



CLOSE READING AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL FOR DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING AND LITERARY ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Close reading is a pedagogical tool that has gained significant recognition for its ability to enhance critical thinking skills and deepen readers' understanding of literary texts. Rooted in the careful examination of a text's details, language, and themes, close reading encourages readers to engage actively with the material, enabling them to develop analytical and interpretive skills. The value of close reading as a pedagogical tool, its benefits in fostering critical thinking, and its impact on readers' literary analysis abilities are the critical perspectives to be looked at in detail in the article.

Keywords: Close reading, HOTS, Pedagogical tool, Literary analysis

Introduction

Reading is a many-tiered process that includes multiple readings of a text, understanding and comprehending it, analysis of the read content, interpreting it, and finally expressing ideas about it through writing or presentation. As readers, we read a variety of texts, messages, and information with many objectives in our minds.

Reading to reach multiple layers of meaning in a piece of writing so that a reader can comprehend it thoroughly, is able to analyse, synthesise and interpret and finally evaluate, may be termed as Close Reading. In it, a reader closely reads a text giving thorough attention so that s/he is able to comprehend the main idea of the written piece, how supporting ideas contribute to the central idea and thus have a total understanding of it. It is a kind of reading for detailed information. It is a kind of reading done with a magnifying glass, going into each detail of a text so that the given text is comprehended minutely. It can also be approached

with a hawk's eye, by observing each detail, picking up the main idea, and then combining it with supporting ideas to get a detailed picture. The next step could be to summarise and interpret it.

Close reading is a literary analysis technique that involves a meticulous and in-depth examination of a text, focusing on the intricacies of language, structure, and meaning. It entails a careful scrutiny of individual words, phrases, and sentences, as well as an exploration of the text's larger context, themes, and literary devices. Close reading aims to uncover multiple layers of meaning, unveil the author's intentions, and reveal the subtleties and complexities that might be overlooked through casual reading. By engaging with the text on a granular level, close reading allows readers to extract deeper insights, make informed interpretations, and develop a richer understanding of the work's nuances and literary craftsmanship. This analytical approach encourages readers to actively interact with the text, forming connections, posing questions, and critically examining the

author's choices to uncover the text's hidden complexities and enhance the overall reading experience.

Fostering Critical Ability

As a powerful pedagogical tool, close reading has gained significant attention in educational settings due to its ability to foster critical thinking skills, promote a deeper understanding of literature, and encourage active engagement with complex texts. Close reading also helps develop critical thinking in readers and helps them extract the main concepts from a written piece. For that purpose, a reader may have to take multiple readings even- the first reading to get an overall idea and the second and even third reading to interact closely with the text.

Close reading offers a structured approach to literary analysis that encourages students to pay meticulous attention to a text's nuances, uncovering layers of meaning that might otherwise remain unnoticed. By dissecting a passage or a poem word by word, students learn to appreciate the significance of individual choices made by the author, such as diction, imagery, syntax, and figurative language. This meticulous examination improves students' comprehension of the text and hones their ability to recognise and appreciate the writer's craft. It serves as a valuable tool for developing students' literary analysis abilities. As students engage with a text through close reading, they learn to recognise recurring motifs, trace character development, identify thematic patterns, and analyse narrative structures. By examining textual evidence and making informed inferences, students are equipped to construct well-supported arguments in their literary analyses. Close reading encourages students to go beyond surface-level interpretations, helping them develop a nuanced understanding of the text and engage in more sophisticated literary discussions.

Close Reading helps to question, understand, apply, analyse, evaluate, remember, visualise, and synthesise. The first reading is a kind of surface reading which helps to answer the basic question: what is there in the content, whereas the second and further readings help in getting a deeper

meaning of the content. Close reading unpacks layers of meanings of a text. It encourages students to engage with a text on a profound level, prompting them to think critically about the author's intentions and the meanings behind the words. This process involves active questioning, analysis, and interpretation of the text's nuances, leading to a deeper comprehension of its themes and messages. By exploring the text in such a meticulous manner, students develop the ability to question assumptions, consider multiple perspectives, and draw evidence-based conclusions. Consequently, close reading enhances their critical thinking skills, enabling them to approach various academic disciplines and real-life situations with a more discerning mindset.

