

Close Reading of Informational/ Literary Nonfiction Texts

Learning Targets

- Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.
- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.
- Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.
- Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others.
- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on *grade 7 reading and content*, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.
- Analyze the main ideas and supporting details presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how the ideas clarify a topic, text, or issue under study.
- Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

LEARNING STRATEGIES:
Diffusing, Close Reading,
Marking the Text,
Questioning the Text,
Rereading, Summarizing,
Paraphrasing

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY
Point of view is the position or perspective conveyed by an author or speaker. **Tone** is the author or speaker's attitude toward a subject.

Close Reading for Meaning

What does learning to **read closely** mean? As readers, we should not just consider what information is conveyed by a text. We must consider the author's point of view and purpose for writing the text, as well as the author's tone, or attitude toward the subject.

An author or speaker's experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and values shape the **point of view**, or perspective, of a text. For example, an author's point of view might be shaped by experiences growing up in a particular part of the world, by cultural values, or by religious beliefs. Along with analyzing the author or speaker's **tone**, understanding point of view can help the reader determine the author's purpose.

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.

Introducing the Strategy: Diffusing

Diffusing is a strategy for close reading of text. Using this strategy, the reader reads a passage to identify unfamiliar words. The reader uses context clues, dictionaries, and/or thesauruses to discover the meaning of unfamiliar words. Writing notes about meaning or substituting synonyms for unfamiliar words helps the reader increase comprehension of the 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.

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 beside the paragraphs to help your understanding.

Autobiography

From

NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF

Frederick Douglass

by Frederick Douglass

The home **plantation** of Colonel Lloyd wore the appearance of a country village. All the mechanical operations for all the farms were performed here. The shoemaking and mending, the blacksmithing, cartwrighting, coopering, weaving, and grain-grinding, were all performed by the slaves on the home plantation. The whole place wore a business-like **aspect** very unlike the neighboring farms. The number of houses, too, **conspired** to give it advantage over the neighboring farms. It was called by the slaves the “Great House Farm.” Few privileges were **esteemed** higher, by the slaves of the out-farms, than that of being selected to do errands at the Great House Farm. It was associated in their minds with greatness. A representative could not be prouder of his **election** to a seat in the American Congress, than a slave on one of the out-farms would be of his election to do errands at the Great House Farm. They regarded it as evidence of great confidence reposed in them by their overseers; and it was on this account, as well as a constant desire to be out of the field from under the driver’s lash, that they esteemed it a high privilege, one worth careful living for. He was called the smartest and most trusty fellow, who had this honor conferred upon him the most frequently. The competitors for this office sought as diligently to please their overseers, as the office-seekers in the political parties seek to please and **deceive** the people. The same traits of character might be seen in Colonel Lloyd’s slaves, as are seen in the slaves of the political parties.

The slaves selected to go to the Great House Farm, for the monthly **allowance** for themselves and their fellow-slaves, were **peculiarly** enthusiastic. While on their way, they would make the dense old woods, for miles around, **reverberate** with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness. They would compose

cartwrighting, coopering:
cart making and barrel making

reposed: placed, entrusted

conferred: granted to; awarded to

diligently: persistently; energetically

and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. The thought that came up, came out—if not in the word, in the sound;—and as frequently in the one as in the other. They would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone. Into all of their songs they would manage to weave something of the Great House Farm. Especially would they do this, when leaving home. They would then sing most exultingly the following words:—

*“I am going away to the Great House Farm!
O, yea! O, yea! O!”*

This they would sing, as a chorus, to words which to many would seem unmeaning jargon, but which, nevertheless, were full of meaning to themselves. I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible **character** of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of **philosophy** on the subject could do.

I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently **incoherent** songs. I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear. They told a tale of **woe** which was then altogether beyond my **feeble** comprehension; they were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirit, and filled me with ineffable sadness. I have frequently found myself in tears while hearing them. The mere recurrence to those songs, even now, **afflicts** me; and while I am writing these lines, an expression of feeling has already found its way down my cheek. To those songs I trace my first glimmering **conception** of the dehumanizing character of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds. If any one wishes to be impressed with the soul-killing effects of slavery, let him go to Colonel Lloyd’s plantation, and, on allowance-day, place himself in the deep pine woods, and there let him, in silence, analyze the sounds that shall pass through the chambers of his soul,—and if he is not thus impressed, it will only be because “there is no flesh in his obdurate heart.”

