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# READING CLOSELY FOR TEXTUAL DETAILS

DEVELOPING CORE PROFICIENCIES  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS / LITERACY UNIT

GRADE 8

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**"And, above all, we had to learn English."**



## DEVELOPING CORE PROFICIENCIES SERIES

This unit is part of the Odell Education Literacy Instruction: Developing Core Proficiencies program, an integrated set of ELA units spanning grades 6-12. Funded by USNY Regents Research Fund, the program is comprised of a series of four units at each grade level that provide direct instruction on a set of literacy proficiencies at the heart of the CCSS.

Unit 1: Reading Closely for Textual Details  
Unit 2: Making Evidence-Based Claims  
Unit 3: Researching to Deepen Understanding  
Unit 4: Building Evidence-Based Arguments

The Core Proficiencies units have been designed to be used in a variety of ways. They can be taught as short stand-alone units to introduce or develop key student proficiencies. Teachers can also integrate them into larger modules that build up to and around these proficiencies. Teachers can also apply the activity sequences and unit materials to different texts and topics. The materials have been intentionally designed for easy adaptation to new texts.

Unit materials available at  
[www.odelleducation.com](http://www.odelleducation.com)



## READING CLOSELY FOR TEXTUAL DETAILS

Becoming literate involves developing habits and proficiencies associated with many reading purposes, from reading for pleasure to preparing for high-stakes business meetings. This unit develops students' abilities to read closely for textual details—a proficiency essential for a variety of reading purposes and contexts. Attending to and analyzing details are essential skills for accessing meaning, allowing texts to inform our understanding and enrich our lives.

Rather than simply ask students to read closely, this unit instructs them in a process for doing so. The activities lay out a process for approaching, questioning and analyzing texts that helps readers focus on key textual characteristics and ideas. Just as experts in any field access deep understanding by knowing what to look for in their particular fields, expert readers know the questions to ask of texts in order to guide them to deep meaning. The framework of questioning presented in this

unit takes the invisible process expert readers have internalized and makes it explicit – to support teachers and students as they develop proficiency in reading text closely.

Proficient readers can also explain and share the discoveries they have made through reading and analyzing a text. Developing evidence-based explanations is essential for clarifying and deepening one's own understanding as well as the foundation for participation in academic and civic life. This unit integrates the development of explanatory communication skills into the close reading process. Students learn to explain their thinking and link it with textual evidence both in discussion and writing. The unit culminates in a structured text-centered discussion in which students examine discoveries they have made about an important topic, by explaining and comparing their textual analyses with their peers.



## HOW THIS UNIT IS STRUCTURED

The unit activities are organized into five parts, each associated with short texts. The parts build on each other and can each span a range of instructional time depending on scheduling and student ability.

Part 1 introduces students to the idea of reading closely for details through an examination of a range of text types. Part 2 introduces students to a particular process for close reading that involves questioning the text—at first generally and then in text-specific ways—to help them focus on important textual ideas and characteristics. Part 3 develops student proficiency by analyzing textual details for making comparisons across texts. Parts 4 and 5 develop students' abilities to express their analysis, first through writing text-based explanations in Part 4 and then, in Part 5, through facilitating and participating in text-centered discussions.

This organization is designed to strengthen the precision of instruction and assessment, as well as to give teachers flexibility in their use of the unit.

The final activities in Parts 1-4 are designed as independent student tasks that can be done either in class or as homework.

Part 5 includes an optional extended assessment activity involving the creating of a student portfolio of work and a reflective essay on their experience throughout the unit.



## HOW THIS UNIT MIGHT BE EMBEDDED IN CONTENT-BASED CURRICULUM

The unit is explicitly and intentionally framed as skills-based instruction. It is critical for students to understand that they are developing core literacy proficiencies that will enrich their academic and civic lives. The unit and activities should be framed for them as such. Nonetheless, the texts have been chosen, in part, for their rich content and cultural significance. They contain many important historical and contemporary ideas and themes. Teachers are encouraged to sequence the unit strategically within their

curriculum and instructional plans, and to establish content connections that will be meaningful for students. This might involve connecting the unit to the study of topics or eras in social studies, related genres or voices in literature, or themes and guiding questions. Whatever the curricular context established by the teacher, the central emphasis of the unit should, however, be on evidence-based, text-focused instruction.



## HOW THIS UNIT TEACHES WRITING

Communicating understanding effectively is an essential part of the close reading process. And while this unit focuses primarily on reading proficiencies, writing from textual evidence plays an important role in most of the activities. The nature of the writing instruction at this stage in the Developing Core Proficiencies Series is rooted in some core principles. First, strong writing flows from deep comprehension of a text or topic. Many deficiencies in writing are the result of shallow or uniformed critical thinking. The unit writing activities are linked closely to student reading in ways that help them both develop and express their emerging understanding of the evidence at hand. Students are continually asked to explain their thinking about texts in their writing. Developing this ability is fundamental to supporting students as they craft extended pieces of writing in later contexts.

