Text Dependent Questions and the CCSS

Text Dependent Questions Defined

An effective text dependent question first and foremost embraces the key principle of close reading embedded in the **CCSS Anchor Reading Standards** by asking students to provide evidence from complex text and draw inferences based on what the text explicitly says **(Standards 1 and 10)**. A close look at the intervening Anchor Reading **Standards 2-9** reveals that the variety of tasks they call on students to perform all critically rely on consulting the text for answers. As the name suggests, a text dependent question privileges the text itself and the information students can extract from it. Consider the following questions about the opening of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*:

Non-Text Dependent Questions	Text Dependent Questions
Are books without pictures or conversations useful?	What kind of books does Alice find useful?
How would you react if you saw a talking rabbit?	How did Alice react when she saw a talking rabbit?
Would Alice have followed the rabbit down the hole had she not seen it look at a watch?	Why did Alice follow the rabbit down the hole?
What do you know about Lewis Carroll?	What does the reader know about the rabbit?

While questions like those found in the first column would undoubtedly generate conversation in the classroom, answering them does not move students closer to understanding *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Tellingly, non-text dependent questions cannot be answered by consulting the text, but instead rely on a mix of personal opinion, background information, and imaginative speculation on the part of the reader.

By contrast, the questions in the second column draw the reader back to the text to explicitly discover what it says about the rabbit or Alice's reasons for reacting the way she did. Such text-dependent questions have concrete and explicit answers rooted in the text, and there are measurable differences in kinds of answers students might give in response to them because such answers can be compared against an objective benchmark: the text itself.

Framing Text Dependent Questions

It is critical that a text dependent question originate from the text itself, and the **CCS Anchor Standards** suggest that questions focus on a word or phrase (**Standard 4**) or even a sentence, paragraph, or larger section of the text (**Standard 5**). Yet an equally important feature of text dependent questions is that they should be framed as open ended and not leading questions, as genuine learning only happens when students can engage in an authentic conversation about the text instead of the questions (or teachers) providing the right answer immediately. Effective text dependent questions therefore encourage students to spend time lingering over a specific portion of the text looking for answers instead of just a cursory look to get the gist of what is meant.

Close Reading Skills and the CCSS

- Ask why the author chose a particular word
- Analyze the impact of the syntax of a sentence
- Collect evidence like a detective on the case
- Test comprehension of key ideas and arguments
- Analyze how portions of the text relate to each other and the whole
- Look for pivot points in a paragraph
- Track down patterns in a text
- Notice what's missing or understated
- Investigate beginnings and endings of texts

An effective text dependent question delves into the words, sentences, and paragraphs of a text to guide students in extracting the key meanings or ideas and events found there. They target academic vocabulary and crucial passages as focal points for gaining comprehension through examining details, explanations and arguments. Yet this focus on evidence drawn from the text is not an end in itself; rather, it serves as a method to focus students on performing the close reading skills spelled out in the intervening **Anchor Reading Standards 2-9.** Successful text dependent questions therefore reflect the principles of close reading by juxtaposing the specific demands of the reading standards against passages drawn from complex text.

Text Dependent Questions and the CCSS

- Determine central ideas or themes and analyze their development **(Standard 2)**

- Summarize the key supporting details and ideas **(Standard 2)**

- Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact **(Standard 3)**

- Analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone **(Standard 4)**

- Interpret technical, connotative, and figurative meanings of words and phrases **(Standard 4)**

- Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics **(Standard 9)**

- Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style **(Standard 6)**

- Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats **(Standard 7)**

- Delineate and evaluate the specific claims and overarching argument **(Standard 8)**

- Assess the validity of the reasoning **(Standard 8)**

- Assess the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence **(Standard 8)**

Consider how a focus on specific words, sentences, and even paragraphs from the opening of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*—when framed inquisitively and filtered through the CCSS reading standards—produces probing text dependent questions that get at the heart of Carroll's meaning:

Level of Text Specificity	CCS Anchor Standard Close Reading Skill	Text Dependent Question
Word / Phrase	Analyze how specific word choices shape tone **(Standard 4)**	Why wasn't Alice "burning with curiosity" when she initially saw the rabbit? What subsequent events led to her feeling this way?
Sentence	Assess how point of view shapes content **(Standard 6)**	In the opening paragraph Alice states "what is the use of a book... without pictures or conversation?" What does that sentence reveal about her?
Paragraph	Summarize key supporting details **(Standard 2)**	What does Alice observe about the rabbit in the third paragraph?
	Investigate the structure of specific sentences, paragraphs, and sections of text **(Standard 5)**	Around what word or phrase does the meaning of the third paragraph pivot?