I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their **contentment** and happiness. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears. At least, such is my experience. I have often sung to drown my sorrow, but seldom to express my happiness. Crying for joy, and singing for joy, were alike **uncommon** to me while in the jaws of slavery. The singing of a man cast away upon a **desolate** island might be as appropriately considered as evidence of contentment and happiness, as the singing of a slave; the songs of the one and of the other are prompted by the same emotion.

pathetic: causing feelings of sadness and sympathy
rapturous: expressing great enthusiasm or pleasure
exultingly: joyously

jargon: a confused or meaningless language

anguish: severe pain or suffering

ineffable: too great or extreme to be described in words

brethren: fellow members of a group or society

obdurate: stubbornly refusing to change one’s opinion

Second Reading: Vocabulary in Context

Now that you have read the passage silently, listen and follow along as your teacher reads the passage aloud. As you read along with your teacher, circle words and/or phrases (other than the underlined words) that you do not know or that you feel are important to the meaning of the passage. Diffuse these words/phrases for comprehension.

Check Your Understanding

1. Pair with another student and, using context clues and reference resources, determine the meaning of any new words you need to define. Then choose six words from the vocabulary that has been underlined, bolded, and/or you have circled, **paraphrase** the definitions to show your understanding, and discuss how the definitions help you understand the meaning of the passage as a whole.

2. Choose two or three of the words you have examined that you think are significant to understanding the passage. Use the words in sentences as part of a **summary** explaining the central ideas in the passage and explaining how these words contribute to your understanding of the passage.

Third Reading: Text-Dependent Questioning

Now read the passage again, this time reading to respond to the Key Ideas and Details text-based questions. As your class discusses the text, write your responses to each question and highlight or underline the textual evidence that supports your answer. During discussions, you may also want to annotate the text to record a new or different meaning of the text.

Background Information: Frederick Douglass was one of the most well-known forces behind the abolitionist movement in America. Born as a slave in Maryland, Douglass later escaped slavery and became a powerful orator and writer, speaking out against slavery. The following excerpt is taken from one of his autobiographies, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, which details his life as a slave and his desire for freedom. It was published in 1845, eighteen years before Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

From *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*
by Frederick Douglass

The home **plantation** of Colonel Lloyd wore the appearance of a country village. All the mechanical operations for all the farms were performed here. The shoemaking and mending, the blacksmithing, cartwrighting, coopering, weaving, and grain-grinding, were all performed by the slaves on the home plantation. The whole place wore a business-like **aspect** very unlike the neighboring farms. The number of houses, too, **conspired** to give it advantage over the neighboring farms. It was called by the slaves the “Great House Farm.” Few privileges were **esteemed** higher, by the slaves of the out-farms, than that of being selected to do errands at the Great House Farm. It was associated in their minds with greatness. A representative could not be prouder of his **election** to a seat in the American Congress, than a slave on one of the out-farms would be of his election to do errands at the Great House Farm. They regarded it as evidence of great confidence reposed in them by their overseers; and it was on this account, as well as a constant desire to be out of the field from under the driver’s lash, that they esteemed it a high privilege, one worth careful living for. He was called the smartest and most trusty fellow, who had this honor conferred upon him the most frequently. The competitors for this office sought as diligently to please their overseers, as the office-seekers in the political parties seek to please and **deceive** the people. The same traits of character might be seen in Colonel Lloyd’s slaves, as are seen in the slaves of the political parties.

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KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Why does Douglas compare slaves going to the Great House Farm to politicians? How does this comparison contribute to your understanding?

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

What is the contradiction between the meaning and the tone in the slaves’ songs? How could this contradiction confuse an outside observer?

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

How does Douglass's choice of words help reveal his feelings about the institution of slavery? Which examples of powerful diction best reveal his tone?

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KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

According to Douglass, what mistaken conclusion do people make from the singing of slaves? What simile does he use to illustrate his point?

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Check Your Understanding

Now that you have read closely and worked to understand challenging portions of this passage, choose a sentence that you think is important to understanding Douglass's point of view. Explain in your own words what the sentence means and why it is important to understanding the passage.

Synthesizing Your Understanding

Now that you have read the passage three times and studied its vocabulary and sentences, work with your classmates and your teacher to synthesize your understanding by thinking about the **speaker**, the **subject**, the **purpose**, and the author's **tone** or attitude. Respond to the following questions as a way of bringing all your knowledge together.

1. Who is the **speaker** and what is the **subject** of the passage? What is the speaker's perspective on the subject? What experiences or beliefs contribute to his point of view?
2. What is the **purpose** of the passage? Now that you have identified the **subject** and **speaker** of the passage, explain Douglass's reasons for writing these paragraphs. What does he hope to communicate to the audience about his subject?
3. What is the author's attitude toward the **subject** of the passage? **Tone** describes the attitude of the author about the subject being discussed. Now that you have identified the subject and the **purpose**, explain how Douglass feels about this subject.