The writing activities—including the writing students complete on the tools—are all very limited in scope. In most cases students write only one or two sentences and at most a few short paragraphs. This in NO way suggests that they are limited in importance. The limited scope intentionally allows teachers and students to focus on building the ability to accurately incorporate textual evidence into their communication, and include effective word choice, punctuation, and syntax that are appropriate to the audience and task.



## HOW THIS UNIT TEACHES VOCABULARY

This unit draws on a variety of strategies for teaching academic and disciplinary vocabulary. The primary strategy is the way critical disciplinary vocabulary and concepts are built into the instruction. Students are taught words like “analyze,” “perspective,” “questioning,” and “criteria” through their explicit use in the activities. Students come to understand and use these words as they think about and evaluate their textual analysis and that of their peers. The handouts and tools play a key role in this process. By the end of the unit, students will have developed deep conceptual knowledge of key vocabulary that they can transfer to a variety of academic and public contexts.

The texts and activities also provide many opportunities for academic vocabulary instruction. Many of the activities focus directly on analyzing the way authors use language and key words to develop ideas and achieve specific purposes.

The sequence of topical texts also builds vocabulary knowledge and connections, supporting both textual comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. The texts are formatted with integrated tools for vocabulary development. Each page includes editable glossaries where teachers and students can choose various words to define. Some words have been pre-selected and glossed. Teachers may choose to differentiate vocabulary support by student.

## INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS AND STUDENTS READING BELOW GRADE LEVEL

This unit is intentionally designed so that all students engage directly with a series of texts that progress in grade level complexity and activities as the unit unfolds. Appropriate scaffolding is built into the unit design, activity sequence, and tools to make instruction comprehensible to students – especially those who are English Language Learners or are reading well below grade level at the start of the unit – so that they directly experience the complexity of the texts. The unit actively supports these students through explicit instruction of skills and strategies, the building of background knowledge, a progression of increasing text complexity, a focus on student-developed questions, and instructional strategies associated with modeling, grouping, and graphic organizers. Instruction follows a progression that moves from scaffolding and support to independent application.

Among the supports for English Language Learners and below grade-level readers integrated into the units are:

**Unit Design and Instructional Sequence:** By design, students begin learning to “read closely” by first encountering visual images, which they scan for details, and then multi-media texts that reinforce the skills of identifying details and making text-based observations from those details. Thus, before they ever encounter print texts of grade level complexity, students begin to develop skills and strategies through visual learning experiences. They then learn to transfer these skills to the reading of more complex texts. The text sequences in this Reading Closely unit are also set up as a “staircase of complexity,” so that students move from more accessible texts that help them build background knowledge to more challenging texts that they analyze for perspective and use of language. The sequence of texts culminates in a final, three-text set, which presents students with a range of text complexity, based on both quantitative and qualitative

measures. Students are expected to become an “expert” for only one of these texts, providing teachers with an opportunity to differentiate content (text selection) based on students’ reading levels or English language mastery.

**Short Texts, Focused Reading:** Most of the texts in the unit are relatively short in length, allowing students to focus on individual paragraphs and sentences as they learn to read closely and derive meaning. Text-dependent questions included in the instructional notes further focus students’ reading to important or more challenging sections of text.

**Read Alouds and Modeling:** At key parts in the instruction, teachers read text aloud so that students can listen to the cadence and structure of texts while also following along themselves. By listening to a proficient reader, students pick up on natural pauses and pronunciation of words. Teachers also model “think alouds,” wherein they discuss what they visualize and think as they read. Teachers thus model reading proficiently, and also model using the skills and graphic organizer tools that help students learn to read closely. Students see the tools and skills modeled before they apply them, first in pairs or small groups, then independently.

**Guiding Question Framework:** The units break the reading process down into manageable steps that are increasingly complex. For example, rather than simply asking students to paraphrase what they have read, the unit asks students to start by writing down details they have found in the text related to a guiding question like “What words or phrases stand out to me as I read?” Already equipped with details they have written down, students are then asked to discuss these details. Only after having had these two opportunities to interact with the text and peers do students attempt to paraphrase what they have read.

## INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS AND STUDENTS READING BELOW GRADE LEVEL

**Graphic Organizers:** The unit's instructional tools provide students with a precise and guided manner for reading texts closely. These tools help break down the complex reading processes - processes that proficient readers automatically use - into clear, visual organizers. The tools, including the Questioning Texts and Analyzing Details tools, guide students to focus specifically on details they identify in the texts. Visually, they help students understand the relationships among those details and the connections and observations they make from the text.

