

Grade 6 Sampler

# UNITS OF STUDY

*in* Argument, Information, *and* Narrative Writing

A COMMON CORE WORKSHOP CURRICULUM

LUCY CALKINS  
*with Colleagues from the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project*



6



# Grade 6 Components

## Professional and Classroom Support

*A Guide to the Common Core Writing Workshop* crystallizes the essential principles, methods, and structures of effective writing workshop instruction.

The *Resources for Teaching Writing* CD-ROM provides unit-specific print resources to support your teaching throughout the year.

## Three Units of Study

- ◆ Are organized around the three types of writing mandated by the Common Core—*argument*, *information*, and *narrative writing*
- ◆ Lay out six weeks of instruction (17–18 sessions) in each unit
- ◆ Include all of the teaching points, minilessons, conferences, and small-group work needed to teach a comprehensive workshop curriculum
- ◆ Model Lucy and her colleagues' carefully crafted teaching moves and language

## Writing Pathways

### *Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions, Grades 6–8*

- ◆ Is organized around a continuum of learning progressions across argument, information, and narrative writing
- ◆ Includes benchmark student texts, writing checklists, learning progressions, and rubrics

## If... Then... Curriculum

### *Assessment-Based Instruction, Grades 6–8*

- ◆ Offers nine alternate units of study
- ◆ Presents if/then conferring scenarios that support targeted instruction and differentiation



## Grade 6

Welcome to this sampler of the Grade 6 components in the Units of Study in Argument, Information, and Narrative Writing series. The first pages of this sampler provide an overview of the units of study. They describe the instructional pathways each unit follows and how this journey is subdivided into bends, or parts. This overview describes how each bend builds on the learning in the previous bend and sets the stage for the learning in the next bend. Likewise, it describes how each larger unit of study builds on the learning in past units and sets the stage for learning in future units and grades. The tables of contents that follow delineate the steps of the journey and map in detail the learning students will see and experience.

The bulk of this sampler is the first bend from Unit 2, *The Literary Essay: From Character to Compare/Contrast*. This bend extends your students' journey into argument writing. This in-depth look allows you to see how learning is progressively built in each unit and how students become immersed in the writing process. In addition to mapping your teaching points, minilessons, conferences, and small-group work, each session also includes Lucy's coaching commentary. In these side-column notes, Lucy is at your side explaining proven strategies, offering professional insight, and coaching you through the nitty-gritty details of teaching.

Also included are samples of the instructional resources that support these core units. *Writing Pathways* shows you the types of learning progressions, checklists, and benchmark writing samples that will help you evaluate your students' work and establish where students are in their writing development. *If... Then... Curriculum* describes the alternate units you can use to enhance or differentiate your instruction. And finally, the samples from the resources CD-ROM show you the wealth of teaching tools that support each unit.

As you review this Grade 6 sampler, it is important to remember that the goal of this series is to model thoughtful, reflective teaching in ways that enable you to extrapolate guidelines and methods, so that you will feel ready to invent your own clear, sequenced, vibrant writing instruction.

“To meet the ambitious goals of the CCSS, you'll want to communicate to your sixth graders that it is not practice alone that leads to perfection. For students' skill levels to increase dramatically, they must learn how to practice effectively. Research is clear that when students are engaged in a cycle of goal-setting, strategic work, self-assessment, and feedback, they make significant progress.”

—Lucy Calkins



- ◆ Units of Study Overview and Contents **pages 2–10**
- ◆ UNIT 2: The Literary Essay: From Character to Compare/Contrast (Argument Writing)  
BEND 1: “Writing Strong Literary Essays” **pages 11–84**
- ◆ *Writing Pathways: Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions, Grades 6–8* **pages 86–91**
- ◆ *If... Then... Curriculum: Assessment-Based Instruction, Grades 6–8* **pages 92–93**
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# OVERVIEW AND CONTENTS FOR UNIT 1

## *Personal Narrative* *Crafting Powerful Life Stories*

Lucy Calkins, Stacey Fell, and Alexandra Marron

In the first bend of this unit, you will ask students to generate ideas for personal narratives based on meaningful places or moments in their lives. Students will practice stretching out key episodes, choosing meaningful details and exact dialogue, and writing from a consistent point of view. You'll ask students to write at least one two-page flash-draft personal narrative each day, and more for homework. Day by day, the quality of their flash-draft narratives will improve as they apply what they are learning. Next, you'll teach students ways to learn writing techniques from a close reading of a mentor text—for example, "Everything Will Be Okay" by James Howe. You will teach them that writers read texts not only to experience the story, but also to admire, study, and select writing moves to emulate.

In Bend II, after you've asked students to select one of their stories to revise for publication, your emphasis will be on teaching students that revision is driven by the writer's effort to communicate meaning. For example, when students plan their leads, you will teach them that writers think, "What is my story really about, and how can I hint at that from the very beginning?" In the same way, you will teach students that a story can be told in different ways, depending on the theme the writer wants to explore. You'll remind students that flash-drafting an entire personal narrative in one sitting can help writers create cohesion and bring voice to their pieces. As students revise, you will teach them to use their writer's notebooks to deliberately practice writing techniques and skills. They might practice elaborating on certain parts or incorporating meaningful flashbacks. By the end of Bend II, students will have revised one piece of writing extensively, and in doing so, they will have gained the sense of self-efficacy that comes with trying out strategies and working toward clear goals.

Bend III emphasizes increased initiative and independence, as sixth graders begin writing new personal narratives. You'll rally students to take charge of their writing processes and plans, reminding them to draw on everything they know how to do, yet keeping their eyes on their goals. You'll continue to support students as they develop their skills at emulating the craft moves of a published author—perhaps drawing attention to ways writers pace their stories, build tension, or create resolutions that connect to the hearts of their stories. At the end of the unit, students will publish their work by reading aloud their final personal narratives to groups of students and invited guests.

### Welcome to the Unit

#### **BEND I ♦ Launching Independent Writing Lives and Generating Personal Narratives**

##### **1. Setting Up to Write**

*In this session, you'll teach students that writers can study finished work, imagining the strategies that other writers probably used, and then try these strategies with their own work.*

##### **2. Calling On All Strategies to Write Up a Storm**

*In this session, you'll teach students that writers call on a toolkit of strategies for finding ideas for their stories, and they can use those ideas to launch into fast and furious writing. You'll also teach students that narrative writers sometimes generate story ideas by thinking of places and the meaningful episodes that occurred in them.*

##### **3. Starting from Moments That Really Matter**

*In this session, you'll teach students that to come up with ideas for personal narratives, it can help to think of small moments that matter deeply. Writers often do this by turning to moments when they realized or learned something significant.*

##### **4. Telling the Story from the Narrator's Point of View**

*In this session, you'll teach students that to write effective narratives, writers reimagine the episode as they put it on paper, so that readers will be able to experience it, too.*

##### **5. Reading Closely to Learn from Other Authors**

*In this session, you'll teach students that one way writers raise the level of their own writing is by imitating the personal narrative writing that inspires and moves them.*

##### **6. Taking Stock: Pausing to Assess and Set Goals**

*In this session, you'll teach students that writers sometimes pause to consider their progress, using a checklist to assess their own growth and set new goals.*

## BEND II ♦ Moving Through the Writing Process and Toward Our Goals

### 7. Experimenting with Beginnings

*In this session, you'll teach students that writers generate multiple leads as a way to rehearse a story.*

### 8. Flash-Drafting: Get the Whole Story on the Page

*In this session, you'll teach students to take their seed ideas to flash-draft a first-draft version of their stories.*

### 9. Using Writer's Notebooks for Mindful, Goal-Driven Work

*In this session, you'll teach students that writers use their writer's notebooks as a place to try new things, to practice their skills, and to work hard at the writing goals they've set for themselves.*

### 10. Re-Angling and Rewriting to Convey What a Story Is Really About

*In this session, you'll teach students to kick off their substantial revision process by re-angling their storytelling to hint at the larger meaning, early on in the story, and then to develop that deeper meaning throughout the story.*

### 11. Elaborating on Important Scenes and Adding New Ones from the Past

*In this session, you'll teach students to use everything they know about writing powerful scenes to further develop the most important parts of their stories and to incorporate new moments from the past that connect with their stories' meaning.*

### 12. Using All Available Resources to Aid with Final Touches

*In this session, you'll teach students to draw on the many writing tools available to them, including classroom charts and checklists, to aid with final revisions and with editing.*

## BEND III ♦ Writing a Second Personal Narrative with New Independence

### 13. Taking Charge of the Writing Process: Deciding Where to Begin and How to Revise from the Get-Go

*In this session, you'll rally students to take charge of their writing process and their plan as they embark on a second personal narrative. You'll remind them to draw on everything they know how to do, keep an eye on their goals, and make use of their many writing tools.*

### 14. Slowing Down and Stretching Out the Story's Problem

*In this session, you'll teach students that when writers draft, they think carefully about how to slow down the problem in their story and build tension.*

### 15. Ending Stories in Meaningful Ways

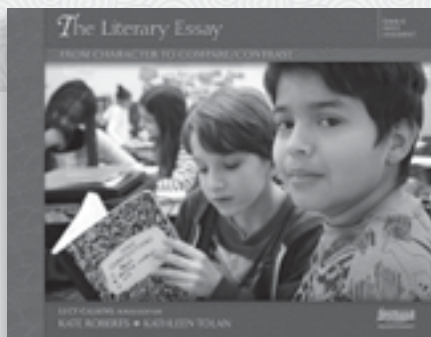
*In this session, you'll teach students that writers don't just end stories; they create resolutions that connect to the big meaning of their story.*

### 16. Editing Sentences for Rhythm and Meaning

*In this session, you'll teach students to listen to the rhythm of their writing and make final revisions to convey the intended mood and feelings of their writing.*

### 17. Publishing and Celebrating as a Community of Writers

*In this session, students will share their final personal narratives with their writing colleagues and their families.*



## OVERVIEW AND CONTENTS FOR UNIT 2

### *The Literary Essay* *From Character to Compare/Contrast* Lucy Calkins, Kate Roberts, and Kathleen Tolan

**B**end I of this unit begins as you coach your writers through the intense process of drafting an entire essay in one day. This writing “boot camp” will reveal to you some of what your students already know about essay writing and will also allow you to introduce your students to some key essay-writing moves. As you move through this bend in the unit, you will help students revise their initial drafts, teaching them first ways writers read closely and develop claims about characters—by finding the details that illuminate those characters and by considering their motivations and desires. You will also teach students ways essayists develop claims and articulate them, ways they plan an essay’s structure and analyze evidence from a text. Then, you will show your students ways to explain how their evidence supports their thinking, a move essential to essay writing and one of the more exciting and challenging sessions in this bend. By the end of this bend, your students will have learned the skills to draft and revise an essay about character.

In Bend II, you will ask students to repeat this cycle, this time angling their essays to consider a theme of a text. Along the way, you will be teaching them new essay-writing skills—from crafting powerful introductions and conclusions to incorporating quotes smoothly and accurately. You will also be supporting students in writing their second essays with greater independence and ease. You will ask them to reflect on their writing throughout, using assessment checklists as well as mentor essays.

Finally, in Bend III, you will teach your students ways to consider the similarities and differences in the how two texts deal with an issue and to write a comparative essay about what they find. You will help your writers apply all they have learned so far in this unit—and in others—to their current work, and you will help them to write with even more independence than before, setting their own writing goals and using their skills strategically to revise and edit their writing. At the end of the unit, your writers will publish and celebrate their completed essays—you might hold a character dress-up party in which characters discuss problems they’ve faced or you might publish essays on a literary blog or wiki.

#### Welcome to the Unit

#### **BEND I ♦ Writing Strong Literary Essays**

##### **1. Essay Boot Camp**

*In this session, you’ll teach students that when writing an essay, writers start with a clear sense of the structure in which they’ll be writing and then shape the content to fit into that structure, changing the structure around if the content requires them to do so.*

##### **2. Growing Big Ideas from Details about Characters**

*In this session, you’ll teach students that to generate ideas for an essay about literature, writers reread a text very closely, paying attention to important details about the characters and thinking about the author’s intention.*

##### **3. Writing to Discover What a Character Really Wants**

*In this session, you’ll teach students that literary essayists think and write about what motivates characters and what characters really want, and then they use this writing as the basis for their essays.*

##### **4. Crafting Claims**

*In this session, you’ll teach students that essayists mull over their ideas about the character and then choose one they can craft into a claim that feels worth thinking and writing about and that may eventually drive an essay.*

##### **5. Summarizing, Storytelling, and Quoting**

*In this session, you’ll teach students that essayists reread the text through the lens of the claim, searching for the most compelling evidence that can support it.*

##### **6. Studying a Mentor Text to Construct Literary Essays**

*In this session, you’ll teach students that writers can study published literary essays to learn techniques and structures to bring to the work of drafting their own essays.*

##### **7. Revising Essays to Be Sure You Analyze as Well as Cite Text Evidence**

*In this session, you’ll teach students that essayists often revise their essays to make sure they explain why and how the evidence connects with or supports their claim.*

**BEND II ♦ Elevating the Complexity of Literary Essays****8. Looking for Themes in the Trouble of a Text**

*In this session, you'll teach students that writers look for themes in texts by identifying and analyzing the problems that characters face and considering the inherent lessons.*

**9. Drafting Using All That You Know**

*In this session, you'll teach students that when essayists sit down to draft, they often draft quickly, piecing together all the necessary parts and drawing on everything they know.*

**10. First Impressions and Closing Remarks**

*In this session, you'll teach students that literary essayists begin their essays with a universal statement about life and then transition to the text-based claim itself, by narrowing their focus to the particular story they are writing about. Then they make sure they end their essays with power and voice, leaving their reader with a strong final impression that concludes their journey of thought.*

**11. Quoting Texts**

*In this session, you'll teach students that essayists use quotations from the text to support their ideas, choosing just key parts of a quotation and providing the context for how that bit of text supports their thinking.*

**12. Editing Inquiry Centers**

*In this session, you'll teach students that editors can learn about conventions by studying mentor texts.*

**BEND III ♦ Writing Compare-and-Contrast Essays****13. Building the Muscles to Compare and Contrast**

*In this session, you'll teach students that to compare and contrast, essayists notice the similarities and differences between their subjects, noting their significance, and then categorize their observations into patterns or ideas, in preparation to write a compare-and-contrast essay.*

**14. Comparing and Contrasting Themes across Texts**

*In this session, you'll teach students that essayists write compare-and-contrast essays by thinking across texts about similarities and differences among themes.*

**15. Applying What You Have Learned in the Past to Today's Revision Work**

*In this session, you'll teach students that essayists use what they already know about essay writing, as well as a variety of resources, to revise their compare-and-contrast essays.*

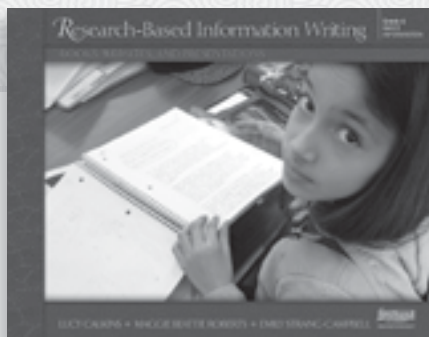
**16. Identifying Run-Ons**

*In this session, you'll teach students that essayists fine-tune their writing by finding and fixing run-ons and sentence fragments.*

**17. Celebrating Literary Essays**

*In this celebration, you and your students will find different ways to share and celebrate their completed literary essays.*





## OVERVIEW AND CONTENTS FOR UNIT 3

### *Research-Based Information Writing Books, Websites, and Presentations*

Lucy Calkins, Maggie Beattie Roberts, and Emily Strang-Campbell

In Bend I of this unit, you will teach students to write research-based informational essays on a whole-class topic, such as teen activism. You'll begin by teaching students how writers present big, important ideas and how they organize and structure parts of their writing. You will teach students that writers read and analyze a wide variety of sources in order to develop a big-picture view of a topic, and you'll teach them that writers analyze information in order to discover key points and ideas. At the end of the bend, you'll ask students to flash-draft an entire informational essay, relying on the plan they've created with your coaching.

In Bend II, your students will join the ranks of authors who write informational books. You'll invite them to choose a compelling issue to write about—such as the fight against child labor or the campaign for the preservation of the environment—by following a trail of research. Next you'll coach them that writers envision several possible tables of contents before they select the right structure for their topic. Throughout this bend, you'll teach students that writers strengthen their credibility by incorporating solid evidence into their writing, including accurate quotes, supportable facts, and clear statistics. In addition, you'll teach students how to elaborate on their key points with emblematic, concrete details to create an accurate picture of the topic for readers. You'll help students refine their writing by teaching them ways writers employ complex sentences and incorporate useful text features.

In Bend III, you'll teach students how to use the writing expertise they've developed to create websites and digital presentations. You will teach them that writers decide which information is most important in order to hone it and shape it for digital formats. You will coach students how to frame and reframe their work for delivery in multiple ways, including visually. Students will practice revising as they work, with your coaching, correcting errors with an editor's speed and accuracy. Finally, students will unveil their work to a select online community, promoting awareness and activism for the issues they've chosen.

#### Welcome to the Unit

#### **BEND I ♦ Writing Research-Based Informational Essays**

##### **1. Becoming Engaged with a Topic**

*In this session, you'll teach students that information writers research and gather information quickly in order to be able to teach others.*

##### **2. Reading for a Wide View of a Topic: Teen Activism**

*In this session, you'll teach students that writers read and analyze a wide variety of sources in order to develop a big-picture view of a topic.*

##### **3. Preparing to Write Informational Essays: Finding and Supporting Key Points**

*In this session, you'll teach students that when writers want to become expert on a topic, they analyze each new piece of information to determine how it fits into the topic as a whole.*

##### **4. Structure Sets You Free—Using Prior Knowledge to Flash-Draft Essays**

*In this session, you'll teach students that writers rely on a structure for their essays that helps them write quickly and efficiently.*



**BEND II ♦ Drafting and Revising Information Books on More Focused Topics****5. The Trail of Research: Pursuing Information and Focusing In on Topics**

*In this session, you'll teach students that as writers pursue a research subject and think about what makes the topic important, this leads them on a trail of research, one topic leading to another.*

**6. Envisioning Structures to Plan an Information Book**

*In this session, you'll teach students that writers of information books envision several possible ways to use or combine structures to create a working plan for a book.*

**7. Constructing Texts with Solid Bricks of Information**

*In this session, you'll teach students that writers construct information writing with solid bricks of information—quotations, facts, anecdotes, and numbers—connecting them with ideas and transitions.*

**8. Research: Gathering Specific Information and Creating Meaning**

*In this session, you could teach students that when doing research, writers read with an eye towards collecting specific bits of information—the information they need for their writing.*

**9. Writing with Detail**

*In this session, you'll teach students that writers write long, with vivid, concrete details that help readers fully understand what the writers are trying to teach.*

**10. Lifting the Level of Sentence Complexity**

*In this session, you'll teach students that one way writers make text sound more authoritative and academic is to write more complex sentences.*

**11. Using Text Features to Strengthen Writing**

*In this session, you'll teach students that informational writers create useful, engaging text features to teach information to readers in a variety of ways.*

**12. Planning Ready to Go Chapters**

*In this session, you'll teach students that as writers have to write a chapter that's ready-to-go, they go through the whole writing process in their minds, even before they write the first word on the page.*

**13. Quoting with a Purpose in Mind**

*In this session, you'll teach students that when writers prepare to write final drafts, part of their work is to use meaningful quotations with a specific purpose in mind.*

**14. Celebrating with a Book Exhibit Tour**

*In this session, you could teach students that writers learn from studying one another's books and sharing feedback, especially when feedback is precise and concrete.*

**BEND III ♦ Digital Writing Projects: Sharing Expertise Online****15. Studying Digital Mentor Texts**

*In this session, you'll teach students that to get insights for new writing projects, writers often study mentor texts to get a broad vision of a particular kind of writing and an in-depth look at genre or format.*

**16. Revising to Fit Digital Formats: Determining Importance**

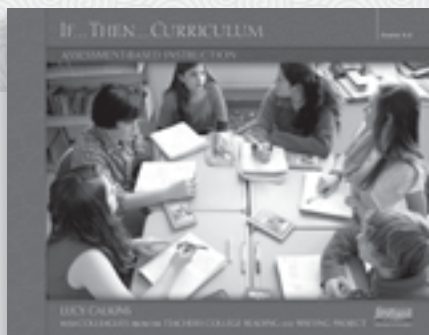
*In this session, you'll teach students that when writers present their work within the constraints of a digital format, they must determine what information is most important to share.*

**17. Pouring into Digital Forms...and Publishing**

*In this session, you could teach students that as writers transition their writing into digital forms, they must make decisions quickly, be flexible about formats, spot errors with an editor's eye, and know that they can go back to revise.*

**18. Celebration: Presentations, Feedback, Reflection**

*In this session, you could teach students that informational writers want to teach information and ideas effectively and engagingly to their audiences—whether it's a printed book, a website, a digital slide show, and/or a live presentation by the writer.*



# CONTENTS

## *If... Then... Curriculum*

### *Assessment-Based Instruction, Grades 6–8*

Lucy Calkins with Colleagues from the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project

#### **Introduction: Middle School Writers and Planning Your Year**

#### **Alternative and Additional Units**

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##### **1. Writing Information Books on Topics of Personal Expertise**

IF your students have not been part of writing workshop classrooms prior to now and they have not had any experience writing informational texts, THEN you may want to teach this unit. This unit provides foundational teaching and learning about information writing that students will need before attempting more complex units such as research-based information writing. This unit invites students to draw from their own areas of personal expertise to create lively, voice-filled information books. Choose this unit if you'd like your students to experience firsthand that information writing need not be bland or tedious to create; it can be filled with opportunities for choice, engagement, and exploration. This unit will support all middle school writers in reaching toward the demands of the Common Core in information writing.

##### **2. Fiction Writing**

IF your sixth grade students display a solid understanding of personal narrative writing and you want them to develop their skills in writing realistic fiction, THEN you may want to teach this unit. This unit will support sixth grade writers in learning to craft and revise integral scenes, to create well-developed characters that respond to conflict in realistic ways, and to use tension and pacing to draw readers into their unfolding plot. If you choose to teach this alongside fiction reading, this unit will particularly build reading-writing connections. This unit will support all middle school writers in reaching toward the demands of the Common Core in narrative writing.

##### **3. Persuasive Essays**

IF your students are new to the genre of argument writing, or if they would benefit from additional practice in writing persuasively, THEN you may want to teach this unit. This unit introduces students to the foundational skills of persuasive writing and then quickly builds on those in more ambitious ways, with the invitation to students to learn from source-based material and to produce argument essays that draw on that research. The work this unit covers sets the stage for the literary essay writing unit that is detailed in the full-length book for Grade 6 (*The Literary Essay: From Character to Compare/Contrast*), Grade 7 (*The Art of Argument: Research-Based Essays*), and Grade 8 (*The Literary Essay: Analyzing Craft and Theme*). It could as easily follow these, especially with a greater focus on the final bends.

##### **4. Memoir: Writing to Reflect on Experience and Suggest Thematic Connections**

IF you want to teach a unit that will tap into students' motivation because it is especially personal, and that can also show students that structure follows content and that authors decide upon their structure as they figure out what they want to say, THEN a unit on memoir is a good choice. Such a unit can extend the personal narrative work that your students experienced in sixth grade, bringing the power of that unit to seventh grade, while also adding a new spin. Choose memoir if your students need to engage with their lives and each other in the curriculum, in order to build a cohesive community of writers, and if you'd like their writing to be more reflective, purposeful, and disciplined.

##### **5. Historical Fiction: Weaving Together Fact and Fiction**

IF your students have already experienced a realistic fiction writing unit and display a solid understanding of personal narrative writing, THEN this unit would be a good choice. This unit will especially appeal to your budding historians. Many teachers accompany this unit with social studies research, though you could teach it in isolation if your students have in-depth knowledge of a particular time period. Either way, the work is challenging in that it calls on students to weave historically accurate details through a well-crafted, fictional narrative; the unit also invites students to incorporate informational text through an accompanying prelude or endnote. Especially (but not only) if you choose to teach this alongside historical fiction reading, this unit will particularly build reading-writing connections.

##### **6. Poetry: Immersion and Innovation**

IF the language with which your students write tends to be social rather than literary, and you'd like to build their sense of playfulness, their love of words, their ability to make reading-writing connections, and their engagement with writing, THEN poetry gets teen writers writing up a storm. If you have students who struggle with stamina or writing long, poetry allows them to be successful as writers and therefore to build positive relationships with writing. When studying poetry, writers can mine mentor texts closely and repeatedly, so this unit provides you with a powerful opportunity to teach students to apprentice themselves deeply to the craft and form of writers they admire.

## 7. Documentaries: Bringing History to Life

IF your students know enough about topics to teach others and you'd like to see their informational writing have more voice, authenticity, and craft, THEN the invitation to produce historical documentaries gives them an opportunity to practice the essential skills of information writing such as organizing information, writing with both ideas and information, and highlighting a perspective. This unit also allows students to compose multimedia digital texts in a short, nine-session unit. To do this work, students need access to research sources, time to research, and opportunities to teach one another digital media.

## 8. Literary Essays: A Mini-Unit on Analyzing Complex Texts for Meaning, Craft, and Tone

IF you want a quick, minor unit to hone students' skills with text-based writing and to support their engaged reading, THEN writing literary essays will give students an opportunity to explore how theme and craft are related in the stories they read. Literary essays will also strengthen students' skills with analyzing text evidence and elaborating their thinking about complex texts. Choose literary essays to sustain a trajectory of writing about reading, analyzing texts, and illuminating complexity.

## 9. Fantasy: Writing Within Literary Traditions

IF your students are game to build upon their experience writing fiction with a unit that extends that work, THEN you'll want to teach them to write fantasy. This will be an especially good fit if you teach students who are fairly strong readers and who love fantasy and dystopian novels. A unit on writing fantasy will give these avid readers the chance to create their own worlds; work with archetypes, quest structures, and universal themes; and generally to revel in complexity. A unit on fantasy will particularly build reading-writing connections.

## Differentiating Instruction for Individuals and Small Groups: If ... Then ... Conferring Scenarios

### INTRODUCTION/RATIONALE

#### NARRATIVE WRITING

##### Structure and Cohesion

*If the writer is new to the writing workshop or this particular genre of writing ...*

*If the student seems to paragraph randomly or not much at all ...*

*If the story lacks tension ...*

*If the beginning of the piece is lacking story elements or does not hint at larger issues or tension ...*

*If the ending of the piece seems incomplete or incongruous with the rest of the piece ...*

*If the writer is ready to learn about the use of flashbacks and flash-forwards ...*

##### Elaboration

*If the writer has elaborated, but in seemingly haphazard ways ...*

*If the writer has created a story that is sparse, with little elaboration ...*

*If the writer has written the external story but not the internal story ...*

*If the writer relies on dialogue and internal thinking to show what a character is thinking and feeling and is ready for new techniques to achieve the same effect ...*

*If the writer is not making use of literary devices ...*

##### Language Conventions

*If the student is struggling with spelling, halting his or her progress ...*

*If the writer constructs short, simple sentences and is ready to learn to punctuate longer, more complex sentences using median punctuation ...*

### INFORMATION WRITING

##### Structure and Cohesion

*If the writer has not established a clear organizational structure ...*

*If there is no logical order to the sequence of information ...*

*If the writer is ready to experiment with alternative organizing structures ...*

*If the writer has chosen a topic that is too broad ...*

*If the writer does not use transition words and phrases to help readers understand how the text is organized or how information fits together ...*

*If the introduction to the piece is lacking or weak ...*

*If the conclusion is lacking or weak ...*



### **Elaboration**

- If each section is short and needs elaboration . . .*
- If the writer elaborates by adding fact after fact . . .*
- If the writer does not elaborate on information from outside sources . . .*
- If the writer does not credit outside sources in his or her writing . . .*
- If the writer does not incorporate domain-specific vocabulary . . .*

### **Language Conventions**

- If the writer incorporates quotes, facts, and statistics, but does so awkwardly . . .*
- If the writer struggles with spelling, particularly domain-specific vocabulary words . . .*

## **ARGUMENT WRITING**

### **Structure and Cohesion**

- If the introduction does not forecast the structure of the essay . . .*
- If the writer's introduction and/or conclusion feel formulaic . . .*
- If the writer's supports overlap . . .*
- If the writer's supports are not parallel or equal in weight . . .*
- If the writer has developed a thesis that is complex and nuanced, but lacks the skills to organize an essay that supports it . . .*
- If the writer needs help incorporating counterargument into her essay . . .*
- If the writer has a thesis and supports, but there is no evidence that he has considered a logical order for his supporting paragraphs . . .*

### **Elaboration**

- If the writer is struggling to elaborate . . .*
- If the writer has chosen evidence for each body paragraph, but it does not all support his claim . . .*
- If the writer has included a variety of details and evidence, but it has swamped her piece . . .*
- If, when writing about reading, the writer is ready to analyze the craft moves an author makes and use those to support his argument . . .*

### **Language Conventions**

- If the writer uses a casual, informal tone when writing . . .*
- If the writer struggles to punctuate correctly when quoting, especially when using only part of a quote from a text . . .*

# Writing Strong Literary Essays

BEND I



SAMPLE BEND



## Session 1

# Essay Boot Camp

IN THIS SESSION, you'll teach students that when writing an essay, writers start with a clear sense of the structure in which they'll be writing and then try shaping the content to fit into that structure, changing the structure around if the content requires them to do so.

