

Fostering Close Reading in the Elementary Classroom Using Patterned Text

Stephanie Grote-Garcia
University of the Incarnate Word

Crystal Frost
University of the Incarnate Word

Abstract

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) place a high focus on close reading — a form of strategic reading associated with the gradual release of responsibility model, text complexity, and text dependent questioning. However, all readers should be provided this opportunity to dig deeper. One method of presenting this opportunity in elementary classrooms is to use patterned books (e.g., circle tales and add-on patterned text) as instructional materials. Patterned books present layers of complexity. At the height of their complexity, patterned books present “hidden messages” that can be uncovered when their structure is closely examined. In this article we discuss close reading as an instructional practice for all classrooms. Next, we explore the use of patterned text as an ideal tool for modeling and implementing various components of close reading in the elementary classroom. Finally, we illustrate the application of using patterned text for close reading.

With the widespread adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in forty-three states, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (CCSS Initiative, 2015), close reading has rapidly become a hot topic in literacy (Cassidy & Grote-Garcia, 2014). However the CCSS, a production of the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers (2010) is not the only agency focusing on close reading— “an instructional routine in which students critically examine a text, especially through repeated readings” (Fisher & Frey, 2012, p. 179). Many non-CCSS states, such as Texas, have also included a focus on close reading.

Repeated readings are often described as a feature of close reading; however, it is important to note that close reading involves much more than simply rereading a text. Namely, close reading presents an invitation for readers to examine the deep structures of text, such as “the way the text is organized, the precision of its vocabulary to advance concepts, and its key details, arguments, and inferential meanings” (Fisher & Frey, 2012, p. 179). In addition, such deep examinations also invite readers to reflect upon the author’s purpose, consolidate text information to formulate opinions, and make connections among the author’s ideas and other texts.

Although many associate close reading with older students, close reading can be fostered in any classroom. In fact, Stephanie Harvey (2015) reminds us that at its core, close reading is really strategic reading. To illustrate this discussion, we have chosen to examine the standards adopted by Texas, the largest state that did not adopt the CCSS. Texas has two sets of instructional standards. First, their grade-specific standards are called the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) (Texas Education Agency, 2012). In addition to these grade-specific standards, Texas has adopted their own Texas College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board & Texas Education Agency, 2009). The TEKS and the CCRS do not directly use the label *close reading*; however, both sets of Texas standards do provide opportunities for students to examine text closely. For example, the TEKS require Texas third-grade students to “identify explicit cause and effect relationships among ideas in texts” (Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Expository Text section, 2012, para 3). So, where is the close reading? Close reading is encouraged when text-dependent questions are asked. The term *explicit*, as used in the identified TEK, implies text dependency. Likewise, the CCRS are written to imply text dependency as captured in the following standard: “evaluate the use of both literal and figurative language [in the text] to inform and shape the perceptions of readers” (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board & Texas Education Agency, 2009, p. 3).

In this article we discuss close reading as an instructional practice for all classrooms. Next, we explore the use of patterned text as an ideal tool for modeling and implementing various components of close reading in the elementary classroom. Finally, we illustrate the application of using patterned text for close reading.

What is Close Reading?

Close reading is described by Fisher and Frey (2013) as a “form of guided instruction in which the teacher questions, prompts, and cues the learner” (p. 16). The following three concepts are often associated with close reading: gradual release of responsibility, text complexity, and text dependent questioning. Here, a brief description is provided for each of these three instructional concepts.

Gradual Release of Responsibility

The gradual release of responsibility model of instruction (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) requires a shift of responsibility within the classroom. More specifically, it requires that the teacher shift from assuming “all the responsibility for performing a task... to a situation in which the students assume all of the responsibility” (Duke & Pearson, 2002, p. 211). Such a shift in responsibility happens over time (e.g., days, weeks, months).

