

Close Reading of Informational/ Literary Nonfiction Texts

Learning Targets

- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and defined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.
- Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.
- Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums, determining which details are emphasized in each account.
- Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 9–10 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.
- Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Close Reading for Meaning

What does learning to read closely mean? As readers, we should not just consider the subject or topic of a text. We must consider the author's diction and the connotations associated with the words the author chooses.

As a reader, consider the importance of specific words in order to analyze how the author uses language to communicate a message. For example, an author may use diction that would appeal to or be accessible to a specific audience. Additionally, the author will use words with strong connotations in order to appeal to an audience's emotions.

In this workshop, you will read three different texts and will practice close reading using strategies that will help you make meaning of the text. Your teacher will guide you through the first activity. In Activity 2, you will work in a collaborative group to read and respond to the text. For the third activity, you will work independently to apply close reading strategies to determine meaning in a new text.

ACTIVITY 1

Guided Practice

You will read the text in this activity at least three times, focusing on a different purpose for each reading.

LEARNING STRATEGIES:

Diffusing, Close Reading, Marking the Text, Rereading, Summarizing, Paraphrasing, SOAPStone

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

Diction refers to the writer's choice of words. **Connotation** is the associations and emotional overtones attached to a word beyond its literal definition or denotation.

PLAN

Pacing: Each workshop has four activities. Allow approximately two days per activity. Pacing for this set of activities will be flexible based on the needs of your students and the demands of your schedule.

Materials: Highlighters, pens, or pencils for marking the text, access to dictionaries, overhead projector or interactive whiteboard.

ACTIVITY 1

Guided Practice

TEACH

1 Review the learning targets to help set a context for what students will be doing in this workshop.

2 This workshop is divided into a guided activity, a collaborative activity, and an activity that students complete independently. The fourth activity provides a variety of assessment opportunities.

3 The first two readings are intended to give students an opportunity to make meaning of the passage independently, and then to give them intensive practice with in-text vocabulary study that leads to deep comprehension and the ability to interpret texts.

4 In Activity 1, students are to first focus on reading the text to themselves silently while practicing close-reading strategies such as diffusing and marking the text to gain a general understanding of what it means. Be sure to review these strategies with students before beginning to read.

ACTIVITY 1 (continued)

5 First Reading: For the first reading have students follow the directions. Monitor their silent reading closely to check for diffusing and marking the text, indicators of active reading.



Text Complexity

Overall: Accessible

Lexile: 980

Qualitative: Moderate Difficulty

Task: Moderate (Analyze)

Context: When Edward Bok was 6, he immigrated to Brooklyn from the Netherlands. As a boy, he earned money after school washing the windows of a bakery shop to help support his family, and he would collect bits of coal that fell from the coal wagons to heat the family home. Despite his modest upbringing, he rose to prominence as the editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal* and is credited with coining the phrase *living room* to refer to the space previously called the parlor or drawing room. Theodore Roosevelt said of Bok: “[He] changed, for the better, the architecture of an entire nation.”

TEACHER TO TEACHER

To aid close-reading practice, underlined words are glossed for students; bolded words indicate Tier 2 words that students should learn. The text is formatted with space between the lines so that students can write notes between the lines of the text.

Differentiated Instruction

This activity challenges students to identify the central idea in each paragraph. You may decide to provide additional definitions for unfamiliar words and perhaps to single out significant sentences for students to explain and discuss as a class or to direct students to look up those words on their own.

Close Reading of Informational/Literary Nonfiction Texts (continued)

First Reading: First Impressions

Read the following passage silently. Your focus for this first reading is on understanding the meaning of the passage. As you read, practice **diffusing** the words you may not know by replacing unfamiliar words with synonyms or definitions for the underlined words. Use the definitions and synonyms to the right of the paragraphs to help your understanding.

In addition, practice **marking the text** by stopping after each paragraph to underline the most important sentence and circle the most important word in the sentence that you underlined.

Text Excerpt

From

The Americanization of Edward Bok (1921)

by Edward Bok

1 Whatever **shortcomings** I may have found during my fifty-year period of Americanization; however America may have failed to help my transition from a foreigner into an American, I owe to her the most priceless gift that any nation can offer, and that is opportunity.

2 As the world stands to-day, no nation offers opportunity in the degree that America does to the foreign-born. Russia may, in the future, as I like to believe she will, prove a second United States of America in this respect. She has the same **limitless** area; her people the same potentialities. But, as things are to-day, the United States offers, as does no other nation, a limitless opportunity: here a man can go as far as his abilities will carry him. It may be that the foreign-born, as in my own case, must hold on to some of the **ideals** and ideas of the land of his birth; it may be that he must develop and **mould** his character by overcoming the habits resulting from national shortcomings. But into the best that the foreign-born can retain, America can graft such a wealth of inspiration, so high a national idealism, so great an opportunity for the highest **endeavor**, as to make him the fortunate man of the earth to-day.

