The Three Levels of Reading
Foundation Lesson

About this Lesson
Close reading is a special kind of analytical reading. When readers look at a text this way, they slow down their reading in order to assess the importance of each word, detail, or image, and they make inferences or draw conclusions about the meaning of the text as they read. Close readers look beyond the plot for deeper layers of meaning.

Readers who use Pre-AP® strategies will discover the three layers of reading as they slow down to notice each aspect of the text. The three levels of reading are

- reading on the line
- reading between the lines
- reading beyond the lines

At the first level, students find meaning directly in the text. As they read, they are mentally answering the questions “Who?” “What?” “When?” and “Where?”

At the second level, students interpret what is in the text. As they read, their key concerns are the following: What does a passage represent, suggest, or personify? What does a certain allusion or metaphor mean? They are also analyzing what they read: interpreting, classifying, comparing, contrasting, and finding patterns.

At the third level, students move beyond the text to connect to universal meaning. As they read, they are asking mental questions like “How does this text connect with my life? With life in a larger sense? With all human beings? With my ideas about morality or values? What kind of perceptions about life in general is the author communicating to me? What do I think of those perceptions?” At this level, students will move from the “What?” of the text to the “So what?” They connect literature with their own experiences and with universal meaning.

This lesson works well with any richly layered text and may be assigned in the middle or at the end of a unit or conclusion of a work. Teachers also have the option of using this lesson with an entire work or an excerpt.

This lesson is included in Module 2: Annotation and Analysis of a Text.

Objective(s)
Students will

- demonstrate an understanding of the three levels of reading.
- read closely to interpret multiple meaning in a passage.
- create a visual representation by applying the three levels of reading to a passage.

Level
Grades Six through Ten
Connection to Common Core Standards for English Language Arts

LTF® Foundation Lessons are designed to be used across grade levels and therefore are aligned to the CCSS Anchor Standards. Teachers should consult their own grade-level-specific Standards. The activities in this lesson allow teachers to address the following Common Core Standards:

Explicitly addressed in this lesson |
<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Code</strong></td>
<td><strong>Standard</strong></td>
<td><strong>Level of Thinking</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.1</td>
<td>Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it. Cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.</td>
<td>Understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.2</td>
<td>Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.</td>
<td>Analyze</td>
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<tr>
<td>R.4</td>
<td>Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.</td>
<td>Analyze</td>
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<tr>
<td>R.10</td>
<td>Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.</td>
<td>Understand</td>
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<tr>
<td>L.3</td>
<td>Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.</td>
<td>Understand</td>
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<tr>
<td>L.4</td>
<td>Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials as appropriate.</td>
<td>Understand</td>
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<tr>
<td>L.5</td>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.</td>
<td>Understand</td>
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<tr>
<td>W.2</td>
<td>Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.</td>
<td>Create</td>
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<td>W.10</td>
<td>Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.</td>
<td>Apply</td>
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<tr>
<td>SL.1</td>
<td>Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</td>
<td>Understand</td>
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### Implicitly addressed in this lesson

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<tr>
<td>L.1</td>
<td>Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>L.2</td>
<td>Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>W.4</td>
<td>Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</td>
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<td>W.9</td>
<td>Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SL.6</td>
<td>Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.</td>
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LTF Skill Focus
The foundation for LTF English lessons is the Skill Progression Chart that identifies key skills for each domain, beginning with grade 6 and adding more complex skills at each subsequent grade level while reinforcing skills introduced at previous grade levels. The Skill Focus for each individual lesson identifies the skills actually addressed in that lesson.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Thinking</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remember</td>
<td>Understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Reading</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>written, spoken, and visual texts</td>
<td>purposeful use of language for effect</td>
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</tbody>
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Reading Strategies
Inference

Literary Elements
Character
Diction
connotation
denotation
Imagery
Theme

Types (modes)
- Expository
- analytical

The Process of Composition
Prewriting
- generation of ideas

Structural Elements
Introduction
- thesis
Body
- use of evidence

Connections to AP*
For success in AP Language and Literature courses, students must closely read in order to analyze text for multiple levels of meaning.

*Advanced Placement and AP are registered trademarks of the College Entrance Examination Board. The College Board was not involved in the production of this material.

Materials and Resources
- any fiction, nonfiction, drama, or poetry selection
- large paper for creating concentric circles
- colored pencils, crayons, markers, etc.
- templates for circles (optional)

Assessments
The following kinds of formative assessments are embedded in this lesson:
- writing assignment
- student products of concentric circles
Teaching Suggestions
Teachers should assist students in generating a list of possible words that will work well with all three levels of this activity to ensure that the center word has both a concrete and an abstract meaning that can extend beyond the text to a thematic statement. Students should be encouraged to present their finished concentric circle activity to the class.

Teachers may wish to have students follow the instructions for “Three Levels of Reading,” but, instead of completing the activity on paper, have students construct an online Glogster using www.edu.glogster.com. A sample Glogster may be found using the link in the Materials and Resources section of this Teacher Overview.

Included with the teacher materials for this lesson is a completed sample based on an excerpt from Where the Red Fern Grows.