### GETTING READY

- ✓ Be sure that you approach this minilesson with the simplest version of "The Three Little Pigs" fresh in your mind or an alternative bare-bones story if you so choose (see Teaching and Active Engagement).
- ✓ Chart paper and markers (see Teaching and Active Engagement)
- ✓ "Boxes-and-Bullets Essay Structure" anchor chart (see Teaching and Active Engagement and Share)
- ✓ Students will need their writer's notebooks during and after the minilesson.
- ✓ For homework, each student will need to read at least one of the short texts suggested for the next session. We recommend the following:
  - ✓ "Thank You, Ma'am," by Langston Hughes
  - ✓ "The Gift of the Magi," by O'Henry
  - ✓ "Everything Will Be Okay," by James Howe (the mentor text for the *Personal Narrative* unit)
  - ✓ "Freak the Geek," by John Green
  - ✓ "Your Move," by Eve Bunting
  - ✓ "Stray" by Cynthia Rylant

Alternatively, you may decide to choose your own favorite stories (see Share).

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:** W.6.1a,b,c,d,e; W.6.4, W.6.5, RL.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.3, RL.6.5, RL.6.10, SL.6.1, SL.6.2, SL.6.6, L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3

IN MANY WAYS, your sixth-graders are educational immigrants. They have arrived on the shores of middle school, carrying with them the wealth of their experience in elementary school, ready for new opportunities and new lives. And while they are excited to meet the challenge, a challenge it is: there are bells going off every forty-some-odd minutes and different teachers for each subject, each with different demands and personalities; there is a new building, new kids, new rules.

And there is often a great divide between what you think students can do and what they actually know how to do. This divide works in both directions: at times you may assume a lack of knowledge where there is great depth of it; other times you might assume that kids know things and are stunned to find that they do not.

By the end of this bend, your students will have drafted a literary essay about a character. But you will spend this first day pushing your class to write an entirely different flash-draft of an essay about a character in a very accessible story that your whole class knows well. You'll see that we have chosen to channel the class into writing an essay about the third pig in the fairy tale "The Three Little Pigs." We've also done this boot camp using the iconic superhero Superman, and that works if your class knows that story well enough (from movies—including sequels or remakes, comics, video games) to be able to produce the evidence they need to support a claim. Either way, the point is to spend just one day in a whole-class, intensive writing experience and to do so in a way that is clearly not serious essay writing but is instead a fun sort of exercise. Hence the choice of well-known texts and, as you will see, a very obvious thesis.

We have found that this "essay boot camp" allows you to induct all your students into using a simple structure for essay writing. This structure will be old hat for some of them, but it is bound to be new (or an important reminder) for others. Teaching this very simple version of essay structure right at the start of your unit means that you are front-loading what can otherwise be time-consuming work of teaching essay structure. Often essay units become so mired with lessons on body paragraphs and topic sentences that they never get to the heart of literary essay writing, which is thinking—deeply—about reading

GRADE 6: THE LITERARY ESSAY



and articulating those thoughts—powerfully—in writing. This intensive boot camp on essay structure allows you to bring kids up to speed and also to determine just how much time you will need to spend teaching into the frames of an essay.

The work here is no-frills. It is the airline dinner of meals. It begins with an assigned claim about a statement, several body paragraphs, and a closing—all within ten minutes. You may extend that window of time (quietly) just a bit if you need to do so, but this is what you need to know: your students can do this.

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*“You can do this,’ you will convey to your writers through every word and action. And they can.”*

Okay, it may take them twelve minutes, not ten. Some may not complete the concluding paragraph. Some may forget to indent their paragraphs. The work won’t be perfect. But in classrooms across even the high-need schools of New York City, every kid has written a part of an essay within this little window of time.

“You can do this,” you will convey to your writers through every word and action. And they can.

Although every writer will not completely finish the draft today, every writer will have experienced essay structure. Toward the end of this unit, you will invite students to do some large-scale revision on these early pieces. By then, their abilities to plan and structure an essay (as well as their stamina) should have developed to the point where they will each be able to write a full flash-draft essay, all on their own, within fifteen minutes. As students become adept at writing within the familiar structure of the five-paragraph essay, you will be amazed at how easily they can produce quick little flash-draft essays—and that skill will be incredibly useful across all the content areas.

You may skip this boot camp, of course. It is especially self-contained and for that reason, easily dropped. But we encourage you to start here, with the simplest of ideas, helping students coming from all sorts of places to begin their middle school essay work by saying, “All together now . . .”

One final note: before teaching today, you will want to scan the upcoming minilessons and make some decisions. For today’s homework, students will need to reread the text they will be working with throughout the bend, a text they have already read and interacted with. Meanwhile, it is equally important that the text you study together as a class both engages kids and holds big ideas about character and theme that students will be able to discover and discuss and write about, with your guidance. We think that “Raymond’s Run,” the story we selected for the upcoming minilessons, will engage students and inspire deep thinking and insightful writing, and we welcome you to use it if you don’t have another text already in mind.



## MINILESSON

# Essay Boot Camp

### CONNECTION

**Rally your students to work on writing essays by talking up the usefulness of the genre.**

"Writers, our new unit is on writing about reading, but you'll still do this writing in your writer's notebooks, so get them out, and fold a page over or use some other strategy to make a divider, setting off this new unit," I said and then waited for the students' attention to be back with me.

"When people want to compliment a musician, sometimes they will say, 'That girl has some serious chops.' *Chops* kind of refers to talent, but more than that, *chops* is about someone's grit and guts—the fact that they are trying something bold and working hard at it.

"Writers, you are starting to have some serious writing chops. I think you are ready to graduate to another really important kind of writing. Today you are going to start your first middle school essay unit on literary essays. I know some of you have written essays before and others of you haven't, but that's okay, because what we are going to do today will get everyone on the same page. And the chops you'll get from this unit? Well, what you do during this unit is definitely going to make you more skilled at expressing your ideas."

"Here is the thing about essay writing: if you can write essays well, that skill will take you places. You'll use this skill to ace any high school writing you need to do, or to get into colleges (with scholarships). And people write essays all the time in life, even though grown-ups might not call them that. People embed essays into emails trying to persuade their bosses to do something, into reviews of great video or computer games or shows. One eighth-grader wrote an essay attacking a passage in a standardized test called 'The Pineapple and the Hare,' and his essay went viral and made the test-maker take that passage off the test, nationwide!"

**Point out that today's boot camp minilesson will be different than usual and explain that the class will work together on a quick essay just for practice.**

"Writers, today we are not going to have a typical minilesson where I teach you something, you try it, and then you go off to work independently. Because I want to give you a feeling for what it's like to write an essay, we will work together to do a writing-in-the-air of an essay, which you'll then each flash-draft into your notebooks, as practice. As we do this, it will help you get a feel for how writers structure, or organize, essays."

### ◆ COACHING

*As you become accustomed to these writing units, you'll see that there are lots of ways we suggest you talk up the power of hard work, perseverance, and, to use a word from Paul Tough's *How Children Succeed* (Mariner Books), grit. This discussion of writing chops is one way to convey this message.*

*I like beginning a unit by conveying a sense that we're entering a new chapter in students' writing lives. And I do believe that essays are fundamentally different from stories.*

*You are using a lot of lingo that kids will know if they have grown up within writing workshops (and specifically within this series) but otherwise will not know. Writing-in-the-air is a phrase that means that the writer dictates aloud what she would say if there was time to actually write it. A flash-draft is a draft that is written, fast and furiously, in one sitting. It isn't really different than a draft, but the words are meant to rally kids into writing especially quickly, with an experimental feel, knowing the draft may or may not work.*

GRADE 6: THE LITERARY ESSAY

❁ **Name the teaching point.**

"Today I want to teach you that when writing an essay, it can help to start with a clear sense of the structure in which you'll be writing, and then you almost pour your content into that structure, changing the structure around if the content requires you do so."

## TEACHING AND ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

**Tell kids they are going to write an essay about a fairy tale, then give them time to talk together and to join you in recalling that fairy tale, highlighting the aspects that you'll mine in the essay.**

"Today we're going to write a flash-draft essay, all in one day, which is a lot (I know), but this will get you warmed up for writing a real literary essay. I've been thinking about a story that everyone in this room knows, so we can all write about it, and I've settled on a real classic: 'The Three Little Pigs.' You know it, right?"

Some of the kids laughed and others gave me skeptical looks.

"I know, I know. This is a silly fairy tale for kids—but actually, people often come up with big ideas about the simplest stories. Here's another reason I chose this story. Today's work will move quickly and it's not easy. You'll be happy it's the three pigs we're thinking about and not more complex characters—trust me! Later, you'll have a chance to read and write about harder stories.

"Before we go any farther, get the story into the front of your mind by quickly retelling it to each other. Work in clusters, pairs, whatever. Go!"

The room erupted into conversation. As students talked, I listened in and then voiced over, "Think especially about the *third* little pig, because I think he's going to be our focus. Keep talking."

Recalling the class's attention, I said, "So writers, you've got the story in mind. You remember that the three pigs each built themselves their own home: one out of straw, one out of sticks, and the third pig, one out of bricks (that must have been a lot of work!). Then the wolf came, and he called . . . what?"

Some kids laughed awkwardly. I started them off and let a few students join me as I said, "Little pig, little pig, let me in."

Resuming my retell of the story, I said, with a smile, "And one after another, each of the pigs answered . . ."

This time, more kids chimed in, now embracing the drama, "Not by the hair on my chinny chin chin!"

*You can make the teaching point memorable by adding gestures. Keep in mind that speech writing courses suggest that large-scale gestures—those in which there is air between your arm and your body—convey "an air of confidence." So with your arms, make a structure—spread out on the imaginary table before you—and then pour in the content.*

*By providing students with a rationale for this choice of text, you accomplish two things. First, you prevent your sixth-graders from disengaging from the lesson simply because it spotlights a story they read as little kids. Second, you convey that they are in on the plan, which is sure to catch their attention. By poking fun at "The Three Little Pigs," you introduce the light tone that is essential to essay boot camp.*

*Enjoy this. You are being a bit silly to suggest the kids write an essay on "The Three Little Pigs." So play around a bit—without elongating things, because the pace needs to be extremely fast. This whole minilesson needs to last all of ten minutes, and that is entirely possible, but not if you are ponderous, not if you wait until everyone is silent before talking, not if you elaborate on and extend everything that is said.*



"Imagine calling that out when you are the third and only remaining pig, after you've watched your brothers get eaten! That third pig is no wimp, is he? Do you recall what the third pig does at the end?"

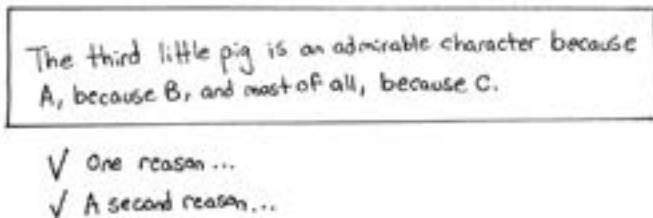
The kids and I agreed that the third pig, in the end, outwitted the wolf by suggesting he come down the chimney and join him for dinner—which ended up being a dinner of wolf, because the pig had a pot boiling under the chimney.

**Set the kids up to coauthor a thesis statement. Give them the starting claim—an obvious one—and get them to talk in pairs to generate reasons that fit into the template you give them. Coach into their work.**

After recapping the story, I said, "So, writers, to write an essay, you need an idea that is important to you. You could take a week coming up with an idea, but remember, you're writing this whole essay in one day, so I'm going to shorten that part of the process by suggesting you write an essay using the claim or thesis, 'The third little pig is an admirable character.' Now, whenever you write anything, it helps to think about the structure you will use. When writing a story, you took on the structure of a timeline or a story mountain, but to write an essay, you start with a structure that is not a timeline but an outline. One of the simplest ways to outline, to organize an essay, is to write about your reasons.

"Let's do that. So for now, take the thesis and come up with your reasons: 'The third little pig is an admirable character because A, because B, and most of all, because C.' Will you talk together to come up with what your first reason could be, your A, what your second reason could be, your B, and so on? Go!"

I quickly jotted the thesis statement along the top of a sheet of chart paper, boxing it out and putting two bullet points below.



The third little pig is an admirable character because  
A, because B, and most of all, because C.

- ✓ One reason...
- ✓ A second reason...

*Eventually, of course, you will want students to move toward writing their own more complex thesis statements, but for now, the goal is to get everyone going writing fairly simple, straightforward essays. Note that our use of the word because is actually a place holder. Eventually students will learn to use more precise words: "one sees this when . . .," "evidence for this can be found at the start of the story when . . .," "one example of this is . . .," "one way in which this is true is . . .," "one reason for this is . . ." The word because can be stretched to accomplish a lot of different jobs; for now, just know that it works not only in this essay but in many essays, and later you'll teach students more precise ways to set readers up for what they'll learn in the essay.*

Then as the students talked, I listened in and voiced over tips and corrections. “Try actually borrowing the line, ‘The third pig is admirable because A! Because B! And most of all, because C!’ and just fill in the holes,” I said. “Make sure your categories don’t overlap. You can’t say he’s admirable because he’s brave and then say because he stands up to evil—those are the same.” I added, “As you do this, think about whether you are going to be able to find support from the story to defend your point. If you don’t have any examples, your claim won’t stand.”

**Convene the class, collect suggestions for the next portion of the shared essay, and synthesize them into the frame for a shared essay.**

“What is your first reason he’s admirable?” I asked, calling on Cindy (whom I’d already identified as having a solid answer).

Cindy pitched in, “Because he works hard, like making the brick house and all?”

Nodding, I said, “Some of that will be in your evidence. For now, we just need the reason.” I dictated the new draft we now had for the class essay:

*The Third Little Pig is admirable because he works hard, because he . . .*

I touched the next bullet, and gestured to another student to pitch in his ideas, and then to a third. Soon we had this thesis:

*The Third Little Pig is admirable because he works hard, because he is brave, and because he outwits his enemy.*

**Set members of the class up to use what will now be a shared box-and-bullets plan to write-in-the-air their own version of the essay’s first paragraph.**

“Okay, we have a claim and ways it’s supported, box and bullets. That’s our structure, our plan. Now you pour your content into that structure. To do this, imagine what you would write if you had time to do so by writing-in-the-air your first body paragraph. Think of scenes or details from ‘The Three Little Pigs’ that you can use to support, to illustrate, or to give an example of the fact that the third little pig works hard.”

*As you listen in, you are also deciding which students you will call upon and in which order. You probably will want your reasons to match the sequence of the story, so you won’t want the first reason to be that the little pig outwits the wolf. What he does first is to build the house out of bricks (not straw, not sticks). So listen in to find a student whose first reason matches that portion of the story.*

*Notice that I tailored what a student offered to fit the lesson. I did not try to work with the student in the moment, as often this kind of back-and-forth uses a great deal of time without much true instructional purpose.*

*You can make this more clear to your students by pointing back to your claim box and bullets you wrote on chart paper.*

After a moment of silence, I said, “You are going to need to write this as a paragraph, not just a sentence, so imagine the detailed story of what the character did, or must have done if it isn’t spelled out, that shows he works hard.” Again I left a bit of silence. “This is actually a bit tricky, so help each other, and remember, as you do this, write-in-the-air how the essay will go. Start with the thesis, then the topic sentence, then your evidence. Get started, and I’ll come around.”

As I listened in, I voiced over. “Love it! I love hearing you dictate the topic sentence for your first body paragraph: ‘One reason why the third little pig is admirable is that . . . For example . . .’” I revealed chart paper on which I’d written out this template for a body paragraph:

*One reason why [character] is [trait] is that . . .*

- *For example, A*
- *For example, B*

I also voiced over saying, “Here is a tip. See if you can retell the part of the story that goes with your point by using what you already learned about writing narratives.”

**Recall the class, and drawing on what you heard, dictate a draft of how the thesis and first body paragraph might go, absent any discussion of the evidence because that will be “written” next.**

After a bit, I recalled the class and said, “I’m hearing some great ideas. Let me see if I’ve captured what many of you are saying,” Then I dictated this first bit of an essay:

*The Third Little Pig, in the fairy tale “The Three Little Pigs,” is an especially admirable character because he works hard, he is brave, and especially because he outwits his enemy.*

*The first reason that the Third Little Pig is admirable is that he works very hard. He builds his own home, which must take a lot of work. He builds it out of bricks, which must have taken an extra amount of work. He carried all those bricks to one place, laid them one by one on top of each other, added in the cement. He made one wall, another, another, another. He even built a roof and a chimney. This shows that the Third Little Pig works hard and I admire him for that.*

“Essayists, there are two other jobs I want to help you to do. The first is this: after citing an example, you need to ‘unpack’ it, or analyze how it fits with your point. So you need to add something like ‘This shows . . .’ or ‘This illustrates . . .’ and then explain how the example fits the claim about the third little pig. *And* repeat your claim. Then you will need to write a transition that gets you started on the next body paragraph, using terms like ‘Another reason . . .’ or ‘Although one reason is . . . another reason is . . .’ Again, write-in-the-air with each other, and do these two things.”



A chart showing a sample thesis and evidence illustrates the boxes-and-bullets plan.



As the students talked, I revealed a chart that scaffolded the work they were doing.



I also listened in. "It is so wise that you are using words like *also* to help readers follow your thinking," I said to one student. To the class, I voiced over, "Some of you aren't writing-in-the-air but are instead talking *about* what you'd write. Go back to the start and dictate what you'd write, word for word, then keep going into the part that unpacks the example and the part that transitions to the next part of the essay."

*Your students will remember from previous units that writing-in-the-air occurs when a writer says the exact words he might write to a partner. Even though students have been asked to do this often, it's worth taking the time to ensure that they are actually dictating the words they intend to write rather than merely discussing their ideas.*

**Debrief. Consolidate what you hope students have learned by naming what they just did.**

"Writers, did you see the way we started by naming our claim and several supports for it? Then, in your first body paragraph, you repeated the claim and the first way it is supported. Then you told the story of an incident in the story that supports that claim and closed the paragraph by saying a bit about *how* the example supports the claim and also by restating what you were aiming to prove. Wow! That is a lot of work for one little paragraph!"

**Set students up to practice by writing-in-the-air the entire essay, including the second body paragraph, as a prelude to flash-drafting the entire essay. Coach into their work.**

"Right now, with your partner, write-in-the-air your second body paragraph, this time supporting the second reason, which is that the third little pig is brave. Do your best to quote the text exactly." The room erupted into talk. Before long, after hearing some more and some less successful efforts, I called out, "You've got it!" and I restated what I heard some of them saying aloud, once again starting at the beginning of the essay.

*The Third Little Pig, in the fairy tale "The Three Little Pigs," is an especially admirable character because he works hard, he is brave, and especially because he outwits his enemy.*

*The first reason that the Third Little Pig is admirable is that he works very hard. He builds his own home, which must take a lot of work. He builds it out of bricks, which must have taken an extra amount of work. He carried all those bricks to one place, laid them one by one on top of each other, added in the cement. He made one wall, another, another, another. He even built a roof and a chimney. This shows that the Third Little Pig works hard, and I admire him for that.*

*Another reason that the Third Little Pig is admirable is that he is brave. He watched a giant angry wolf with big teeth blow down his brothers' houses and eat them up but still, when the wolf came to the Third Little Pig's house this pig was brave. He didn't run and hide. Instead when the Wolf called, "Little Pig, Little Pig, let me come in," the Third Little Pig called out, "Not by the hair on my chinny chin chin." That shows that he is brave because he is not intimidated by the scary wolf, even though he has good reason to be.*

**LINK**

**Remind students that writers often brush up on the structure of the genre before diving into writing in it. Ask them to use the thinking of the past few moments to help them do that now.**

"Fabulous! I don't want to say another word. Just start writing. You are going to flash-draft an entire essay in your writer's notebooks on the admirable character, the Third Little Pig (although if any of you are game for a challenge and want to argue that the Big Bad Wolf is admirable, or evil, you can do so). Feel free to borrow the reasons and evidence we've shared in class or to make up your own, but here is the thing—you only have thirteen and a half minutes to write the whole essay, so get started!"

*Remind students that flash-drafting means fast and furious writing to get ideas down on paper. The end result of flash-drafting will not be perfect and sets the stage for later revisions. Clarify for students that a flash-draft differs from a draft—a piece of writing that is the product of significant time and effort and probably multiple revisions.*

*The truth is that the kids may not completely finish this essay, but if you act confident that they will, there is at least a good chance that your confidence will carry the day. Note that you are not doing a final debrief about ways this work is transferable. Generally you would do so, but for now, it seems more important to channel them immediately toward the page while the oral draft is still in their minds.*



## CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

# Ratcheting Up the Level of Student Work

**B**ECAUSE THE MINILESSON WAS AN UNUSUAL ONE, involving extended guided practice, your kids will have less writing time than usual, and therefore you'll have less time for conferring as well. Although you won't want to pull a chair alongside one writer and engage in a long talk, you absolutely *will* want to be involved in the work that students are doing. The best way to do this will be to observe their work and to either interject small comments, almost whispering in as an individual writer works, or to call out voiceovers that relate to the whole class. Either way, your coaching will aim to ratchet up the level of students' writing by reminding them of moves that are integral to writing in an essay structure and by nudging them to write quickly and powerfully.

At the start of the very brief writing time, you will probably want to nudge writers to get themselves started writing without delay. In this world of high-stakes testing, it is important for students to grow up understanding that there are times when writers need to write with great dispatch. After all, on SAT and ACT tests, students are given less than half an hour to read the prompt and plan and write an essay. A study conducted by an MIT professor and cited in the *New York Times* found that students' scores on the essay portion of those tests are directly correlated with the length of their essays. Those students who produced an essay that spanned two sides of a page—writing the entire essay in that amount of time—almost always scored far better than students who wrote just a page. For today's work, there is no reason for delay. The

content and wording of the essay are already established. So this is a perfect occasion to nudge students to get themselves off the starting block right away.

Compliment and push writers with strong, decisive gestures that carry heft. A bold thumbs-up sign, a marginal exclamation point: these can mean more than you dare to believe. So, too, can short comments mean the world. "Fabulous, you've gotten half a page written," you might say to one writer. "You're on a roll. That whole page will be filled in three minutes." These prompts are meant for individuals, but if you raise your voice just a bit, others will overhear you, and that will help your cause. "Keep your hand moving," you will tell another writer. "Don't stop, mid-sentence. Just keep going. Keep your hand moving down that page."

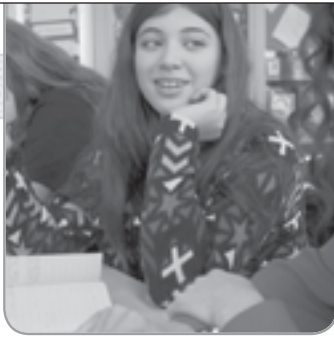
Once students have gotten themselves started, you'll want to shift your prompts so that now you are reminding them to incorporate transitional phrases. Chances are good that you will need to remind them to indent when they come to new body paragraphs. Paragraphing is a very big deal when writing an essay, so make a fuss about this. Of course, once students are within their body paragraphs, you can coach them to write more than one example, to "unpack" or discuss the example in relation to the opinion statement, and to recap what they have said at the end of each paragraph. Don't worry that any of this is done perfectly—this is not a piece of writing that writers will publish. It is, instead, what we sometimes refer to as "an exercise text."

### MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING **Essay Body Paragraphs Have Beginnings, Middles, and Ends**

"Writers, I know you know that stories have beginnings, middles, and ends. When writing an essay, each body paragraph also has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning of the paragraph will usually contain a transition that hooks the new reason to the others and to the claim. The middle will need to reference the story with details, and the end will need to unpack the references, the evidence, perhaps

by saying, 'This shows . . .' or 'This illustrates . . .,' and certainly by restating the idea you are writing about. Reread and make sure you are writing in paragraphs (you might have more than one paragraph in a part) and that each paragraph has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Back to work."





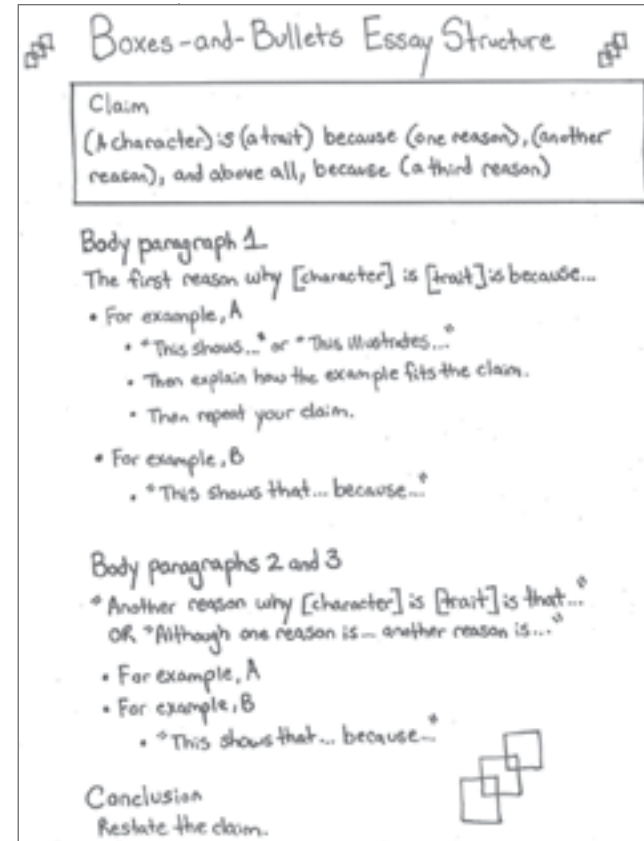
SHARE

## Reflecting on Being an Essayist

**Channel writers to reread their own and each other's essays and to annotate them with notes about how they can make these better.**

"Writers, can I stop you? Last night I read something about how people get good at things—at anything. You know I am always studying that! Anyhow, it turns out that world-famous chess players spend as much time reviewing their game and critiquing what they did as they spend playing chess. I know that might sound totally irrelevant, but for you to become world-famous essayists, I figure you need to spend time reviewing your essay and critiquing what you did, just like the chess players do, and studying essays that others write, as well. So for share today, will you and your partner look at one person's essay or the other's and annotate it, almost as if you are the teacher making comments? Note the things the essayist has done well, and jot suggestions, because after you annotate your essay, you'll rewrite it. I know we don't have time in school, but you can do that at home. Get started."