3 He can go where he will: no traditions **hamper** him; no limitations are set except those within himself. The larger the area he chooses in which to work, the larger the vision he demonstrates, the more eager the people are to give support to his **undertakings** if they are convinced that he has their best **welfare** as his goal. There is no public confidence equal to that of the American public, once it is obtained. It is fickle, of course, as are all publics, but fickle only toward the man who cannot maintain an achieved success.

potentialities: qualities that can be developed to make someone or something better; possibility of growth

graft: join or unite closely

fickle: likely to change; not constant or loyal

2 SpringBoard® English Language Arts Grade 9

4 A man in America cannot **complacently** lean back upon victories won, as he can in the older European countries, and depend upon the glamour of the past to sustain him or the **momentum** of success to carry him. Probably the most alert public in the world, it requires of its leaders that they be alert. Its appetite for variety is insatiable, but its appreciation, when given, is full-handed and whole-hearted. The American public never holds back from the man to whom it gives; it never **bestows** in a niggardly way; it gives all or nothing.

5 What is not generally understood of the American people is their wonderful idealism. Nothing so completely surprises the foreign-born as the discovery of this trait in the American character. The impression is **current** in European countries—perhaps less generally since the war—that America is given over solely to a worship of the American dollar. While between nations as between individuals, comparisons are valueless, it may not be **amiss** to say, from personal knowledge, that the Dutch worship the gulden infinitely more than do the Americans the dollar.

6 I do not claim that the American is always conscious of this idealism; often he is not. But let a great **convulsion** touching moral questions occur, and the result always shows how close to the surface is his idealism. And the fact that so frequently he puts over it a thick veneer of **materialism** does not affect its quality. The truest approach, the only approach in fact, to the American character is, as Sir James Bryce has so well said, through its idealism.

7 It is this quality which gives the truest inspiration to the foreign-born in his endeavor to serve the people of his adopted country. He is mentally **sluggish**, indeed, who does not discover that America will make good with him if he makes good with her.

8 But he must play fair. It is essentially the straight game that the true American plays, and he insists that you shall play it too. Evidence there is, of course, to the contrary in American life, experiences that seem to give ground for the belief that the man succeeds who is not scrupulous in playing his cards. But never is this true in the long run. Sooner or later—sometimes, unfortunately, later than sooner—the public discovers the trickery. In no other country in the world is the moral **conception** so clear and true as in America, and no people will give a larger and more permanent reward to the man whose effort for that public has its roots in honor and truth.

9 “The sky is the limit” to the foreign-born who comes to America endowed with honest endeavor, ceaseless **industry**, and the ability to carry through. In any honest endeavor, the way is wide open to the will to succeed. Every path beckons, every **vista** invites, every talent is called forth, and every efficient effort finds its due reward. In no land is the way so clear and so free...

insatiable: unable to be satisfied

niggardly: stingily; not generously; miserly

gulden: the basic currency of the Netherlands prior to 1999

veneer: a deceptive show; a fake cover

endeavor: effort or work toward a specific goal or purpose

scrupulous: principled; morally right

endowed: supplied or equipped with

ACTIVITY 1 (continued)

6 While several words have been underlined for students, they may identify additional unfamiliar words as they read. Encourage students to annotate the text for these words, looking up definitions or synonyms as needed to help their understanding.

7 After students have read the excerpt through once silently and diffused the underlined and bolded vocabulary, use **think aloud** to model how to use the diffused vocabulary to make meaning of a complex text. You may also model how you chose important sentences.

8 Have students **pair-share** how they marked the text by underlining important sentences and circling key words.

ACTIVITY 1 (continued)

9 Use the **Check Your Understanding** as a formative assessment of the students' ability to understand how Bok organizes and presents his ideas.

10 Second Reading: Students will now read along as you read the text aloud as an "expert" reader. During this reading, students should continue vocabulary study by focusing on powerful or emotional diction.

11 With selected vocabulary chosen to complete the graphic organizer, conduct a **think-aloud** and discussion to clarify the effect of connotations of words on the meaning of the text.

12 Check Your Understanding: Have students work in pairs to complete the chart to analyze how Bok uses connotative diction to characterize America and Americans.

13 Third Reading: For this reading, students have been supplied with background information about Edward Bok and the context for this excerpt. Discuss how this information adds to the reader's understanding.

14 During this third reading, students should focus on the Key Ideas and Details questions. These interpretive questions lead students into textual analysis by requiring them to look closely at the text. Students should answer by annotating and noting textual evidence with underlining or highlighting.

