Close Reading and Making Meaning

By Jackie Jacobs | Categories: Reading

In a previous post, I did a little thinking around the article "Close Reading" by Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher. As a result of that thinking, I tasked myself with reviewing a unit of Making Meaning to identify instruction that either supported the teaching of a close reading technique or to identify places where there might be an opportunity to incorporate a close reading technique. The techniques I kept in mind were those identified by Frey and Fisher:

- Using short, worthy passages of text for instruction
- Encouraging rereading
- Annotating the text
- Returning to the text to answer questions
- Post-reading activities that require students to return to the text

So, with pencil in hand, I read and reread Making Meaning grade 4, Unit 5, Making Inferences. Here's a summary of what I found in Week 1.

Grade 4: Unit 5, Making Inferences, Week 1

Lesson	What do the students do?	Close Reading Technique
Week 1, Day 1	• Students use "Stop and Ask Questions" as they listen to a story read aloud. • Students think about whether their questions were answered in the story and then use the questions to discuss the story with their partners. • Students discuss theme—what they learned from the story that they can apply to their own lives. • During IDR, students review "Fix-up" strategies: rereading and reading ahead. Students mark places in their texts that they don't understand and then try out one or both of the strategies to see if it helps their understanding. • In the extension activity students discuss questions they have about hurricanes and listen for answer to those questions.	**Techniques practiced as a whole-class through a read-aloud:** • Annotating (writing down questions or indicating places in the text where they have questions) • Returning to the text to answer questions • Post-reading discussion requires students to return back to the text • Encouraging rereading **Techniques practiced independently using self-selected, appropriately leveled texts:** • Returning to the text to answer questions • Encouraging rereading
Week 1, Day 3	• Teacher rereads part of the story • Partners read excerpt of text, underlining clues that let them know a storm is happening. Teacher supports students by rereading the passage, if needed. • Students share what they underlined and explain how that passage let them know a storm was coming. • During IDR, students think about questions that come up as they read. Students reread the same section of text and think about any new questions that come up or if any misunderstanding were clarified.	**Techniques practiced with partners using excerpted text:** • Analyzing short passage of text • Annotating (underlining clues in the text) • Encouraging rereading **Techniques practiced independently using self-selected, appropriately leveled texts:** • Returning to the text to answer questions • Encouraging rereading **Adaptation to Instruction to Support Annotation** • During IDR, students can write down questions they have as they read on a self-stick note and place it next to the passage where they had the question.
Week 1, Day 4	• Students practice making inferences when reading independently. They read for ten minutes and then reread the same section again thinking about inferences they are making. Students are given questions to ask themselves as they read. • Students talk in pairs about what is happening in their books and if they know that because it was stated directly or if they inferred using clues. They are asked to explain the clues. • Students write in their journals about one thing they know about their books. They must include details about how they know (if was stated directly or if they made an inference).	**Techniques practiced independently using self-selected, appropriately leveled texts:** • Encouraging rereading • Returning to the text to answer questions • Post-reading activities that require students to return to the text

I'm not going to outline the entire unit here, but I found similar support provided in Days 2–4 of Weeks 2 and 3 (it's a three-week unit).

Summary

This exercise confirmed my belief that the instruction in Making Meaning supports students with learning close reading techniques.

Students have opportunities to:

- Analyze short, worthy passages (done during Guided Strategy Practice and Independent Strategy Practice lessons with passages reproduced in the Student Response Book)
- Read and reread excerpts from read-aloud texts and IDR texts for a specific purpose
- Annotate excerpted texts or self-selected texts for specific purposes
    - Underline clues that help them make inferences about a character, the setting, or plot of a story
    - Think about questions they have about the text as they read and marking those places with self-stick notes
    - Think about things that surprised them as they read
    - Identify key details in a text and summarizing them
- After-reading tasks such as whole-class discussions, Writing About Reading activities, and Reading Journal entries require students to return to texts for a specific purpose (*e.g.*, comparing two texts, writing about inferences, character change, or questions they have about their texts)
- Additionally, students learn specific questions to ask themselves to help them think about all texts-not just "complex" texts (*e.g.*, self-monitoring questions and questions to think about when making inferences)

In the end, Making Meaning helps students understand that reading is an active process-that readers need to be alert and attentive as they read and they need to ask questions and wonder about what they are reading. I also appreciate that the instruction encourages students to practice close reading techniques not only in short excerpts of text but in self-selected texts that they are reading independently during Individualized Daily Reading.

I'd be interested in others doing a close read of a Making Meaning unit and seeing what they come up with. How does the instruction in these lessons support instruction around close reading? In what ways are the students practicing close reading techniques? How might these techniques be used across content areas?