Writing Prompt: Based on your current understanding of the passage, summarize Douglass’s point of view and tone about slavery. Write a paragraph that explains your interpretation of his perspective on this topic. Be sure to:

- Identify the subject, speaker, purpose and tone of the passage in a topic sentence
- Provide several pieces of textual evidence that support your statement
- Explain how the evidence supports your topic sentence.

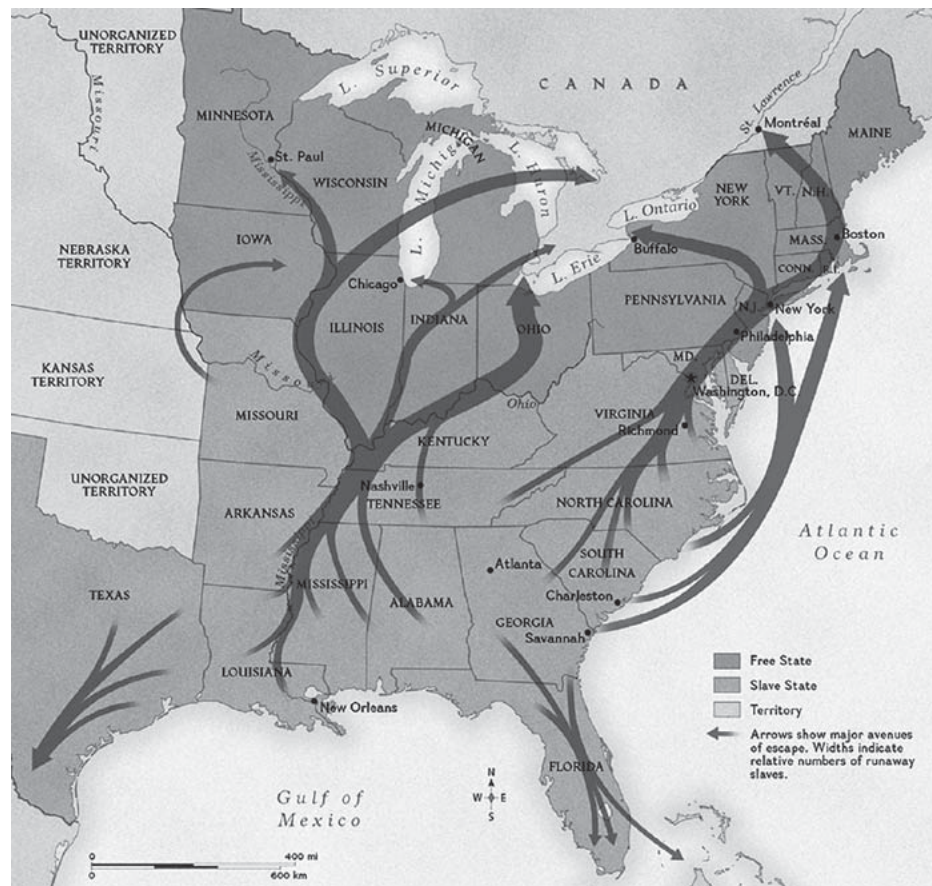
ACTIVITY 2

Collaborative Practice

Look carefully at the map that follows. It depicts the Underground Railroad, a network of safe houses and secret routes that existed in the 19th-century United States. With the aid of abolitionists and sympathetic allies, an estimated 100,000 escaped slaves had gained their freedom by 1850 via the Underground Railroad.

First Reading: What do you see?

As you look at the map, what catches your eye? What details do you notice? How would you describe the details in this map to someone who could not see it? To answer this question, keep your responses *only* on what you can see in the map.



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Second Reading: What does it mean?

Now that you have examined the map carefully, what inferences can you make? How do you interpret what you see? In other words, what might you say about the states or routes that goes beyond what is explicitly shown on the map?

Third Reading: How do you know?

Explain the connection between the details you notice and your interpretation of these details. How might you use the details in the map as textual evidence to support the ideas or inferences you have made?

Writing Prompt: Now that you have carefully examined the content of this map and come to conclusions about what it shows explicitly and what inferences you can make about the meaning, write a paragraph that makes a connection between this map and the passage written by Douglass about his point of view of slavery. Be sure to:

- Write a topic sentence that connects the two texts.
- Include textual details and explain how they support your connection.
- Write a conclusion that follows from your explanations.