As students worked, I listened in. A few talked a bit about the fact that they'd had a hard time figuring out what to say in the final paragraph. One said that talking it out first helped, which is true for a lot of writers! I pointed out to them that among other things, they could look to see ways in which writers had followed the template on chart paper at the front of the room.



## SESSION 1 HOMEWORK

### REFLECTING ON ESSAYS AND THEN WRITING A NEW DRAFT

“Tonight, finish annotating your essay, noting in the margins and with stars and underlines and arrows and happy and sad faces—any marks you want—what you think about the essay. Then write a new draft, a fabulous draft, of the essay.

“Tomorrow we will all work as a class with ‘Raymond’s Run’ (you’ll remember that story well because I read it to you just a few days ago), and each of you will work with another familiar story of your choice from these options: ‘Thank You, Ma’am,’ by Langston Hughes, ‘The Gift of the Magi,’ by O’Henry, ‘Everything Will Be Okay,’ by James Howe, ‘Freak the Geek,’ by John Green, ‘Your Move,’ by Eve Bunting or stories recommended by your teacher. Take home one or two that you especially like to reread, so that you are ready to write about it when you come in tomorrow. You will work on that one story not just tomorrow but also for the next two weeks.”

*We asked each student to select one of several familiar short stories—all ones the class has read. One choice is presumably Howe’s “Everything Will Be Okay,” which, of course, students know from the previous writing unit. We’ve also often used a combination of some of these: “Thank You, Ma’am,” by Langston Hughes, “The Gift of the Magi,” by O’Henry, “Freak the Geek,” by John Green, “Stray,” by Cynthia Rylant, and “Your Move,” by Eve Bunting. You could choose these same texts or others that reflect your students’ particular interests. You’ll notice that some of these are more complex than others. You’ll of course want to choose texts your students are able to read. If your plan for Session 2 is for students to work with novels they’ve read earlier rather than with short stories, remind them to bring in novels for the next class. Tell them the novel they select should be one they’ve reread and know very well and that they will be using the same text for writing essays in upcoming classes.*



## Session 2

# Growing Big Ideas from Details about Characters

IN THIS SESSION, you'll teach students that to generate ideas for an essay about literature, writers reread a text very closely, paying attention to important details about the characters and thinking about the author's intentions.

### GETTING READY

- ✓ Before starting the session, each student will need to have read at least one of the short texts suggested for this session. We recommend the following:
  - ✓ "Thank You, Ma'am," by Langston Hughes
  - ✓ "The Gift of the Magi," by O'Henry
  - ✓ "Everything Will Be Okay," by James Howe (the mentor text for the *Personal Narrative* unit)
  - ✓ "Freak the Geek," by John Green
  - ✓ "Your Move," by Eve Bunting
  - ✓ "Stray" by Cynthia Rylant
- Alternatively, you may decide to choose your own favorite stories.
- ✓ "How to Write a Literary Essay about Character" anchor chart (see Connection, Active Engagement, and Link)
- ✓ Copies of the shared class text, "Raymond's Run," by Toni Cade Bambara, one per student (provided on CD-ROM). You should also have an enlarged copy of the excerpted passage, written on chart paper or displayed for the class (see Teaching and Active Engagement).
- ✓ "Thought Prompts that Help an Essayist Think and Write" chart (see Teaching and Active Engagement)
- ✓ Chart paper and markers (see Teaching)
- ✓ Students' writer's notebooks and pens (see Active Engagement)
- ✓ The short texts students will study across the unit (see Link)

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:** W.6.1.a,b; RL.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.3, RL.6.10, SL.6.1, SL.6.6, L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3

TO WRITE DEEPLY ABOUT TEXTS, students will need to have read those texts deeply to begin with. As my grandmother used to say (to my unending horror), "You can't make chicken soup out of chicken poop." This is true for essays as well—you cannot write great essays out of weak thinking. This session teaches students that by reading a text closely, their writing about those texts improves.

While the previous session was a one-day stand-alone, today's session launches students into a stretch of work that will span the first bend of this unit. Today your students will get started working closely with a familiar short story, growing an idea about that story that is worth developing into a character-based literary essay. It is important that students mine a text they have already read so that writing time is reserved for writing or for the special kind of close rereading one does when writing about reading.

You could conceivably alter this bend by asking students to write about a whole-class novel if you and your students have been studying one together and they are close to finishing that work. We prefer to teach into more independence, recognizing that choice is especially critical to young adolescents' engagement. If students are writing essays about novels, remember that they need to have already completed their reading, because today they will be rereading a text. This means that you'll need to figure out a way for them to have read the texts in advance of writing workshop.

Either way, you will teach students that to read a text closely, one must reread. You will model how to focus attention on the details of a text and highlight the fact that even the smallest detail in a text can spark rich thinking. You will teach students that to write effective literary essays, it is important to read analytically, thinking about the author behind the words, aware—and wary—of the choices that have been made.

There is one other reason to spend time teaching your students to attend to the details of a text; by looking at a text closely, even students who have not yet fallen in love with reading will find something to latch on to—some small detail or moment that resonates with them and hooks them in to the world of the story.



## MINILESSON

# Growing Big Ideas from Details about Characters

### CONNECTION

**Remind the class of the work they did in the previous session, and help them to anticipate that today they'll launch similar work, only on a larger and more ambitious scale.**

"Right now, will you open your notebooks to the page on which, last night, you wrote your revised essay about the 'Three Little Pigs,' and will you glance over it, asking one very important question: 'What did I learn from doing that essay that I can use again, when writing a more intellectually ambitious essay?'" I left a pool of silence, and then after a bit said, "Star places in your draft that represent lessons you learned. And the lessons might be reminders of things you knew already but have forgotten.

"You're not going to talk about those lessons right now, but carry them with you, because starting today, you are going to work on a much more ambitious character essay. Your essay will take four or five days to write, and it will be lots better than the essays you whipped out yesterday. But the process of writing these essays will be largely the same, and again, it helps to start by thinking about the big claim that you want to make about the text—and in this case, about the character.

I revealed a chart in which I'd recorded the following steps:

#### How to Write a Literary Essay about Character

- Reread selected bits.
- Notice details, think, talk, write to explore: "Why this detail?"

### ✿ Name the teaching point.

"Today I want to teach you that to get big ideas about texts—and eventually grow those ideas into a literary essay—it pays to notice important details the author has included about the character, and then to reflect on the author's purpose for including a detail, and to jot down those thoughts."

SESSION 2: GROWING BIG IDEAS FROM DETAILS ABOUT CHARACTERS

### ◆ COACHING

*Notice that this minilesson begins with asking students to be active and reflective. Their engagement in your whole-class teaching is the sun, the moon, and the stars. The challenge, of course, is to get them engaged but to keep your minilessons tight and efficient to save time for the engagement that matters most—that is, for students' engagement in their own writing.*



## TEACHING

### Demonstrate the way essayists mine texts to notice details that reveal something important.

"The writer Stephen King wrote, 'Good books don't give up their secrets all at once.' I love this quote. I love it because it tells us that there is great reward in paying attention to the details in stories, that if you do, you will uncover the big ideas that make the story important. In this bend of the unit, you'll be writing essays about characters, and of course, paying attention to the details of a character is an especially important thing to do because characters are people. Just like you can't know everything about a person the first time you glance at them, you can't know everything about a character the first time you meet the character in the pages of a story.

"To learn how to write essays about character really well, we're not going to mine 'The Three Little Pigs.' Instead, we're going to return to a really well-written story that we read earlier, 'Raymond's Run.' There is a copy for each of you on your table. You remember this story about the tough girl with a brother who has some special needs and her discovery that even though he has problems, he's a great runner, just like she is.

"To grow a claim about Squeaky, the protagonist in this story, you and I need to do some work that you'll also end up doing with whatever story you choose to work with later today." I gestured to the chart I'd begun.

- Reread selected bits.
- Notice details, think, talk, write to explore: "Why this detail?"

"We first need to reread a part of the story that shows what the protagonist is like, and we need to reread closely, with pen in hand. After that, we'll need to take some of what we notice and think *hard* about why the author might have put in this particular detail.

"So let's get started by doing some rereading. Remember, we need to go right to a part of the story that shows the character we're writing about. Point to the first part of 'Raymond's Run' that you think shows Squeaky." They did, and I scanned the room. "Almost all of you pointed out that we could even read just the start of the story, so let's do that. Will you reread your copy while I read aloud? And as we read, let's underline details about Squeaky that show what she is like as a person. After each part that shows a lot, let's stop and think, 'Why might the author have chosen this particular detail?'"

I read, and underlined as I did, pausing a bit after the second underline.

*But now, if anyone has anything to say to Raymond, anything to say about his big head, they have to come by me. And I don't play the dozens or believe in standing around with somebody in my face doing a lot of talking. I much rather just knock you down and take my chances even if I am a little girl with skinny arms and a squeaky voice, which is how I got the name Squeaky.*

*Tell students that it's their responsibility to hang onto the copies of their selected stories, for their work today and in future classes, as well as for homework. If they have a writing folder they use for their ongoing work or a special pocket in their writer's notebooks, the stories could reside there for the next several weeks. They should also keep a copy of the shared text, "Raymond's Run," in their writing folders or notebooks. Remind students that they will be referring to this story throughout the unit.*

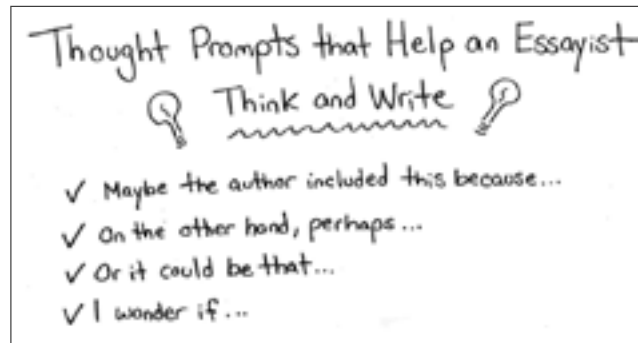
*I am asking students to join me in reading for important details because I want them to be active in the lesson, right from the start. Although I begin with a demonstration, very quickly I'll ask them to do this work themselves, and it's essential that they are with me.*

*You could, of course, have just gone to the start of the story and started to read there, but remember that you are trying to leave a trail that kids can follow. Say they are writing about a novel—they can't just reread starting at the beginning and proceeding through the text. So you add in the step of selecting the passage to leave a trail that kids can follow, with success, when they do this work on their own.*

"I bet by now you have underlined some parts, haven't you? Did some of you underline the phrase, 'I much rather just knock you down' like I did?" Many kids agreed that they'd thought that line was significant too. "I thought it said a lot when she said, 'If anybody has anything to say about Raymond they have to come by me,' but this next line is even stronger." I reread it, acting it out. "This is a pretty intense thing to say, right?" The class nodded: a consensus had been reached.

**Demonstrate that instead of just noting an important detail, essayists ask, "Why might the author have included this?" Show that you can do this thinking by writing, though you will actually write-in-the-air.**

"Writers, when essayists find a detail that seems important, they don't just gloss by it. Instead, they think about it more, talk about it more, and often write about it, even. Only the writing isn't something for other people to read. It's just writing-to-think. Do you remember that I said earlier, essayists ask, 'Why did the author include that detail?' Let's think about this detail in the story, trying to grow big ideas about it by asking that question, but here is one more tip. Because we aren't going to know for sure why the author did anything and we are just speculating, it helps to use thought prompts like these":



"I'm not going to *actually* write-to-think, I'm going to say what I would write aloud, but will you pay attention to how I am doing this sort of writing and thinking? In a minute, you are going to take another detail in the story and do the same work I try to do, thinking big ideas about small details."

I shifted my posture, becoming a writer/reader in front of the class. "Hmm, . . ." I scratched my head, then picked up my marker. "Remember, our question is Why does the author have Squeaky say that she'd knock people down if they have something bad to say about her brother? One thing we know for sure is that this wording, in the story, it isn't an accident. Toni Cade Bambara chose Squeaky's way of responding (and these exact words) for a reason. There's a purpose behind it. So we need to ask, 'Why does Bambara include this detail about Squeaky? Hmm . . .'"

Voicing my thoughts out loud, I touched the relevant thought prompts as I wrote-in-the-air:

*Notice that before you get going, thinking aloud in front of the class, you definitely need to set kids up so they understand their role. And you need to do just one kind of thinking at a time. When kids are more proficient at this, they'll be able to think like you do—shifting from one kind of thinking to another with finesse. For now, they are novices. That's why you are explicitly teaching these steps.*

*The most important word that I've said might be hmm. It's crucial for us to show students that ideas don't come to any of us right away. So often, students expect ideas to be right there, fully articulated, in their minds, and they don't understand the experience of waiting for an idea to come.*

I notice that when people say mean things about Raymond, Squeaky reacts by saying, “I much rather just knock you down . . .” I wonder why Bambara included this detail about Squeaky—that she wants to knock people down. **Maybe the author** wants to show us that Squeaky is really really angry over how people treat her brother. **On the other hand, perhaps Bambara is showing us** that Squeaky really loves Raymond—she loves him so much that she’s willing to fight for him. **Or could it be that Bambara is trying to show that Squeaky thinks it works better to fight than to talk through stuff?**

**Debrief, naming the strategies you just modeled so students can try them in their own work.**

“Writers, what I did just now is the work literary essayists do. They reread a passage from the text, pausing when they find a detail about the character that merits thinking. You watched me thinking about that little detail by asking, ‘Why *might* the author have included this?’ And because I was speculating, wondering, I used phrases like ‘Maybe . . .’ and ‘On the other hand, perhaps . . .’ When I kept using words like *maybe*, that helped me keep writing more stuff. Literary essayists do that, and you could try that today if you like.

“Here’s the thing. If I hadn’t been planning to write an essay about this story, I would have zoomed right past the detail that Squeaky can’t tolerate people talking to her about Raymond—that she ‘knocks them down.’ But writing helps a person see more—in life, and in texts. After this, bear in mind that it always helps to wonder *why* the author of a text may have chosen a specific detail, a word, an action. Authors write on purpose—they make deliberate choices. It’s your job as readers and as essayists to take notice.”

## ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

**Ask students to reread aloud to each other another passage from the shared text, paying attention to another detail that might reveal the character, and then to write off from what they notice.**

“So give this a try yourselves. The section we were looking at continues,” I said, displaying the next portion of the story on a document camera. “In your own copies of the story, reread the next few lines, paying attention to details that reveal Squeaky. Decide which partner is going to read aloud—and which partner is going to have responsibility for listening and following along, underlining the details that seem significant. Stop at ‘I’m the swiftest thing in the neighborhood.’”

I listened as around the room, one student read to another. As I saw what students underlined, I did the same on the enlarged text.

*And if things get too rough, I run. And as anybody can tell you, I’m the fastest thing on two feet.*

*There is no track meet that I don’t win the first place medal. I used to win the twenty-yard dash when I was a little kid in kindergarten. Nowadays, it’s the fifty-yard dash. And tomorrow, I’m subject to run the quarter-meter relay all by myself and come in first, second, and third. The big kids call me Mercury cause I’m the swiftest thing in the neighborhood.*

*Notice that in this active engagement section, we give students a second experience working with the class’s shared text. This allows us to tuck more instruction into the lesson; you will note a few tips that we incorporate into this work. If your students resist writing and have a hard time generating things to say, we recommend you alter this active engagement so that students talk with someone else who will be writing about the same story as they have selected. Together, they choose a detail that is worth mining and begin to discuss how that detail reveals the character. That talking can then scaffold the writing work you will be asking them to do today. Always be aware that you can adjust your teaching so that it is more supportive or more challenging. In this session, our choice is the more challenging option because we leave students to fare on their own when writing about the stories they selected.*

After a minute, I said, “If you didn’t yet find a detail worth discussing, reread and find one now,” and I pointed to the second bullet on the chart.

- Notice details, think, talk, write to explore: “Why this detail?”

“Start writing.” As students did this work, I read the passage aloud, highlighting some significant parts. “As you try to figure out why the author included the detail—what she says about Squeaky—remember to use those phrases.”

### Thought Prompts that Help an Essayist Think and Write

- ✓ Maybe the author included this because . . .
- ✓ On the other hand, perhaps . . .
- ✓ Or it could be that . . .
- ✓ I wonder if . . .

As students worked, I coached, “You picked out a detail. Now push yourself to think, ‘Why *might* the author have included that detail? What is she trying to say about Squeaky?’” And, after another moment, “If you feel ‘done’ with one detail, pick another!”

### Recruit the class to listen to and build upon what one student has done.

“Writers, listen to what Jamhil wrote. Before Jamhil shares what he wrote, listen to the passage he found significant and think about this bit of the story yourself.”

*And tomorrow I’m subject to run the quarter-meter relay all by myself and come in first, second, and third.*

“You found the passage? Squeaky vows to run this race all by herself, and therefore she is going to come in first, second, and third place? (My hunch is that when you think about being in a running race, you don’t think of racing yourself, and therefore coming in every place.) Jamhil, good job realizing this shows a lot about Squeaky.” I said to the class. Then I began sharing his work. I said, “Jamhil first wrote this”:

*I think Bambara wants to show that Squeaky is a good runner.*

“Here’s the cool thing. After he wrote that, he said to himself, ‘Wait, I can use *maybe* and come up with some other ideas.’ Listen to how he uses a few *maybes* in what he writes next.”

Jamhil read:

*Or maybe she wants to show that Squeaky is really egotistical, like she is a rapper saying, “I’m the best!” But it is sad she is running by herself. Maybe the author is trying to show that*

*If time is running out, cut this part of the minilesson. This gives you another chance to bring home your point, but it is expendable. Be sure your entire minilesson can fit into ten minutes so that students have time to work.*

*If you do decide to highlight the way one student has written a thoughtful entry by using maybe to get himself speculating, be sure to nudge a student to do this.*

*You could report on Jamhil’s thinking, as if he were a past student of yours, but it is far better if you can talk about what a student in your own class says. As you do, be sure to emphasize the strategy the student is using instead of whether or not his ideas are “good.” In this instance, it helped to show what the writer did first, then what the writer said to himself, and what he did next. Of course, I really didn’t know the thoughts that Jamhil said to himself—so some of this needs to be improvised.*



*Squeaky doesn't have any friends because she is running all by herself and winning all the spots. I bet maybe she doesn't have friends because she is always attacking other kids.*

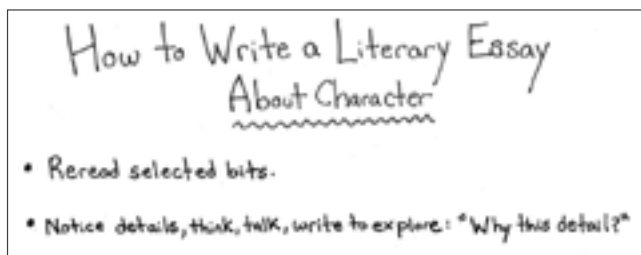
**Debrief in a way that highlights what the one student has done and how you hope others will do this as well.**

"Writers, do you see that when Jamhil asked why the author included a detail about Squeaky, he started off thinking the detail showed a sort of obvious external trait—her talent for running? But then he thinks more about what the detail really shows, and goes deeper. He next talks about how that detail shows Squeaky's *internal* state. Is she egotistical? Lonely? That's the kind of thinking work that will lead to a powerful essay."

## LINK

**Channel students to start using the strategy you taught with the short story they chose to study. As soon as an individual begins writing about details in the text, send that person off, so those needing help remain and get that help.**

"Today you learned that to get big ideas about texts—and to eventually grow those ideas into a literary essay—it pays to notice important details the author has included about the character, and then to surmise the author's reasons for including those details, recording your thoughts." I again gestured to the chart showing the beginning of the process for literary essay writing.



"Right now, get out the short story that you have chosen to work with and go right to a part of it that you think really reveals the main character. Put your finger on that part." I waited for them to do this. "Now, reread that part really carefully, underlining key words, key details. You should be rereading about four lines, not ten."

I gave them a minute to do this. "Open up your notebook, and begin writing about what you are thinking. Start as I did: 'I notice that the author says . . .' Go!"

I watched as students got started, and as soon as I saw one of them seem engaged, I tapped that student on the shoulder and whispered, "Go back to your seat and keep writing." After most students had been dispersed, I suggested the remaining students pair up with someone who was writing about the same story and read a passage aloud to each other and talk together about it.



## CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

# Generating Meaningful Ideas, Right from the Start

WHEN YOUR STUDENTS WERE WRITING PERSONAL NARRATIVES, getting a lot of writing done was easier for them than it will be today. They could select an event, recall what transpired, and essentially creep through their memories of the event, recording all that they remembered. Now you are asking for them not just to recall and record, but to generate ideas and content. You will find that many of your students write a bit and then feel finished. A good deal of your teaching will center around helping them to see more in the text, to write more. And a good deal will revolve around helping them to not stop working. If you haven't yet gotten to students

to coach them into elaboration, they can at least write about a succession of details, though this may take some encouragement.

Your first goal, then, will be to support productivity. You will probably want to circulate quickly among your students, making sure they are engaged in this work. As you do this, note first the good things that your students are doing. Nothing will recruit their energy more than you functioning as a talent scout. Notice, for example, if a student has marked up the text she is reading—underlining, adding arrows, circling. Close

*(continues)*

### MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING **Link Ideas in the Story**

"Writers, let me interrupt you to push you a bit farther. When I did this, the entries I wrote first contained some great ideas, but each idea and each entry felt a bit like an island. The ideas I had at the beginning of the story are just sitting there, unconnected to the rest of the story, to what happens after, and to the ideas I developed about later sections of the story. One way to make your entries and your ideas feel less like islands is this: after you have read on and written more, you can return to an entry you wrote early on to reread the entry in light of all the reading and thinking and writing you have done. Then add a blurb at the bottom of your writing that starts off, 'What I am thinking now is . . . ' or 'While this idea made sense at first, now I am thinking differently because . . . '

"Who would like to try this with me now?" Stephen raised his hand. "Great, Stephen. Go ahead and share an idea you had at the beginning of 'Thank You, Ma'am.' That's what you're reading, right?"

Stephen nodded and cleared his throat, "So, at the beginning of the story I wrote, 'The woman is kind of scary. You shouldn't mess with her.'"

"That's a terrific start-of-the-story idea. But I bet you are thinking something more complicated about her now that you are rereading the later parts of the story. Just dictate your thinking, writing-in-the-air, starting by saying, 'What I am thinking *now* is . . . '"

Stephen said, "Umm . . . What I am thinking now is . . . that she doesn't play around, because she has been through a lot, and she wants to help Roger through, like, tough love." Then he added, "But it's still love. She has a lot of love too, I guess."

I nodded. "So, Stephen, do you see that you could put your ideas together, saying something like, 'At first So-and-So seemed . . . but then I realized that really . . . ' How many of the rest of you are game to try what Stephen has done—returning to an early entry, rereading it in the light of all you now know, and writing, 'At first . . . but now . . . '"

Most of the students indicated that they'd give this a try, and I sent them back to work.

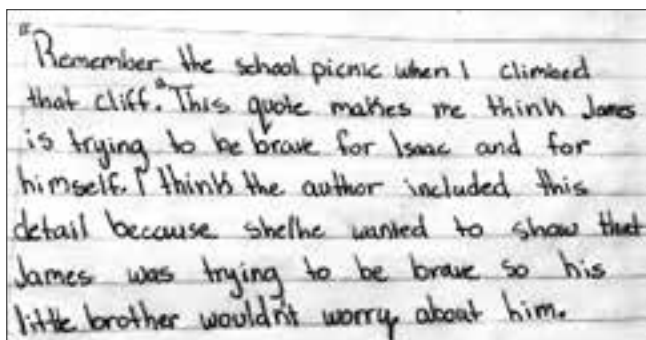


FIG. 2-1 Isis writes off a quote in her notebook.

attention to the text will pay off. Make a bit of a fuss about this if you see it. Notice if a student seems to have written one burst of thinking and then returned to reread the short story yet again, to think at a deeper level. Again, as you comment to her that the sort of rereading and rewriting she is doing will definitely pay off, make sure that those sitting nearby know, too. Notice, too, if a student has tried to reach for precise words, saying things in ways that aren't clichéd. Often this can lead to confusing prose, but the intent to capture an idea that isn't easily pinned down is worth celebrating.

You will also want to notice and address predictable problems. Some writers will focus on the plotline of the story rather than on developing ideas that emerge from it. They will retell a key scene or summarize the plot. This can be a way for a reader to prime the pump, so support the practice, but suggest that the student then push himself to grow an idea. Sometimes using little sentence starters, such as these, can help: "The thought I have about this is . . ." "This makes me realize that . . ." "I think this is important because . . ."

Sometimes you will find that students get stuck thinking about a character's emotions. While feelings are a great place to begin when thinking about characters, simply saying, "The woman in 'Thank You, Ma'am' is angry" is not going to uncover the depth of meaning of the text that you expect sixth-graders to generate. While naming a character's emotions is a grand way to begin an analysis, if the thinking work stops there, you will want to help your writers identify the next steps. Teach your students to step back from the emotion and the event of the text and to ask themselves, "What kind of person would feel and act this way?" or to begin with another prompt: "This is the kind of person who . . ." Or they could ask, "Why might this person be this way?"

One of the best scenarios you may encounter will be that some of your students do this work especially easily. When writers are ready for next steps, you might challenge them to notice that with every choice the author makes, he or she is trying to show you something, teach you something not just about the character but about life. Teach your students that when people read stories, they are immediately on the lookout for what this story is *really* about. (Meanwhile, note that you will teach this to the whole class later in the unit, so this is a preview of that teaching, and you can often populate later teaching with examples of work from your class.)

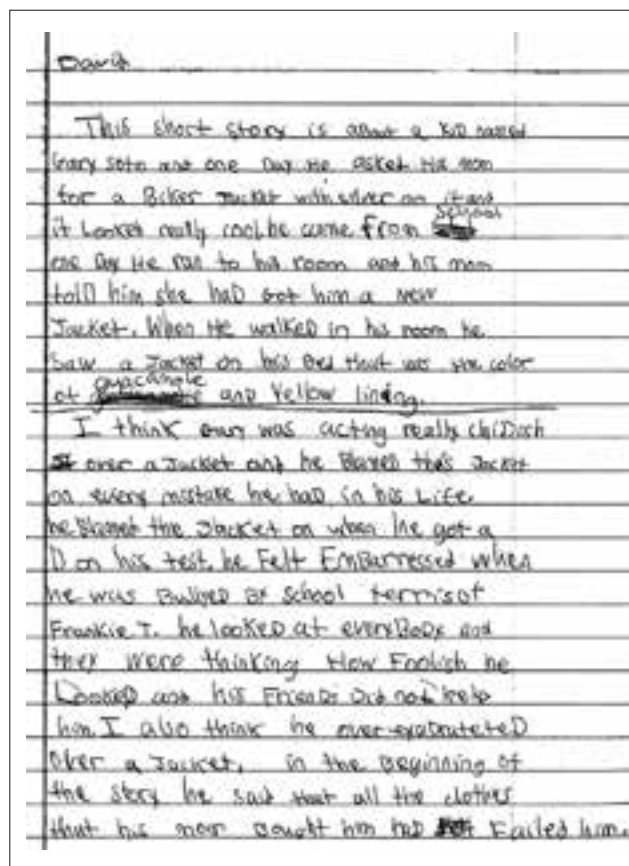


FIG. 2-2 David pushes himself beyond retelling the text in this notebook entry.



## SHARE

# Thinking Gets Better through Talk

**Talk up the value of talking about ideas, and then ask one member of each partnership to share her thinking and the other to talk back to it in ways that develop ideas.**

"One of the most helpful lessons I have ever learned is that my thinking gets better when I talk to other people. This is true in my life, and this is true also in my work as a writer. It helps to run ideas by other people so they can remind me of things I haven't considered, or disagree with me, which then leads me to strengthen, clarify, or revise my thinking.