Fisher and Frey (2007) have documented that the gradual release of responsibility model of instruction is an effective approach for improving literacy achievement. In addition, Kong and Pearson (2003) report that it can improve literacy outcomes for emergent multilingual students (i.e., English Language Learners) and Lloyd (2004) has documented that it can increase reading comprehension in general. Fisher and Frey (2013) describe close reading as a “gradual release of responsibility, not a comprehensive literacy instructional effort” (p. 16). In other words, close reading is a way to scaffold literacy instruction when reading complex text.

Text Complexity

Not all texts are worthy of this level of attention. The selected text must be complex if a reader is going to engage in deep examination. So, how is text complexity measured? There are three areas of consideration when identifying text complexity — qualitative dimensions (e.g., levels of meaning and structure), quantitative dimensions (e.g., word length and frequency), and reader and task considerations (e.g., background knowledge and motivation to read). Together these three areas of consideration create a complex text. This triangulation is emphasized by Stephanie Harvey (2015) who reminds us that “complexity goes way beyond text level” (p. 31). In other words, simply increasing the lexile level does not create a complex text.

Text Dependent Questioning

During close reading, students re-read complex text to dig deeper into the meaning and to interact with specific parts of the text. Students also answer text-dependent questions. Such questions invite students to return to the text to find text-based evidence to support their answers. Text-dependent questions often address multiple skills such as text structure, author’s purpose, and cross-text analysis — not just key details. Text dependent questions can be thought of as critical tools for empowering and encouraging students to examine text closely.

What are Patterned Texts?

Now that close reading has been discussed, let’s turn our attention to patterned texts. Patterned texts contain “purposefully crafted conversations that are organized in predictable patterns” (Grote-Garcia & Durham, 2013, p. 45). Examples of common patterns found in children's picture books are add-on, circle-tale, repetitious, and rhyming (citation?). Each of these patterns are described further in Table 1. Also provided in Table 1 are lists of books and instructional practices for each pattern. These featured texts are recognized by the International Reading Association (recently renamed International Literacy Association) as books “children really enjoy reading” (2011, p.1). They can be found on the *Children’s*

Choice Reading Lists (IRA, 2011; IRA, 2012; IRA, 2013; and IRA, 2014). Although there are various patterns that authors use to organize their texts, and each of these patterns provide opportunities for close examinations using text dependent questions (e.g., What story events contributed to the story pattern? What additional meaning did the text pattern bring to the story and what story events support this additional meaning?), for the sake of clarity and depth of our discussion, we focus primarily on circle-tale patterned text.

Table 1

Common Patterns in Children’s Picture Books

Pattern	Description	Examples	Connections to Literacy Instruction Students...
Add-on	A cumulative pattern in which events are repeated with the introduction of one new event	Emberley, R. & Emberley, A. (2009). <i>There was an old monster</i> . New York: Scholastic, Inc. Norman, K. (2012). <i>I know a wee piggy</i> . New York: Dial Books.	... read repeated text to build automaticity in word recognition ...perform a close reading to evaluate how the text structure contributes to the story plot
Circle-tale	The story terminates back at the starting point of the story	Kann, V. (2011). <i>Silverlicious</i> . New York: HarperCollins Publishers. Willems, M. (2010). <i>City dog, country frog</i> . New York: Hyperion.	...write circle-tales and use the text structure as a scaffolding tool ...perform a close reading to evaluate how the text structure contributes to the story plot
Repetitious	Features a repeated phrase or sentence	Bjorkman, S. (2012). <i>Dinosaurs don’t, dinosaurs do</i> . New York: Holiday House. Gibbs, E. (2013). <i>I spy pets</i> . Dorking, Surrey: Templar.	... choral read repeated phrases to build word recognition, fluency, and prediction skills ...read repeated text to build automaticity in word recognition
Rhyming	Pairs of rhyming words are presented in the text	Rosenthal, A. K. & Reynolds, P. (2011). <i>Plant a kiss</i> . New York: HarperCollins Children’s Books. Schwartz, C.R. (2012), <i>The three ninja pigs</i> . New York: Penguin Young Readers Group.	...choral read to build reading fluency (i.e., prosody, speed, and automaticity) ... read and use the rhyming text as a cueing system for recognizing unfamiliar words