Answers
Answers for this lesson are subjective and will vary. To obtain the maximum benefit of the lesson, ask students to go beyond the expected responses.
Excerpt from *Where the Red Fern Grows*

My fire had burned down, leaving only a glowing red body of coals. The cave was dark and silent. Chill from the night had crept in. I was on the point of getting up to rebuild my fire, when I heard what had awakened me. At first I thought it was a woman screaming. I listened. My heart began to pound. I could feel the strain all over my body as nerves grew tighter and tighter.

It came again, closer this time. The high pitch of the scream shattered the silence of the quiet night. The sound seemed to be all around us. It screamed its way into the cave and rang like a blacksmith’s anvil against the rock walls. The blood froze in my veins. I was terrified. Although I had never heard one, I knew what it was. It was the scream of a mountain lion.

The big cat screamed again. Leaves boiled and stirred where my pups were. In the reflection of the glowing coals, I could see that one was sitting up. It was the boy dog. A leaf had become entangled in the fuzzy hair of a floppy ear. The ear flicked. The leaf dropped.

Again the hellish scream rang out over the mountains. Leaves flew as my pup left the bed. I jumped up and tried to call him back.

Reaching the mouth of the cave, he stopped. Raising his small red head high in the air, he bawled his challenge to the devil cat. The bawl must have scared him as much as it had startled me. He came tearing back. The tiny hairs on his back were standing on end.
First Level of Reading

**Innermost Circle:** Concentrate on the concrete level of meaning—*reading on the lines*.

- Write the **most significant word** from the part of the work assigned.
- **Quote the sentence in which the word appears**, or enough of the sentence to reveal the word’s use in context. **Document** the source of the quotation in parentheses.
- Write multiple **dictionary definitions** of the word (denotation).
- Explain why the word is important to the meaning of the work by placing it **in the context of the narrative**.

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*Scream*: to cry out loudly and shrilly as from pain or fear; a long, loud, piercing cry.

_In this scene, young Billy and his new coonhounds sleep in a cave, where they hear the frightening screams of a mountain lion._

“The high pitch of the scream shattered the silence of the quiet night….It screamed its way into the cave and rang like a blacksmith’s anvil against the rock walls” (45).
Second Level of Reading

Middle Circle: Concentrate on the abstract level of meaning—*reading between the lines*.
- Referring to the text, draw four images inspired by the assigned part of the reading.
- Write an explanation of the link between each image and the word you have written.

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This is the kind of cave that Billy was in when he heard the screaming. A cave would make the scream echo and seem even more terrifying.

This illustrates the primal way that humans react when threatened by a wild animal. Billy is screaming inside as he hears the cat scream outside.

The boy pup bawls back at the mountain lion, which is his way of screaming. Even as a puppy he has the instinct for protecting his pack—Billy and the little girl pup.

*Scream*: to cry out loudly and shrilly as from pain or fear; a long, loud, piercing cry.

In this scene, young Billy and his new coonhounds sleep in a cave, where they hear the frightening screams of a mountain lion.

“The high pitch of the scream shattered the silence of the quiet night” (45).

The scream of the cat is the catalyst for the whole episode, causing the consternation of the boy and his dogs.
Human beings can overcome their fear and act courageously, even when threatened by extreme danger.

Scream: to cry out…
In this scene…
“The high pitch.”

This is the kind…

The boy pup bawls…

The scream of…

Emotions such as fear reveal the primitive, animalistic side of human beings.

Third Level of Reading

Outer Circle: Concentrate on the thematic level of meaning—reading beyond the lines.
- Write two thematic statements drawn from the significant word you wrote in the innermost circle and the images you drew in the middle circle. Tie everything to the work as a whole.

Where the Red Fern Grows
by Wilson Rawls
Write an Essay
Select one of your thematic statements to use as the thesis statement of an essay. On the reverse side of your paper, compose a short essay analyzing meaning in the assigned part of the work.

Example of an introduction to an essay using one of the themes as a thesis statement:

*Fear can cause the strongest among us to act irrationally, even hysterically. When Billy, the young protagonist of Wilson Rawls’s *Where the Red Fern Grows*, hears the unearthly-sounding scream of a mountain lion, terror threatens to overcome his good sense. But with his beloved new coonhound pups in mind, he calms himself, showing that human beings can overcome fear and act courageously, even when threatened by extreme danger.*
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Complete the following activities on the paper provided.

1. Across the top of the paper, write the title of the work and the author’s name.

2. Draw three large concentric circles on the paper (one circle inside another circle inside a larger circle).

3. For the innermost circle, concentrate on the concrete level of meaning—reading on the lines.
   a. Write the most significant word from the part of the work assigned.
   b. Quote the entire sentence in which the word appears—or enough of the sentence to reveal the word’s use in context. Document the source of the quotation in parentheses.
   c. Write multiple dictionary definitions of the word (denotation).
   d. Explain why the word is important to the meaning of the work by placing it in the context of the narrative.

4. In the middle circle, concentrate on the abstract level of meaning—reading between the lines.
   a. Referring to the text, draw four images from the assigned part of the reading.
   b. Write an explanation of the link between each image and the word you have written in the innermost circle.

5. In the outer circle, concentrate on the thematic level of meaning—reading beyond the lines. Write two thematic statements drawn from the significant word you wrote in the innermost circle and the images you drew in the middle circle. These should be universal thematic statements and should not refer directly to the text.

6. Select one of your thematic statements to use as the thesis statement for an essay. On the reverse side of your paper, compose a short essay analyzing meaning in the assigned part of the work.