

PREFACE

My journey has never been on a straight road. Often, patterns are not recognizable until we are able to view them from a distance. Years ago, my interest and a Google search about critical reading led me to Daniel Kurland’s website. His three questions about text initiated a quest for a process that leads students to close and critical reading. His first two questions—**What does the text say?** and **How does the text say it?**—appeared to move the reader effectively to a deeper level of meaning and enabled the reader to answer the last question: **What does the text mean?**

I shared these three questions with committees and colleagues; the questions percolated and were used as the structure for the Michigan Department of Education’s (MDE) high school literature units that were developed to meet Michigan’s ELA requirements for graduation. In addition, the three questions shaped the reading initiative in Macomb County, Michigan. The goal remained the same: to move students through complex texts—literature and informational—and enable them to ascertain the theme, principal theory, and big ideas in general.

The three questions turned into four questions when Susan Codere Kelly, the standards consultant from MDE, suggested that students needed to connect with the text. So the fourth question was added: **What does the text mean to me?** The intent was that students were encouraged to connect at the big-idea level and not just with a character or smaller detail in the text.

Since then, teachers and students across the county are using the questions to lead to rich conversations in literature circles, deep discussions in Socratic circles, and profound reflective written responses. It is awe-inspiring to witness what students can discover in a piece of text by reading closely and critically.

Standards: 1–3:
What does the text say?

Standards: 4–6:
How does the text say it?

Standards: 7–9:
What does it mean?

In 2009, the Common Core State Standards were being created and I, along with Karen Wixon, represented Michigan as part of the multi-state initiative to shape the standards. In general, the 10 Common Core Reading Anchor Standards ended up reflecting the four questions. In fact, Timothy Shanahan, in one of his addresses to the 2012 International Reading Association Conference, held up the 10 reading anchor standards and said, “The first three standards answer the question ‘What does the text say?’

And the next three standards answer the question ‘How does the text say it?’ And the next three standards answer the question ‘What does it mean?’”

Through the years, Macomb County and colleagues across Michigan have dedicated themselves to scaffolding students to the pursuit of the literacy needed for the twenty-first century. They have created countless presentations, bookmarks, rubrics, websites, and scaffolding for these four questions. My co-authors and comrades, Cynthia Schofield and Gerri Newnum, have shared vast parts of my journey. They have made numerous presentations on close and critical reading at various state conferences. Our collaborations and conversations have deepened our understanding of close and critical reading. But, we are well aware that knowledge must be shared. All students need to be close and critical readers of complex texts. So, the quest continues.

The creation of the Common Core State Standards supplied fertile ground for this book. Now we have multiple states sharing standards that can be attained through these four simple questions. It is time to share with a broader audience the ways we can use these standards and questions to help students achieve college and career readiness. The journey continues.

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