While reading a lot of mental activities take place depending upon the level of the language and cognitive proficiency of a reader. Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) are those skills that are at work in the mind of a reader during and after reading a written piece. They are not just memorising skills but creative thinking abilities which include comprehension, synthesis, analysis, interpretation, (knowing, understanding, and applying), etc. which are manifested through description, judgment, assessment, and evaluation of read content. As the name suggests, they are high-order thinking skills, which develop in high-proficiency readers.

Comprehension

Comprehension is deep understanding at multiple levels - literal and interpretive. In simple words, it is to get a direct meaning as well as an indirect meaning out of a text. It is a complete process that, along with reading, also includes some mental processes (HOTS). When we stop reading, we think: to connect, infer, create a mental picture, and summarise the main points, thus, we go through the process of comprehension.

Strategies of Comprehension

How much has a reader understood/comprehended a text closely read by her/him, can be gauged from many perspectives. In fact, there are many strategies that help readers to augment comprehension.

A. Question: The reader poses questions to herself/himself after close reading, like- What is the main idea of the text read? What makes me think so? Which sentences are supporting the main idea? What does the author wish to convey? Are there any indicators? What is the author's viewpoint? Why am I reaching this conclusion? Are there simple obvious meanings or deeper meanings too? Which words are suggestive of deeper meanings? Or alternatively, text-based direct questions, as well as indirect questions, may be asked.

B. Predict: After a close reading of a short story, a reader is asked to predict what happens next, etc. which eventually will improve the creative and thinking ability of readers.

C. Connect: To figure out the main ideas, then find connecting ideas – the parts which elaborate on the main idea, support the main idea and contrast it.

D. Visualise: After reading, create a visual picture in mind. Recalling what all has been read by the reader after reading. For this purpose, observation and analytical skills should be developed. Care must be taken to recall precise and accurate details.

E. Infer: To draw deeper meaning out of written content. When a reader asks herself/himself a question like, what all the author wishes to convey to me, then probably one can easily infer deeper meaning from the text.

F. Determine importance: to know which part is most important and which holds lesser value in terms of conveying an idea.

G. Synthesise: Putting together main and supporting ideas to get a synthesised overall clear picture of the text read.

H. Paraphrase: Asking a student to quote a specific point of the author in one's own words. It is not as easy as it seems to be. Even if one has to write one quote of the author, s/he will have to reread the author's comment/point carefully.

I. Summarise: Providing a gist of the entire text in one's own words. The difference between paraphrasing and summarising is that paraphrasing is changing the expression of the original into a simplified form, whereas summarising is

paraphrasing and also cutting short the length. In fact, paraphrasing is lower in terms of understanding whereas summarising is a higher skill. The main idea of a story or essay or chapter is made in the form of a statement and is called *Thesis Statement*. It is the main sentence that sets the argument of an entire paper/essay. Generally, each paragraph should have one main idea presented through the main sentence, known as *Topic Sentence*. It is the main sentence of a paragraph and is also called a *focal sentence*. Other sentences of the paragraph normally support the topic sentence.

Unlike *speed reading*, Close Reading is a kind of *slow reading* which takes the readers into deeper layers of understanding/comprehension and makes them deep and creative readers.

There are many issues related to close reading for comprehension and analysis. The reader doing close reading may ask her/himself a number of questions, like the first impression of the text, the patterns running through it, unfamiliar words, words with implied meaning or figures of speech expressions, type of writing, the idea to be conveyed, etc.

J. Interpretation and Analysis of Written Pieces

The analysis covers all the 'what' and 'how' points of a piece of writing. In fact, you have been engaged in the analysis since you started reading essays, short stories, and poems. When you read a chapter of a book of any discipline, you do close reading and go through the process of analysis which involves comprehension, interpretation, evaluation and even argumentation.