**Reading Teams:** Students are given chances to read both in groups and individually. Teachers can group students in various ways, sometimes by reading abilities, sometimes by interests or target text, sometimes heterogeneously to pair less able readers with more advanced readers. By reading in teams, students practice talking about texts in a structured supported context.

**Academic Vocabulary:** While leaving many decisions about the teaching of vocabulary to the teacher, the unit includes glossaries for each text and sets up the learning of vocabulary in a text-based context. More generally, the Guiding Questions Handout utilizes vocabulary related to reading skills that students can apply while both reading and discussing texts. Additionally, many of the Guiding Questions direct students to identify and think about key words in the texts. Teachers of English Language Learners and below grade-level readers are encouraged to use additional vocabulary building strategies such as Word Walls, whereby students can visually reference the meaning of key words in the classroom as they read and discuss texts.

## SOURCES OF THIS UNIT INSTRUCTION

The instructional ideas contained in this unit are presented as our contribution to the national effort to prepare all US secondary students for college and career readiness. We intend that these principles, activities, tools, and strategies will be taken up, adapted, and improved upon by the educators who use them. While we take full responsibility for the content of the unit, and recognize that mentioning our key sources in no way implies their endorsement of that content,

we would like to acknowledge some important influences and reference points for this work: the students and colleagues who contributed to the classroom experiences of our development team; the Common Core Standards; the PARCC ELA Curriculum Frameworks; the Tri-State Quality Review ELA Rubric; and the research on text complexity and text-dependent questioning from Student Achievement Partners.

## ≡ HOW THIS UNIT ALIGNS WITH CCSS FOR ≡ ELA/LITERACY

The instructional focus of this unit is on learning to read text closely: attending to details, language, and perspective; posing and responding to text-dependent questions; and analyzing connections and relationships to deepen understanding. The unit also emphasizes informational text, while incorporating literary nonfiction and other literary texts. Accordingly, the primary alignment of the unit – the targeted CCSS – are **RI.1**, **RI.2**, and **RI.6** (*read closely to determine literal and inferential meaning, determine central ideas and supporting details, and assess author's point of view – while attending to and citing specific textual evidence*). Students develop these skills throughout the unit through direct instruction and guided practice, and they are assessed continuously through activities, tools, and written products.

As students develop these primary targeted reading skills, they are also practicing, and eventually demonstrating, their abilities to engage in text-centered discussions. Thus, **SL.1** (*engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively*) is also an emerging targeted CCSS as the unit progresses, and is directly assessed in the final, discussion-based activity of Part 5.

As students develop these primary targeted CCSS skill sets, they also practice and use related reading and writing skills from supporting CCSS. Thus, in Part 2, they begin to focus on **RI.4** (*interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text*) and in Part 3 on **RI.9** (analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics), with **RI.9** formatively assessed in Part 5.

Students focus on crafting effective evidence-based writing, working from titles and paraphrases to summary sentences and explanatory paragraphs. Thus, **W.2** (*write explanatory texts to convey ideas and information clearly and accurately*) and **W.9** (*draw evidence from texts to support analysis*) are also introduced and practiced in the unit, as is **W.4** (*produce clear and coherent writing*).

Finally, because students are expected to read and analyze a grade-level text somewhat independently in Parts 4 and 5, the unit provides initial evidence of how well students can meet the expectations of **RI.10** (*read and comprehend complex texts independently and proficiently*).



# HOW TO USE THESE MATERIALS

This unit is in the format of a **Compressed File**. Files are organized so you can easily browse through the materials and find everything you need to print or e-mail for each day.

The materials are organized into three folders:

## UNIT PLAN AND TEXTS

- Unit Plan
- Models
- Texts

The **model questions and tools** are meant only to illustrate the process, NOT to shape textual analysis. **It is essential that both teachers and students develop questions based on their own analysis and class discussion.** Teachers are encouraged to develop their own questions in the blank tools to use with students when modeling the process.



**TEXTS** are formatted with spacing and margins to support **teacher and student annotation**. Students should be encouraged to mark up their texts (electronically or in print) as they search for details. **Paragraphs and lines are numbered** for referencing in writing and discussion. **Editable glossaries** are provided at the bottom of each page. While some words have already been bolded and glossed, teachers are encouraged to use the editable features for choosing words they wish to focus on or gloss, and to differentiate word support for their students.

## HANDOUTS

- Guiding Questions Handout
- Reading Closely Checklist
- Text-Centered Discussion Checklist



**TOOLS** and **CHECKLISTS** have been created as **editable PDF forms**. With the free version of Adobe Reader, students and teachers are able to type in them and save their work for recording and e-mailing. This allows students and teachers to work either with paper and pencil or electronically according to their strengths and needs. It also allows teachers to collect and organize student work for evaluation and formative assessment.

