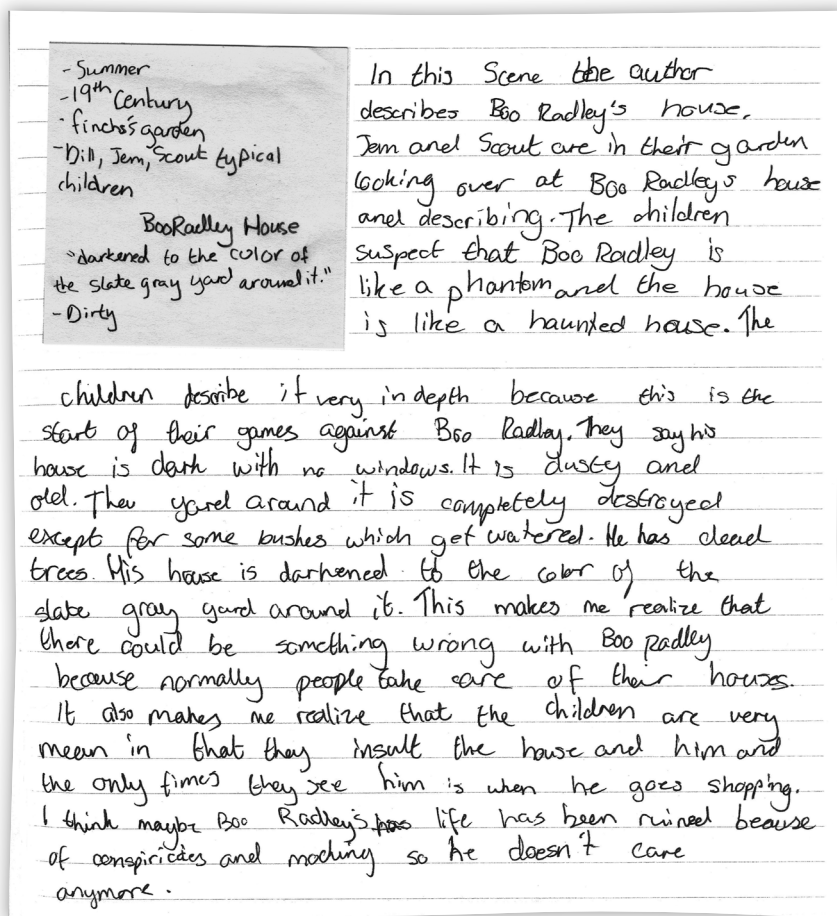
## A Study of Text Evidence

**W**e all yearn to be understood. We want a smile of recognition, a nod of heads in agreement, the feeling of community and connection that being truly understood brings. We choose what we say carefully in hopes of drawing other people to us, to have them understand just what we are trying to say, to feel connected. According to the field of cognitive relationship counseling, one of the most essential building blocks of a successful relationship is clear communication (Epstein and Baucom 2002). During a tough conversation, we can say to our partner, “I think I hear you saying,” and repeat back that they felt you weren’t listening when you glanced at the TV during dinner, then, through this retelling, realize that they *really* just wanted to feel more loved. We can observe our children carefully and look into their eyes and say, “Can I tell you what a great person you are?” and follow up with concrete examples of the way they give amazing hugs and how kindly they treat their friends. This is the stuff of our most important relationships: aiming to understand and be understood.

Texts strive to be understood in much the same way. Authors thoughtfully select details, hoping that we, the readers, are listening. When we take the time to do so, as carefully as we listen to the people we love, we see the complexity of ideas that reach beyond the page and

impact our lives. In *The Art of Slow Reading* (2012), Thomas Newkirk describes this relationship between reader and text as an intimate one: “We commit ourselves to follow a train of thought, to mentally construct characters, to follow the unfolding of an idea, to hear a text, to attend to language, to question, to visualize scenes.” When we become careful listeners of texts in this way, we smile in recognition, we nod our heads, and we create connections. This is the love that can come only from closely paying attention.

Take Marius. When reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), Marius aimed to understand as he paused and carefully considered Harper Lee’s words. In Figure 2.1 he zooms in on the descriptions of Boo Radley’s house, looking at the evidence closely to see what the author is trying to say.



**Fig. 2.1** Marius’ Response to *To Kill a Mockingbird*

You can see the care with which Marius gathered descriptions of the house, and you can almost hear the moment of his realization—his empathy for Boo—as he comes to believe that the children are “very mean” and that Boo Radley’s life “has been ruined because of conspiracies and mocking so he doesn’t care anymore.” Teaching our students to read for “caring understanding” can be teaching them to listen with caring understanding, and can lead them to *live* with this same caring understanding.