"Give it a go. Find someone who has read the same story as you (don't leave anyone out, you can be in triads). Talk out your ideas. But here's the thing. The goal is not just for one person to say, 'I wrote this,' and the other person to nod and say, 'Well, I wrote this.' Instead, the idea is to think about one person's ideas only and for as long as you can, have a long conversation about just those ideas.

"The hard job for you, as the listener, is to find places in what the other person has said that you can add onto. You might say, 'Yeah, *but* what about . . . ?' Or '*But* could it maybe be that . . . ?' Or 'I see what you are saying, *but* is there another place where that happens?' The goal is to grow ideas by talking about them and especially by using the word *but*. That is, try to think a little differently than the first person. You may find yourself adding on to the ideas or disagreeing with part of them, questioning if that's the best evidence."

## SESSION 2 HOMEWORK

### HAVE A DIALOGUE ABOUT YOUR IDEAS ON THE PAGE

"While it is very helpful to have a partner coaching you in these moves, the real work is to be able to do this work on your own. Tonight, reread what you have written about the story you have selected, and conduct a written conversation on the page. Maybe you'll write, 'Yeah, but what about,' and then shift back to writing. Keep throwing the conversational ball between yourself and your imaginary partner to let those questions, those challenges, push you to develop your own ideas.

"Then, write another entry about the story and the character that interests you in that story. When you enter our classroom tomorrow, you will need to have your story read and marked up pretty thoroughly, and you will need to have at least three entries."

SESSION 2: GROWING BIG IDEAS FROM DETAILS ABOUT CHARACTERS

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## Session 3

# Writing to Discover What a Character Really Wants

IN THIS SESSION, you'll teach students that literary essayists think and write about what motivates characters and what characters really want, and then they use this writing as the basis for their essays.

### GETTING READY

- ✓ An enlarged copy of the excerpted passages from the shared class text, "Raymond's Run" (From Session 2; it is assumed that students have their own copy of the shared text for this and future sessions.) (see Teaching and Active Engagement)
- ✓ Chart paper and markers (see Teaching and Mid-Workshop Teaching)
- ✓ Your own writer's notebook (see Teaching)
- ✓ The texts students worked with in the previous session (see Link)
- ✓ "How to Write a Literary Essay about Character" anchor chart (see Link and Share)
- ✓ "Thought Prompts that Help an Essayist Think and Write" chart (see Mid-Workshop Teaching)

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:** W.6.1.a,b; W.6.2, W.6.3.b, W.6.10, RL.6.1, RL.6.3, SL.6.1, L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3

WHEN YOU CONSIDER THE PEOPLE YOU KNOW WELL, it is likely that your full relationship with them feels more like a novel than a note, more like an epic poem than an advertising slogan. There is so much to say about the people closest to us. The same could be said of the characters in the texts that move us. There is so much to say about Katniss, about Auggie, about Scout and Tom. And yet often when students write about and discuss the characters in their texts, their thoughts come out in three-word sentences with a period set so finally that you can practically hear the implicit "The End!"

In this session, you can help change that. First, you will teach your students that one way to find more powerful ideas about a character—ideas worth really writing about—is to investigate what makes them tick, what motivates them to do the things they do—and to investigate, too, what a character really wants out of life or from other people in the story. By spotlighting these queries, you position students to come up with more interesting ideas about their characters, ones that are not obvious, and you also position them to write with greater volume and independence. Later on in the session, you will teach students to elaborate on their thinking by using a few simple prompts that nudge the thoughts that may lie unarticulated in their heads to the surface of the page.

How easily this lesson goes will depend on what kind of reading work your kids bring to the table. To have powerful thoughts about a character, it helps to know the angles and aspects of characters that will reward attention. This session assumes that students have already learned that it pays off to think about a character's traits, choices, and relationships. You'll come to this session with the tone of "obviously this is what you would think about when you think about characters," and then you'll move on to a more complex way of thinking—in this case, to think about characters through the lens of motivation—what causes them to act the way they do.

If your class has not had this rich work in thinking about texts—if they have not, for example, had a lesson or series of lessons on how to consider the ways that a character's choices affect both the character and the secondary characters—then you may want to

take a bit of time here to do some of that teaching. While you cannot fit an entire reading unit into this slot of time, you can outfit your students with some powerful reading and thinking strategies that will help them as they begin to collect ideas for essays.

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*“There is so much to say about the people closest to us. The same could be said of the characters in the texts that move us.”*

In this session, then, you will continue to show students the power of looking closely at people, at characters. More specifically, you will teach them that when readers know what to look for, their thinking multiplies, for they can see nuances and meanings they would have missed had they just skimmed the surface of the story.

SESSION 3: WRITING TO DISCOVER WHAT A CHARACTER REALLY WANTS





## MINILESSON

# Writing to Discover What a Character Really Wants

## CONNECTION

**Using an example from school life, point out that when we think about people, we often think about what they want and that it's useful for essay writing to think of characters the same way.**

"Yesterday, coming back from lunch, I couldn't help but notice there had been some sort of drama in the cafeteria. As I was eavesdropping, I noticed how intuitive you all were about what was going on, how insightful you were about people and what motivates them. It struck me that the work you did yesterday in analyzing your classmates is also the work essayists do when they analyze texts! When you were talking, I heard a few of you say things like, 'The thing about her is that she just wants people to understand her, and if she feels misunderstood, she flips.' The way you were thinking is *exactly* the way essayists think. They analyze what motivates a character to understand what the character *really* wants. Today I'd like to push you to try that 'cafeteria-thinking' out on the characters in your stories."

### ✿ Name the teaching point.

"Today I want to teach you that when literary essayists are writing about characters, one way they make their ideas more powerful, more intriguing, is by looking beyond the obvious details about the characters to think about what motivates them—to figure out what the character really wants from other people and from life."

## TEACHING

**Stress the value of thinking about a character's motivations, emphasizing that what a character seems to want on the outside may not be the deeper motivation.**

"Okay, so one way we can get started is to just think to ourselves for a moment, what does our character—Squeaky—want? What motivates her to act all tough and prickly and defensive? As we try to answer this question, it's important that we go beyond the obvious, the external—just like Jamhil did when he went beyond noticing Squeaky's talent for running to consider her loneliness. I mean, the first thing that comes to my mind is that Squeaky wants people to stop being jerks, but let's go deeper than that.

"You know, my dad never had a ton of money, but he always wanted this British sports car, a weird car if you ask me. But even though he said that he wanted that car, I think really what he wanted was to feel successful. It's this kind of

## ◆ COACHING

*For all of their shrugging shoulders and sucking of teeth, adolescents want nothing more than to be seen and valued. By noting the drama of the day before, without knee-jerk disapproval, you are valuing their lives and their problems, equating their everyday lives to their academic work.*

thinking work we want to do—so that we point out not that Squeaky ‘wants people to stop picking on her brother,’ although that’s true, but something about how she wants to feel, or what she wants her life to be like, or how she wishes her relationships were.”

**Channel students to ponder the protagonist’s real motivation and to be ready to share their thinking.**

“We are going to go pretty deep with Squeaky here, and one thing I notice is that sometimes it takes me a second to have a good thought, you know? So let’s pause for just a bit so you each have a chance to think about the question ‘What does Squeaky *really* want, from other people and from life?’ Use the whole story to help you answer this.”

In the silence, I looked up to the ceiling, as if pondering deeply myself. After an interval, I said quietly, not wanting to stop their thinking, “After you have time to think, I’m going to ask for people to offer up ideas, to just speak out, and I’ll write down what you say. I’m not going to call on you, so you’ll have to remember that if it is quiet, it is your turn to talk. Okay, let’s think in silence together, What does Squeaky *really* want?”

**Invite students to share their thinking.**

I waited twenty seconds and then gently asked students to begin voicing their ideas. There was silence at first, and then Stephen said, “She wants people to stop making fun of her brother.” I nodded, smiled, and gestured for others to chime in.

Slowly voices started to add ideas to the mix. Diamond said, “She wants to win everything. She keeps saying she’s the fastest and no one can beat her. And she practices her running all the time.”

Crystal offered, “She acts really tough toward people. I don’t know why. But even though she is tough, she really loves Raymond.”

Frankie jumped on this and added, “I think she acts tough, but she is really lonely. At the end, I think she wants to be friends with that girl, what’s her name?”

Natori’s hand shot up. “I know, I know. She acts all tough, but she also has a soft side, because she really loves Raymond. She is tough because she is so protective of him. She would do anything for him.”

I jotted notes capturing these ideas, writing fast and furiously so as not to stem the tide, and then stopped the class.

**Debrief by naming what students have just done that you hope they do often when they write about literature. Then set students up to do the next step—to take one of their ideas and think/write long about it.**

“Wow. You really get people! You get that what people want on the surface—a new car, for people to stop picking on them—isn’t usually what they want most of all, what they want deep inside. What they *really* want is usually a feeling,

*You will not find anything quite so magical as the silence of a group of sixth-graders sitting in a room together, thinking. You may need to remind a couple of your writers with a finger to your lips, and it may not always be perfect, but giving your students time to consider a question you have asked is integral to them being able to answer it. It may help if you repeat the question a few times, whispering, “What does Squeaky really want?”*

*Stephen’s idea is totally obvious and not exactly the deep thinking I was hoping to yield—and he knew that. He contributed with a tone of voice that signaled he knew he was making my question seem silly. Here I make the choice to let this go or to talk to him after class rather than in front of others. I also chose to silently communicate that I got the joke—and even appreciated his wit. It seems important to let kids have their small victories.*

*You are going to want to decide now whether you’ll be writing your own literary essay or borrowing the literary essay that weaves in and out of this chapter. This entry contains seeds of the literary essay that becomes important to the next six sessions, so borrow or adapt the following entry if you are going to want to lean on the essay within this book.*



a way of living, a new kind of relationship; it's human nature to want these things. And in Squeaky's case, even though she tells us she wants to win that race—and I agree with all of you that she does want this, desperately—it seems like maybe she wants some deeper things, too.

"I bet you know what essayists do next, after listing possible motivations a character seems to have," I said, pointing to my writer's notebook to signal my intended meaning. When students began to say, "They write?" I nodded, picked up my notebook, and started to scrawl in it. Students could not see what I was writing, which allowed me to write extra quickly, scrawling across the page. I deliberately took one of the ideas they'd offered.

*Squeaky seems tough and angry, wanting to knock down people, but even though she seems tough, what shines through is how much she loves Raymond. He is disabled in some way, I am not sure how exactly, and having him tag along could make some people crazy. But she wants to stay near him to look out for him. They go everywhere together. If people tease her brother or treat him badly, Squeaky gets mad. She knows he is different and that he can't protect himself.*

PROTECT.

*That is a good word for what Squeaky does. Squeaky wants to protect her brother from the world. She watches that he walks on the safe side of the sidewalk and knocks anyone down who so much as looks at him. It is like she sees the whole world as enemies to her and to Raymond.*

**Maybe** *she's gotten tough because people have made fun of her and she uses that toughness to protect Raymond. But while she thinks she is just protecting Raymond, she is also pushing people away and I sort of wonder if she is lonely, deep down.*

## ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

**Set your class up to try the work you've demonstrated. In this instance, ask students to try to talk long about the character's motivation. Coach in as needed, suggesting they trace the idea through the beginning, middle, and end of the story.**

"Your turn. I know you'll be thinking and writing about a whole different short story later today. But just to get your muscles for doing this work as strong as possible *before* you tackle a story all on your own, will you and your partner take another idea about what motivates Squeaky and talk about it together? The important thing is not just to say the idea to each other, but to grow some thinking about it. You can push your thinking by saying, 'Maybe . . .' You can also do what I did and think about examples from the start of the story, the middle, and the end."

As I listened in, I heard Jaz say to Sarah, "Um, okay. Let's take the idea that she wants to win everything, Because she does. All the races, for example."

Sarah checked in with me, and then followed with a sheepish, "Maybe she wants that because . . . ?"

*Because I was writing in my notebook, tilted up toward me, I also tucked a crib sheet containing the prewritten entry. The truth is that when writing in your own notebook in front of the class, you can pretend to write, scrawling wiggly lines across your page (quickly!), and meanwhile you can actually read aloud what you have already written (crib sheets) as you pretend to write that.*

*Notice that when writing this entry, I've written about how the idea I have relates to the beginning, the middle, and the end of the text. It helps to have a strategy in mind for what you are doing when you write publicly. Later in this minilesson I will tell students the plan I had up my sleeve that led to this piece of writing.*

Jaz glowered, and I coached into the conversation, “Sarah, Jaz isn’t the only one who could follow up on your prompt. You could answer your own question.”

Jaz looked triumphant and Sarah said, “Okay. Uhh . . . Or maybe . . . maybe the author has her wanting to win the races because . . . umm . . . she wants to feel good about herself?”

I gave them a thumbs up, added in another prompt (“This is significant because . . .”) and moved on to listen in for half a minute to Natori and Kayla, who were in a heated conversation about whether Squeaky *had* to be mean. Was she protecting her brother or her image (or both)? I tried to listen to another partnership but found that Sam and Eli were just staring at each other, clearly feeling like they were done talking. I nudged them to reread the story, looking for examples of their point, and to say, “For example . . .”

### Share a strategy that one partnership used that will help students if they get stuck doing this work.

“Writers, I want to share a strategy that Sam and Eli tried just now. They said their idea and then sat there—done.” I imitated how they’d just sat for a bit, scanning the room, waiting for others to be done as well. “But then they got the idea to reread the story and see if they could find evidence for their idea! Instead of just sitting there, they reread—and you know what? I’m pretty sure they are not just going to find evidence for their original idea, but they are also going to find that their original idea evolves, that it becomes more complicated.

“So if you ever find yourself feeling stuck in today’s workshop or future times when you are writing about reading, try Sam and Eli’s strategy of going back to the text to reread and rethink.”

## LINK

### Remind students that expert readers know which features of a story are worth studying and that it pays off to study a character’s wants and motivations.

“You’ve spent today reading texts closely, noticing the kinds of details that get you growing ideas about characters.” I gestured to the chart I created the day before. “Let’s record this work. You’ll be doing this again and again as you write literary essays, so this chart can be a way to keep yourselves on track.” I turned back to the chart and added a third bullet point:

#### How to Write a Literary Essay about Character

- Reread selected bits.
- Notice the details, think, talk, write to explore: “Why this detail?”
- Think, “What does the character really want?” and write long.

*Notice that here I attribute my own suggestion to these two somewhat recalcitrant students. This is intentional. They may not have come up with the idea themselves, but they used it, and my goal here is not to spotlight my own role in this, but rather to help them feel ownership of the work they did. Also, I want kids in the class to know that they can be their own problem solvers.*

“So today you’ll continue working to grow ideas about the story you have selected. You might return to thinking about the details in a text, writing long about them. Or you might think about character motivations. I imagine you will fill at least two pages of your notebook with entries today.

“But just one tip before you start. You’ll recall that yesterday I suggested you reread passages that seemed important to you, looking for details in them. Instead of thinking all about character motivations in general, you might again first select important scenes and, only then, try to pinpoint, in those scenes, what the character wants, deep down inside, or what is motivating the character. Your writing and your thinking will be best if it is lodged in very particular parts of the story.”



*Notice that minilessons are cumulative, so that at the end of today’s minilesson, I send students off to do the work they learned about today, and also to use what they learned yesterday. If yesterday’s teaching doesn’t even last until today, the chances aren’t great that it will become a lifelong strategy!*



## CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

# Helping Students Write with Engagement and Precision

**R**EMEMBER THAT YOUR STUDENTS will be working with stories other than “Raymond’s Run.” The first thing you’ll need to do is to get your students to go to selected scenes, reread them, and then use those scenes to help them find and jot possible character motivations. That process of jotting character motivations should be as brief as the process of listing possible personal narrative ideas was in the earlier unit. That work just primes the pump and gets students ready to write. The real work of this session involves taking one of those motivations and writing a half-page entry about

it, and then taking another. Of course, ideally, the entries will be longer than that, with lots of text citations, but it is early in the unit, so you should expect that some students will find it hard to elaborate extensively.

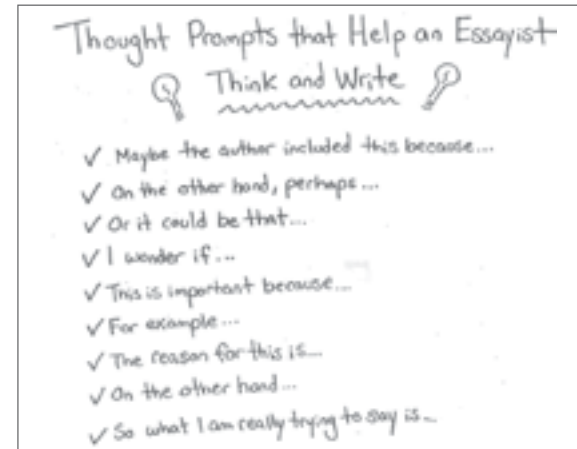
Early on in any unit, one of your responsibilities is to find ways to recruit students’ engagement in the work. If some of your students seem to resist, it will be important *(continues)*

### MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING Using Thought Prompts for Elaborating

“Class, I’d like to share some work that Sarah found helpful. She’s writing about the story ‘Popularity.’ She was having a tough time keeping her thinking going down the page. It seemed like she ran out of things to say, so then she was just doing busy work. We talked about this and she remembered some prompts that she learned in previous years and that are helping her keep her thinking going.” I looked at Sarah, giving her a cue that her part was coming up. “Sarah will let you in on the prompts that helped her. I’ll add these to a chart we started yesterday, only I think we better rename the chart.”

Sarah stood nervously, inspiring one of her friends to yell out “Go, Sarah!” which got the rest of the class laughing for a second. I motioned for Sarah to begin. She did. “Um, so, so the best prompt that I have is ‘This is important because . . .’ It really helps to, um, I guess it gets me to think about why my idea matters to the story.”

Listening, I recorded, “This is important because” on the chart. I asked, “Does anyone else remember some thought prompts from our earlier lesson that helped you to elaborate? Let’s think of a few more points to add to our chart.” After a brief discussion, my chart looked like this:



“Class, Sarah is going to let you study her entry later to see if you get some tips from it. Meanwhile, see if this list can help you think and write more.”



to try to turn that around now. That's why, in the minilesson, we made two students who were resisting the work famous for inventing a strategy. In your conferring, too, you'll want to reach those who are reluctant and turn them around. Chances are good that students who aren't engaged will feel as if the work of writing a literary essay doesn't connect to them and their lives. You'll want to help these students know that just because they are writing about someone else's story does not mean they cannot write about personally important topics and ideas. Teach them that it actually helps to think about questions such as these: Which characters do they most relate to? Which scenes resonated for them? Which problems, issues, and ideas are important in their lives as well?

They won't be writing about "Raymond's Run" but about one of the short stories from their packet. However, you can use "Raymond's Run" to make your point, perhaps explaining that if you want to think about, say, the role of running in the story, you can think, "How does this connect to my life?" You don't run, but you play basketball. So you can think, "What does basketball do for me in my life? How is that the same, and how is it different from the role that running plays in Squeaky and Raymond's lives?" You can then coach the students to think in similar ways about whatever story they are reading. By spending some time thinking about aspects of that story that resonate for a particular student, you can give those students strategies that allow them to be more insightful about the stories they are analyzing and writing about.

As you look over your writers' shoulders, you may see some essayists relying on generic words to describe complicated characters or ideas. The character is *nice*, the changes are *hard*, the lesson is to be a *good* person. Students who have written literary essays in previous years have the vocabulary to be more precise, more descriptive, but they may not be using it, so by all means simply ask them to revise some of their jottings to reflect the language they have at their fingertips. If you have some students who do not seem to you to have been taught to generate precise words to describe a character, introduce them to some powerful language that they will use over and over again as they begin their careers as literary essayists. Set these students up to collect and record synonyms for easier, more generic words they know.

You could start by drawing four boxes, with simple trait or feeling words at the top of each one:

Nice	Mean
Brave	Afraid

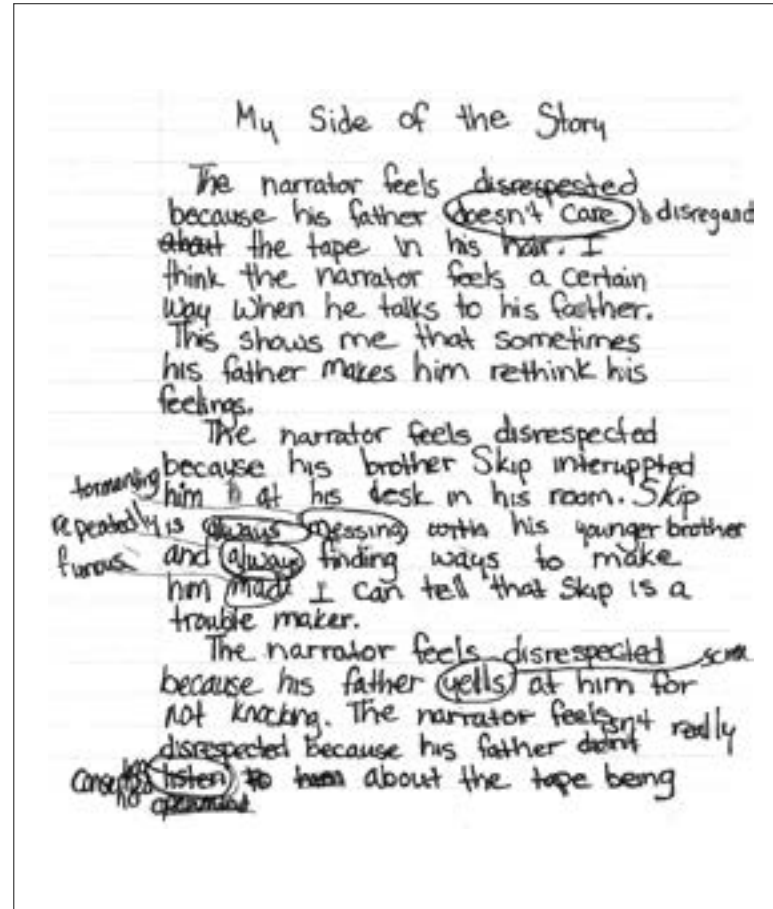


FIG. 3-1 Natori lifts the level of her vocabulary as she writes.

Then, in a small group, have students begin to brainstorm words that mean sort of the same thing as one of the generic terms they've been using—say, *nice*. Point out that many words that *seem* similar in fact represent slightly different shades of the word, for example, *content*, *happy*, *ecstatic* (or *want*, *yearn*, *crave*), and get students thinking along spectrums of similar words. As students work, they can rank the words they collect, from most nice to least. Over time, charts or personal word walls such as these can help develop students' academic vocabulary.



SHARE

## Setting Goals for Future Work

**Coach students to study a mentor entry to name what that writer has done that they, too, could try.**

"Writers, I know you are accustomed to studying the published work of famous authors and thinking about what that writer has done that you could try. But to write an essay well, there is behind the scenes writing-to-think that makes a world of difference, and people don't usually get a chance to

In the story Popularity <sup>it says</sup> that the character wants to be popular. I think this because in the story there are many details that show this. One detail I found was that the main character, Allen S, and Allen G. spend their recess at the oak tree and circle it while trying to find 4 leaf clovers. And if they ever found one they would wish for that they would be so popular that they never would have to spend another recess together again. This shows that the main character is maybe lonely, not popular, outcasts, and maybe a little shy. I think the author put this detail in because he wants you to know that they are outcasts and don't fit in. That is one detail to show that the main character in Popularity is not popular, yet.

FIG. 3-2 Sarah uses a thought prompt to keep her thinking going down the page.

James

James wanted to be in the K-Bones because he wanted to be cool, he wanted respect and he wants to show his brave. However, throughout the story James realizes it's stupid and turns down Kirs' offer.

I think James wants to be apart of the K-Bones to be cool. He acts sneaky when he waits until his mom leaves the bus stop and thumps on the wall so Mrs. Lopez thinks him and Isaac are there. Maybe James doesn't want to get in trouble, but the struggle of being cool tempts him to do stupid things. Or maybe, James just doesn't want to seem dumb in front of Kirs. I think what James really wants is to be accepted by the K-Bones. So what I am really trying to say is James is a good kid, but will do whatever it takes to be cool, and be accepted.

FIG. 3-3 Crystal revises an entry after studying a mentor entry.

study that kind of writing. The great thing about working alongside each other is that in this class, you *can* study what writers do in their notebooks, what writers do to grow ideas—because that’s what you all are doing.

“So I’m going to ask you to start and study part of Sarah’s entry (the one we talked about in the mid-workshop), and specifically, I’m going to ask you to notice one really terrific thing that Sarah has done that you could try (see Figure 3–2 on page 33). Now, here is the hard part. Then you’ll turn to your writing and try your hand at whatever you notice Sarah doing that you thought was so admirable. You can study Sarah’s writing with a partner, but of course, you’ll be revising your writing on your own”.

## SESSION 3 HOMEWORK

### STUDY A MENTOR ENTRY TO EXPLORE NEW WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT A SHORT STORY

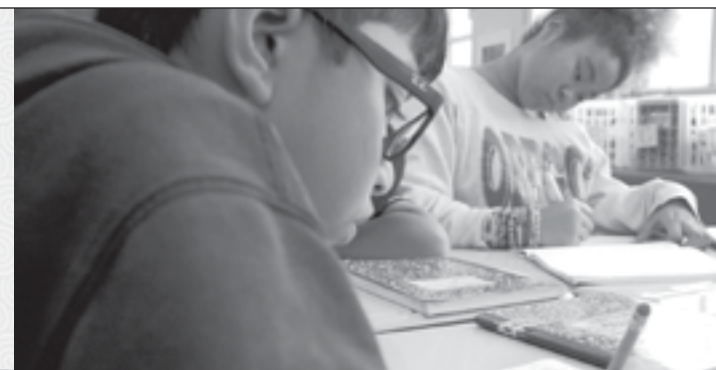
“For homework tonight and across the next few days, I’m going to ask you to do a similar kind of writing as you did today. Remember to look at Sarah’s writing and be willing to think, ‘I haven’t tried that yet,’ and then give that new way of thinking and writing a go. Look at the writing I’ve done in class, too, and see if any of that can nudge you to try new stuff in your entries about your short story. I’ve tried to put the tips you have learned so far onto our anchor chart. I imagine you will write at least one to two more pages tonight for homework, so be sure you make a good plan now for what tips you can use.”

How to Write a Literary Essay  
About Character

- Reread selected bits.
- Notice details, think, talk, write to explore: “Why this detail?”
- Think, “What does the character really want?” and write long.
- It can help to use thought prompts (Maybe... Perhaps...)
- Think about the deep down, internal motivations.
- Once you have an idea and some evidence, reread again, reread more of the text, reread more closely, and expect your original idea will change.

## Session 4

# Crafting Claims



**T**HE TIME HAS COME for your class to develop and choose a claim. Students—and teachers, you too!—may be used to calling this a *thesis statement*, which is an appropriate term. We’ve opted for *claim* here, in part to align closely to the Common Core’s terminology and in part to allow for the possibility of introducing counterclaims. *Claim* and *thesis* are synonyms, so you’ll see both terms throughout this book.

This is a big moment. And like any big moment, this one has the potential to set students up beautifully or to derail them a bit. There are two common ways for writers to become derailed at this point. The first is that the push to get a claim can lead writers to grab onto whatever looks like the easiest, most obvious idea to write about, which can then lead them to steer clear of the richer, more interesting and more challenging ideas. That may not be the worst thing for those of your students who are new to writing essays. For some, it may be fruitful to write about fairly obvious ideas at this point, saving the more challenging work for later. But mostly, you want this unit to lead students to think more deeply because they are writing. The second risk is that writers might grab onto an idea that pertains to the most powerful part of the story but that doesn’t (like a big idea hug) encompass and embrace much of the story.