Circle-Tale Patterned Texts

Circle-tale patterned texts are artistically and purposefully crafted so that the main character or characters experience a great adventure that terminates back at the original origin citation. For example, in *Silly Doggy!* Stower (2011) tells the story of a fictional character named Lily who finds a bear rummaging through the trash. Lily, unaware that the animal is a bear, shouts “Doggy!” Lily then takes Doggy on a series of adventures including a bus ride to the park. When Doggy is eventually returned to the zoo, Stower ends this adventure with Lily finding a tiger and shouting “Kitty!” — leading readers to believe a second adventure is beginning. Table 2 lists additional examples of circle-tale patterned texts. Again, the featured texts are recognized as books “children really enjoy reading” (IRA, 2011, p.1) and can be found on the *Children’s Choice Reading Lists* (IRA, 2011; IRA, 2012; IRA, 2013; and IRA, 2014).

Table 2

List of Circle-Tale Patterned Text Featured on the Children’s Choice Lists

Year of Children’s Choice List	Book Publication Information
2011	Litwin, E. (2010). <i>Pete the cat: I love my white shoes</i> . New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers. Willems, M. (2010). <i>City dog, country frog</i> . New York, NY: Hyperion.
2012	Kann, V. (2011). <i>Silverlicious</i> . New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers. Numeroff, L.J. (2011). <i>If you give a dog a donut</i> . New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers. Wilson, K. (2011). <i>Bear’s loose tooth</i> . New York, NY: Margaret K. McElderry Books.
2013	Stower, A. (2012). <i>Silly doggy!</i> New York, NY: Orchard Books. Willems, M. (2012). <i>The duckling gets a cookie?</i> New York, NY: Hyperion.
2014	Hale, B. (2013). <i>Clark the shark</i> . New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers. Kann, V. (2013). <i>Emeraldalicious</i> . New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.

How Can Circle-Tale Patterned Text Support Close Reading?

Readers use a number of strategies in order to understand text. Some of these strategies include activating prior knowledge, generating questions, drawing inferences, making predictions, and identifying the structure of the text (NICHD, 2000; Pressley, 2002; Smolkin & Donovan, 2002). With over thirty-five years of research (e.g., Kintsch, Mandel, & Kozminsky, 1977; Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Thorndyke, 1977) suggesting that comprehension is enhanced when texts are organized into well-known structures, it seems reasonable to suggest using patterned text in the classroom. And in fact, patterned text has been used to scaffold comprehension, as seen in Grote-Garcia's and Durham's (2013) discussion,

readers of circle-tale patterned books can increase their recalling of story events by participating in activities that explicitly draw their attention to the story structure...a linear timeline does not accurately reflect the story structure [of circle-tales]. Instead, consider creating a retelling that is circular in nature with a 'timecircle' (creatively named by a second-grade reader). Timecircles assist readers with rebuilding the story events in circular patterns to retell the rounded structure and to explore the author's purpose for writing in this pattern (p. 48).

Past applications of using pattern text in the classroom have used the gradual release of responsibility model to enhance comprehension. In the example above, Grote-Garcia and Durham (2013) provided explicit instruction in the circular story structure (teacher led), provided a timecircle for students to identify the circular pattern with guidance from the teacher (less teacher responsibility), and then provided additional opportunities for students to read circle-tales on their own (student led).

