



A Teacher's Guide

to the Jewish Historical Sites Series



CLOSE READING, CRITICAL THINKING
Focus on Text Structure

Dear Educator,

Today's literacy standards demand that students become proficient at close reading. Reading closely involves reading – and rereading – the same text multiple times to construct meaning. In close reading lessons, students are asked to read the text carefully as they consider the main ideas and details, and then to reread the text as they look at the craft and structure and as they integrate what the text says with what they already know.

The **Jewish History Comes Alive** books can be used for close reading in your elementary classroom. Your third through fifth graders might be ready to read these books with your scaffolding and support. Remember that close reading should involve texts a bit beyond what students can read on their own to meet the Common Core expectations for text complexity. Asking students complex questions with room for deeper thinking ensures that these lessons meet the expectation of rigor. Use this instructional routine to guide your students through the close reading of *It Happened in Soncino*.

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Next Generation English Language Arts Anchor Standards

Reading, discussing, and responding to the Jewish History Comes Alive series helps students move toward the Next Generation English Language Arts Learning Standards.

- *Reading Anchor Standard 1* expects children to “read closely to determine what the text says explicitly/implicitly and make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.” The close reading activities detailed in the teacher's guide encourage students to read closely to construct meaning from the text and to support their ideas with textual evidence.
- *Reading Anchor Standard 2* calls for children to “determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas,” skills that are woven into the first read of the close reading routine.
- *Reading Anchor Standards 4 and 5* focus on vocabulary and text structure, skills that are targeted during the second read of the close reading routine.
- *Reading Anchor Standard 9* requires children to “analyze and evaluate texts... through a variety of lenses and perspectives.” In their third read, children work toward this standard as they integrate knowledge and ideas within the text and across texts.

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STEP-BY-STEP LESSON PLAN

CLOSE READING, CRITICAL THINKING

1: PREPARING TO READ

Distribute the book *It Happened in Soncino* to students. Explain that this book is full of interesting and new information. Students will be reading the book more than once in order to understand it completely. Decide how they will be reading the book – individually, with partners, or in a small group. Remind students to use whatever strategies they know to prepare for reading the text, such as looking at the cover, table of contents, and illustrations.

2: READING AND DISCUSSING

READ THE BOOK – FIRST READ

Students read the entire book and determine what the text is about. Remind students that during this read, they should be thinking about what the book is *mostly about* as well as the *most important details* in the book.

CLOSE READING QUESTIONS

Discuss some of the following key questions after students read the entire book.

- » **What is the book mostly about?** *The book is mostly about the Soncino printing press.*
- » **How did the process of printing books change over time?** *Originally books were written on parchment scrolls, then wax tablets, then papyrus codices, then stamped wood block letters, and eventually with the printing press.*
- » **Why was Joseph Soncino's accomplishment important?** *By printing the first book of the Talmud, Soncino made it more widely available. He also printed Rashi and Tosafos on the same page as the Talmud, making learning much smoother.*
- » **How are Jewish books printed today?** *Books are written on computers and then printed on large printing machines all over the world.*

READ THE BOOK – SECOND READ

Direct students' attention to pages 15-24 of the book. This time, focus on the language used by the author and how the text works.

CLOSE READING QUESTIONS

Discuss some of the following key questions as students look at these pages.

- » **How did the author organize ideas in this section of the text?** *(focus on text structure) These ideas are organized in chronological order, describing the development of Jewish printing from 1484 to the 1550s.*
- » **Look back at the table of contents. How do the sections of this book fit together to develop the main idea?** *(focus on text structure) The different parts of this book fit together to*

describe the development of Jewish printing as we know it today, including the Soncino printing press and its role in Jewish printing.

» **On p. 16 there is a photograph of an old page of the Talmud. There is another photograph of a page of the Talmud on p. 24. How are these photographs similar and different and why are they included?** *(focus on text features) Both photographs show a page of the Talmud with the words of the Talmud in the center and the commentaries around it. The second photograph shows the page numbers that were added in by Bomberg. These photographs provide support for the information in the text about the changes by Soncino and Bomberg.*

» **Later in the book, the author writes, "When people hear the name Soncino, they think of books." Why?** *(focus on making inferences) With their printing press, the Soncino family made Jewish books cheaper and therefore more available. They made beautiful books, some with pictures. They printed a wide range of books, including the Bible, Talmud, prayer books, Haggadahs, and books of Rambam.*

READ THE BOOK – THIRD READ

Students look back at pages 18-24 one more time, this time with a focus on looking for meaning by making inferences and putting ideas together. Have students think about the following key questions as they read: What inferences can I make from the text to help me understand what the author doesn't say explicitly? How can I connect any of the ideas of the text to another text I've read or something I've learned? What larger message do the writer's ideas add up to?

CLOSE READING QUESTIONS

Discuss the following key questions after students reread these pages.

- » **Look at the photo on p. 23. How does it help you to understand the topic on this page?** *This photo helps the reader visualize the beautiful books which the Soncinos printed.*
- » **Describe the Soncino family based on details from these pages.** *They wanted books to be available to all Jews, showing us their concern for others. They were proud of their craft, as evidenced by the beautiful books they created and the fact that they only used the best paper. They were hard workers and grew their business.*
- » **What text features (headings, table of contents, glossaries) did the author include to help the reader?** *Bold words, headings, table of contents, glossary.*

3: CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

Engage students in a class discussion around the following points. What does this text show us about the importance of books in Jewish tradition? How have you seen the significance of books in your own life or home?

CLOSE READING: IT HAPPENED IN SONCINO

EXPLORING TEXT STRUCTURE

Answer the questions below to help you explore the text features and primary sources in *It Happened in Soncino*.

1. Reread the first section of the book on page 4. Compare and contrast books today to books long ago.

2. Much of the book is organized in chronological order. Review pages 15-22 and find signal words that indicate that the story is told in the order in which it happens. Explain the significance of these signal words.

3. In the section "In 1484," the Talmud printed by the Soncinos is compared and contrasted with the Talmud that had been written previously. How was the Soncino Talmud similar to and different from earlier written versions?

4. What remains in Soncino, Italy, today that reminds us of the Soncino family's printing press?
