**Focusing on High Impact Excerpts When Reading Full Length Texts**

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As teachers work to align their curriculum with the Common Core State Standards and prepare their students for the rigors of college and career, one of the most daunting challenges they face is figuring out how to tackle full length texts. When considering poetry, articles, essays, and short stories, the relative brevity of these works automatically permits teachers and students to engage in a more detailed examination than can be sustained over the course of reading a book-length text. The demands of close reading when applied to longer works necessitate that teachers and students be able to identify and examine high impact excerpts in the course of reading full texts.

By using carefully identified sections of complex text, teachers have the opportunity to capitalize on the new landscape created by the demands of the Standards to promote effective student learning of both literacy skills and content knowledge. Students benefit both from the experience of focusing careful attention on high impact selections and the sustained reading called for by longer texts from which the excerpts were drawn.

As the full implementation of the CCSS comes closer, it will be necessary for students and teachers to adjust to increasingly complex texts. For teachers, a successful transition will come by way of understanding that the acquisition of content knowledge and discipline specific skills will be enhanced by the use of close reading activities integrated into most units of study. Teachers must begin to see their content area classrooms as direct venues by which students will begin to build and perfect the competencies outlined in the CCSS. For students, it will necessitate a shift in their daily reading routines so both close and sustained reading becomes a normal part of learning. Close reading pushes students to acquire new skills in identifying appropriate and useful evidence from text. By learning how to closely read high impact text selections, students can grow in confidence, become increasingly independent, and enhance their understanding of the content they are studying. The challenge for both students and teachers will be learning how to master the demands of reading full length texts while staying attuned to the valuable skills cultivated through close analytic reading. Fidelity to both practices will necessitate teachers and students making critical decisions to identify and focus on excerpts worthy of closer attention within longer texts.

By creating close reading experiences while reading full length texts, teachers can open multiple access points for students with diverse learning needs. Accelerated students will have the space to dig deeply into a complex text, providing them the exposure to a variety of content while also building more critical reading and writing skills. Students with more specific learning needs will have a variety of opportunities to interact with the text in ways that boost their confidence, independence, and literacy skills. Along with offering practice in essential literacy skills, teachers will be able to guide and develop the thoughtful use of evidence from the text by students to produce rich discussion and informed critiques.

The exemplar I prepared for this collection incorporates these principles and serves as a starting point to demonstrate the benefits and challenges facing teachers when confronting the challenges of teaching close reading when engaged in a full length text. I chose high impact excerpts that I felt were critical to highlight from *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand and *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki-Houston and James D. Houston. Together these show how teachers can offer their students highly focused interactions with complex texts that tell related yet different stories. The learning experiences outlined in my exemplar offer what I hope is a compelling case for the use of text selections from longer works. These close reading activities enhance students’ reading comprehension, exercise critical writing skills, and push students into deep interaction and discussion about complex text. In working through these two excerpts, students will also be challenged to compare perspectives on historical events. Bedrock to the Common Core Standards is the principle that content learning can fruitfully incorporate features of content literacy to fulfill a goal shard by ELA and content-based teachers alike: that students understand what they read.