

- By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 6–8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. (RL.7.10)
- In collaborative discussions, demonstrate evidence of preparation and exhibit responsibility for the rules and roles and purpose of conversation. (SL.7.1a, SL.7.1b)
- In collaborative discussions, share and develop ideas in a manner that enhances understanding of a topic and contribute and respond to the content of the conversation in a productive and focused manner. (SL.7.1c, SL.7.1d)
- Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate. (SL.7.6)
- Demonstrate command of standard English and its conventions and use the knowledge when writing, speaking, reading, and listening. (L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3)
- Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, strategically building vocabulary knowledge when needed. (L.7.6)

Choosing Core Texts

This lesson set asks our students to analyze strong works of timeless poetry as well as classic fictional texts to determine and trace the development of a central idea (theme). The primary goal of this lesson set is to expose students to the power and use of key words and phrases within a text to create strong images that enhance the treatment of the central idea. Therefore, in advance of teaching this lesson set, you will want to make sure that your classroom library includes a variety of poetry collections as well as a selection of classic fictional texts for students to engage with and discuss. It is ideal to gather several texts from a variety of genres around a few particular central ideas. When collecting these texts for your students, be mindful of the range of independent reading levels present in your class as well as individual student interest.

Core Texts Used Within the Lesson Set

- “Oranges” by Gary Soto
- “A Poem for My Librarian, Mrs. Long” by Nikki Giovanni
- *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck
- “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost
- “The Mouse’s Tail” by Lewis Carroll (available online)
- “The Storm” by Sara Coleridge (available online)
- “Storm Ending” by Jean Toomer (available online)
- “The Wind Begun to Rock the Grass” by Emily Dickinson
- “The Wind’s Visit” by Emily Dickinson

Supplemental Text Suggestions with Strong Central Ideas

Novels

- *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain
- *Anne of Green Gables* by L. M. Montgomery
- *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell
- *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery
- *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott
- *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee
- *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett
- *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells
- *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson
- *The War of the Worlds* by H. G. Wells
- *White Fang* by Jack London
- *The Wizard of Oz* by Frank L. Baum
- *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L’Engle

Short Story Anthologies

- *The Book of Virtues for Young People* by William J. Bennett, Ed.
- *Edgar Allan Poe: A Collection of Stories* by Edgar Allan Poe
- *Great American Short Stories* by Paul Negri, Ed.
- *Imagining America: Stories from the Promised Land* by Wesley Brown and Amy Ling, Eds.
- *Twelve Impossible Things Before Breakfast* by Jane Yolen
- *Who Do You Think You Are? Stories of Friends and Enemies* by Hazel Rochman, Ed.

Short Stories

- “All Summer in a Day” by Ray Bradbury
- “The Bet” by Anton Chekhov
- “The Catbird Seat” by James Thurber
- “Eleven” by Sandra Cisneros
- “Everyday Use” by Alice Walker
- “The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry
- “Flowers for Algernon” by Daniel Keyes
- “Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut
- “The Interlopers” by Saki (H. H. Munro)
- “Leiningen Versus the Ants” by Carl Stephenson
- “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson
- “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi” by Rudyard Kipling

- “The Strangers That Came to Town” by Ambrose Flack
- “The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe
- “The Treasure of Lemon Brown” by Walter Dean Myers

Poetry Anthologies

- *100 Best-Loved Poems* by Philip Smith
- *101 Great American Poems* by The American Poetry and Literacy Project, Ed.
- *Classic Poetry* by Michael Rosen, Ed.
- *Great Short Poems* by various authors
- *Poems to Learn by Heart* by Caroline Kennedy
- *Selected Poems* by Emily Dickinson

Poems

- “A Noiseless Patient Spider” by Walt Whitman
- “A Poison Tree” by William Blake
- “Alone” by Maya Angelou
- “Breakage” by Mary Oliver
- “Declaration of Interdependence” by Janet S. Wong
- “Dream Boogie” by Langston Hughes
- “First Men on the Moon” by J. Patrick Lewis
- “The Fish” by Elizabeth Bishop
- “Foul Shot” by Edwin Hoey
- “History Lesson” by Natasha Trethewey
- “Hope Is the Thing with Feathers” by Emily Dickinson
- “I Go Back to the House for a Book” by Billy Collins
- “Jerusalem” by Naomi Shihab Nye
- “Nothing Gold Can Stay” by Robert Frost
- “Ode to Family Photographs” by Gary Soto
- “Puzzlement” by Gwendolyn Brooks
- “Somebody Has To” by Shel Silverstein
- “Still I Rise” by Maya Angelou
- “The Children’s Hour” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
- “We Alone” by Alice Walker
- “What It Looks Like To Us and the Words We Use” by Ada Limon

Teacher’s Notes


Writers are often avid observers, thinkers, and readers. In addition to studying the world around them for inspiration as well as ruminating on their latest storyline, writers also drink up the language, structure, and beauty of other writers. As readers, writers often analyze the word choices, the narrative techniques

employed, and the intricate ways others weave their tales. We want to convey the importance of this close reading of texts to our students by inviting them into this lesson set in which they will work closely with the language and craft of timeless texts as a stepping-off point to write their own fictional narrative.

In this lesson set, we focus our readers’ and writers’ attention on timeless or classic texts. What makes a piece of literature a “classic” can be hard to define. For the purposes of this lesson set, we have selected and encourage students to seek out pieces of literature, including poetry, short stories, and longer texts, that touch upon universal themes (such as love, loyalty, trust, death, hope, and justice) to connect with a broad audience. Classic or timeless texts stand the test of time in that they are relevant for present-day readers while still maintaining the qualities and language of a previous era. Finally, timeless texts reflect a powerful use of language and words and often inspire the work of others.

In advance of teaching this lesson set, you will want to consider and review the various genres of writing with which your students may be familiar by consulting previous teachers and/or curricula. This lesson set opens up possibility and choice to the student, focusing more on language, technique, and word choice than genre and format. You will also want to curate a collection of timeless texts, both short and long, that represent a wide range of genres for students to study as mentors.

Questions for Close Reading

 The Core Ready lessons include many rich opportunities to engage students in close reading of text that require them to ask and answer questions, draw conclusions, and use specific text evidence to support their thinking (Reading Anchor Standard 1). These opportunities are marked with a close reading icon. You may wish to extend these experiences using our recommended Core Texts or with texts of your choosing. Use the following questions as a resource to guide students through close reading experiences in classic poetry and in longer works of timeless fiction.

- What central idea is being addressed in this text? What textual evidence can you provide to support this claim?
- What powerful images does the writer create with his or her specific word choice?
- What narrative techniques does the author use to create a vivid story?
- Which sentence or phrase best describes your character?
- Which sentences/words convey the strongest imagery?
- Which sentence(s) best reveals the central idea?
- What form of narration is used in this text? What textual evidence can you provide to support this claim?
- What is the narrator’s point of view toward key events in this text? What textual evidence can you provide to support this claim?