Close Reading of Informational/Literary Nonfiction Texts (continued)

Check Your Understanding

Choose one paragraph of the excerpt. Explain the relationship between the sentence that you underlined and the main idea of the paragraph. Also, explain how your understanding of the word you circled is important in terms of the meaning of the paragraph as a whole.

Second Reading: Vocabulary in Context

Now that you have read the passage silently, listen and follow along as the passage is read aloud. As you read, highlight the words and/or phrases that are examples of powerful, important, or emotional diction that communicates the writer's attitude. Diffuse these words/phrases for comprehension.

After your teacher has read the passage aloud the second reading, look up the words or phrases that you highlighted and find several that describe America or the character of Americans. Make inferences about the connotations of these words and phrases in the chart below.

Diction: Words or Phrases	Connotations: Associations or Emotions
failed	Negative: disappointment
priceless gift	Positive: treasure, gratitude
limitless opportunity	Positive: has the connotation of open lands
"straight game"	Playing fairly without cheating or corruption
idealism	Living by the most positive values

Check Your Understanding

Now that you have diffused unfamiliar terms and identified and analyzed Bok's diction, write a brief summary of the central idea as presented in the first two paragraphs of the text. Explain how Bok's use of connotative diction in these paragraphs contributes to this central idea.

Third Reading: Text-Dependent Questioning

Now read the passage again, this time with the focus of reading to respond to the Key Ideas and Details interpretive questions. As your class discusses the text, annotate in the margins your responses to each question and highlight or underline the textual evidence that supports your answer. During discussions, you may also want to revise your annotations to reflect a new or different meaning of the text.

Background Information: This text is an excerpt from Edward Bok's Pulitzer Prize-winning autobiography published in 1921, *The Americanization of Edward Bok: An Autobiography of a Dutch Boy Fifty Years After*. Bok was born in the Netherlands and immigrated to Brooklyn, New York, at age six. While Bok was editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, it became the first magazine in the world to have one million subscribers. He wrote his autobiography upon retiring after 30 years as Editor.

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KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Bok repeats the words *limitless* and *opportunity* several times in the opening paragraphs. What connotations do these words have, and what evidence does he give in the third and fourth paragraphs to support this characterization of America?

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

What is Bok referring to with the word *valueless*? Why is this an interesting word to use in the context of the main idea of this paragraph?

ACTIVITY 1 (continued)

15 As part of the guided reading, you could have the entire class work with you to answer the questions. Or you might have students work in groups to answer the questions and then share their ideas in a whole-class discussion.

Key Ideas and Details *Limitless* evokes the connotation of vast spaces and therefore possibilities. *Opportunity* evokes the connotation of America as the land of opportunity—a concept that has defined this country since the time of the pilgrims. Bok supports these ideas with a description of the “fortunate” immigrant—“no traditions will hamper him, no limitations”—and the “eager” public that will embrace him: “to give support to his undertakings.”

Key Ideas and Details Bok describes comparisons as “valueless” saying that America should not be compared to European countries because comparisons are never truly helpful or illuminating. But then, he cannot keep himself from comparing the Dutch love of money to Americans’. However, the use of the term is interesting in the context of whether or not Americans are “given over solely to a worship of the American dollar.” Bok asserts that Americans value ideals more than material wealth.

ACTIVITY 1 (continued)

Key Ideas and Details According to Bok, American materialism serves as a veneer—or “thick” cover—to disguise the idealism that lives, perhaps unconsciously, beneath the surface. In this view, the American emphasis on material wealth is only a “front” used to support the greater ideals of hard work and fair play.

Key Ideas and Details Bok concedes to the practical evidence that sometimes unscrupulous people appear to become successful in American society. However, he refutes this evidence with the claim that “never is this true in the long run.” According to Bok, the “larger and more permanent reward” will always go to the man who has “roots in honor and truth.”

Close Reading of Informational/Literary Nonfiction Texts (continued)

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

According to Bok, what is the relationship between American idealism and American materialism? What do you think he means by this?

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

What kind of evidence might appear to contradict Bok’s assertion that Americans play fair? How does he counter this evidence?

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Sooner or later—sometimes, unfortunately, later than sooner—the public discovers the trickery. In no other country in the world is the moral **conception** so clear and true as in America, and no people will give a larger and more permanent reward to the man whose effort for that public has its roots in honor and truth.

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Check Your Understanding

Now that you have read closely and worked to understand the Key Ideas and Details of this text, choose one of the assertions Edward Bok makes about America or Americans and discuss whether or not you think the assertions that he made in 1920 are still true today.

Some possible assertions to discuss:

“What is not generally understood of the American people is their wonderful idealism.”