To us, choosing a claim is much like choosing a prom date. It’s not as life altering as choosing a partner to marry, but it sure is something that will stick with you for a while. You don’t want to grab the first person—or the first claim—that comes your way. Instead, you want to reflect for a moment, imagining the whole night from beginning to end—the dinner out with friends, the prom itself, the photos and the after-party. Does this person fit into the whole night, or is he just a good fit for the after-party?

So in today’s session, you’ll teach your students to search their notebooks and their thoughts for any claims that might be contenders and then to step back and ask themselves whether these claims feel precisely right and whether they apply to the whole story or just to one part of it. Claims should encompass most of the text; writers should be able to find evidence for a claim across the course of the story, not just in the beginning, or at the end.

**IN THIS SESSION**, you’ll teach students that essayists mull over their ideas about the character and then choose one they can craft into a claim that feels worth thinking and writing about and that may eventually drive an essay.

### GETTING READY

- ✓ “How to Write a Literary Essay about Character” anchor chart (see Connection, Teaching and Active Engagement, and Share)
- ✓ Students’ writer’s notebooks and pens (see Teaching and Active Engagement)
- ✓ Your own notebook that captures the class’s thinking about “Raymond’s Run” or this same thinking on chart paper, enlarged to share with the class (see Teaching and Active Engagement)
- ✓ A few white boards and markers, for several students to capture the claims that are generated (see Teaching and Active Engagement)
- ✓ Chart paper and markers (see Teaching and Active Engagement)
- ✓ The texts students worked with in the previous session (see Connection and Link)
- ✓ A copy of the class essay on the *third little pig*, generated in Session 1, enlarged for the class to see (see Share)

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:** W.6.1.a,b,c; RL.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.3, RL.6.4, SL.6.1, SL.6.3, SL.6.4, SL.6.6, L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3





## MINILESSON

# Crafting Claims

### CONNECTION

**Share an anecdote from your life to demonstrate what it means to formulate a substantial idea.**

"Writers, when you come to the meeting area today, I want you to notice that I have divided the space into four corners. Each corner is for people who are working with a different story. Choose your seat based on the story that you read, because later you'll be talking with others who read the same story."

Once students had settled, I began. "The other day I was out to lunch with a friend, and he asked me what I liked about this other friend of ours, who can be a bit difficult to get along with. And the thing is, I had a hard time figuring out what to say, because my reasons didn't seem big enough. They didn't seem to quite capture why I like our friendship. It was an annoying feeling, like my brain was failing. I kept coming up with little things, with ideas that only showed a tiny part of her, like, 'I like how she is really into video games.' or 'She can be really nice sometimes.' But later on, when I had more time to think, I realized that the real reason I like this friend is that she sees the world in interesting ways, and helps me see it in those ways, too. This felt like a real thing to say about my friend, but it was hard to get to."

**Tell students that the next step for them, as literary essayists, is to develop all the thinking they have done into an idea that is big enough to become their essay's central idea—its claim.**

"You all have loads of ideas about the stories you've been working on in your notebooks, and even more in your minds. Like the ideas I had initially about my friend, when I thought, 'I like how she is into video games,' your ideas are probably true, and yet they might not yet be some kind of 'big truth' about the text, or the character."

### ❁ Name the teaching point.

"Today I want to teach you that when literary essayists write about a character, they work hard to come up with an idea, a claim, that captures the whole of that person so the claim (or thesis statement) is big enough to think and write about for a while and can maybe even become the central idea of the entire essay."

I gestured toward the anchor chart, to highlight the new bullet I had added prior to the minilesson.

### ◆ COACHING

*It may be tempting to ramble on about what students have been doing prior to today—because it's an easy way to orient yourself and your students before plunging ahead—but kids will pay closer attention to new information, anecdotes, and stories than to long summaries of what they have already been taught. So if you are accustomed to recapping at the start of a minilesson, try to make that work somewhat interactive ("Let me read over a list of things you've learned, and give me a thumbs up if you feel you have mastered an item on the list, and a thumbs down if you haven't yet practiced it").*

### How to Write a Literary Essay about Character

- Reread selected bits (best not to start with the whole story).
- Notice the details, think, talk, write to explore: "Why this detail?"
- Think, "What does the character really want?" and write long
  - It can help to use thought prompts (Maybe . . . Perhaps . . .).
  - Think about the deep down, internal motivations.
- Once you have an idea about character motivations and some evidence, reread again, reread more of the text, reread more closely, and expect your original idea will change.
- **Try to generate an idea about the character that encompasses the whole character and the whole text**

*This is a writing unit, but of course, it hinges on the reading instruction you and others before you have given to your students. To write a compelling essay, students need to be able to develop and test out ideas about texts, and this work can be infinitely complex. It will be important to teach your students that coming up with an idea requires exploration, time, and thought. Essayists don't grab hold of the first idea that occurs to them. Although you will demonstrate a bit of the process of sorting through notebook entries for ideas, listing and evaluating possible claims, this isn't easily conveyed through a minilesson, and your main goal will be to set students up to do this work and to say those all-important words: "Off you go." They'll learn from doing.*

## TEACHING AND ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

**Point out that to generate a claim, it helps to reread what you've written and review what you've thought, working to generate a collection of possible claims that each encompass the whole character and text.**

"To come up with a strong claim about a character, it helps to reread one's entries and notes and to think again about the text, coming up with drafts of 'possible claims.' Let's return to our entries and ideas about 'Raymond's Run,' and as we do so, ask, 'What is the main thing we really want to say about Squeaky?' Let's review the entries we wrote and talked about, including Jamhil's, where he answered that same question by going deeper and deeper with *maybes*.

"As I reread these entries, will you try to come up with a claim that you think is big enough to encompass all of your most important ideas about Squeaky? Your idea might come from these entries or it might come from the story itself. Ready? Pens up?" I read aloud, pausing for kids to stop and jot. Occasionally I said, "After you've jotted one possible idea, try another, and another."

I projected the following pages from my notebook to the class.

I notice that when people say mean things about Raymond, Squeaky reacts by saying, "I much rather just knock you down . . ." I wonder why Bambara included this detail about Squeaky—that she wants to knock people down. Maybe the author wants to show us that Squeaky is really really angry over how people treat her brother. On the other hand, perhaps Bambara is showing us that Squeaky really loves Raymond—she loves him so much that she's willing to fight for him. Or

*For today's teaching, you'll need to have a way of making the past few days' ideas visible for students. You could follow our model, showcasing the class's thinking by putting a few pages of your notebook on the document camera, with the class's collective thinking prerecorded. Or you could do this just as easily with chart paper and a marker.*

could it be that Bambara is trying to show that Squeaky thinks it works better to fight than to talk through stuff?

\* \* \* \*

I think Bambara wants to show that Squeaky is a good runner. I think maybe she also wants to show that Squeaky is really egotistical, like she is a rapper saying, "I'm the best!" But it is sad she is running a relay race all by herself. Maybe the author is trying to show that Squeaky doesn't have any friends because she is running all by herself and winning all the spots. I bet maybe she doesn't have friends because she is always attacking kids.

\* \* \* \*

Squeaky seems tough and angry, wanting to knock down people, but even though she seems tough, what shines through is how much she loves Raymond. He is disabled in some way, I am not sure how exactly, and having him tag along could make some people crazy. But she wants to stay near him to look out for him. They go everywhere together. If people tease her brother or treat him badly, Squeaky gets mad. She knows he is different and that he can't protect himself.

PROTECT.

That is a good word for what Squeaky does. Squeaky wants to protect her brother from the world. She watches that he walks on the safe side of the sidewalk and knocks anyone down who so much as looks at him. It is like she sees the whole world as enemies to her and to Raymond. Maybe she's gotten tough because people have made fun of her and she uses that toughness to protect Raymond. But while she thinks she is just protecting Raymond, she is also pushing people away and I sort of wonder if deep down, she is lonely.

**Use a symphony share as a way to allow multiple students to share the claims that they generated.**

"Writers, now let's hear your ideas. Reread the claims about Squeaky that you have jotted, star the one you think best captured her, in all her complexity, and get ready for a symphony share. Remember, I'll be the conductor of the orchestra, and when I tip my baton your way, you read out just one of your claims—your favorite one—as if you are the clarinet or the oboe in the orchestra, coming in on cue."

After giving students a minute to select their best claim (and meanwhile orchestrating it so that a few students captured the claims that were called out on white boards), I tipped my baton to a succession of students, and soon we were sitting among these and other claims:

*Squeaky seems tough and angry, wanting to knock people down, but what shines through is how much she loves Raymond.*

*As I circled the room, some kids were focused on the fact that Squeaky is a really tough person but that she's that way to protect the things she cares about, like her brother and her status as the fastest runner. Other kids were on about the fact that Squeaky really values the truth and respect. The latter idea didn't come out in the symphony share, but if I had wanted it to, I could have deliberately signaled for that writer to share her ideas. The advantage of listening in first is that you are able to engineer what is shared with the whole group. I just thought for now that I wanted to make the work accessible enough that everyone would generally see the ideas as central to the story.*

Deep down, Squeaky just really wants to protect Raymond.

Squeaky acts tough to people and pushes them away.

In spite of her big talk and her toughness, Squeak is lonely. BUT she doesn't want people to know.

**Channel students to join you in testing the claims they generated, weighing whether each encompasses the whole character and text. After narrowing the field of contenders, point out that essayists tweak the wording and thinking before settling on a still-tentative claim.**

"You'll do this same work on your own later today, generating claims about the short story you have selected. Always remember that after an essayist drafts a few possible claims, he then looks them over, weighing which seems most viable—which encompasses the whole character and which rings truest? Right now, review these claims that we've come up with about Squeaky with the people sitting near you, and decide which you think comes closest to capturing the essence of her. Turn and talk." While the students were talking, I listed the claims that were captured during the symphony share on a sheet of chart paper.

Soon I quelled the conversation and asked, "So let's tackle the really hard question. Which of these seems most encompassing of *all* sides of Squeaky, and why do you say that? Or go for the opposite. Which seems one-sided, like the thought I had that I like my friend because she enjoys video games?"

Hands shot up. Frankie began the conversation. "I think the second claim, the one that Squeaky just really wants to protect Raymond, that one is just about one side because yes, Squeaky *does* want to protect Raymond, but she is more than just that—like she also wants to win the race. That has nothing to do with Raymond. Squeaky has this really huge personality. There is more to her than loving Raymond."

I nodded. "Okay, so we think that 'Deep down, Squeaky just really wants to protect Raymond' might not be broad enough?" When some students nodded, I took that as enthusiastic assent, coming from middle-schoolers!

Sarah added, "Same with the third one—that is true that Squeaky acts tough, but it is just one side. She's not all tough."

I nodded, crossed those two out, and then starred the first and last claims on our list. "So these ideas seem best because they capture different—even conflicting—sides of Squeaky." I reread them, underlining key terms for emphasis as I said, "'She is tough and angry—but also loving.' Or, 'She is tough, but also lonely, and intent on protecting herself from anyone knowing that she is lonely.'"

**Channel students also to weigh whether the possible claims encompass the whole text, and as they consider that, suggest they tweak and revise and refine and rewrite the claims so they do work.**

"You have done some important work that essayists do. But essayists don't stop there." I returned to the anchor chart and emphasized the final few words on the bullet I'd added that day. "Essayists also think about whether a claim can

*Notice that today's teaching is longer than usual. You may find that you can condense it, especially if your students have had experience writing essays. One of the hardest things for students to learn in this genre is how to come up with a claim that is big enough that they can then support it in ways that generate a powerful essay. Moreover, you want to teach kids that coming up with a compelling idea takes some time and thought. You don't want to convey that essayists grab hold of the first idea that occurs to them. And so, you model how you can take your students through the process of sorting through their notebook entries for ideas, then looking across these to come up with a possible claim by asking, "Is this the big thing I'm trying to say? Does it convey a full picture of the character and the story?"*



be supported by the whole story—the beginning, the middle, and the end—because the best ideas encompass not only the whole character but also the whole text.” I gestured toward the final bullet on the anchor chart.

- Try to generate an idea about the character that encompasses the whole character **and the whole text**.

“Think about that idea and our two remaining claims. Talk about that. Go!” After students talked a bit, I said to them, “I think you are realizing that this process involves not just choosing between a bunch of possible claims, but tweaking the claim that seems closest to what you want to say and rewriting it over and over until it is just right. So get your pens going and try making a claim that is more precise. Those of you sitting near kids with white boards, work on the white board.”

As students worked, I looked over their shoulders, giving pointers. “You are aiming to capture something that is not only true about the character but that is important. Try to dig down under what you say first to ask, ‘What’s *really* important about this?’ Is the big thing that she wants to win the race—or what?”

**Name a claim that the class seems to agree upon, one that you can imagine as the thesis to an essay on the shared story, and remind students that the next order of business is to read the text with this claim in mind, checking on whether the evidence is there to support the claim.**

“Class, so I am hearing new versions of claims, and the new ones seem to encompass several sides of Squeaky as well as a good deal of the story. Here is one that I think is especially strong—it encompasses a good deal of the story, and it is also clear.” I drew a line on the chart paper that listed our claims, and below the line wrote the following revised claim:

*Squeaky is fiercely protective of both her brother and herself.*

“I like the idea, but if we had time now, we’d still need to check to see if it is really grounded in many parts of the story.”

**Debrief. Share the realization that students were able to land on a bigger claim by looking across the various initial ones.**

“So what you have done is what essayists do. You generated a list of claims and found that some just talk about one side of a person. It is wise to try for one that feels bigger, one that encompasses the whole person. Even after you found a claim that generally worked, you rewrote it, then tested it again. This is a *lot* of work to produce just one or two sentences!”

*Listen in to what students are saying so that when you convene the class to put forth a thesis you want to suggest works, you can spin this as if it has come from the class. You may, in fact, have already thought this through yourself.*

*Good stories prompt readers to have all kinds of ideas, and this is one of those stories. We also found that this claim was a compelling one: Squeaky demands respect for things that matter to her.*

## LINK

**Set students up to start doing similar work with other students who read the same story, leading them toward being ready to do this work on the page of their notebook, settling on a claim for their own character essay.**

"You are sitting near others who read the same story as you did. Get with another student or two—not more than two others, not leaving anyone out. Reread your entries about the short story you've read and work together to come up with a list of possible claims. You can come up with one shared list or talk together and jot separately so you each have a list. But as soon as you have a few possible claims, start testing them out to see whether they fit with the whole character, and across the whole story. Get started!"

As students worked, I voiced over. "Remember, you're searching not for facts about the character, but for ideas—for things that are not explicitly said in the story itself, but ideas that you thought up on your own."

A bit later, I piped in with, "Remember that you can look over the writing you've collected about the text and ponder your thoughts about it. It helps to underline or star or list the big ideas you've written about the text."

Then a few minutes later I commented, "Some of you are testing your ideas now, as you come up with them. Let yourself generate a whole slew of ideas—good, bad, whatever—and only afterward, ask questions of one idea, then another, such as 'Can I find evidence that supports this across the story?'"

I watched students work and sent those who weren't working especially industriously with others off to their seats to work alone. Others, however, continued working in pairs or triads for much of the workshop.

*This link is extended so that students have a chance to practice with others before they go work on their own. If you feel your class does not need this extra support, you may choose to simply send them off.*



## CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

# Strengthening Claims and Supporting Them with Compelling Evidence

AS YOU CONFER TODAY, expect to encounter challenges. Revising a claim so that it has traction is no easy task, but it is essential to everything else that follows in this unit. Expect to encounter a wide array of needs, from students who struggle to generate a claim instead of a fact (let alone select one that is especially strong), to those who have decided to press forward with a claim that, for one reason or another, you think may not lead to a successful essay, to those with a fairly basic claim that won't lead to rich thinking. And, of course, you'll have students who magically get today's teaching, who are ready to tackle next steps; you won't want these kids to be held up just because others need more support.

So how to get to it all? Begin by familiarizing yourself with the sorts of challenges you're likely to encounter.

Inevitably, some students in your class will struggle to find ideas in their notebooks that they can spin into an *initial* potential claim, let alone one with traction. You may want to pull these kids into a group in which you set them up to revisit some of the earlier work the class did. Remind these students that big ideas come from small details, and that noticing details that will stir big thinking is essential to this work. You might suggest that recurring details are especially worth noting because they are often ones the author uses to reveal something big. Students might notice whether there are particular things a character says over and over or actions he repeats. Are there objects the character has with her often or that she values?

Likewise, you might direct these kids to notice any recurring patterns in the writing they've done in their notebooks. Is there a tendency to focus on a particular aspect of the character—a trait, for example—or on a relationship between the main character and another character? Have they wondered the same types of things again and again or had an ongoing (maybe escalating) reaction to the story?

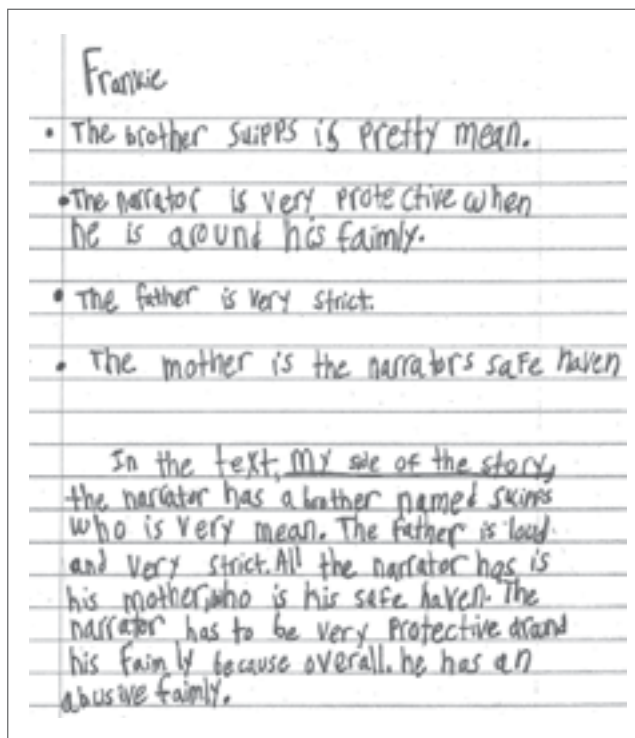


FIG. 4-1 Frankie pushes to find a claim that encompasses the whole text.

You could reiterate some of the previous session's work on motivation. Students might use prompts to move from initial observations to bigger statements that can be supported across the text: "The fact that \_\_\_\_\_ wants \_\_\_\_\_ feels important because . . ." "I notice patterns in what \_\_\_\_\_ seems to want, and these patterns makes me think that . . ."

You'll want to challenge any students whose claims are a bit simplistic to push themselves—and their thinking. Often, this is simply a matter of supporting their first ideas and helping them to say more. Sometimes asking relevant questions will help. "What

surprises you especially about this?" "Why do you think this is the case?" Be ready to redirect students to the text itself.

Finally, you'll want to challenge any students who are on target—kids who have successfully generated several possible claims and have landed on one that feels like a strong option and for which they can name supports that cross the story—to begin developing their points. They might do some freewriting in their notebooks, in which they write long about the first support, then the second, then the third, frequently mining the text for precise words, lines, and details that prove each one.

### MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING Planning the Boxes-and-Bullets Structure, Then Finding Evidence

"Writers, many have you have got your claim, your thesis, and are ready to plan your essay, so let me get you started. Remember your essay about the third little pig being an admirable character? To write that essay, you found reasons and evidence to support the claim, 'The third little pig is an admirable character.' To write this next essay, you are also going to need to come up with evidence to support your claims, and your evidence needs to be in *some* categories, *some* buckets. It could be that your evidence, like in the 'Three Little Pigs' essay, can get divided up into *reasons why* the claim is true, in which case your boxes and bullets will go like they did earlier."

(A character) is (a trait) because

- (one reason),
- (another reason)
- and above all, because (a third reason)

"Right now, take a minute and see if you could figure out a plan for your essay that follows that template."

The students worked on this, and I listened in. After a bit I called out, "So Crystal's essay might go like this: 'Jim is not like the men in his family because, one, he doesn't like to hunt, two, he doesn't want to kill a sick kitten, and most of all, three, he has a different idea of what it means to be a man.'"

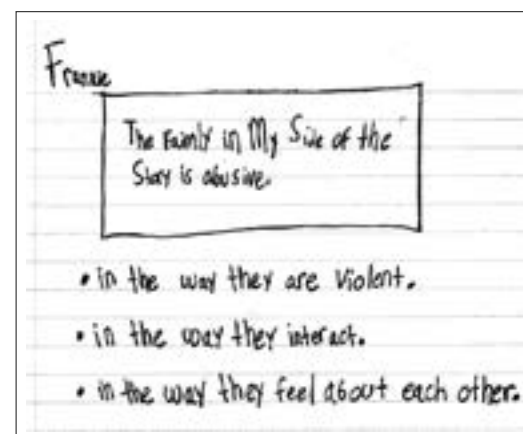


FIG. 4-2 Frankie tries out a structure for his essay.

"That works in the template. On the other hand, to write the class essay, 'Squeaky is fiercely protective of her brother and of herself,' we already have categories. They aren't reasons, but they *are* ways that Squeaky is fiercely protective, one, of her brother and, two, of herself.

"The important thing is that you find the evidence you need to support your claim, and then get it into categories. So will you take the next fifteen minutes to work like the dickens, identifying evidence? Stick Post-its® beside the evidence you spot in the text, and as you work, think about how you can divide your evidence into buckets, into categories, into the bullets in your boxes and bullets."





SHARE

## Drawing on Structure Boot Camp to Organize Evidence

**Ask students to return to the essays they crafted during essay boot camp, noticing the techniques that were used to structure their essay.**

"Essayists, when you wrote your 'Three Little Pigs' essay, you were laughing a bit and fooling around, but the truth is that what you did then was important because it gave you an example you can follow now. So I'm going to show you the class essay we started (we never totally finished the essay when we were working together, but you can also turn to your own essay). Will you and your partner annotate these essays, marking off all the things in them that can help you when you write this new essay as well? Notice the techniques you used to structure, to organize, that essay."

I showed students a chart-paper-sized copy of the class essay on the third little pig. "Can one or two of you come up and annotate this chart paper version of the essay while others work on your own paper versions?" I asked. Soon two students were marking up the class essay while other students did the same on their private copies.

"Writers, after you have annotated what you notice from this essay, will you make sure you have the start of an outline to your essay, putting in it not just the thesis and the topic sentences but your hunch about the evidence you'll include. I'll come around to help you."

I pulled alongside Chris, who was working on an essay about the character James in "Your Move."

James is frustrated

- James is frustrated because he always has to take care of his brother.
- James is frustrated because he wants to be in with the cool kids.
- James is frustrated because he is tired of being good.

"Chris, can you pick one of your reasons and start listing some of the evidence you have to support?" Chris sighed. "Yeah. He wants to be cool like he wants to join the K-Bones." I nodded. "Good . . . keep doing that work."

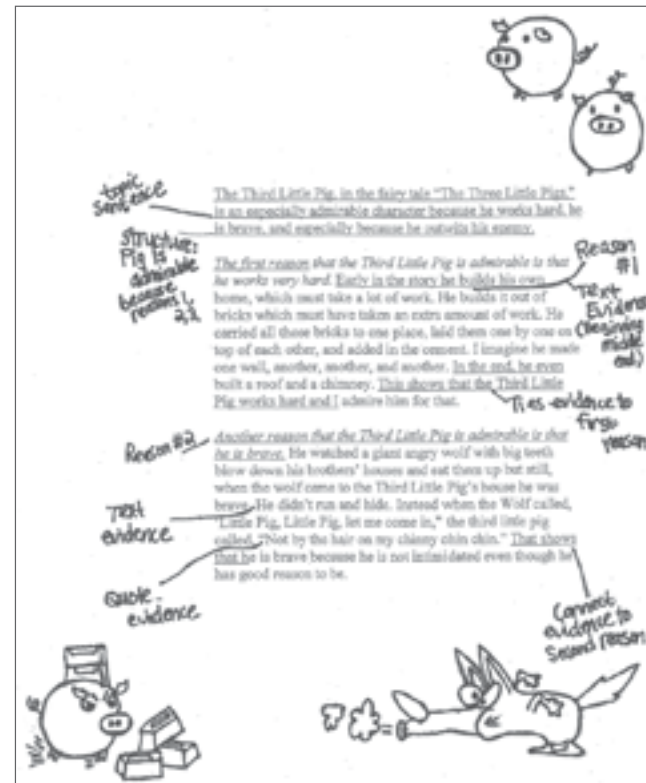
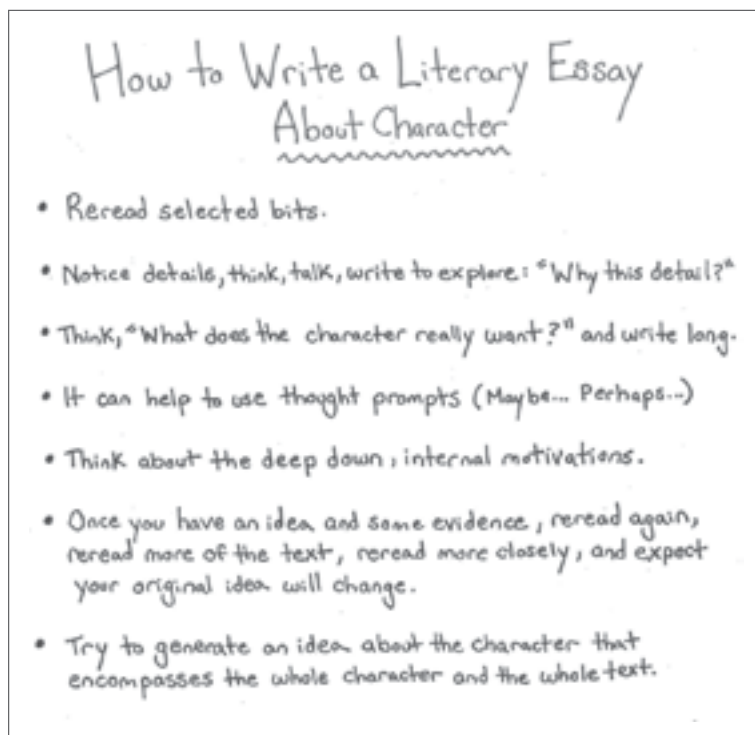


FIG. 4-3 Annotated and illustrated essay on "The Three Little Pigs"

## REVEALING THE CHARACTER THROUGH DETAILS

"Tonight for homework, will you go back to the work you were doing earlier, and reread two selected passages in your story, writing about the details you see in those two passages and the ways those details reveal the character? But this time, choose those passages because you are sure you will be writing about them in your essay. So when I do this work, I'll find a passage that is especially strong and relates to Squeaky being protective of her brother and another passage that is especially strong and relates to Squeaky being protective of herself. I am hoping that tomorrow you will have at least one to two pages written in your notebook where you are trying this work.

"Remember some of the things you learned earlier about doing this work."





## Session 5

# Conveying Evidence

*Summarizing, Storytelling, and Quoting*

Dear Teachers,

Occasionally throughout these units of study, we'll write a letter to you with some suggestions for the day rather than writing out in detail what we've done. We hope this will give you a welcome opportunity to get your own curriculum-writing feet underneath you. When you do design your own minilesson, with just some scaffolding from us, you'll be able to especially tailor it to your students.

In this session, you continue to support students in the work of going back to the short story they are writing about to collect the evidence that convinced them of their claim in the first place. It is through this close reading of the text and thinking deeply about it that they come to their ideas, as in the one that Jim Howe, in "Everything Will Be Okay," is not like the other men in his family. And now it is time to gather the evidence together in ways that will be equally convincing to other people. To help students do that, you'll be teaching them several ways to harvest evidence.