## The Tools of the Trade: Getting Ready to Close Read for Text Evidence

Teaching students to read in this careful way involves helping them to acquire the vocabulary for talking about text. The more specific your language, the more you focus your attention and your thinking. If you tell a child how great she is, you can give vague praise: “Kid, you are *great*.” But the more specifically you learn to describe a child’s greatness, the more explicitly you will compliment her—for the generous things she does, for her sense of humor, for her intellect and creativity. Thinking “things she does,” “things she says,” “qualities she has” not only helps you to be more specific, it literally guides you to search out her qualities.

In narrative texts, for example, it helps to teach students some terminology for the kinds of evidence they are collecting and the types of ideas they aim to create. At the Reading and Writing Project, when we aim to support students in developing more specific thinking, we often find that the *more* words they use, the more precise their thinking becomes. There is a difference between saying, “I’m going to gather details” and “I’m going to pay attention to descriptions of the setting.” Just as saying, “I’m going to have an idea” differs from, “I’m going to consider the type of relationship these characters have.” We have collected some common ways to describe text evidence and ideas in narratives (see Figure 2.2), and later in the chapter, we include a similar chart for informational texts (see Figure 2.7 on p. 26).


Teaching students to read in this way also involves helping them transfer skills to their independent practice in more powerful ways. We often used to say to students, “Take your idea about the book, say ‘*because the text says*,’ and then find a detail from the text to support your thinking.” But what we mostly found was that students’ initial ideas were overly simple, or too far removed from the text. As we studied this more closely, it turned out that the issue was not whether they could *cite*, the challenge was how they constructed their ideas in

the first place. What we came to find is that helping students to develop clearer ideas often involves flipping the steps around:

1. *Now, students tend to:* have an idea, then go find evidence.
2. *Instead, we can teach:* gather evidence, then develop an idea.

This was just what Marius did when he *first* looked at the descriptions of Boo Radley’s house, *then* developed ideas from those details. His ideas were more thoughtful and reflective of what he read because he began with the details.

This brings us back to the close reading ritual that we introduced in Chapter 1: three repeatable steps that students can learn to move through to develop new understandings of a text. Many teachers post this chart, or a variation of it, as a reference for students throughout this study. Here we include descriptions for narrative texts (see Figure 2.2).

	<b>READING CLOSELY FOR TEXT EVIDENCE</b>
<b>1. Read through lenses.</b>	Choose specific details to gather as data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What characters/people: say/think/do</li> <li>• Relationships</li> <li>• Setting descriptions</li> <li>• Time period</li> </ul> <i>(See Appendix for others.)</i>
<b>2. Use lenses to find patterns.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which details fit together?</li> <li>• How do they fit together?</li> </ul>
<b>3. Use the patterns to develop a new understanding of the text.</b>	Look at patterns to think about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Character’s/people’s:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◊ Feelings</li> <li>◊ Traits</li> <li>◊ Relationships</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Whole text:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◊ Themes</li> <li>◊ Lessons</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <i>(See Appendix for others.)</i>

**Fig. 2.2** Close Reading Ritual: Text Evidence in Narrative Texts

## Putting It All Together: Allowing a Text to Guide Our Reading

Across the initial chapters of this book we presented close reading skills in lessons that support students in learning, what we call the foundational skills—reading closely for text evidence (Chapter 2), word choice (Chapter 3), and structure (Chapter 4). We then moved to supporting students in combining those skills in Chapters 5 and 6, to read closely to analyze a point of view or argument (Chapter 5) and to make close comparisons between texts (Chapter 6). Now we want to think about the step after that. Specifically, that as students become more developed in reading closely, they can move from deciding ahead of time which lenses to place on a text and instead allow the text to direct them in choosing what to analyze.

To illustrate this, let's move from informational texts and literature, which have been the examples across this book, to look at another genre: poetry. Instead of choosing a lens at first, let's read "Let Go of It," by Cindy Day (1997), and see what lenses the poem invites us to use. Begin by reading through the poem, then we will come back and draw on all of our close reading habits in order to look at it once again, more closely.

### ***Let Go of It***

- 1 *When the wind came up that day*  
*I was holding the jib, I was holding it tight*  
*like Harriet said to and it was something*  
*to be flying over the bright water,*
- 5 *the wind with us, the shore becoming small,*  
*then green, then a dark line.*



*It was my first time and I was glad  
that it was easy, my job steady,  
the boat as light as a toy, the water  
10 slipping by with a slipping sound.*

*And then the wind changed, turning  
like a face in anger, darkly,  
and hurled itself at the side of us.  
Harriet said, "Let go of it," but I couldn't,  
15 I kept pulling the jib tighter while the mainsail  
she let go of clapped over my head  
and the rope tying everything to everything  
dug deep into my hands. Disaster is  
to me now this perfect symbol,  
20 that boat keeling, Harriet leaning backward  
over starboard, arching her neck as far as it will go  
into the wind, the volume of the wind,  
the Atlantic spilling in, again  
her cry, "Let go of it!" and myself  
25 when I couldn't, when it was more than  
terror, I already believed I was stronger,  
bigger than the wind and could not see  
how not holding on would save us,  
how letting go is holding on.*

