

# How to Teach Close Reading Using a Recipe

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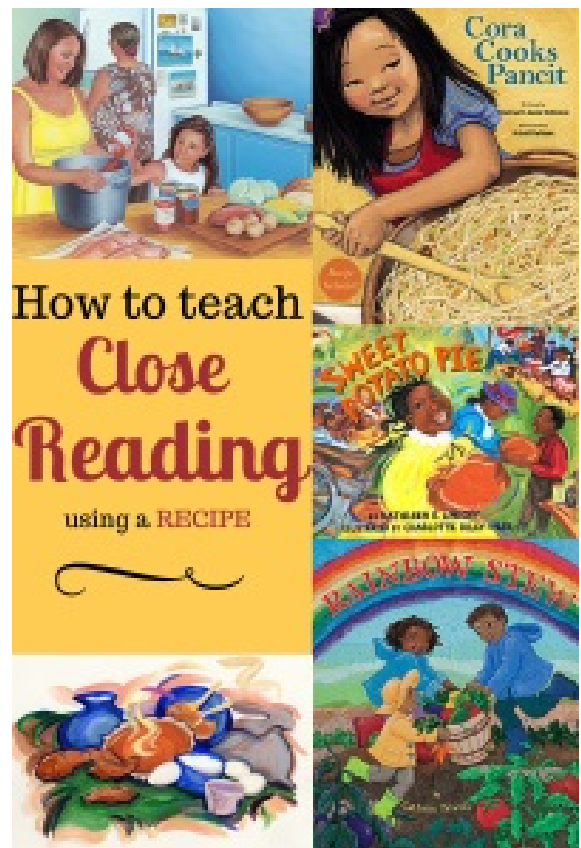
What happens if we don't follow a recipe? Potentially, a disaster. Recipes require careful reading and we can literally taste the consequences of our failure to do so. In this way, a recipe is fantastic for small group instruction, such as guided reading, and for parent-child practice because it is grounded in real world applications and requires multiple re-readings to grasp the information.

For guided reading, there were only a dozen or so book sets that I used with my students because those available to me were dated in content (think: Pluto is still a planet) and image, worn out from being shared across the whole school, and unreliable in student engagement. On one of my monthly trips to a Friends of the Library book sale, where I often scrounged, hunted, and bargained, I discovered a milk crate full of the children's literary magazine, *Cricket*. As these were used periodicals, they were available for free. I remember the award-winning magazine as a child myself and quickly discovered that the wide variety of high-quality texts would be perfect for guided reading, including the recipes and craft instructions.

Young readers can use recipes to analyze an author's choices, such as the order of steps, choice of ingredients, and ingredient amounts. Recipes provide hands-on experience at home while building critical background schema and additional practice with a nonfiction text. Recipes are great for teaching close reading because they:

- naturally engage students with the content (yum!)
- create real-world connections for why we learn to read and the skill of close reading (look—even adults do it!)
- provide a small amount of text which can be read in one sitting but requires several re-readings to understand it fully (perfect for 20-25 min. periods)
- allow students to interpret and solve new words in context
- require students to visualize and analyze how the individual parts create the final product

As you read and carry out each step of a recipe, students can think about the author's choices along the way. Why would the author want *only*  $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp of salt? What would happen if we added 2 tsp instead? Why is salt needed in this recipe in the first place? Why do we need to add the salt before we boil? And so on.

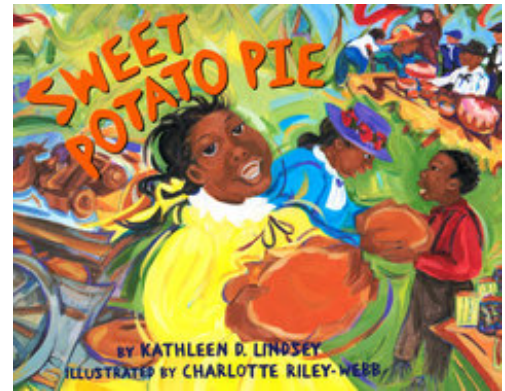


Below is an example of questions for close reading using the recipe included at the end of the story, [Sweet Potato Pie](#).

Read and follow along with the full [Mama's Sweet Potato Pie recipe](#).

**First reading:** (Literal questions to understand the information)

1. What are we making? What is the central idea of this text?
2. How much vanilla do we need?
3. What are the general steps we need to do to make a sweet potato pie?
4. What do we have to do first? (This is tricky because you have to make the pie crust *before* you can do the filling even though it is ordered in reverse)
5. How will we know the pie is finished?
6. Why do we use a fork to press down around the rim of the pan?
7. What step is for attractiveness and not necessary?



**Second reading:** (Higher level/open-ended questions to infer significant ideas)

1. Why should we cut the potatoes into chunks before boiling? What would happen if we put in the whole potato to boil instead?
2. Why does the author say only use  $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp of salt? What would happen if we added 1 tsp of salt instead? What would happen if we didn't add any salt at all?
3. Why does the author tell us to mash the potatoes AFTER boiling the potatoes and draining the water in, not before?
4. Why does the author state, "children will need adult help"? Which step should adults do or supervise? Why?

**Third reading:** (Higher level/open-ended questions to analyze author's methods, craft, and text structure)

1. What is the meaning of the word *preheat* in Step 1 (*Preheat the oven to 350 degrees*)? What is the meaning of the prefix *pre-*?
2. What is the meaning of the word *except* in Step 4 (*Add all remaining ingredients except cinnamon and beat sweet potato mixture until smooth*)?
3. What is the author's purpose of this text (persuade, explain, entertain, inform)? How do you know?
4. How is the text organized? Why would the author organize the information as a list of steps? Why would the author separate the steps for the pie crust and filling within the same recipe?
5. What features show this text is a recipe? How are this text's format and features different from other nonfiction texts' format and features? How does this text compare to the story that precedes it?
6. What type of sentence is used throughout the recipe (declarative, imperative, interrogative, exclamation)? How do you know? Why would the author choose this type of sentence?
7. Why does the author put the "children will need adult help" note at the beginning of the recipe?

**Where can you find child-friendly recipes and craft instructions?** Many food-centric books, such as [Sweet Potato Pie](#), [Cora Cooks Pancit](#), and [Rainbow Stew](#), will include the recipe at the end of the book. Children's magazines, like *Cricket* and *Highlights*, have user-submitted recipes and craft ideas with easy to follow steps. Finally, children's cookbooks are widely available.

*How does close reading look in your classroom? Any tricks and tips to share?*

*Jill Eisenberg, our Resident Literacy Expert, began her career teaching English as a Foreign Language to second through sixth graders in Yilan, Taiwan as a Fulbright Fellow. She went on to become a literacy teacher for third grade in San Jose, CA as a Teach for America corps member. She is certified in Project Glad instruction to promote English language acquisition and academic achievement. In her column she offers teaching and literacy tips for educators.*

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