Complexity of Circle-Tale Patterned Text

As stated earlier — not all text need to be read with the intensive attention that close reading demands. Harvey (2015) expresses this realization very well,

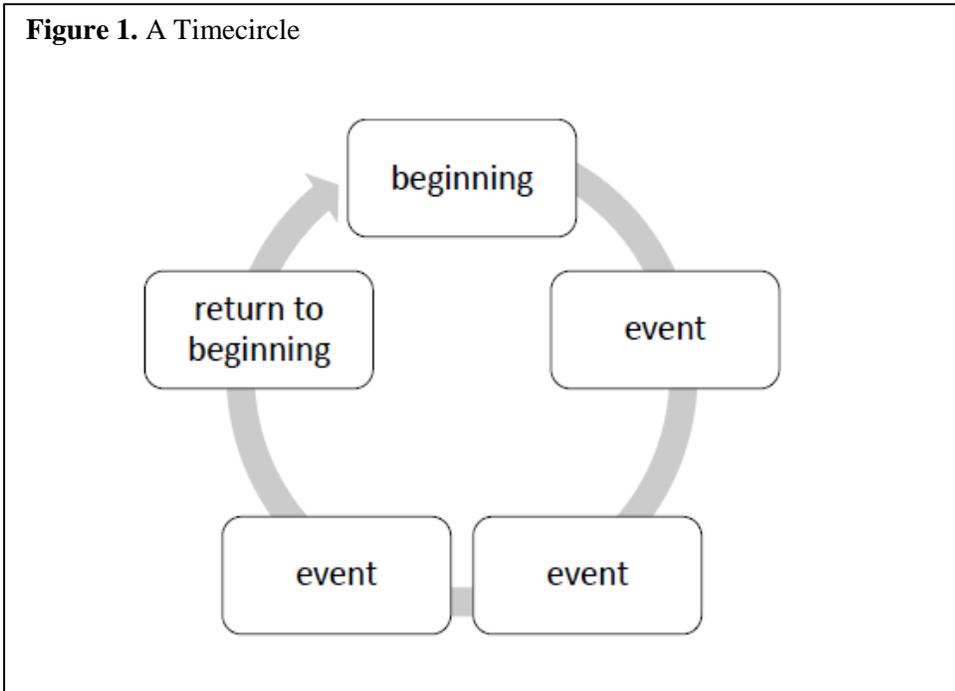
I don't need to read my daily dose of *The Onion* closely. I cry with laughter and sail through.

But hand me Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* (Bantam) and I can't simply reread the incomprehensible words; I need strategies to hurdle the background knowledge gap (p. 30).

What Harvey is describing is that a text must be complex if the reader is going to deeply examine it. Reflecting upon this idea, elementary teachers may wonder, what texts present this level of complexity? We propose that circle-tale patterned texts do. Why? To illustrate our reasoning, we have selected a specific text — *City Dog, Country Frog* by Mo Willems (2010). In this text Willems tells the story of City Dog, who repeatedly runs out to the country during each change of season to visit his friend Country Frog. At the onset of the tale, the two characters meet in the spring as Country Frog sits on a rock. When City Dog questions Country Frog about his actions, Country Frog replies that he is waiting for a friend, but “you will do” (Willems, 2010, p. 4). Each of City Dog's seasonal journeys is accompanied by familiar phrases and repeated sentences until Country Frog is not found during the winter visit. The story's circular pattern is then made very clear as City Dog sits alone on Frog's rock in spring and Country Squirrel approaches him. Country Squirrel asks City Dog “What are you doing?” (Willems, 2010, p. 50). City Dog then replies with a froggy smile, “Waiting for a friend...But you'll do” (Willems, 2010, p. 50 & 54).

One can take a literal approach to examining Willems' story by mapping out the story events in a timecircle, as suggested by Grote-Garcia and Durham (2013). This is an effective way to increase comprehension. One can also move past retelling the surface story events and deeply examine how the story structure adds complexity to this story. For example, following a read aloud of *City Dog, Country Frog* a third grader and emergent multi-lingual student named Samantha (pseudonym), was asked to map out the story events in a timecircle (see Figure 1). Following this mapping activity, Samantha was asked to continue the story. Although she could have completed this task in writing, we chose to have her tell us the story orally. We also gave her a full 24 hours to think about her story.

