Close Reading & Grammar Gallery: A Perfect Fit

When students read closely, they not only grasp the meaning of individual words, sentences, and paragraphs, but also become attuned to the nuances and connotations of the text. These nuances and connotations are revealed in many different ways—through vocabulary, syntax, thematic elements, point of view, and the use of literary devices. Close readers must attend to the linguistic, semantic, structural, and cultural aspects of a text, a skill that requires more than a superficial reading of a text. In fact, in requires the opposite. Students must read and reread a text many times to uncover all the work has to reveal. Close reading is an approach to reading that can be extremely complex, which underscores why students need a great deal of practice in order to master the skills of close reading.

Grammar Gallery’s Reading Gallery includes more than 300 readings, any one of which can be a springboard for you to use to help your students develop and refine their close reading skills. Here’s a suggested sequence, keeping in mind that only the most advanced students will continue all the way through Step 4:

1. **READ AND DESCRIBE:** Select a reading in Grammar Gallery’s Reading Gallery and have students read it individually, in pairs, or as part of a whole-class activity. Then ask questions that lead students to describe what they have just read: *Was the text fiction or nonfiction? What was it about? What was the main idea or purpose? Who is the author? When do you think the text was written? Who is the intended audience?* ... and so forth.

2. **REREAD AND THINK:** Have students read the text again, but this time guide their reading with questions such as the following: *What can you infer from the text? What is the author’s point of view? Why does the author use certain words or sentence structures? Is the author trying to convince you of something, teach you a lesson, or get you to like or dislike a person or character? How does the author do that? What words or sentences surprised you? Why? What literary devices did the author use?* ... and so forth.

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**Popul Voh**

*The Popul Voh is a written account of the ancient Maya. This 8-000-line poem reveals important information about the lives and writings of the Maya civilization. By the time the Spanish arrived in the “New World,” in the early 1500s, the golden age of the Maya civilization had already ended. The incredible images, paintings, and other stories the Maya built give testimony to their civilization, but it is reaped by the imagination of the person who reads it. The work uses many times words and stories in the Popul Voh, which means, “Council Book.” The accounts of the Maya civilization are written from the perspective of the conquering Spaniards, but the Popul Voh is special because it is written from the perspective of the Maya themselves. The original version of the Popul Voh was lost, but copies of it have survived. In the section below, you can read the Popul Voh it is a complete story. In your reading the Popul Voh it is a complete story. In your reading, think about how it compares with other creative stories you have read about.*

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“Popul Voh,” a nonfiction reading from Level 5 of Grammar Gallery.
After students have reread the text, lead them in a discussion of what the text reveals implicitly, focusing on the questions that guided their rereading.

3. **REREAD AND ANALYZE.** Have student read the text a third time, guiding their reading with analytical questions such as the following: *What is the author’s attitude toward the subject? How does the author use vocabulary, syntax, and various literary devices to reveal his/her attitude? Why did the author choose to use certain words or sentence structures? How did these choices affect the meaning of the text? Do you think the literary devices the author used were effective? ... and so forth.* After they have reread the text, lead students to analyze the text on a deeper level, focusing on the questions that guided their rereading.

4. **REREAD AND INTERPRET.** Have student read the text a fourth time, guiding their reading with questions that require them to consider the text in relation to the body of cultural material in which it resides: *What references does the author make to the larger cultural context (e.g., myths, Biblical stories, literary works, and so forth)? Why did the author use those references? How does that choice affect the overall impact of the work? ... and so forth.* After students have finished rereading the text, lead them in a discussion of their interpretation of the text, focusing on the questions that guided their rereading.

Instructing students in the process of close reading will help them develop a much stronger grasp of the material they encounter in school (as well as the texts that will face them in “real life”). The critical importance of close reading skills is reflected in the emphasis the Common Core Standards accords this level of reading proficiency.

*If you’re not already using Grammar Gallery, see for yourself how the 300 readings in the program can help your students develop and refine their close reading skills. Every reading is available online. You can print the readings, project them on a screen, or have students access them on a computer or an iPad. Visit www.grammargallery.org to learn more about the nation’s premier grammar program. We offer free trials for educators!*