

Close Reading of Informational/ Literary Nonfiction Texts

Learning Targets

- Analyze and discuss explicit and implicit meanings of texts, citing evidence to support your analysis and understanding.
- Determine key ideas and analyze how they develop throughout the text.
- Paraphrase and summarize texts in ways that maintain the author's meaning.
- Determine an author's purpose, audience, and message within a text.
- Use context to determine the meanings of words and analyze how authors use language to achieve specific purposes.
- Study context to determine the denotative and connotative meanings of words.
- Discuss informational texts with your classmates, listening actively and responding appropriately and comprehensively.

Preview

In this workshop, you will practice close reading with different texts, including visual texts. After working with your teacher and classmates to use close reading strategies for the first two activities, you will work independently to apply those specific strategies to determine meaning in a new text.

Close Reading for Meaning

What does it mean to “read closely”? As a reader, you need to think about more than just the basic subject or topic of a text. An author's **diction** and the **connotations** of his or her words can affect the way readers perceive and understand the text's content.

As you read, 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 appeals to a specific audience. Authors may also choose words with strong connotations to appeal to readers' emotions.

LEARNING STRATEGIES:

Close Reading, Diffusing, Marking the Text, Think-Pair-Share, Paraphrasing, Rereading, SOAPStone, Think Aloud

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.

ACTIVITY 1

Guided Practice

First Reading: First Impressions

- You will read the autobiography in this activity several times. Read the autobiography silently the first time, and focus on understanding the general meaning.
- Practice diffusing the words you may not know by replacing them with synonyms or the definitions that appear in the margins.
- Practice annotating, or marking the text, by stopping after each paragraph to underline the most important sentence and to circle the most important word in the sentence you underlined.

Close Reading Workshop 1 • Close Reading of Informational/Literary Nonfiction Texts 1

College and Career Readiness Standards

Focus Standards:

RI.9–10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RI.9–10.2 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 refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

RI.9–10.3 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.

ACTIVITY 1

Guided Practice

PLAN

Pacing: 3 50-minute class periods

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

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.



TEACHER TO TEACHER

Each workshop has four activities. Pacing guidance is provided for each activity, but pacing will be flexible based on the needs of your students and the demands of your schedule.

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 annotating the text, indicators of active reading.

TEXT COMPLEXITY

Overall: Accessible

Lexile: 1100L

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, bolded words are glossed for students. The text is formatted with space between the lines so that students can write notes between the lines of the text.

Differentiating Instruction

This activity challenges students to identify the key 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)

Autobiography

from *The Americanization of Edward Bok*

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.

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.

potentialities: capability for development; possibility of growth

graft: join or unite

fickle: likely to change; not constant or loyal

insatiable: unable to be satisfied

niggardly: stingily; not generously; miserly

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College and Career Readiness Standards

RI.9–10.6 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.

RI.9–10.7 Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person’s life story in both print and

multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

Additional Standards Addressed:

RI.9–10.5, RI.9–10.8, SL.9–10.1, SL.9–10.1d, L.9–10.4a, L.9–10.4b, L.9–10.4c

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. . . .

gulden: Dutch currency prior to 1999

veneer: fake cover

endeavor: effort toward a specific goal or purpose

scrupulous: principled; morally right

endowed: supplied or equipped with

ACTIVITY 1 (continued)

6 Several words have been bolded for students, and 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 bolded vocabulary, use a **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 **think-pair-share** how they marked the text by underlining important sentences and circling key words.

ACTIVITY 1 (continued)

9 Check Your Understanding: Use the paragraph 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 text-dependent questions. These interpretive questions lead students into text analysis by requiring them to look closely at the text. Students should answer by annotating and noting text evidence with underlining or highlighting.

Close Reading of Informational/Literary Nonfiction Texts (continued)

✓ Check Your Understanding

Choose one paragraph of the autobiography. 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

- Listen and follow along as your teacher reads the passage aloud.
- As you read along, highlight words and/or phrases that communicate the author's attitude.
- Diffuse these words/phrases for comprehension.
- Look up the words or phrases that you highlighted and find several that describe America or the character of Americans.
- Record your ideas about the connotations of these words in the chart below.
- Monitor your comprehension of the author's purpose and attitude by using strategies such as rereading or asking questions.