Analysis not only covers what has been stated directly but also what is being persuaded or being indirectly conveyed.

After watching a movie, you may have many comments about the characters, their dialogues, song sequences, and action. Do not you think that your mind had gone through the process of movie analysis which equipped you to write its review?

Similarly, after reading a book, you can write what the book is all about in a page or so or review it or write a report on it. This has been possible

because you passed through the process of comprehension, interpretation, and analysis. Beginning from its reading to writing its review is a part of this entire process.

An analysis is mainly responding to a text – by preparing a sequential list, comparing two ideas, working on cause and effect, showing the contrast, elaborating, and many more ways.

Stages of Analysis

Analysis of any written piece after reading it minutely is to acquire the entire information stated and implied and then reach at a conclusion. For example, you wish to cook something which you have not tried before. You download the recipe and go through the details once (understanding for general information); then you reread the recipe to note down the ingredients required and the step-by-step procedure (multiple readings). When you have comprehended it thoroughly, only then do you venture into cooking it. While you were reading and rereading and taking some pauses, simultaneously some critical thinking was going on in your mind. This critical thinking is very crucial for comprehension and interpretation.

Analysis of any written piece is similar to the recipe process: comprehension through close reading, connecting ideas, interpretation, synthesis, evaluation, etc.

Once comprehended and prepared a mental picture of the entire piece, the reader becomes ready to write it down.

Analysing a text closely requires students to examine literary elements, such as imagery, symbolism, metaphor, and character development. Through this process, students hone their analytical skills by discerning how these elements contribute to the overall narrative and impact the reader's interpretation. As they recognize patterns and recurring motifs, students are better equipped to identify underlying themes and explore the complexities of human experiences embedded within the text. These enhanced analytical skills extend beyond the realm of literature, proving invaluable in problem-solving and analytical thinking across diverse disciplines.

Comprehension, interpretation, and analysis can be done by following stages of reading and thinking. For this purpose, the reader of a text has to primarily get a preview of the text by using the title, context, heading and sub-heading, keywords, and italicized and bold words. Then s/he passes through advanced stages of comprehension. Synthesis is done through the author's tone, style, selection of words, etc. which helps in the analysis and finally evaluation.

Close reading emphasises the importance of supporting interpretations with textual evidence. As students delve into the text, they learn to draw connections between different sections and infer meanings that might not be immediately apparent. This practice fosters a strong reliance on textual evidence, as students must defend their interpretations using concrete examples from the text. By doing so, they develop a more rigorous and evidence-based approach to analysing information, a skill applicable not only to literature but also to research and academic writing.

Through close reading, students are encouraged to step into the shoes of characters and empathize with their experiences, emotions, and motivations. By immersing themselves in different perspectives, students develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of human nature, fostering empathy and emotional intelligence. This ability to relate to diverse characters and situations cultivates a more compassionate and open-minded approach to the world around them.

Close reading actively involves students in the learning process, making it an effective pedagogical tool. Through collaborative discussions, guided questions, and close examination of texts, students become active participants in their own learning. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and personal connection to the material, which can significantly enhance students' motivation and engagement. By encouraging students to express their thoughts and interpretations, close reading creates a classroom environment that values diverse perspectives and promotes intellectual growth.

Literary Analysis through Close Reading

Close reading is a crucial skill for any literary enthusiast or academic seeking a deeper understanding and appreciation of literary works. It involves a meticulous examination of the text, focusing on language, structure, themes, and other literary devices to unravel the complexities hidden within the words. By engaging in close reading, readers can gain profound insights into the author's intentions, historical context, and the broader implications of the work.

The first step in close reading for literary analysis is active reading. This involves approaching the text with an attentive and inquisitive mindset. As you read, take notes and annotate the margins of the text to mark significant passages, make observations, and jot down questions or reflections. Annotating helps you to engage more deeply with the material and ensures that your analysis stems from your own interpretations rather than copied ideas.