## MINILESSON

The connection in the minilesson will need to return to the content from the previous session, because that was especially important. You will probably remind essayists that yesterday they learned that once they have tested out their claim, it is time to plan how the whole essay will go so that the claim at least *hints* at what the plan for the essay will be. To make this plan for the essay, people who write essays about characters often try to see if this template will work:

*A character is (a trait) because (reason A), (reason B), and (reason C).*

If that template doesn't fit what the essayist has to say, the essayist sometimes tries out one of these alternate templates:

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: W.6.1, W.6.9.a, RI.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.3, RL.6.4, SL.6.1, L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3, L.6.6

A character is (a trait) because (reason A), (reason B),  
and (reason C).

A character is (this way) (with person A) and (with person B).

A character is (this way) (in this situation) and (in that situation).

A character is (this way) and (that way) as a (role).

A character is (this way) at the start, the middle, and the end  
of the story.

The important thing is that once this structure work is underway, writers collect evidence to support their thinking.

Your teaching point, then, might be something like this: “Today I want to teach you that when writing a literary essay, after developing a text-based claim, essayists reread the text through the lens of the claim, searching for the most compelling evidence that can support it. Essayists quote some parts of the text, story-tell other parts, and summarize yet other parts, but one way or the other, they collect evidence.”

As you proceed into the teaching and active engagement sections of the minilesson, you’ll want to decide whether you will again use “Raymond’s Run” as the centerpiece of the minilesson or instead will discuss what a student has been doing and use the story that student has used. Either alternative will work well.

If you use “Raymond’s Run,” you could say to the class, “What essayists do is they reread the text with their claim in mind, so let’s do that now. Let’s skim ‘Raymond’s Run,’ looking through the glasses, the lenses, of the claim, ‘Squeaky is fiercely protective of both her brother and herself,’ so as to recall the evidence that convinced us this claim was a good one.”

Before you demonstrate how to do this, be clear in your mind that the goal is not really to find the evidence in this one story. It is to highlight the strategies you hope students use when they look for evidence for their essays. But you’ll figure out what the strategies are by doing this work yourself and meanwhile spying on yourself to notice what you actually do. For example, if you start doing this work, you’ll probably note that you aren’t actually reading the story so much as skimming over it, pen in hand. Teaching students to skim is tricky business but very important. It is tricky because what you or I do when we skim may be entirely different but equally effective. What I do is make a beeline down the first word or two of each line, trying as I do that to cut to the chase of that part of the story. You may do the same (or not). I suggest doing this reading work with teachers at your grade level and talking together about how exactly one goes about doing it. Then decide, as a group or individually, what portions of the strategies you use seem worth teaching to the class and which you will keep in mind as possible tips to give individuals or small groups.

That is, you might decide that although it is the case that you don't skim by running your eyes over every word at triple speed but instead by looking at just a portion of each line and recalling, as you do, what that part of the story says, you may also decide that's a detail compared to the real work that you need to teach.

In any case, as you skim through "Raymond's Run," you'll immediately come upon mention of Squeaky keeping Raymond on the inside part of the sidewalk as they walk down the street. That's being protective, right?

For sure, you need to teach students to mark the evidence and keep going, because in the end, they need evidence from the beginning, the middle, and the end of the story (and if they are not careful they will just get a lot of it from the first five lines of the story or from the all-important scene, usually at the end, of the story). You will also want to point out that the challenge is not just to find evidence, but to find the most compelling and convincing evidence.

As you continue skimming the story, you'll also come upon the part when Squeaky runs into the girls on the street and starts being rude to the girls before any of them actually *say* anything at all to Raymond. You can show to students that you again take note—bingo! More text evidence that Squeaky is protective of Raymond.

At this point, or soon thereafter, you'll have spent as much time skimming and marking evidence as you can afford to spend in a ten-minute minilesson, so point out that you'd normally read more before pausing, but that in any case, at some point you pause to reread the marked evidence, thinking "Which bit of evidence especially makes the point I want to make?"

Suggest that students need to reread closely, pen in hand, annotating the passage, underlining the words that show exactly what they want to show as evidence, and encourage them to do this in a critical mode, expecting that a lot of the passages won't, in the end, be perfect. For example, does the fact that Squeaky keeps Raymond on the inside part of the sidewalk really show that Squeaky is *fiercely* protective? Probably not. But when it comes to Squeaky's interactions with the girls, that's a different thing. Close reading will yield the realization that Squeaky is in attack mode even in her thoughts about the girls. She has mean thoughts about each one—and Mary Louise used to be her friend! And then, just the thought that they are about to say something prompts her to be rude first. That perhaps does qualify as evidence that Squeaky is being *fiercely* protective.

You might even mine this passage a bit more, suggesting that actually, when Squeaky is so quick to push away the girls, even her old friend Mary Louise, this could also be evidence that Squeaky is protective of herself. These are her peers that she is pushing away. Maybe this scene also shows that she is protecting herself from the pain of seeing her brother teased or from being disappointed in people, like Mary Louise who used to be her friend but who is now instead friends with Rosie, a girl Squeaky actively dislikes, and Gretchen, a girl who is Squeaky's competition. It seems like there's a way in which Squeaky protects herself *so much* that she doesn't have any friends.

In any case, once you have located some evidence to include in your essay, you can demonstrate how you actually bring that part of the story into the essay. Here, you'll want to tell students that there are a few



options for how to bring evidence from a story into an essay. They can story-tell the evidence, using their own words and what they know about narrative writing to re-create the portion of the story.

You could show students how you might do this in the first body paragraph of the class's essay about Squeaky being fiercely protective of Raymond.

*Squeaky is fiercely protective of her brother, Raymond, especially when they go for strolls. One day, when Squeaky and Raymond are on a walk down Broadway, Raymond on the inside of course, to keep him safe, they bump into Mary Louise, Gretchen, and Rosie. When Mary Louise tries to talk directly to Raymond, asking him what grade he is in, Squeaky snaps, "You got anything to say to my brother, you say it to me . . ."*

Another way to bring evidence into an essay is by summarizing the background of the story and quoting just the key parts of the text. Here, point out how you weave in important phrases or lines of dialogue that work to support your point.

*Squeaky is fiercely protective of her brother, Raymond. We learn right away that Raymond is "not quite right in the head" and that all Squeaky has to do in life is "mind my brother Raymond, which is enough." Another kid might crumble under the weight of looking after a brother with special needs, who is "subject to fits of fantasy" and who might dash into traffic after pigeons. But not Squeaky. She is Raymond's biggest protector. During their strolls, she's careful to keep him on the inside, near the buildings, when they walk down the street. And if "anybody has anything to say about his big head," Squeaky tells us, "they have to come by me."*

Here, you'll want to remind students that if they stray from what the actual text says to embellish, they must make this clear to the reader by using phrases such as, "I can imagine this scene . . ." (e.g., "I can imagine this scene. Squeaky leaning in toward Mary Louise, with her fists clenched at her side.") or "One can imagine this began with . . ." or "This must have happened like this . . ."

You may not have time to give other examples, but if you do have a few extra moments, you could also let students know that they could also refer to key details from the text in passing by writing something like this:

*Squeaky is fiercely protective of her brother, Raymond. For example, when she describes how she practices her running exercises while going for strolls with her brother, she says she keeps Raymond on the inside, near the buildings. This is so that he doesn't fall off of the curb into puddles in the gutter, or dash into the street, chasing the pigeons into the island in the center, upsetting the old people sitting there eating their lunches and reading the paper.*

Be sure to update the anchor chart with this thinking, so that students can refer to it as they work to convey the evidence they find in their own texts.

In any case, you'll send students off to continue working on their boxes-and-bullets plan and to reread their story through the lens of their claim, collecting evidence. That is, in your link, it is best to send students off to do not only the new work you will have taught that day but also the cumulative work they've been learning to do all along.

## CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

Today you may find that some students will need additional support as they think through how best to convey the evidence they've collected in support of their claim. You might gather a group in the meeting area while the rest of the class works independently, and say something like, "Class, this work can be tricky. If you feel a little unsure of how to get started, or if this was hard for you, stay here in the meeting area and we'll work on it more together. If you think you've got a grip on this strategy and now have a way to get writing, off you go to your desks."

Chances are you may need to help some kids with the step you assumed most students could do in a snap: finding evidence that supports their bullets. These kids may have easily come up with supports for their claims, but when asked to show where in the text they see evidence of these, they simply shrug. "I don't know—I just think that," they may say. When pushed, you will see these students pick a scene somewhat at random—and it may or may not really support the idea they are writing about. This isn't surprising. By asking students to proceed from generating a claim to determining bullet points to finding evidence that supports these to finding the *strongest* evidence, you are, in effect, asking students to move from making a large, often sweeping statement to coming up with supports that are increasingly precise and pinpointed. What you—and these kids—may discover along the way is that the challenge lies not in the task itself, but in the claim on which everything rests. Or on the bullet points. That is, this is a chain of work, with each piece relying on the one before and after it. If a student's claim or body paragraph foci are weak, it will be difficult to find evidence anywhere in the text, let alone strong evidence. Be on the lookout, then, for any spots where the process broke down even before today's work—and then help the student redo that work.

If, on the other hand, you find that, in fact, a student who is struggling *does* have a strong claim and strong support, it may simply be a matter of helping that student do the kind of close reading that looking

### How to Write a Literary Essay About Character

- Reread selected bits.
- Notice details, think, talk, write to explore: "Why this detail?"
- Think, "What does the character really want?" and write long.
- It can help to use thought prompts (Maybe... Perhaps...)
- Think about the deep down, internal motivations.
- Once you have an idea and some evidence, reread again, reread more of the text, reread more closely, and expect your original idea will change.
- Try to generate an idea about the character that encompasses the whole character and the whole text.
- Search for the most compelling evidence that can support the claim, then add it to your essay like this:
  - Quote some parts of the text.
  - Story-tell other parts.
  - Summarize yet other parts.

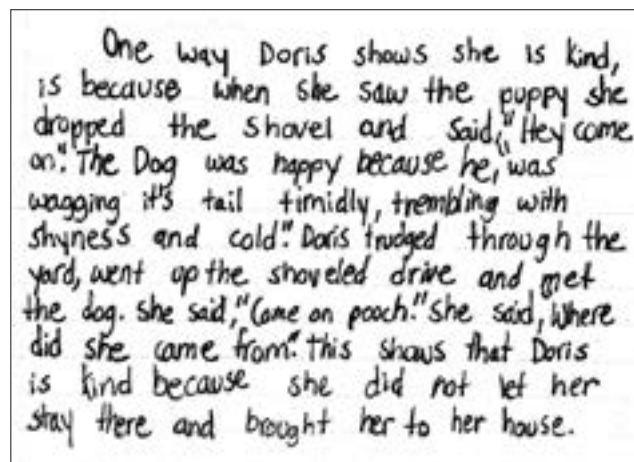
for evidence entails. See if you can get the student to narrow down the text to places where evidence might remotely live, and then help him zoom in closer and closer to the precise line of dialogue or image or action that provides evidence of the point he is hoping to make.

Some of your students may have a clear sense of what evidence to include but may struggle with how to get that evidence down on the page. At the most basic level, they may not know how to retell, or summarize, in a way that doesn't go on endlessly, but rather gets across their main point. Teach these students that essayists know how to "spin" their retells to highlight the parts that best show their point, and that they also try to retell their scenes in a way that is engaging to read, by including some strategies they learned during their narrative writing units, such as slowing down and stretching out the details of a scene to build tension. Then quickly revisit some of those strategies. Make sure you use student essays to demonstrate.

Meanwhile, you will have other kids who aren't sure which parts of the text to quote. You may want to give them highlighters and then read aloud parts of the text, suggesting that they listen with their claim in mind, noting any text that jumps out in defense of it. You could also show them how you might do this yourself, explaining how particular lines of dialogue or phrases or actions work to make your point, and how often it's enough to take a partial quote or to weave one in to one of your own sentences. You might have students try angling their evidence a few different ways in their notebooks, vetting the entries they have written, with the help of a partner, to determine which is strongest.

Finally, some students may have chosen evidence with little selectivity; these kids will benefit from learning how to weigh—or rank—their evidence. The cognitive work involved in ranking will have a big payoff for sixth-graders. You will want to emphasize that this strategy is one that students can use far beyond this one day's work, or even in this precise context—to great effect. Try saying something along these lines: "So I have a feeling that once you get the hang of ranking, you are going to be ranking all over the place. You can rank figures from history to see who was the most influential person, or you can rank heroines in books to see which one is the cleverest. And certainly, whenever you are drafting the body paragraphs of an essay, you will always want to rank—in your head or on paper—the evidence you are considering to be sure you include the strongest support for your thinking."

To help students practice this strategy before applying it to their own stories and essays, you might put up a list of scenes that could go with your other reason, "Squeaky is fiercely protective of herself," and then give partnerships a few minutes to rank these in order of "most supportive" to "least supportive." Be sure to coach students to explain *why* they rank the evidence as they do; this is important work for essay writers and will be the focus of the next session. The ability to analyze how a piece of textual evidence supports an idea is a crucial one, and this is a good opportunity for you to quickly assess how easily it comes to your students. In any case, this quick practice will help students get a feel for ranking and for thinking through why a piece of evidence might support an idea strongly or weakly.



One way Doris shows she is kind, is because when she saw the puppy she dropped the shovel and said, "Hey come on." The dog was happy because he was wagging it's tail timidly, trembling with shyness and cold. Doris trudged through the yard, went up the shoveled drive and met the dog. She said, "Come on pooch." She said, where did she come from. This shows that Doris is kind because she did not let her stay there and brought her to her house.

FIG. 5-1 Kevin story-tells his evidence while using quotes.

## MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING

For today's mid-workshop teaching, you may want to teach students a strategy for incorporating even more evidence into their essays, through using appositives. As they are working to incorporate more evidence from the text into their essay, they will need to clarify and identify who their evidence is referring to or what it is about. You have continued to highlight how your sixth-graders are more grown-up versions of their elementary school selves, so don't be afraid to use more grown-up terminology with them. Introduce them to the term *appositive*, and teach them how appositives can be a way to provide their reader with extra information. Demonstrate with your own essay, showing how you use commas to highlight the appositive, which provides your reader with further clarification, and even more evidence to support your reason.

*One day, when Squeaky and Raymond are on a walk down Broadway, Raymond on the inside of course, to keep him safe, they bump into Mary Louise, Gretchen, and Rosie. Squeaky thinks about trying to avoid the girls, but they end up having a confrontation on the street. She exchanges words with Mary Louise, who used to be Squeaky's friend when she first moved to her neighborhood from Baltimore, about the May Day race and the conversation turns to Raymond. When Mary Louise tries to talk directly to Raymond, asking him what grade he is in, Squeaky snaps, "You got anything to say to my brother, you say it to me . . ."*

## SHARE

You'll probably want to use the share session to do two things. You'll want to teach responsively, and you'll want to rally kids to continue collecting evidence for their essays.

To teach responsively, plan to take all moves that any one student is making and broadcast them. For example, if you noticed that a student that day had been debating whether a moment showed a character's generosity or not, and the student had been thinking, "Was that really generosity or just being nice?" you could celebrate the importance of that effort. When engaged in argument, defining one's terms is a really important enterprise, and yes, it is impossible to debate a claim without clarifying what the terms of the claim mean. Before you can make the case that a character is generous, you need to clarify what the difference is between being generous and just being kind. Paying close attention to the exact meaning of the words used in a claim is a big deal. That means, of course, that to write the class essay, it will be important to examine what the term *protective* means. Is Squeaky being protective? Could her actions be described more accurately as vigilant? As cautionary? As thoughtful? As shielding?

One important thing to stress is that an essayist's claim evolves through this process. The work is not simply deciding which evidence best fits the claim; the work also involves reconsidering the initial claim in light of the evidence.



FIG. 5-2 Denise weighs the evidence for her essay.

## HOMework: GROWING EVIDENCE THAT FITS YOUR CLAIM

You'll want to set students up to continue growing evidence that fits their claim. You could suggest that before they go home, they need to do what people who cook do all the time. They need to think ahead to what they will be making tomorrow (an essay!) and whip up a quick shopping list of all the ingredients they need to produce that essay tomorrow. Only instead of getting their ingredients from a store, they'll need to produce them through their homework.

You could help them make a shopping list by telling them that to make a literary essay, they need certain things:

1. They need to be able to introduce the text. Usually this means they will write some background information about it—almost a little tiny report. The background information needs to include the author and the genre, and sometimes it includes a tiny summary of the story.
2. They need a boxes-and-bullets plan so they can write a thesis, a claim, early in their essay and then have a plan for how they will organize the evidence they bring in to support their claim. Will they be talking about the reasons for their claim, the ways it is true, the situations in which it is true, the way it is true in the start, the middle, the end of the story—or what?
3. For each part of their essay, they will need compelling evidence. Some of the evidence will be told in micro-stories, some in lists, some in quotations—and sometimes the evidence is told through a combination of those.
4. The evidence needs to come from all portions of the story: beginning, middle, and ending.

Enjoy designing and teaching the session!

Lucy, Kate, and Kathleen





## Session 6

# Studying a Mentor Text to Construct Literary Essays

IN THIS SESSION, you'll teach students that writers can study published literary essays to learn techniques and structures to bring to the work of drafting their own essays.

### GETTING READY

- ✓ A sample literary essay to use as a mentor text, one copy for each student. You could use the example in this session, one written by another student (available on CD-ROM), or one that you have crafted (see Teaching and Active Engagement).
- ✓ Pens (see Teaching and Active Engagement)
- ✓ "Things to Look for When Annotating a Mentor Essay" listed on chart paper (see Teaching and Active Engagement)
- ✓ Planning outline for mentor text, enlarged on chart paper (see Link)
- ✓ Colored pencils or markers (see Link)
- ✓ Copies of the Argument Writing Checklists for Grades 5 and 6, one per student, as well as an enlarged copy (see Share)

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:** W.6.1, W.6.4, W.6.5, W.6.9.a, W.6.10, RI.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.3, RL.6.10, SL.6.1, SL.6.2, SL.6.3, L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3

YOU CAN THINK of the work of making an essay as a bit like a barn raising. And if that analogy holds, it's time to build the barn. Your students have many of the materials they need, and they have the framework. Everything isn't done, no, but nothing will rally energy more than letting the work culminate in something that looks not like a lumberyard but like a barn, not like notebook entries but like an essay.

It is time for your students to roll up their sleeves and put this thing together.

Notice that what you are starting with is probably quite a mess. Students will have entries—outlines, lists, jots, blurbs—scattered across the pages of their notebooks. How do they tack all that stuff together when it is locked into the binding of a notebook? How is this thoughtful mess going to clean up into an architectural marvel?

It is tempting to distribute a worksheet that will tell writers that this next step is no big deal: they just pour everything into its proper place, and presto! But instead, we suggest you convey that the work ahead is challenging work. It is not for the faint of heart. The job is to do nothing less than turn notes and jottings into full-fledged drafts, and this requires some of the most intellectually demanding work of all. For example, students will need to read over all their evidence and think, "Which piece of evidence best matches my claim? What stays? What goes?" They also need to think about how evidence is bound together to make cohesive essays. After all, you have not yet taught transitions.

One way to develop the eye to judge is to spend some time reading finished work that is something similar to the essay they'll be writing, written by a mentor author. As they read, they'll ask, "How has she constructed this text? What has she done with her text that I, too, can do with mine?" And they will annotate that text for themselves. Then they will begin constructing their own essays.

As students draft, they will piece their material together. In earlier grades, this work may have been done in a hands-on, manipulative process. Today, however, your grown-up middle-schoolers will engage in a less physical process, doing more of this work in their mind's eye. Eventually, they'll abbreviate this process even more, moving seamlessly from reading and thinking to outlining and writing an essay.



## MINILESSON

# Studying a Mentor Text to Construct Literary Essays

## CONNECTION

**Celebrate that students are ready to construct their literary essays.**

"Writers, today's the day! If you think of the work of making an essay as a bit like a barn raising, then today, it's time to build the barn. You have the materials you need, and the framework. It is time for you to roll up your sleeves and put this thing together.

"Before you begin, though, I want to make sure you imagine how all the pieces will go together. I want to be sure you remember how barns look in the end (only, really, these aren't barns we are making but literary essays about characters).

"Mo Willems, an author of picture books for kids, once said, 'You work like the devil to make something that looks like you just threw it together.' In the end, your essay will look like it was no big deal to write—and months from now, the truth is that writing an essay like this one will be something you can practically do in your sleep—but for now, actually getting the little things right is a very big deal.

"So before you begin constructing your final essay, I want to suggest you take some time to study a completed essay."

### ✿ Name the question that will guide the inquiry.

"Today, then, instead of a regular minilesson, we will do an inquiry. We will be researching this question: What makes for a good literary essay? And what, exactly, does a writer do to go from making a claim and collecting evidence to actually constructing an essay?"

## TEACHING AND ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

**Set writers up to study a mentor text, letting them know that they should be thinking about the inquiry question.**

"I'm going to suggest that you do a specific kind of reading that writers do before they make a draft. Specifically, I suggest you look over this draft of a literary essay and ask, 'What has this author done that I, too, could do?' This is an

## ◆ COACHING

*Note how little quotes by authors help add meaning and a little spice to minilessons. So be sure that you have a place where you keep the gems that you run across so you can use them when you develop your own minilessons. Mo's books—Knufflebunny is one and a whole series of Pigeon books—are written for young readers (though adults love them too!). One wouldn't normally think of him as a resource for middle school kids, but in fact his insight is apt. So collect intriguing quotes even when they don't seem to be relevant, and you'll be pleasantly surprised one day when you're in need of inspiration and discover it in your quote collection.*

essay about 'Raymond's Run.' It'll be interesting to study an essay that was written off of a text we all know so well. Also, it was written by a student when she was in sixth grade; Yuko is an eighth-grader now. Lots of teachers have said that her essay is quite effective, so it is worth studying." I distributed a copy of Yuko's essay to each student and displayed an enlarged copy on the document camera.

"While I read the first three paragraphs of the essay aloud, notice the different parts of the essay, and label—annotate—what you notice. Listen closely to my intonation as I read aloud." I read the first two paragraphs aloud with intonation that highlighted the claim and its relationship to the supporting ideas, as well as the link between evidence and an idea. (The emphasis, in the essay below, is our own. Students will be annotating clean copies of the text.)

"Now, go ahead and read the rest of the essay on your own. When you finish reading, Partner 1, will you specifically study the bits the author has tacked together to construct her introduction and last body paragraph? And Partner 2, will you do the same for the middle portion of the essay? Think, 'What did the author do that I could try?' and afterward, we'll talk about it."

● In the story, "Raymond's Run," by Toni Cade Bambara, Squeaky, the protagonist, is a hard person to love. She is a hard person to love because she has a negative outlook on life, because she is always looking for a fight, and because she is conceited.

The most obvious reason why Squeaky is hard to love is because she has a negative outlook on life. Whenever she mentions someone, it seems like they are always "stupid," or a "fool." Also, Squeaky thinks that everyone is out to get her and Raymond. For example, when she is walking down the street and runs into some girls she knows, right away she starts thinking awful things about them, like that Mary Louise isn't "grateful" and that Rosie is "too stupid to know that there is not a big deal of difference between her and Raymond." Squeaky doesn't think kind thoughts about people, and she doesn't act kindly towards them either. We have all heard the phrase—"you can't love anyone else until you can love yourself." In this story we see that the opposite might be true too—it is impossible to be loveable if you don't show any love to others.

Furthermore, Squeaky is hard to love because she is combative—she is always looking for a fight. There are many times in the text where Squeaky mentions that she is ready to fight someone, that, in fact, she would "much rather just knock you down and take my chances" rather than talk about anything. At the beginning of the story, Squeaky says that if anyone has something to say about her brother, they have to come through her first. And then later on in the story when she and Raymond see the girls on the street, when Mary Louise asks Raymond what grade he is in, Squeaky says right away, "You got anything to say to my brother, you say it to me, Mary Louise Williams of Raggedy Town, Baltimore."

While as a reader, you kind of understand why Squeaky is so combative, that doesn't make it any easier to love her as a character. Sure, people are probably really mean to Raymond. And she definitely has a lot on her plate as a young kid. However, that doesn't make it right for her to always think about using violence and conflict to get her way. Just because we can understand why she is angry doesn't mean we agree with how she deals with her anger. Squeaky doesn't even give anyone a chance to be nice—it's as if she would rather fight than make friends. This also makes her a very hard character to love.

Finally, Squeaky is a hard character to love because she is pretty conceited. It seems like she is always bragging about her running in this text. Right away she says "There is no track meet that I don't win the first place medal." And even if this is true, the way she says it sounds kind of cocky. Like when she mentions that Gretchen even thinks she has a chance in beating her she calls the idea "ridiculous." And later, when she is talking to Mr. Pearson and he suggests that maybe she could let someone else have a chance this year, she is not gracious about it, she is not kind. Instead she gives him a nasty look and acts like he said something awful. She is so conceited about her running that she doesn't notice that he was just looking out for some of the other girls. Squeaky's ego is so big that it pushes all the love and compassion you might feel for her right out of the way. Her ego is like a force field protecting her, but that force field is also keeping everyone out.

As you can see, Squeaky is tough to love, because she sees the worst in people, she is always ready for a fight, and she is conceited. While at the end of the story she starts to change a little, by smiling at someone for the first time ever, she is still a hard person to love.

**Start annotating the enlarged copy of the essay to help students get started, then once they begin, listen and watch as they do this work and talk in pairs about their observations.**

I looked up at the students. "Annotate—mark up—your text." For a moment, I marked my own copy of the essay, then I began looking over to watch as kids worked. To scaffold them, I said, "Here are some of the terms you might use to annotate your essay," and I flipped over a new piece of chart paper to display this list. As I showed this list, I knew full well that it contained terms that the class did not necessarily know, and therefore I expected it would generate a lot of discussion.



I channeled students to share their observations with their partner, reminding them they could talk not only about what Yuko did, but also about what she did not yet do. I listened in as the partners talked.

Jamhil announced to his partner, “I noticed quotes.” Frankie nodded in agreement.

I gave them a thumbs up, then challenged them to extend their first observation. “If you look closely at a quoted section of the text, you can notice *how* the author quoted that part.” I said, then voiced over, “Don’t just notice what the author did. Notice *how* she did it. Why is this considered well-done work?”

Soon the students were noticing instances when the cited text was just part of a sentence and other instances when it was several sentences. “What ideas do you have for why Yuko would quote the parts that she did?” I asked. The students launched into a discussion of that. I gestured for them to think how Yuko’s work might influence what they did when their evidence involved quoting parts of the story and left to crouch down next to another group.

*Of course, Yuko’s essay follows just one of many possible structures that literary essayists use—and in fact, hers is a relatively simple one. More experienced essayists entertain points of view other than their own and then provide a counterargument; they compare and contrast one text to other texts, or to life. Then, too, they often raise questions in their conclusions or land new insights. Don’t worry about this right now. Soon you will enter a new bend, and with it will come a focus on more complex, theme-based essays—ones that will invite new formats and extended features of essay construction. In Bend III, you will introduce compare-and-contrast essays. For now, it’s enough that students see what a finished draft resembles, noticing some of its component parts.*



### Share some students' observations.

After a bit, I called the writers back together and asked Crystal to get us started saying what she noticed. "I noticed that the essay included what the character didn't do," she began. When I gestured for her to elaborate, she read from the essay, "Squeaky *doesn't* think kind thoughts about people, and she *doesn't* act kindly toward them either. This makes her very hard to love." When I asked why she thought Yuko did this, she said she figured that Yuko did this to highlight what the character *did* do.

Interested, I said to the rest of the class, "Hands up if you noticed that, too." I marked the essay with Crystal's observation.