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	Positive: playing fairly without cheating
idealism	Positive: 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 key 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 key idea.

Third Reading: Text-Dependent Questioning

- Read and discuss the text a third time, and respond to the text-dependent questions in the margins. Highlight or underline evidence in the autobiography that supports your responses.
- During discussions, you may also want to revise your initial responses to reflect a new or different understanding 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 thirty years as editor.

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.

Question 1: Bok is clearly a believer in the American Dream, having developed his opinions and point of view over the last fifty years, as an “Americanized” citizen of the United States. He supports this belief by using words such as *limitless* and *opportunity* to describe the possibilities for personal advancement in the United States. He may be writing to seek approval from his fellow citizens, or he may be writing to convince people from other countries to immigrate. **RI.9–10.6**

Question 2: Bok claims that immigrants to America can go wherever they want and that their only limitations are self-imposed. He further states that the “eager” public will embrace him “to give support to his undertakings.” These ideas support his characterization of America as a place of limitless opportunity. **RI.9–10.1**

Question 3: Bok suggests that although America is a land of opportunity, immigrants have to gain the trust and acceptance of their fellow Americans to experience its benefits. If they are diligent and hardworking, they will find that America “never holds back from the man to whom it gives.” **RI.9–10.2**

from *The Americanization of Edward Bok* by Edward Bok

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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.

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.

1. Bok’s essay describes a set of ideals known as the American Dream. What is his point of view, and what is his purpose in writing the passage? Cite words and phrases from the passage to support your answer.

2. What evidence does Bok give in paragraph 3 to support his characterization of America?

3. How does Bok develop his main idea? How can immigrants to America overcome obstacles?

ACTIVITY 1 (continued)

Question 4: Bok acknowledges that some people see Americans as materialistic. In his view, though, this materialism is a kind of veneer that masks the idealism underneath. Far from worshiping the dollar, what Americans value most are the ideals of hard work and fair play. **RI.9–10.5**

Question 5: Although Bok acknowledges that unscrupulous people can sometimes succeed in American society, he counters this evidence by downplaying the relevance of these rare instances. He claims, “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.” **RI.9–10.3**

Question 6: Responses will vary. Students should cite and respond to specific claims from the essay, explaining why they agree or disagree. **RI.9–10.8**

Close Reading of Informational/Literary Nonfiction Texts (continued)

4. In paragraphs 5 and 6, what does Bok say is a common criticism of Americans? How does he respond to this criticism?
5. How does acknowledging that some Americans don't “play fair” affect Bok's argument?
6. Do you think that the American Dream is alive and well today? Evaluate Bok's argument, explaining why you agree or disagree with his reasoning.
7. 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.
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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. . . .

Check Your Understanding

Now that you have read closely and worked to understand the autobiography, choose one of the assertions Edward Bok makes about America or Americans and comprehensively discuss whether or not you think the assertions that he made in 1920 are still true today. Use text evidence and original commentary in your response.

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 autobiography three times and studied its vocabulary, language, and ideas, synthesize your understanding by applying the **SOAPStone** strategy to this text.

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 help them comprehensively 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 elements such as author’s purpose, audience, and message within a text.

18 Go over the SOAPStone elements with the class to be certain students are ready to analyze the characteristics and structure of this informational text, which will help them clearly understand 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 achieve specific purposes. Note that this prompt requires students to provide original commentary on several pieces of text evidence. Evaluate their demonstration of understanding text evidence that shows how the author's word choices convey details of his ideas and tone. Students' responses should also indicate that they implemented close reading strategies to analyze and synthesize Bok's ideas about America and Americans, such as idealism and limitless opportunities.

ADAPT

Because this first activity is teacher-guided, you may want to conduct a whole-class discussion before students respond to the writing prompt. Review with students the connotative diction they discovered by revisiting the work they did diffusing vocabulary. Then help them determine the author's purpose revealed by word choices and their connotations. You might want to provide students with several possible topic sentences based on the author's ideas and tone to help them get started, or co-construct 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 gulden” 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 achieve specific purposes, such as developing his ideas and conveying tone. Be sure to:

- Identify a key idea in a topic sentence.
- Provide several pieces of text evidence that support your analysis.
- Include original commentary about the author's use of connotative diction to support your response.

Possible topic sentences:

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

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