Figure 1. A Timecircle



Samantha’s continuation of the story followed Willems’ (2010) original circular structure of City Dog making seasonal journeys to the country to visit Country Squirrel and it ended with Country Squirrel meeting City Cat. After she told us her story, we asked her why she chose to introduce City Cat as a new character. She replied with, “The pattern helped me think of that.” It was at that point that we realized that pattern books can also function as mentor text for creative writing. The complexity of circle-tales is even more evident with their invitations for text dependent questions. To fully understand how circle-tales can be used as tools for close reading, let us examine how these types of text provide opportunities for text dependent questions.

Invitations for Text-Dependent Questioning

Fisher and Frey (2013) suggest that “text-dependent questions should be kept in the teacher’s metaphorical back pocket, only to be brought out when the conversation falters, or when students are

ready for a deeper dive into the text” (p. 16). Our work with Samantha presented an opportunity for this “*deeper dive*,” as illustrated in the condensed conversation below:

Author: *“The author of this book, Mo Willems, made his story into a pattern. What story pattern did he create?”*

Samantha: *“It was a circle.”*

Author: *“How do you know it was a circle?”*

Samantha: *“At the beginning, City Dog ran to the country. It was spring and he met Country Frog. They played together. Then they played again and again. In the winter Frog was gone so Dog was sad. But, then it was spring again and Dog made a new friend named Country Squirrel.”*

Author: *“I noticed that you mentioned spring and winter. Did the author mention other seasons.”*

Samantha: *“Yes, he talked about all of them because Dog and Frog would play in all the seasons. But, not winter. Frog was missing in winter. That is why Dog met his new friend Country Squirrel.”*

Author: *“Sometimes a pattern can help us find a hidden message in the story. Think about the characters of the story and the story pattern. Do you think the author has a hidden message for you?”*

Samantha: *“Maybe.”*

Author: *“Since the book is about a friendship, can you think of a hidden message about friendship?”*

Samantha: *“Maybe the author wanted us to know that the friendships we have now will help our next friendships.”*

Author: *“I am going to take your idea and turn it into a statement. Let me know if the following statement is the same as your idea: ‘Our friendships of today, influence our friendships of tomorrow?’”*

Samantha: *“Yes, can we write that on a poster?”*

This conversation with Samantha illustrates that pattern books, particularly circle tales, present opportunities for readers to dive deeper into the text.

Conclusion

The CCSS place a high focus on close reading — a form of strategic reading that is associated with the gradual release of responsibility model, text complexity, and text dependent questioning. However, all readers should be provided this opportunity to dig deeper. In this article, we have proposed that one method of presenting close reading in elementary classrooms is to use patterned books as instructional materials. Patterned books present layers of complexity to engage the reader. At the height of their complexity, patterned books present hidden messages that can be uncovered when their structure is closely examined, as in the case of Samantha shared earlier.

When using patterned books as a tool for close reading, it is necessary to engage the reader with text-dependent questions. In fact, we like to describe such questions as critical tools for empowering and encouraging students to examine text closely. Through these types of questions, readers identify text structure, author's purpose, and cross-text analysis. All of which can lead to discovering a hidden message. We encourage you to introduce your students to patterned text and to use them as instructional tools in your classroom.

References

- Cassidy, J. & Grote-Garcia, S. (2014). What's hot...? What's not. *Reading Today*, 32 (2), 8-12.
- Common Core State Standards Initiative (2015). Standards in your state. *Common Core State Standards Initiative: Preparing America's students for college & career*. Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org/standards-in-your-state/>
- Duke, N. K., & Pearson, P. D. (2002). Effective practices for developing reading comprehension. In A. E. Farstrup & S. J. Samuels (Eds.). *What research has to say about reading instruction* (pp. 205-242). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Fisher, D. & Frey, N. (2013). What's the secret to successful close reading? Strategic preparation and follow up. *Reading Today*, 31 (2), 16-17).
- Fisher, D. & Frey, N. (2012). Close reading in elementary schools. *The Reading Teacher*, 66 (3), 179-188.
- Fisher, D. & Frey, N. (2007). Implementing a Schoolwide Literacy Framework: Improving Achievement in an Urban Elementary School. *The Reading Teacher*, 61 (1), 32-45.
- Grote-Garcia, S. & Durham, P. (2013). Engaging readers, increasing comprehension and building skills: The power of patterned books. *Texas Journal of Literacy Education*, 1 (1), 45-53.
- Harvey, S. (2015). Digging deeper: At its core, close reading is strategic reading. *Reading Today*, 32(5), 30-31.
- International Reading Association (2011). *Children's Choice 2011*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- International Reading Association (2012). *Children's Choice 2012*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- International Reading Association (2013). *Children's Choice 2013*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