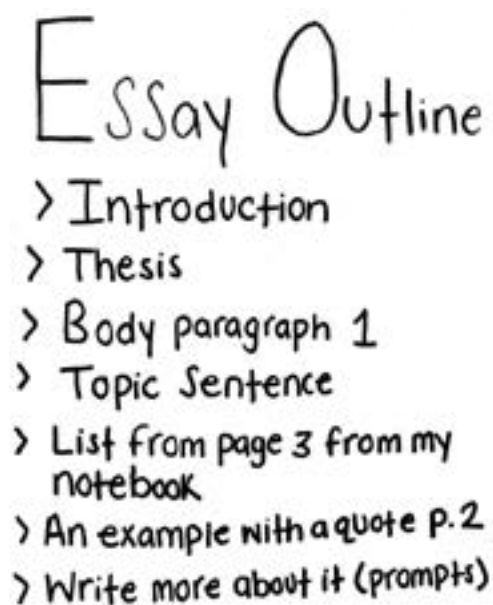
Then, I gave a marker to three other students, asking them to cluster around the document camera, jotting one thing they noticed into the margins of the essay. "Don't forget to use some of the terms that are listed on the 'Things to Look for When Annotating a Mentor Essay' chart. Where do you see 'background information on the text'? Where is the 'analysis of evidence'?" While they worked, I suggested the rest of the class share their annotations with anyone sitting near them in such a way that they, too, could mark new stuff onto their copy of Yuko's text if they agreed with it. Soon each student's copy of Yuko's essay (and the class copy of it as well) bore labels.

### LINK

**Show writers the plan that undergirded the student's exemplar essay that they just studied, and suggest writers prepare to revise their own plans to include elements they may have neglected to include. Tell them that then they will write their essays.**

"Before Yuko began writing her essay, she wrote a quick outline to follow as she wrote. She sketched out how her essay would go, jotting key words such as *introduction*, *thesis*, *new paragraph*, *topic sentence*.

"The start of her outline for her essay looked something like this." I revealed the sheet of chart paper where I had jotted down the outline.



Essay Outline

- > Introduction
- > Thesis
- > Body paragraph 1
- > Topic Sentence
- > List from page 3 from my notebook
- > An example with a quote p. 2
- > Write more about it (prompts)

*I'm aware that giving students opportunities to share their ideas with the whole class can be very time-consuming. My top priority—always—is to keep all students engaged and to protect writing time, so here I make a concerted effort to support both goals.*

“Writers, you have the start to a plan for your essay. Please revise that plan to add elements to it that you may have forgotten, and then spend most of your time today writing your draft. And don’t forget, you have so many great ideas already written in your writer’s notebooks. Don’t let those ideas go to waste. You may want to use colored pencils or markers to go back through your notebook, reading closely, finding entries or portions of entries that can go directly into your draft and color-coding these ideas. Pick a color for your first bullet and then use that same color to mark each supporting entry you find. And keep going with different colors for each bullet and supporting entry. Some of these entries may be in great shape and can go directly into your draft, as is. And some color-coded entries may simply provide you with a starting point and may need further revision as you incorporate them into your draft.”

*You’ll be amazed at how the invitation to use colored pencils to code entries spurs students on to work with great fervor. The notebooks also begin to look more beautiful and personalized, and that leads students to love them more. Writer and educator Peter Elbow once pointed out that it is important for writers to love their writing, because they’ll be more game to work at it if they love it. So even if the colored pencils feel a bit over the top—go for it.*



## CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

# Small Groups to Support Students as They Draft

AS STUDENTS CONTINUE DRAFTING in light of the mentor essay, you will find that a few of your young writers just plain freeze up. This is predictable; you have directed your class up until now to write essays with a great deal of direction, and now here you are showing them an exemplar and saying, “Do what you will!” For a sixth-grader, this can be an intimidating task. The fear of making the wrong choice can be paralyzing for the best of us, and our students are no different.

As you pull a small group of students who are having a tough time making their own choices, your main goal is not to make sure they have chosen the “right” or even “best” strategy to make their writing better, but to build their confidence that as writers new (or new-ish) to essays, they have the ability to read a mentor text, identify something that looks like it might help their writing, and implement that strategy right away. This skill—this independence and transference—is far more important than any one particular line or strategy that you might compel them to use in this particular essay.

Start your small group by relaxing the pressure a bit. You might start by saying something like, “We are going to work together today to help each other choose something that Yuko did in her essay that you think will be good in yours. And here is the best part—there is absolutely no way you can make a mistake today, unless you choose not to even try.” Then coach your students to repeat what they noticed in Yuko’s essay during the lesson, perhaps listing what they say on a piece of paper or white board. Follow up by saying, “Now, turn and talk to the person sitting next to you. Which of these things do you think would help you make your writing better today? And if you can, say a little bit about why.”

Then, after the mid-workshop teaching point channels students to note their transitions, you may want to convene another small group and invite them to work together to study more closely the transitions that Yuko used in her essay. You can get them to notice even little details like the commas, which can signal to readers that the text is  
*(continues)*

### MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING Using Transitional Phrases

“Many of you noticed Yuko’s transitional phrases at the start of each major part of her essay, which is something most of you learned during fifth grade, to include in your writing. But you are right to remind yourself of the importance of transitional phrases because they help essays flow more smoothly and they set readers up to know what kind of thing will come next in the essay.

“Right now, will you and your partner do a quick study of one of your drafts (it can even be of your essay plan) and notice your transitions, comparing them to Yuko’s?

Her transitions are not very fancy, so I am pretty sure some of you will have much more sophisticated ones. Turn and talk!”

I quickly navigated the room, moving from table to table as partners shared their writing with one another. I helped Jacquelyn notice that Yuko used prompts to transition into her supporting reasons, using “Furthermore . . .,” while her partner, Theo, used “. . . this proves that . . .” and “for example . . .” to connect his evidence to his claim. I coached Theo to help Jacquelyn find places where she might include similar transitions.

about to say more, to give them more information, to show an example. Bring students together with a copy of the mentor essay and point to the phrase you want them to notice first.

*Furthermore, Squeaky is hard to love because she is combative—she is always looking for a fight. There are many times in the text where Squeaky mentions that she is ready to fight someone, that, in fact, she would “much rather just knock you down and take my chances” rather than talk about anything. At the beginning of the story, Squeaky says that if anyone has something to say about her brother, they have to come through her first. And then later on in the story when she and Raymond see the girls on the street, when Mary Louise asks Raymond what year he will be in, Squeaky says right away, “You got anything to say to my brother, you say it to me, Mary Louise Williams of Raggedy Town, Baltimore.”*

“See, right there at the start of the paragraph Yuko uses the word *furthermore*, instead of saying something like ‘Another reason is . . .’ The comma signifies that Yuko is about to say more. And *furthermore* has a cool ring to it. It sounds like you are so confident in your thinking that you are almost saying, ‘Not *only* am I right because of this last thing I said, there is even more that shows how right I am!’ This is powerful academic language that I bet you could use as well. Let’s take a second with Yuko’s essay. With your partner, can you underline any other places where she uses a powerful transition word or phrase?”

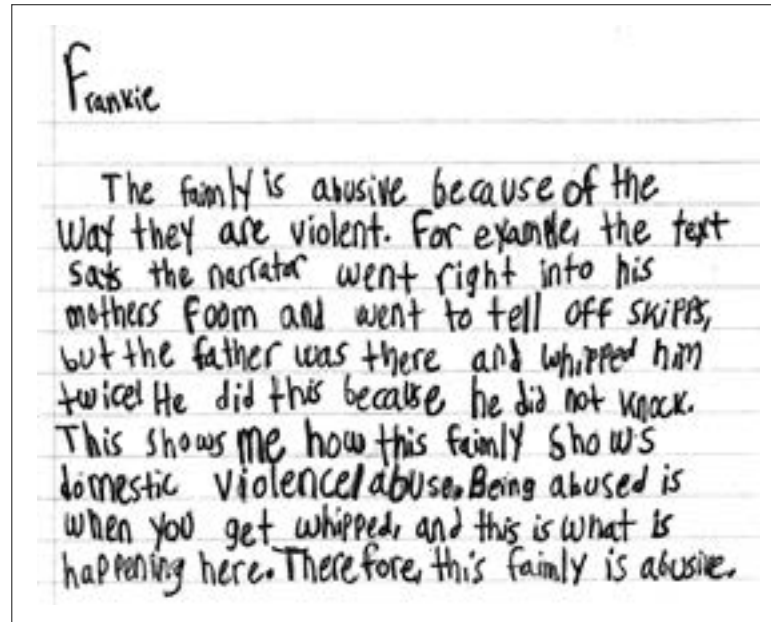
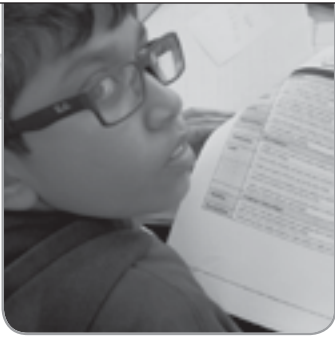


FIG. 6–1 Frankie’s body paragraph after studying a mentor essay



## SHARE

# Using a Checklist for Self-Analysis and Goal-Setting

**Emphasize to students that anyone who is looking to improve, no matter what their discipline, takes the time to look back over their past work or performances and analyze what their strengths and weaknesses are.**

"Anyone who is looking to improve at something—running, playing the violin, boxing, singing—needs not just to work hard, but also to take pause, reflecting on what they have accomplished so far and making a plan for how to push themselves further.

"As you know, writers also need to pause and think, 'How am I doing?' When you wrote personal narratives, you analyzed your writing against a narrative checklist; there are also checklists you can use for other kinds of writing.

"The interesting thing about writing about reading is that, in a way, it falls into two categories. It can be information writing because the writer is teaching people about a text. Also, literary essays can be thought of as argument writing, because the writer is defending his interpretation. For now, we are going to think about literary essays as argument writing, and so I am hoping you will assess the draft that you have written so far by comparing it to the checklist that writers use at the very end of fifth grade. Once you have aced that checklist and I've taught you a few more strategies, you can compare your writing to the sixth-grade argument checklist—and to parts of the information checklist as well. You'll also see the grade 6 checklist here. Once you make sure you're doing the work you learned last year, then you can move on to using the grade 6 checklist.

"Let's start with the first part of the checklist—structure." I pointed to the first section on the enlarged copy of the Argument Writing Checklist. "Before you look at your own writing, talk to the writers at your table about those points. What do you notice? What will you look for in your own writing?" I gave the students a minute to discuss, then reconvened the group.

"Now that you have a sense of some of the things that are expected of essayists, take a look at the structure of your writing. How does it stack up? If you met the criteria, how did you do it? What are the replicable moves for future essays? And if you didn't yet meet the criteria, what specifically could you do to improve? Don't be afraid to mark up your drafts as well as your copy of the checklist, circling the goals you have for yourself, or making a T-chart in your notebook to keep track of your progress."

As students worked with the checklist, I circulated around the classroom, leaning in and nudging students along, constantly asking them to show me *evidence* of the checkpoints in their drafts or prompting them to formulate ideas for what they might do to improve.

SESSION 6: STUDYING A MENTOR TEXT TO CONSTRUCT LITERARY ESSAYS

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**Argument Writing Checklist**

	Grade 5	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!	Grade 6	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!
	<b>Structure</b>				<b>Structure</b>			
<b>Overall</b>	I made a claim or thesis on a topic or text, supported it with reasons, and provided a variety of evidence for each reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I explained the topic/text and staked out a position that can be supported by a variety of trustworthy sources. Each part of my text helped build my argument, and leads to a conclusion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Lead</b>	I wrote an introduction that led to a claim or thesis and got my readers to care about my opinion. I got my readers to care by not only including a cool fact or jazzy question, but also by telling readers what was significant in or around the topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I wrote an introduction to interest readers and help them understand and care about a topic or text. I thought backwards between the piece and the introduction to make sure that the introduction fits with the whole.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I worked to find the precise words to state my claim; I let readers know the reasons I would develop later.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not only did I clearly state my claim, I also told my readers how my text would unfold.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Transitions</b>	I used transition words and phrases to connect evidence back to my reasons using phrases such as <i>this shows that...</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I used transitions to help readers understand how the different parts of my piece fit together to explain and support my argument.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I helped readers follow my thinking with phrases such as <i>another reason</i> and <i>the most important reason</i> . I used phrases such as <i>consequently</i> and <i>because of</i> to show what happened.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I used transitions to help connect claim(s), reasons, and evidence, and to imply relationships such as when material exemplifies, adds on to, is similar to, explains, is a result of, or contrasts. I use transitions such as <i>for instance</i> , <i>in addition</i> , <i>one reason</i> , <i>furthermore</i> , <i>according to</i> , <i>this evidence suggests</i> , and <i>thus we can say that</i> .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I used words such as <i>specifically</i> and <i>in particular</i> to be more precise.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

## SESSION 6 HOMEWORK

### EVALUATING YOUR WRITING USING THE ARGUMENT WRITING CHECKLIST

“Writers, continue this self-analysis at home. Look through the remaining points on the checklist, and determine the work you are already doing well, as well as the work you’re going to push yourself to do next. Remember, when you hold your writing up against a checklist, it’s not just so you can say, ‘Oh yeah, I did that,’ and move on. Tomorrow you will have time to revise your essays and work toward the goals you’ll set for yourself tonight. We will also have an opportunity to celebrate your hard work tomorrow!”

## Session 7

# Revising Essays to Be Sure You Analyze as Well as Cite Text Evidence



ONE OF THE CHALLENGES of teaching middle school is that even if students do enter the school having grown up within a strong writing community, something seems to happen between fifth grade and sixth, and the kids need to be reminded of all they know and can do. Prior to now, one focus of this unit was geared toward bringing your students back up to speed. It's not accidental that they didn't assess their essay writing to see if it met end of fifth-grade standards on their Argument Writing Checklists until the session prior to this one!

Today's session, on the other hand, is clearly meant to push forward, and it pushes forward in the one area that will be especially challenging for your students and for middle school students in general. The topic you teach on today is not one of those things where you can show an example of what you hope kids can do and then presto, they do it! This work is challenging; in fact, of all the work of essay writing, analyzing evidence is often the toughest for many teachers and writers. And so, across this session you will offer students other ways of connecting evidence to ideas. This session conveys to students that the true heart of an essay is the degree to which it provides analysis of why or how the evidence chosen supports the claim and reasoning. To that effect, then, today you will teach your class to connect two parts of an essay together through writing—the angled evidence they have gathered and the reasoning that holds that paragraph together.

You'll start the session by communicating to your students that making a claim and supporting it with an example from this story is not, in and of itself, enough. What's needed is for the writer to “unpack” the example, looking closely at the precise words that the author has used, the decisions the author has made, to help essay readers see that evidence as the essayist sees it.

You'll teach students to use some “analytic phrases” that can help them begin to do this work. Some of these aren't new, although they used to be referred to simply as “thought prompts.” In prior years, students were taught to “unpack” a bit of evidence by saying “This shows . . .” Now, however, you'll suggest that the essayist actually has to *make* that case. How, exactly, does the evidence support the essayist's ideas?

SESSION 7: REVISING ESSAYS TO BE SURE YOU ANALYZE AS WELL AS CITE TEXT EVIDENCE

IN THIS SESSION, you'll teach students that essayists often revise their essays to make sure they explain *why* and *how* the evidence connects with, or supports, their claim.

### GETTING READY

- ✓ Passages from your own literary essay, enlarged for students to see (see Teaching and Active Engagement)
- ✓ “Ways to Analyze Evidence” chart (see Teaching)
- ✓ Students' drafts and short texts that they are writing their essays on and pens (see Active Engagement)
- ✓ Chart paper with several counterargument thought prompts listed (see Mid-Workshop Teaching)
- ✓ Student writing sample that shows evidence of a counterargument (see Mid-Workshop Teaching)
- ✓ Clean copies of the Argument Writing Checklist, Grades 5 and 6, one per student (see Share)

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:** W.6.1.a,b,c; W.6.5, W.7.1.a, RL.6.1, RL.6.2, SL.6.1, SL.6.3, L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3, L.6.6



As part of this, you'll suggest that writers need to entertain the notion that others could see that passage as illustrating a different point altogether. In the mid-workshop teaching point, you make the suggestion that by anticipating a counterargument, writers are more apt to be persuasive. You also point out that one of the counterarguments that an essayist can anticipate is the view that the data actually shows something close, but different. Is Squeaky actually protective of her brother, or might there be a more precise term?

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*"The true heart of an essay is the degree to which it provides analysis of why or how the evidence chosen supports the claim and reasoning."*

Today's session focuses on teaching students to "unpack" their evidence and explain the connections between their evidence and their claims, but meanwhile you'll also remind writers that just yesterday, they concluded the workshop by using a checklist to assess their own essay. That self-assessment work will have led most writers to see possible next steps, and they'll be revising to do that work, as well as to do the work your minilesson revolves around.



## MINILESSON

# Revising Essays to Be Sure You Analyze as Well as Cite Text Evidence

### CONNECTION

**Convey to your students that being able to express themselves clearly lends power to their essays—and also to their own lives.**

"When I was your age, there were these times when I said to my mother, 'Why do I have to . . .?', and her only answer was, 'Because I said so, that's why.' It was as if my mother was saying, 'Why? Because I am the grown-up and you are the kid and you have to do as you are told.'"

"Has that ever happened to you? You ask *why* and there is no good reason except, 'Because I said so.' It is really frustrating, right?" The class erupted into stories of guardians and older siblings who had used this phrase often—and apparently unfairly. Above the clamor I gathered their attention.

"Oh my—that certainly struck a chord! Here's my point. When I read over the drafts you're planning to revise today, it seemed to me that sometimes *you* are doing the same thing that makes you so mad. Sometimes you are making claims—'Squeaky is protective of herself,' 'Jim Howe is different than the other men in his family because his ideas about what it means to be a man are different'—and you plop in stuff from the story that you think makes your point, but the reader is left unconvinced. The reader is left thinking, 'So? You still haven't convinced me why your claim is true.'"

### ✿ Name the teaching point.

"Today I want to teach you that when an essayist makes a claim and includes evidence to support that claim, that alone doesn't convince readers that the claim is justified. Essayists often revise their essays to make sure they explain *why* (and how) the evidence connects with, or supports, the claim."

### ◆ COACHING

*Sometimes you begin a connection with a story about your life at your students' age that may at first seem to have nothing to do with the minilesson, but by the end leads directly to your teaching point. Once your students are hooked by your story—and they will be since it's about you, and moreover, you as an adolescent!—they'll be better able to grasp your teaching point.*

## TEACHING

**Name the work of the day: analyzing the evidence from the text by explaining how it illustrates the support for your claim.**

"It can be tricky to learn how to analyze evidence. Let me show you how I get started. The work here is to explain how the scene from the text—my evidence—fits with the thinking in this paragraph and, of course, with my claim. Here is part of the draft that I wrote yesterday—my thinking and my evidence."

*Squeaky's protectiveness of herself also drives her to push people away. For example, in the scene where she is talking to Mr. Pearson before the race, and he asks (jokingly) if she will let someone else win, Squeaky stares him down like he is an idiot. She is so angry that he would even suggest that she not win, that she glares at him until he stops talking!*

"So first I want to just name to myself what my work is here. What am I trying to explain? I am trying to explain how the scene with Mr. Pearson shows her pushing people away *and* that this is an example of her being protective." I lifted a finger for each point to highlight that there are two ideas being addressed. "Whoa. That's a lot to explain. No wonder this work is hard!

"I have a feeling we can learn the most from each other today. Can you take a second with your partner right now and try explaining how this scene shows Squeaky pushing people away and that she is protective? Remember, you are trying to really say *how* or *why* this scene shows the idea. Try to avoid saying 'Because I said so!' One way you can start is by using the phrase, 'This shows . . . because . . .'"

The class began to talk, hesitantly at first, so I moved to some partnerships and gave them encouragement and a little push to try out some thinking. I gathered the class together after listening to a few other examples and asked Brian and Janessa to share what they were thinking.

They furrowed their brows. Janessa, looking a little unsure, said, "Um, this shows that . . . Squeaky pushes people away because maybe Mr. Pearson was just trying to be nice to the other girls?" Brian added in, "And she just is so mean to him like no one else matters but her, which definitely pushes him away." I nodded and gathered the class' attention.

"So many of you made a great start to analyzing your evidence. Brian and Janessa used the prompt that said 'This shows . . .'. Does anyone have another explanation for this scene?" I nodded toward Sarah and Jaz.

Jaz started. "Being protective means always watching out for danger, so this scene definitely shows Squeaky being protective. Like, if Squeaky lost the race, and lost it on purpose, her reputation as a star runner would be in danger. So this scene shows how Squeaky is protecting herself."

"Wow, guys, did you catch that? Sarah and Jaz actually tried to define what we meant when we said *protective*. "What a great strategy! Here are some others you could try."

*It is vital that I name what it is that my evidence is supposed to illustrate—without this clarity any analysis will remain vague.*

*Of course, I had coached Sarah and Jaz to think about the definitions of words as a way to help explain their evidence, but as I gather the class together I name this strategy as theirs. Having ownership over the work you are doing is an important element of engagement. That being said, as students are talking today, you will want to have the strategies and prompts in your mind so that you can help students to try them on the fly, thereby creating "student-owned" strategies that are also ones you would like the whole class to try.*



## Ways to Analyze Evidence

This shows... because...

It is important to notice...

\_\_\_\_\_ means \_\_\_\_\_, therefore \_\_\_\_\_

This is significant because...

Even though... (the character)...

"So let's keep going now. Can you try again with your partner, doing the same work? But this time see if you can add onto your explanation by using one of these prompts."

Diamond took charge of her partnership, and so when we came together again I asked her to share her thinking. She said confidently, "I think this scene shows that Squeaky thinks she is protecting herself, but really she is almost building a wall around her. Not that she wants to be friends with Mr. Pearson, but by being so rude, even if you think you are being protective, you are really just making people not like you." I nodded and said, "Which of these prompts might help you close up your thought, Diamond?"

"Oh. Um. I could say, 'This is significant because . . . even though she thinks her rudeness is protecting her . . . um . . . all she winds up being is rude . . . and alone!'"

"Wow!" I said "That was awesome! It's like the prompt just got that brilliant thought right out of your head! Nice work!" Diamond beamed.

## ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

**Help students as they work with partners to analyze how a scene supports the rationale for a claim, using thought prompts to push their thinking.**

"Right now, will you find the first place in your draft where you supplied evidence? Go to the end of that part of the essay and put a star there. That's the first place where you are going to need to analyze your evidence. So right now, will Partner 1 read aloud your evidence, and then, Partner 2, will you toss your partner one of the thought prompts? One you think might work to get your partner analyzing the evidence. Partner 1, repeat your evidence, then take whatever thought prompt your partner threw your way, repeat it, and keep talking as long as you can. When Partner 1 slows

*I urge Diamond to use a prompt here in order to help her focus her big ideas into a powerful line. Often, when students begin to explain their thinking they start to ramble. Making their thinking fit a thought prompt can help with this.*

down, Partner 2, throw another thought prompt, one you think will keep the writer analyzing the evidence. Do this for as long as it seems to work. Then if there is time, switch roles."

I walked over to David and Devin. David was looking at his paper, reading the scene he selected. "James wants to do the right thing. For example, even when he is going with the gang he knows it's wrong and is worried."

Devin said, "Um, 'this shows . . .'"

David looked annoyed and thoughtful. "This shows . . . that James knows it is wrong and feels bad."

"Keep going!" I said to Devin.

"Ok. Try 'Even though . . . (the character) . . .'"

David sighed. "Even though. Uh, even though James wants to be bad and join the gang, he can't, because deep down he is a too good a person."

"See that?" I said. "Good work."

## LINK

**Remind students of the importance of analyzing their evidence to provide their readers with a more compelling argument in support of their claim.**

"As you continue to revise your essays, remember that it's not enough to just plop that evidence right into your piece. The analysis of the evidence, the *how* and *why* of it, is what is really going to convince your readers that your thinking is real and true. And this goes not just for writing, but for life. The 'because I said so' reasoning is super frustrating. Supporting your reason with the *why* of it is just as important as the reason itself.

"At the end of the workshop today, you're going to have some time to share your essays with a few others. Be sure to work now to make your essay as powerful and convincing as you can. Think about the goals that you set for yourself last night when you analyzed your writing using the Argument Writing Checklist."

*Assuming one partner as "the thinker" and one as "the prompter" helps focus their work, as it allows for fun discoveries. Making your active engagement as active as possible helps keep your class attuned to the work of the session.*



## CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

# Troubleshooting Common Problems with Analysis of Evidence

AS STUDENTS BEGIN TO WORK ON THIS DAY, you will notice two major issues arising. First, there will be your students who have trouble taking the plunge into explaining and analyzing evidence. They will need a bit of cheerleading, a little support.

Try ushering these students to look at the “Ways to Analyze Evidence” chart, putting a bit of pressure on them by saying, “Choose one that looks good now and try it out. Don’t worry too much about whether it is the perfect one yet.”

(continues)

### MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING Considering the Counterargument

“Writers, I know you are trying to come up with ways to write about how your evidence fits your claim, and you have so far been using thought prompts to help you begin to do the thinking you need to do between what the evidence is and the point you are trying to make. This part that you are working on—explaining your evidence in convincing ways—is the crux of what makes your essay feel like it is the work of a middle school writer. This is the really challenging part of the whole unit, up to this point.

“So I want to give you another tip. You are essentially arguing *for* something, and one of the best ways to argue *for* something is to imagine what the counterargument might be. So it really helps to entertain an opposing idea and to then come up with ways to counter that point of view, to talk back to it.

“There are, again, phrases you might use to put out an opposing view.” I flipped to the sheet of chart paper where I had jotted some counterargument thought prompts.

*Some people might interpret this differently. They might argue that this passages shows not that . . . but that . . .*

*Some people might suggest that this shows . . . but I disagree because if that was the case, then . . . I think this shows . . .*

“You can also pose a counterargument by suggesting some people would differ on the precise term that you use in your claim. Earlier, when I looked over Miguel’s

shoulder, he was wrestling with whether his character’s behavior was *generous* or just generally *kind*. In the same way, you could put forth the notion that some people might suggest your character’s behavior can best be characterized a bit differently. Again, posing that argument allows you to defend the choice you have made.

“Listen to the way Jaz uses counterargument in this essay about *Fly Away Home*. When you notice her use of counterargument, give me a signal.” I read:

*The Dad in Fly Away Home is not that great a father because he is teaching his son to lie, to hide, to break the law. For example, when they are in the Mall and they notice people looking at them, the son says, “We know how not to get noticed.” This shows that the son is almost proud of the fact that they know how to sneak around. I know a lot of people will say that the Dad is doing what he can to keep his kid dry and safe, and that this makes it all worth it, but I disagree. I think there are always choices in life, and that while it is great that the Dad is giving his son a place to sleep, it is not great that he is teaching him how to be deceptive.*

“Jaz imagined what someone who disagreed with her might say and then answered that disagreement ahead of time. This is called rebutting the counterargument, and it is an effective way to make your essays even stronger.”

Some students will lose the grip of structure in their paragraphs, adding the explanation before the evidence, or in the middle, or in some odd spot that does not make sense. Many times this indicates that the writer does not really understand how a body paragraph works, or even what the different parts are and how they relate to each other. You can help these students by simply coaching them to identify the evidence in their paragraphs, asking them to actually point out those spots, and then gently reminding them that often essayists put their explanations after their evidence. Invitations to study completed essays help as well.

The second very predictable problem—and much tougher issue—is that as they begin to explain their evidence, their thinking goes a little off track. Their body paragraph is about how the character is caring because she helps others, but then in their explanation they begin discussing the character's sadness. When this happens, you can gather your small group together, asking them to take a moment and point out or underline the word or words in the first line of the body paragraph that they are trying to explain, for example, *caring* and *helping others*. Then, ask your students to reflect on their analysis, asking, "Did I explain what I was supposed to explain?" Hopefully your students will recognize that they have gone off the beam a bit, and you can redirect them to try again.