Reading through once, you probably can't help but have ideas. We think right away, for example: "This poem is about letting go." That feels right, but seemingly great first ideas can become so much better through closer reading. When you go back to reread, know that you can draw on all of the work of this book, pull thinking from across all of the chapters, to develop a new interpretation. To illustrate this, we have described what we were thinking as we reread this poem, and to the left of this we highlighted the skills from this book that we were drawing upon. Notice how we aim to let the poem lead us to different lenses.

Let's reread the poem to look more closely at it, drawing on all that we have learned.

Chapter 2 considering text evidence

Chapter 2 choose a lens: descriptions and definitions

Chapter 4 choose a lens: techniques as structure

Chapter 4 have a new understanding: a metaphor

Chapter 5 considering point of view

Chapter 2 considering text evidence when analyzing point of view

Chapter 5 have a new understanding: what is revealed from these words?

Chapter 5 have a new understanding: author's purpose or theme

Chapter 2 text evidence

Chapter 6 considering text comparisons

have a new understanding: an interpretation by drawing on all lenses

Right away in line 2, an **unfamiliar term**: *jib*. But, we know how to handle this! Looking for **descriptions** we can find text evidence such as the *jib* is something you *hold onto tightly*, is related to the *mainsail*, and is the *rope* "tying everything to everything." We notice a **pattern** here: something that holds parts of the boat together. So, **a jib is** either the rope that connects to the sail or a rope in the sail and it needs controlling.

We can reread not with just one lens, but many. Such as noticing a **technique** the poet is using: **repetition**. In lines 2, 15, and 24 the speaker is holding the jib. We ask, "Why would the poet repeat this?" We know that **in poems** often times repeated images connect to meaning. Maybe, **letting go of the jib is like letting go in our lives**.

Feeling more confident, we go back into the poem. It gets us wondering: what exactly **is this poet or poem saying**? To dig into point of view we know we can look more closely at **text evidence**: the storm, the jib, holding on tightly, someone shouting, "Let go of it!" **These seem to** describe a choice: let go or try to control. Then **word choice**: "disaster" in line 18, in line 25 "I couldn't," in line 26 "more than terror," and "I already believed I was stronger, bigger." **This pattern suggests** that trying to control everything might be worse than the storm itself. And then we look to **structure**: the start of the poem is calm, the weather nice, the narrator confident; the end of the poem is dangerous, dark, the narrator uncertain.

We bring all of these together. **What is the poet saying about letting go?**

We think about **the jib** that controls the sail. **The end of the poem**, in the scariest moment, you are supposed to let go of it. There is also **the phrase**, "letting go is holding on"—but holding onto what? There is a sense that if she lets go, it will be OK. So maybe it is saying we should hold onto trust? Trusting that the boat knows what to do. The sails and the wind will take care of you if you let them.

As we reread we know it helps to think of **other texts in our reading legacy**, comparing them reveals more in both. *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (2008) by Patrick Ness comes to mind, where the characters Todd and Viola struggle so much with trust and survival. **In both** that novel and this poem there is a need to learn to let go—in the poem the jib, and in the book with the world they know. **But these texts are different**, because Todd and Viola feel they must control what is happening around them, they cannot trust life to take care of them. Maybe the poem's narrator fears the same thing? Yet, they learn to rely on one another. Could the poem be saying this as well?

**We are now thinking** that the poem is saying that there is a time and a place for control—you *should* know how to use a jib to steer a boat—but also sometimes in life you need to let go and trust that you will end up where you need to be. You guided the boat, so the boat can guide you. You supported others, now they can support themselves, support you.

Chapter 2 look for patterns: how do these details fit together?

Chapter 2 have a new understanding: clarify the meaning of the term

Chapter 4 considering structure

Chapter 4 choose a lens: genre as structure

Chapter 5 have a new understanding: what is revealed from these details?

Chapter 3 consider word choice when analyzing point of view

Chapter 4 considering structure when analyzing point of view

Chapter 4 structure

Chapter 3 word choice

consider similarities

consider differences

This, then, is a vision to hold in mind during each of the lessons across this book—that our instruction is building toward students’ independence, that our ritual becomes their *habit*. Teach the steps so students can use them when they have trouble. Help students develop lenses for looking closely within a text so they will learn to let the text guide them in which lens to use. Guide them to practice ways of finding patterns so they will develop their own strong ideas. The dream of this ritual is that your students will read a text closely on their own, in all of the messy brilliance that entails.