To educators who have followed reading schools of thought for many years, the Common Core marks a return to the kind of reading that was promoted in the thirties and forties through New Criticism. New Criticism put the text at the center and equated reading with close analysis of the text. It’s a kind of highly academic reading that can be particularly effective on very complex texts that reward poring over language and structure and deciphering internal meanings—you can see why seminars on New Critical approaches proliferated at Ivy League institutions and at the Sorbonne. Perhaps because the Common Core authors worked backward from these elite college skills and imagined a progression of reading skills that would lead to this sort of reading of university-level texts, the standards reside in this territory of academic reading. Objective, close, analytical reading is what is valued as deep comprehension and interpretation by the Common Core.

In focusing on textual analysis as the primary means of comprehending and interpreting texts, the Common Core puts aside theories of reader response. To return to the historical view, the notion that all meaning resided solely in the text was rejected by Louise Rosenblatt. In *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt (1938/1968/1976/1995) argued that the meaning of texts resides in the interaction of the reader with the text. The logical consequence of Rosenblatt’s definition of reading is that when two readers read *Charlotte’s Web*, they can’t and won’t see the same things in it because their own experience partially shapes their interpretation. Even the same reader at different ages will see different things in the text. The reader as a third grader may particularly notice Fern’s friendship with Wilbur, while that same child, twenty or thirty years later as a mother, may reread *Charlotte’s Web* and see more clearly a theme of the willingness to sacrifice oneself for a loved one. Reader response approaches to reading suggest that even if you claim that themes reside within the corners of the text, the variation in the readers’ experience and preoccupation releases meanings differently. Louise Rosenblatt, Peter Johnston, many reading researchers, and we posit that reading, like any activity, is always subjective. As Robert Scholes remarks, reading remains “incomplete unless it is absorbed and transformed in the thoughts and deeds of readers” (1989, x).

You may want to assess your students to see if they need more support with academic, text-based responses. If you want to assess adults’ or children’s current reading practices, ask them to discuss a poem or story with a familiar plot or issue. Do they veer off into discussions of their own experiences? They’ll need nudging to move to CCSS work.