## TOOLS

- Analyzing Details
- Questioning Texts

If you decide to **PRINT** materials, please note that you can print them at **actual size**, without enabling the auto-fit function. All materials can be printed either in color or in black and white.



# UNIT OUTLINE

## PART 1: UNDERSTANDING CLOSE READING

- The teacher presents an overview of the unit, discussing the purposes and elements of close reading.
- Students are oriented to the idea of attending to details through examining images.
- Students use guiding questions to look closely for details in a text.
- Students use guiding questions to look closely for details in a multi-media text and write a few sentences explaining something they have learned.
- Students use guiding questions to independently explore a multi-media website.

## PART 2: QUESTIONING TEXTS

- The teacher models how to use the Questioning Texts Tool to guide a process for close reading, and then pairs practice on a text they have read.
- Students listen to a new text and use the Questioning Texts Tool to guide their reading.
- The teacher guides the class through an analysis of the text using the Analyzing Details Tool.
- Students develop their own text-specific questions with which to analyze the text.
- Students write 1-3 sentences explaining their analysis of the text and list supporting textual details.

## PART 3: ANALYZING DETAILS

- Students listen to and then closely read and analyze a new text.
- The teacher guides and supports students in a comparative discussion of the texts.
- Students develop a comparative question in groups and individually write a paragraph answering their question.
- Students independently read texts using a guiding question.

## PART 4: EXPLAINING UNDERSTANDING

- The teacher introduces the final culminating text-centered writing and comparative discussion.
- Students listen to three related texts and discuss them as a class.
- Students select (or are assigned) one of the texts to discuss with a small group and then analyze independently.
- Students use their analysis to independently write a detail-based explanation of one of the texts.

## PART 5: DISCUSSING IDEAS

- The teacher leads students in a reflective conversation about productive, text-centered discussions.
- Students discuss their analysis in groups and independently prepare for leading a text-centered discussion by crafting a comparative text-dependent question.
- Students lead and participate in text-centered discussions with other students who have analyzed different texts.

# READING CLOSELY GRADE 8 UNIT TEXTS

AUTHOR	DATE	PUBLISHER	L	NOTES
<b>Text #1: Ellis Island (Photos)</b>				
Unknown	1902-13	NY Public Library Digital Gallery	NA	Historical photos of immigrants being processed at Ellis Island provide rich details for scanning.
<b>Text #2: Description of Ellis Island (Informational Text)</b>				
Jacob Riis	1903 (?)	Publisher Unknown	1010L	Short passage describes immigrants leaving Ellis Island; provides descriptive and narrative details; accessible text.
<b>Text #3: Ellis Island: Deconstructed (Video)</b>				
History Channel	Unknown	History.com	NA	Short informational video “deconstructs” Ellis Island history; mixes imagery and factual text.
<b>Text #4: Interactive Tour of Ellis island (Website)</b>				
Scholastic	NA	Scholastic	910L	Contains multiple resources and media related to immigration; combines imagery and text.
<b>Text #5: On the Trail of the Immigrant, Ch. V (Informational Text)</b>				
Edward Steiner	1906	Fleming H. Revel	1550L	Descriptive/narrative excerpt written by a professor/ researcher; provides rich detail and immigrants’ perspective.
<b>Text #6: The Future in America, Ch. III (Literary Nonfiction)</b>				
H. G. Wells	1906	Harper & Brothers	1410L	Excerpt provides subjective description of Ellis Island from a foreigner’s perspective; complex language and syntax.
<b>Text #7: The Promised Land, Ch. IX (Personal Narrative)</b>				
Mary Antin	1912	Houghton Mifflin	900L	Narrative excerpt describes young girl’s first experiences in America.
<b>Text #8: Rebels into Anarchy, Ch. I (Personal Narrative)</b>				
Marie Ganz & Nat Ferber	1920	Dodd, Mead and Co.	1240L	Narrative excerpt presents a woman’s recollection of her first visit to America; juxtaposed viewpoints.
<b>Text #9: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Ch. XI (Personal Narrative)</b>				
Frederick Douglass	1845	Boston Anti-slavery Office	1300L	Narrative excerpt details a slave’s thoughts and emotions before and after he escapes to New York.
<b>Extended Reading: The New Colossus (Poem)</b>				
Emma Lazarus	1883	NA	1180L	Sonnet commemorates the installation of the Statue of Liberty; rich description and allusion; idealistic perspective.
<b>Extended Reading: America (Poem)</b>				
Claude McKay	1922	Harcourt, Brace and company	NA	Sonnet describes love/hate relationship of Jamaican-born poet with his adopted homeland; rich imagery and language.