- International Reading Association (2014). *Children's choice 2014*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Kintsch, W., Mandel, T.S., & Kozminsky, E. (1977). Summarizing scrambled stories. *Memory and Cognition*, 5, 547-552.
- Kong, A. & Pearson, P. D. (2003). The Road to participation: The construction of a literacy practice in a learning community of linguistically diverse learners. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 38 (1), 85- 124.
- Lloyd, S. L. (2004). Using comprehension strategies as a springboard for student talk. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 48 (2), 114-124.
- Mandler, J.M., & Johnson, N.S. (1977). Remembrance of things parsed: Story structure recall. *Cognitive Psychology*, 9,111-151.
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers (2010). *Common Core State Standards*. Washington D.C.: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers.
- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. (NIH Publication NO. 00-4769).
- Pearson, P. D. & Gallagher, M.C. (1983). The instruction of reading comprehension. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 8 (3), 317-344.
- Pressley, M. (2002). Comprehension strategies instruction: A turn-of-the-century status report. In CC.Block & M. Pressley (Eds.), *Comprehension instruction: Research-based best practices* (pp. 11-27). New York, NY: Guilford.

- Smolkin, L. B., & Donovan, C.A. (2002). "Oh excellent, excellent question!" Developmental differences and comprehension acquisition. In C.C. Block & M. Pressley (Eds.), *Comprehension instruction: Research-based best practices* (pp. 140-157). New York, NY: Guilford.
- Texas Education Agency (2012, April). TEKS and instructional materials working document. Retrieved from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=6148>
- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board & Texas Education Agency (2009). Texas college and career readiness standards. The University of Texas at Austin: Austin, TX. Retrieved from <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=BCA1DEF2-02B0-B3FB-5A72BD7F7FB2448E>
- Thorndyke, P.W. (1977). Cognitive structures in comprehension and memory of narrative discourse. *Cognitive Psychology*, 9, 77-110.

Children's Books

- Bjorkman, S. (2012). *Dinosaurs don't, dinosaurs do*. New York: Holiday House.
- Emberley, R. & Emberley, A. (2009). *There was an old monster*. New York: Scholastic, Inc.
- Gibbs, E. (2013). *I spy pets*. Dorking, Surrey: Templar. Kann, V. (2011). *Silverlicious*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Hale, B. (2013). *Clark the shark*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Kann, V. (2011). *Silverlicious*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Kann, V. (2013). *Emeraldalicious*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Litwin, E. (2010). *Pete the cat: I love my white shoes*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Norman, K. (2012). *I know a wee piggy*. New York: Dial Books.
- Numeroff, L.J. (2011). *If you give a dog a donut*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Rosenthal, A. K. & Reynolds, P. (2011). *Plant a kiss*. New York: HarperCollins Children's Books.
- Schwartz, C.R. (2012), *The three ninja pigs*. New York: Penguin Young Readers Group.
- Stower, A. (2012). *Silly doggy!* New York, NY: Orchard Books.
- Willems, M. (2010). *City dog, country frog*. New York: Hyperion.
- Willems, M. (2012). *The duckling gets a cookie?* New York, NY: Hyperion.
- Wilson, K. (2011). *Bear's loose tooth*. New York, NY: Margaret K. McElderry Books.