One of the key strategies of close reading is meticulously scrutinizing the language used in the text. Pay attention to specific words, phrases, and sentences that seem significant or ambiguous. Identifying and analyzing literary devices is essential in close reading. Literary devices such as imagery, symbolism, metaphor, simile, alliteration, and irony, among others, add layers of meaning to the text. Examine how these devices contribute to the overall message and themes of the work. Analyze the connotations and denotations of words, as well as the tone and mood established by the author.

The structure of a literary work can be as vital as its content. Closely examining the narrative structure is another essential aspect of close reading. Examine the plot's progression, the sequence of events, and the overall organization of the story. Observe the organization of the text, the arrangement of chapters or stanzas, and the transitions between different sections. Analyse how the structure enhances the narrative, creates suspense, or reflects the author's thematic intentions. See how the author employs techniques like flashbacks, foreshadowing, and shifts in

perspective to create an engaging and meaningful narrative.

The characters in a literary work play a crucial role in driving the plot and conveying its underlying themes. Close reading involves a thorough analysis of character development, motivations, and interactions. Examine their dialogue, actions, and thoughts to gain insight into their complexities and how they contribute to the overall narrative.

Themes and symbols are the heart of any literary work. Through close reading, readers can uncover the multiple layers of meaning embedded in these literary elements. Identify recurring motifs and symbols and consider how they contribute to the overall message of the work.

Understanding the historical, social, and cultural context in which a literary work was written adds depth to close reading. Consider the author's background, the prevailing ideologies of the time, and any events that might have influenced the writing. These contextual insights help readers appreciate the intended meaning and relevance of the text in its historical context.

Close reading is a fundamental practice for literary analysis, enabling readers to delve deep into the nuances of a text and uncover its hidden meanings. By adopting strategies like active reading, analysing literary devices, focusing on structure, considering context, exploring characterization, and tracing themes, scholars can understand a literary or any other text deeply. By carefully examining the language, narrative structure, characterization, themes, and symbols, readers can gain a profound understanding of the author's intentions and the underlying messages. Remember that each text is a universe of its own, waiting to be explored through the lens of close reading. With these strategies, readers can embark on a journey of discovery and appreciation of the beauty and depth of literature.

By engaging deeply with literary texts, students not only expand their literary knowledge but also develop essential cognitive abilities that are transferable across disciplines and real-life scenarios. Close reading empowers students to become active learners, critical thinkers, and

thoughtful individuals, equipped with the skills to navigate complex texts and engage meaningfully with the world around them. As educators continue to embrace close reading in the classroom, they empower their students with the tools necessary to excel in academic pursuits and become lifelong learners.

Conclusion

Overall, close reading is a kind of slow reading which involves multiple readings and helps in comprehending, analysing, and interpreting a text. It helps in developing Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) which succor in complete understanding of a text/content, from the stated meaning to the implied meaning conveyed. One can master these skills when a reader clearly knows the objective of her/his reading and then accordingly uses appropriate strategies so that the purpose is fulfilled and the reader is able to comprehend and interpret it after going through the process of analysis and synthesis, among others. However, close reading requires time and patience, as it demands students to devote substantial effort and attention to the text. Additionally, teachers need to provide clear guidance and support, as students may initially find the process daunting. Balancing the exploration of textual details with broader analysis can also be a challenge. It is important for educators to strike a balance that allows for both deep engagement with the text and broader discussions of its themes and implications.

Close reading serves as a powerful pedagogical tool that fosters critical thinking and enhances students' literary analysis abilities. By engaging students in a careful examination of a text's details, close reading encourages active learning, deepens comprehension, and cultivates analytical thinking. The benefits of close reading extend beyond the realm of literature, equipping students with essential skills that they can apply to various academic disciplines and real-life situations. As educators continue to recognize the value of close reading, it is essential to incorporate this technique into teaching practices, empowering students to become thoughtful readers, critical thinkers, and lifelong learners.

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