**Books Fall Open** by David McCord

Books fall open,

you fall in,

delighted where

you’ve never been;

Hear voices not once

heard before,

reach world on world

through door on door;

Find unexpected

keys to things

locked up beyond

imaginings.

What might you be,

perhaps become,

because one book

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True books will venture,

dare you out,

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**Instructional Sequence for a Close Reading of**

**David McCord’s poem “Books Fall Open”**

| **Text Under Discussion** | **Directions for Teachers** |
| --- | --- |
| Books fall open,  you fall in,  delighted where  you’ve never been;  Hear voices not once  heard before,  reach world on world  through door on door;  Find unexpected  keys to things  locked up beyond  imaginings.  What might you be,  perhaps become,  because one book  is somewhere? Some  wise delver into  wisdom, wit,  and wherewithal  has written it.  True books will venture,  dare you out,  whisper secrets,  maybe shout  across the gloom to  you in need,  who hanker for  a book to read. | **1. Introduce the text and ask students to read independently.**  Other than giving an initial gloss to words students would likely not be able to define from context (underlined in the text), teachers should avoid giving any background context or instructional guidance at the outset of the lesson while students are reading the text silently. This close reading approach forces students to rely exclusively on the text instead of privileging background knowledge, and levels the playing field for all students as they seek to comprehend the featured message. It may make sense to notify students that the short text is thought to be difficult and they are not expected to understand it fully on a first reading--that they can expect to struggle. Some students may be frustrated, but all students need practice in doing their best to stay with something they do not initially understand.  Instruct students to read the text silently a second time and underline any words that are unfamiliar or difficult. |
| **2. Read the passage out loud as students follow along in the text.**  Listening to a difficult text is another excellent way to acquaint students a second time with powerful and stirring words. After students have an opportunity to silently read the text, read it aloud slowly and methodically, allowing students to follow the twists and turns of the message. Do not attempt to dramatize the text, but rather carefully speak the words clearly to the class, being sure to follow the punctuation and rhetorical clues. Speaking clearly and carefully will allow students to follow the argument and reading out loud with students following along improves fluency while offering all students access to a complex text. Accurate and skillful modeling of the reading provides students who may be dysfluent with accurate pronunciations and syntactic patterns of English. |
| **3. Model annotating text.** Project the poem for all to see. Go through the poem and write responses in the margins.  Begin by going line-by-line and reading the poem and defining unfamiliar words in the margin. Be sure to ask students to predict how the poem would change if those particular words were different. Also draw pictures or write connections in the margin as you go through the poem line-by-line. |
| **4. Guide discussion of the poem with a series of specific text-dependent questions and tasks.** | |
| 1. How would you describe the poem's speaker (sometimes called the persona or the voice)? (The speaker may be different from the author.) What tone or emotion do you detect--for instance, anger, affection, sarcasm? Does the tone change during the poem? 2. What is the structure of the poem? Are there stanzas (groups of lines separated by space)? If so, how is the thought related to the stanzas? 3. What images do you find? 4. What use has the writer made of repetition to convey meaning and/or emotional effects? 5. How is rhythm used to complement the thought and feeling of the poem? 6. Look at the verbs in the poem. Is there use of personification in the poem? If so, why do you think the poet chose to use it? | |
| **Student Extension:** Have students use the poem to create a bookmark or other artistic rendering of the poem. | |