“...[T]he United States offers, as does no other nation, a limitless opportunity: here a man can go as far as his abilities will carry him.”

“It is essentially the straight game that the true American plays, and he insists that you shall play it too.”

Synthesizing Your Understanding

Now that you have read the passage three times and studied its vocabulary, language, and ideas, synthesize your understanding by applying the SOAPStone strategy to this text. You have worked with all the elements of this strategy in previous reading workshops.

Introducing the Strategy: SOAPStone

SOAPStone is a strategy for analysis of a text to understand an author's craft. Using this strategy, the reader discusses and identifies the **speaker**, the **occasion**, the **audience**, the **purpose**, the **subject**, and the **tone**.

S–Speaker

Who is the **speaker**? Be more detailed than just identifying the individual by name. What is his or her position? What information about the speaker helps you understand his or her perspective? What characteristics of the speaker help you understand the meaning of the text?

Edward Bok is an immigrant who came to America at a very young age. His perspective as a successful immigrant who is “living the American Dream” is important, as is his Dutch heritage.

O–Occasion

What is the **occasion**? Make inferences based on what you know about the time and the place of the piece. A piece of writing may be prompted by a larger occasion (an environment of ideas, attitudes, and emotions that surround a larger issue) and/or an immediate occasion (an event or situation that catches the writer's attention and triggers a response.)

The most immediate occasion is that Bok retired and in 1921 wrote an autobiography in order to reflect upon his life and its meaning. Bok makes one casual reference to the recent war—World War I, which ended in November 1918. This hint is enough to infer that immigration to the United States would have increased in recent years due to refugees from Europe.

ACTIVITY 1 (continued)

16 Check Your Understanding

Have students **think-pair-share** their understanding of Bok's autobiographical text before reflecting on the assertions he makes about America and Americans. You may have students do a Quickwrite to respond to an assertion made by Bok and then discuss as a whole class.

17 Synthesizing Your Understanding

This is an opportunity for students to bring together all their thinking about the passage. Because this is a guided exploration, consider either completing the analysis with the whole class or having students divide up into small collaborative groups to work on individual questions before working together as a class to synthesize ideas.

TEACHER TO TEACHER

You may need to introduce or review individual elements of the **SOAPStone** strategy with students before they begin the analysis. Identifying and explaining the elements of SOAPStone in texts has been a major part of Close Reading Workshops in previous grades. Students should be familiar with these elements.

18 Be sure to go over the SOAPStone elements with the class to be certain students have clearly understood the meaning of the text.

ACTIVITY 1 (continued)

ASSESS

The writing prompt gives students an opportunity to focus on how Bok uses connotative diction to convey ideas and tone. Note that this prompt requires providing commentary on several pieces of textual evidence.

ADAPT

Because this first activity is teacher-guided, you may want to conduct a whole class discussion before students respond to the writing prompt. You might want to provide students with several possible topic sentences to help them get started, or coconstruct a draft.

Close Reading of Informational/Literary Nonfiction Texts (continued)

A–Audience

Who is the **audience**? What inferences can you make about the people who will read this text? Is it a specific person, a targeted group, or a general audience? How do you know?

Bok seems to be simultaneously addressing both an American audience—appealing to their better nature, and in defense of immigration—and a European audience, in defense of America. (His comment about how the Dutch “worship the golden” seems to be a defensive retort.) He also seems to address prospective immigrants by detailing the “limitless opportunity” they would have in America.

P–Purpose

What is the **purpose**? What points is the author trying to make? What does he want the audience to feel or experience?

Bok makes several points: 1. America is the land of limitless opportunity; 2. American immigrants are in the luckiest of all positions; 3. Americans are characterized by idealism rather than by materialism.

He wants his audience to be inspired, grateful, and motivated to fulfill America’s promise and potential.

S–Subject

What is the general focus of this text, stated in a few words or phrases?

Bok feels blessed to be an American immigrant.

Tone

What is the author’s attitude toward his subject? How does his use of connotative diction convey this tone?

Grateful: “I owe to her the most priceless gift that any nation can offer, and that is opportunity.”

Admiring: “What is not generally understood of the American people is their wonderful idealism.”

Defensive: “He is mentally sluggish, indeed, who does not discover that America will make good with him if he makes good with her.”

Writing Prompt: Based on your current understanding of the passage, summarize the central idea and explain how Edward Bok uses connotative diction to develop his ideas and convey tone. Be sure to:

- Identify a central idea in a topic sentence.
- Provide several pieces of textual evidence that support your analysis.
- Include commentary about the author’s use of connotative diction.

Possible topic sentences:

In his autobiography about his immigrant experience, Bok expresses his gratitude towards America.

Edward Bok describes America favorably as a land of “limitless opportunity” and idealism.