If they do not recognize their misstep, you could check in on how well they are understanding their original ideas. For example, when working with Yeiry, I coached her to tell me a bit about what it means to be caring, and she said, "it means that you, well you care about people and you help them and are nice to them." It was an easy transition for me to ask, "And how is this scene of Doris trying to keep the dog in 'Stray' a good example of that?" She responded by saying, "She is trying to save the dog, which is a way of helping others, so that is caring." I ushered her to write her thoughts in the margins of her essay.

A final thought about these conferences and small groups in which you are going to push your students to analyze and explain: while you will teach and coach and offer support and encouragement, it is true that for some of your students, their analysis will not quite be as airtight as you might have wished. And for sure, when this happens, you will push your students to notice the tangents, to try to get their thinking in line with their essay. But at the same time you will want above all to celebrate the attempts your students make, even allowing for some sloppy thinking here and there in the efforts to get your class more comfortable with having this kind of thinking in their essays in the first place. Remember that this work—analyzing and explaining—is both terribly



FIG. 7-1 Yeiry works to explain her evidence.

difficult for all writers and perhaps the most important part of an essay as students get older. Certainly we strive for perfection here, but if the work is terribly important while also being terribly difficult, we might need to also celebrate the approximations our kids make along the way, so that they have the confidence to try again next time. This is a process in which students gradually build competence and confidence.



## SHARE

# Giving Feedback Using the Checklist

**Give students the opportunity to share their essays in small groups, using the Argument Writing Checklist as a guideline to offer compliments and feedback to each other.**

"Class, right now, will you grab your pens and the essays you've been working so hard to revise and get ready to share? Join me in the meeting area." Once the students had gathered, I began. "Yesterday, you had the chance to use the Argument Writing Checklist to look back at your work and set goals. I am so impressed by each of you and the hard work you've done, not just today, but all week, thinking about ways to make your essays clearer, more organized, and more compelling."

I leaned in, as if to deliver the best news of the hour. "Right now, you'll share your first pieces with one another, to show off all you've already learned to do as an essayist, as well as the work you're still striving toward. In just a moment, you'll meet in small groups, taking turns reading aloud. And, partners, your job as a listener will be to notice the impressive work your friend is doing as a writer so that you can give the kind of compliment that really matters, one that shows you know this kind of writing well. I have a fresh copy of the Argument Writing Checklist for each of you to use as you listen to one another share. You can mark it with stars to help you listen closely and remember the compliments you'll give at the end."

I gestured toward each student, placing them quickly into groups of three or four, as they clustered into spots around the room. I moved from one group to the next, gesturing toward a specific point on the

*Create an opportunity for students to share their writing with an audience, celebrating their hard work thus far and reminding themselves of the goals they'll carry on into the next bend. You may have students sit in small groups of three or four writers, asking each to take turns reading their essay aloud, while the others use the Argument Writing Checklist to give feedback in the form of a specific compliment.*

**Argument Writing Checklist**

	Grade 5	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!	Grade 6	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!
	<b>Structure</b>				<b>Structure</b>			
<b>Overall</b>	I made a claim or thesis on a topic or text, supported it with reasons, and provided a variety of evidence for each reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I explained the topic/text and staked out a position that can be supported by a variety of trustworthy sources. Each part of my text helped build my argument, and leads to a conclusion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Lead</b>	I wrote an introduction that led to a claim or thesis and got my readers to care about my opinion. I got my readers to care by not only including a cool fact or jazzy question, but also by telling readers what was significant in or around the topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I wrote an introduction to interest readers and help them understand and care about a topic or text. I thought backwards between the piece and the introduction to make sure that the introduction fits with the whole.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I worked to find the precise words to state my claim; I let readers know the reasons I would develop later.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not only did I clearly state my claim, I also told my readers how my text would unfold.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Transitions</b>	I used transition words and phrases to connect evidence back to my reasons using phrases such as <i>this shows that...</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I used transitions to help readers understand how the different parts of my piece fit together to explain and support my argument.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I helped readers follow my thinking with phrases such as <i>another reason</i> and <i>the most important reason</i> . I used phrases such as <i>consequently</i> and <i>because of</i> to show what happened.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I used transitions to help connect claim(s), reasons, and evidence, and to imply relationships such as when material exemplifies, adds on to, is similar to, explains, is a result of, or contrasts. I use transitions such as <i>for instance</i> , <i>in addition</i> , <i>one reason</i> , <i>furthermore</i> , <i>according to</i> , <i>this evidence suggests</i> , and <i>thus we can say that</i> .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I used words such as <i>specifically</i> and <i>in particular</i> to be more precise.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				



checklist as I heard clear indicators, or paused students as they read aloud, asking partners to reflect for a moment or listen once more as students reread key parts.

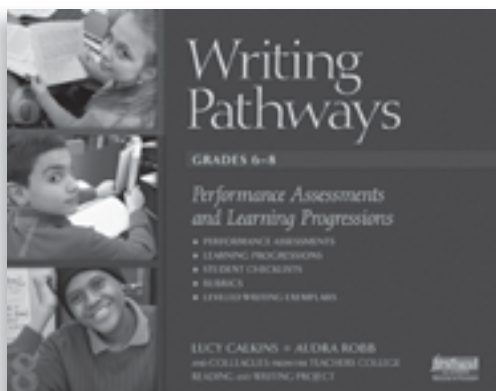
## SESSION 7 HOMEWORK

### CELEBRATING PROGRESS AND TRACKING ONGOING GOALS

“Tonight, to celebrate your hard work as an essayist, read your piece once again to someone at home or show it to a friend or relative online. Use the checklist to show off what you’ve done really well. You might even share the compliments you received today from your friends. Then, using the checklist, track the goals you set and think about how you’ll continue to work toward these goals as we move into the next part of this unit. Jot your plan in your notebook or use Post-its on your copy of the checklist.”







*Writing Pathways* is designed to help you provide your students with continuous assessment, feedback, and goal setting. Organized around a 6–8 continuum of learning progressions for argument, information, and narrative writing, this practical guide includes **benchmark student texts, writing checklists, learning progressions, and rubrics** that will help you evaluate your students' work and establish where students are in their writing development.

*“The assessment system that undergirds this curriculum is meant as an instructional tool. It makes progress in writing as transparent, concrete, and obtainable as possible and puts ownership for this progress into the hands of learners. This system of assessment demystifies the Common Core State Standards, allowing students and teachers to work toward a very clear image of what good work entails.”*

A benchmark piece of writing for each writing genre shows how one piece of writing could develop according to the learning progressions established by the Common Core State Standards.

## Grade 6

The writer's introduction helps the reader understand and care about the topic. The writer clearly thought through his entire argument, ensuring the points made in the opening fit the whole of the piece.

The writer used transitional phrases to help the reader understand how each part fits with the next.

The writer included and arranged a variety of evidence to support his claim. He used trusted sources and information from authorities on the topic, citing those sources as needed.

The writer explained why and how various pieces of evidence support his points, explaining which evidence supports which point.

The writer's conclusion restates the main points of the essay and may offer a lingering thought or a new insight for the reader. The ending adds to and strengthens the argument as a whole.

Until two weeks ago, sixth graders could be found tossing footballs, running for touchdowns, and working through sports-related conflicts. Recess was a time to play, learn, and exercise. Then, football was banned for being “too dangerous.” Now you'll find us lounging on the grass and wishing for something to fill our time with. What the adults at M.S. 293 need to understand is that football is not dangerous. In fact, it is great for kids. Football is a good source of exercise, is a game that everyone can participate in, and helps you learn important life lessons.

The first reason football should not be banned from recess is because it is great exercise. The *TIME for Kids* article, “First Lady Fights Fat in Kids,” talks about the different ways that Mrs. Obama is fighting obesity in America. One of the reasons kids get obese is because they don't get enough exercise. This shows how important sports like football are. Also, Sam Rapoport, a senior manager for USA Football says “Football is great exercise.” Teachers and kids could play together and everyone would be more active. We need football so we don't grow up to be unhealthy and get diseases like diabetes or heart disease.

Another reason we should be able to play football during recess is because everyone can play. You don't need to spend money on fancy equipment or uniforms. Football will not cost the school any money. Football has big teams so it doesn't leave anyone out like other games. Just picture it: Every child in sixth grade invited to play together! Whether you are a great player or a beginner, there is always a place for you on the team! Some people think football is only for boys, but that's not true. Out of 25 kids, all 25 said they wanted football. Even my mom and sister love to play. This proves that football is a valuable part of recess and should not be banned.

The final and most important reason why we should have football is because it will help us learn important things. For example, we can learn to solve problems. For instance, sometimes a play is made and both teams argue because they think they should get the point. This gives kids a chance to work out their problems on their own and make a solution. In “Flag Football: It's the Girls' Turn to Play,” Christine McAndrews, a parent, argues that football is good for kids. She says that “It's great for their social skills and they resolve things on their own. It's good for them.” As a parent, she should know. This proves that football can teach us a lot.

Please allow football again at recess. We will be healthier, stronger kids if you do. We will get more exercise, we will build community, and we will learn important skills. These are lessons we need, and as long as we are careful, we can be safe. Please take the football ban away and let us play again.

Sources:

- “First Lady Fights Fat in Kids.” *TIME for Kids* (2010)
- “Flag Football: It's the Girls' Turn to Play.” *Washington Post* (2011)

The writer stated his claim clearly and forecasted the reasons he will provide to support it.

The writer arranged paragraphs, reasons, and evidence purposefully. That is, there is evidence that the writer has thought about a logical progression for his argument.

The writer used powerful, precise words that have an effect on the reader. He also reached for phrases, metaphors, analogies, or images that will help strengthen and convey his argument.

The writer used a serious, scholarly tone when writing.

The writer may have acknowledged different sides of the argument.

The writer used punctuation such as dashes, colons, parentheses, and semicolons to help include or connect extra information in some sentences.

Crystal-clear checklists that spell out the genre-specific benchmarks students should be working toward help students set goals and self-assess their work.

### Argument Writing Checklist (continued)

	Grade 6	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!	Grade 7	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!
<b>Craft</b>	I chose my words carefully to support my argument and to have an effect on my reader.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I used words purposefully to affect meaning and tone.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I worked to include concrete details, comparisons, and/or images to convey my ideas, build my	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I chose precise words and used metaphors, images, or comparisons to explain what I mean.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Argument Writing Checklist (continued)

	Grade 6	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!	Grade 7	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!
<b>Ending</b>	In my conclusion, I restated the important points and offered a final insight or implication for readers to consider. The ending strengthened the overall argument.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	In my conclusion, I reinforced and built on the main point(s) in a way that makes the entire text a cohesive whole. The conclusion may reiterate how the support for my claim outweighed the	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Argument Writing Checklist

	Grade 6	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!	Grade 7	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!
<b>Structure</b>								
<b>Overall</b>	I explained the topic/text and staked out a position that can be supported by a variety of trustworthy sources. Each part of my text helped build my argument, and led to a conclusion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I laid out a well-supported argument and made it clear that this argument is part of a bigger conversation about a topic/text. I acknowledged positions on the topic or text that might disagree with my own position, but I still showed why my position makes sense.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Lead</b>	I wrote an introduction to interest readers and help them understand and care about a topic or text. I thought backwards between the piece and the introduction to make sure that the introduction fits with the whole.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I interested the reader in my argument and helped them to understand the backstory behind it. I gave the backstory in a way that got the reader ready to see my point.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Not only did I clearly state my claim, I also told my readers how my text would unfold.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I made it clear to readers what my piece will argue and forecasted the parts of my argument.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Transitions</b>	I used transitions to help readers understand how the different parts of my piece fit together to explain and support my argument.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I used transitions to link the parts of my argument. The transitions help the reader follow from part to part and make it clear when I am stating a claim or counterclaim, giving a reason, or offering or analyzing evidence. These transitions include terms such as <i>as the text states</i> , <i>this means</i> , <i>another reason</i> , <i>some people may say</i> , <i>but</i> , <i>nevertheless</i> , and <i>on the other hand</i> .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I used transitions to help connect claim(s), reasons, and evidence, and to imply relationships such as when material exemplifies, adds on to, is similar to, explains, is a result of, or contrasts. I use transitions such as <i>for instance</i> , <i>in addition</i> , <i>one reason</i> , <i>furthermore</i> , <i>according to</i> , <i>this evidence suggests</i> , and <i>thus we can say that</i> .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

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restate the main points, respond to their significance.

piece are arranged purposefully to and to lead readers from one claim, reason, or piece of evidence to

tences, transitions, and formatting (date) to clarify the structure of the highlight my main points.

at

d kinds of evidence such as facts, mples, and definitions. I analyzed or easons and evidence, showing how y claim(s) and build my argument.

orporated and cited trustworthy

nother possible position or fferent claim or claims about this plained why the evidence for my ghed the counterclaim(s).

ke my argument compelling as well ble. I brought out why it mattered ience should care about it.

narrative Writing, Grade 6 (firsthand, Portsmouth, NH).

# Writing Pathways Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions, Grades 6–8

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Rubric for Argument Writing—Sixth Grade						
	Grade 5 (2 POINTS)	2.5 PTS	Grade 6 (3 POINTS)	3.5 PTS	Grade 7 (4 POINTS)	SCORE
STRUCTURE						
<b>Overall</b>	The writer made a claim or thesis on a topic or text, supported it with reasons, and provided a variety of evidence for each reason.	Mid-Level	The writer explained the topic/text and staked out a position that can be supported by a variety of trustworthy sources. Each part of the text builds her argument, and leads to a conclusion.	Mid-Level	The writer laid out a well-supported argument and made it clear that this argument is part of a bigger conversation about a topic/text. He acknowledged positions on the topic or text that might disagree with his own position, but still showed why his position makes sense.	
<b>Lead</b>	The writer wrote an introduction that led to a claim or thesis and got his readers to care about his opinion. The writer got his readers to care by not only including a cool fact or jazzy question, but also by telling readers what was significant in or around the topic.  The writer worked to find the precise words to state his claim; he let readers know the reasons he would develop later.	Mid-Level	The writer wrote an introduction to interest readers and help them understand and care about a topic or text. She thought backward between the piece and the introduction to make sure that the introduction would fit with the whole.  Not only did the writer clearly state her claim, she also told her readers how her text would unfold.	Mid-Level	The writer interested readers in his argument and helped them to understand the backstory behind it. He gave the backstory in a way that got readers ready to see his point. The writer made it clear to readers what his piece would argue and forecasted the parts of his argument.	
<b>Transitions</b>	The writer used transition words and phrases to connect evidence back to her reasons using phrases such as <i>this shows that ...</i>  The writer helped readers follow her thinking with phrases such as <i>another reason</i> and <i>the most important reason</i> . She used phrases such as <i>consequently</i> and <i>because of</i> to show what happened.  The writer used words such as <i>specifically</i> and <i>in particular</i> to be more precise.	Mid-Level	The writer used transitions to help readers understand how the different parts of his piece fit together to explain and support his argument.  The writer used transitions to help connect claim(s), reasons, and evidence and to imply relationships, such as when material exemplifies, adds to, is similar to, explains, is a result of, or contrasts. The writer used transitions such as <i>for instance</i> , <i>in addition</i> , <i>one reason</i> , <i>furthermore</i> , <i>according to</i> , <i>this evidence suggests</i> , and <i>thus we can say that</i> .	Mid-Level	The writer used transitions to link the parts of her argument. The transitions help readers follow from part to part and make it clear when she is stating a claim or counterclaim, giving a reason, offering or analyzing evidence. These transitions include terms such as <i>the text states</i> , <i>as</i> , <i>this means</i> , <i>another reason</i> , <i>some people may say</i> , <i>but</i> , <i>nevertheless</i> , and <i>on the other hand</i> .	

Rubrics for each kind of writing establish clear learning benchmarks and help teachers monitor student progress throughout the stages of development.



	<b>Grade 5</b> (2 POINTS)	2.5 PTS	<b>Grade 6</b> (3 POINTS)	3.5 PTS	<b>Grade 7</b> (4 POINTS)	SCORE
<b>STRUCTURE (cont.)</b>						
<b>Ending</b>	The writer worked on a conclusion in which he connected back to and highlighted what the text was mainly about, not just the preceding paragraph.	Mid-Level	In the conclusion, the writer restated the important points and offered a final insight or implication for readers to consider. The ending strengthened the overall argument.	Mid-Level	In his conclusion, the writer reinforced and built on the main point(s) in a way that made the entire text a cohesive whole. The conclusion reiterated how the support for his claim outweighed the counterclaim(s), restated the main points, responded to them, or highlighted their significance.	
<b>Organization</b>	The writer grouped information and related ideas into paragraphs. She put the parts of her writing in the order that most suited her purpose and helped her prove her reasons and claim.	Mid-Level	The writer organized his argument into sections: he arranged reasons and evidence purposefully, leading readers from one claim or reason to another.  The order of the sections and the internal structure of each section make sense.	Mid-Level	The writer purposely arranged parts of her piece to suit her purpose and to lead readers from one claim, counterclaim, reason, or piece of evidence to another.  The writer used topic sentences, transitions, and formatting (where appropriate) to clarify the structure of the piece and to highlight her main points.	
						TOTAL:
<b>DEVELOPMENT</b>						
<b>Elaboration*</b>	The writer gave reasons to support his opinion that were parallel and did not overlap. He put them in an order that he thought would be most convincing.  The writer included evidence such as facts, examples, quotations, micro-stories, and information to support his claim.  The writer discussed and unpacked the way that the evidence went with the claim.	Mid-Level	The writer included and arranged a variety of evidence such as facts, quotations, examples, and definitions.  The writer used trusted sources and information from experts and gave the sources credit.  The writer worked to explain how the reasons and evidence she gave support her claim(s) and strengthen her argument. To do this the writer referred to earlier parts of her text, summarized background information, raised questions, or highlighted possible implications.	Mid-Level	The writer included varied kinds of evidence such as facts, quotations, examples, and definitions. He analyzed or explained the reasons and evidence, showing how they fit with his claim(s) and build his argument.  The writer consistently incorporated and cited trustworthy sources.  The writer wrote about another possible position or positions—a different claim or claims about this subject—and explained why the evidence for his position outweighed the counterclaim(s).  The writer worked to make his argument compelling as well as understandable. He brought out why it mattered and why the audience should care about it.	(x2)

\*Elaboration and Craft are double-weighted categories. Whatever score a student would get in these categories is worth double the amount of points. For example, if a student exceeds expectations in Elaboration, then that student would receive 8 points instead of 4 points. If a student meets standards in Elaboration, then that student would receive 6 points instead of 3 points.

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# Writing Pathways Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions, Grades 6–8

	Grade 5 (2 POINTS)	2.5 PTS	Grade 6 (3 POINTS)	3.5 PTS	Grade 7 (4 POINTS)	SCORE
DEVELOPMENT (cont.)						
<b>Craft*</b>	<p>The writer made deliberate word choices to have an effect on her readers.</p> <p>The writer reached for the precise phrase, metaphor, or image that would convey her ideas.</p> <p>The writer made choices about how to angle her evidence to support her points.</p> <p>When it seemed right to do so, the writer tried to use a scholarly voice and varied her sentences to create the pace and tone of the different sections of her piece.</p>	Mid-Level	<p>The writer chose his words carefully to support his argument and to have an effect on his reader.</p> <p>The writer worked to include concrete details, comparisons, and/or images to convey his ideas, build his argument, and keep his reader engaged.</p> <p>When necessary, the writer explained terms to readers, providing definitions, context clues or parenthetical explanations.</p> <p>The writer made his piece sound serious.</p>	Mid-Level	<p>The writer used words purposefully to affect meaning and tone.</p> <p>The writer chose precise words and used metaphors, images or comparisons to explain what she means.</p> <p>The writer included domain-specific, technical vocabulary relevant to her argument and audience and defined these when appropriate.</p> <p>The writer used a formal tone, but varied it appropriately to engage the reader.</p>	(x2)
						TOTAL:

\*Elaboration and Craft are double-weighted categories. Whatever score a student would get in these categories is worth double the amount of points. For example, if a student exceeds expectations in Elaboration, then that student would receive 8 points instead of 4 points. If a student meets standards in Elaboration, then that student would receive 6 points instead of 3 points.

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	Grade 5 (2 POINTS)	2.5 PTS	Grade 6 (3 POINTS)	3.5 PTS	Grade 7 (4 POINTS)	SCORE
LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS						
<b>Spelling</b>	The writer used what he knew about word patterns to spell correctly and he used references to help him spell words when needed. The writer made sure to correctly spell words that were important to his topic.	Mid-Level	The writer used resources to be sure the words in her writing are spelled correctly, including returning to sources to check spelling.	Mid-Level	The writer matched the spelling of technical vocabulary to that found in resources and text evidence. He spelled material in citations correctly.	
<b>Punctuation and Sentence Structure</b>	The writer used commas to set off introductory parts of sentences ( <i>At this time in history,</i> ) The writer used a variety of punctuation to fix any run-on sentences. The writer used punctuation to cite her sources.	Mid-Level	The writer used punctuation such as dashes, colons, parentheses, and semicolons to help him include or connect information in some of his sentences. The writer punctuated quotes and citations accurately.	Mid-Level	The writer varied her sentence structure, sometimes using simple and sometimes using complex sentence structure. The writer used internal punctuation appropriately within sentences and when citing sources, including commas, dashes, parentheses, colons, and semicolons.	TOTAL:

Teachers, we created these rubrics so you will have your own place to pull together scores of student work. You can use these assessments immediately after giving the on-demands and also for self-assessment and setting goals.

#### Scoring Guide

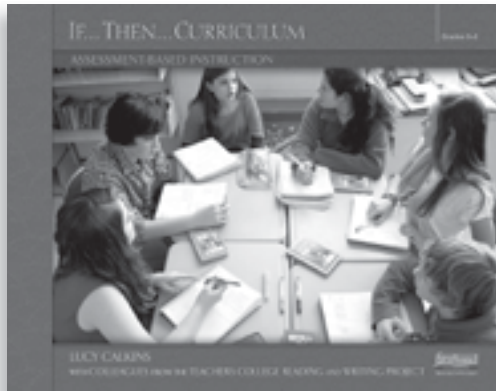
In each row, circle the descriptor in the column that matches the student work. Scores in the categories of Elaboration and Craft are worth double the point value (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, or 8 instead of 1, 1.5, 2, 2.5, 3, 3.5, or 4).

Total the number of points and then track students' progress by seeing when the total points increase.

Total score: \_\_\_\_\_

If you want to translate this score into a grade, you can use the provided table to score each student on a scale of 0–4.

Number of Points	Scaled Score
1–11	1
11.5–16.5	1.5
17–22	2
22.5–27.5	2.5
28–33	3
33.5–38.5	3.5
39–44	4



***“The quality of writing instruction will rise dramatically not only when teachers study the teaching of writing but also when teachers study their own children’s intentions and progress as writers. Strong writing is always tailored for and responsive to the writer.”***

### ALTERNATE UNIT

#### Persuasive Essays

If your students are new to the genre of argument writing, or if they would benefit from additional practice in writing persuasively, THEN you may want to teach this unit which introduces students to the foundational skills of persuasive writing and sets the stage for literary essay writing.

In addition to the three units of study, the Grade 6 series provides a book of if... then... curricular plans. *If... Then... Curriculum: Assessment-Based Instruction, Grades 6–8* supports targeted instruction and differentiation with nine alternative units of study for you to strategically teach before, after, or in between the core curriculum based on your students’ needs. This resource also includes If... Then... Conferring Scenarios that help you customize your curriculum through individual and small-group instruction.

## Persuasive Essays



### RATIONALE/INTRODUCTION

This unit on argument writing will likely be predominantly used in sixth grade and precede or follow the opinion unit that is detailed in the full-length book, *The Literary Essay: From Character to Compare/Contrast*. However, if you have seventh-graders with no essay experience, they may benefit from doing this unit prior to the seventh-grade full-length book, *The Art of Argument: Research-Based Essays*. This unit does not assume that students enter it with strengths in writing thesis-driven essays. Both this unit and the sixth-grade literary essay unit take students on an ambitious, fast-paced journey into the land of source-based persuasive writing. So the timing of this unit is your decision, entirely. It should not be your first unit of the year (we hope you rely on the sixth-grade unit, *Personal Narrative: Crafting Powerful Life Stories*, for that), but you can teach this unit at any other time within the year.

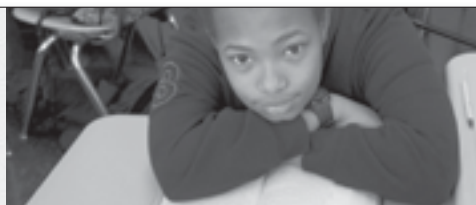
The title of this unit, “Persuasive Essays,” reflects the fact that the unit supports the Common Core standards for argument. As part of a long tradition of helping students write persuasive essays, we have taken special care to meet all the CCSS for argumentation, which will give this unit a special flavor, making it slightly different from a traditional persuasive writing unit. Whatever the name, the unit aims to support your students in getting better at writing logical, compelling, and persuasive arguments about topics that feel relevant to them. Students will learn to harness their own expertise on a topic, to incorporate a bit of added research, and to tailor their arguments for specific audiences.

Your students are not short on opinions; they have opinions on music groups, on school policies, and on what is fair and unfair. Adolescents sometimes feel that the adults in their lives do not take them seriously. They believe they have opinions that could help their schools, their communities, but to adult ears their opinions sometimes come off as lists of demands or as complaining rants more than as thoughtful suggestions. The ability to not just have an opinion, but to support it clearly and persuasively is a powerful life skill. Entire industries are built around persuasion, convincing the public that *this*

PERSUASIVE ESSAYS

1

# Argument Writing



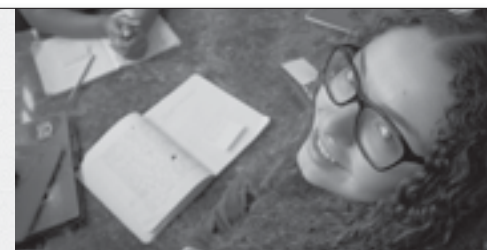
These charts will help you to anticipate, spot, and teach into the challenges your writers face during the independent work portion of your writing workshop. They lay out the specific strategy you might teach and the way you might contextualize the work for your writers.

If . . .	After acknowledging what the student is doing well, you might say . . .	Leave the writer with . . .
<b>Structure and Cohesion</b>  <b>The introduction does not forecast the structure of the essay.</b>  The writer has made a claim and supported it with reasons, but there is no forecasting statement early on in the essay that foreshadows the reasons to come. Instead, it seems as if the writer thought of and wrote about one reason, then, when reaching the end of the first body paragraph, thought, "What's another reason?" and then raised and elaborated upon that reason. He would benefit from learning to plan for the overarching structure of his argument and forecast that structure in the introduction.	You have learned to make a claim in your essay and to support that claim with reasons. As essayists, though, it's important to pre-plan how our essay will go, and to let the reader know how our writing will be organized from the very beginning. This is called forecasting. Today, I want to teach you that opinion writers forecast how their writing will go. They do this by stating their claim in the introduction and then adding on, "I think this because . . ." Then they list the reasons that they will write about in the body of their piece.	Writers use the introduction to forecast how their opinion pieces will go. 1. State your claim. 2. Tell your reader why your claim is true. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "One reason this is true is because . . ."</li> <li>• "Another reason this is true is because . . ."</li> <li>• "A third reason this is true is because . . ."</li> </ul>
<b>The writer's introduction and/or conclusion feel formulaic.</b>  The writer has stated her thesis upfront and forecasted the reasons to come in the essay. She has probably done something similar in her conclusion—wrapping up the essay by recapping her opinion and reasons. Though there is nothing wrong with this, the essay feels formulaic and dull. This writer would benefit from learning a few techniques to make her introduction and conclusion a place where she can grab a reader's attention, shed light on important issues, and appeal to her audience.	You have done everything that a teacher when writing an introduction and conclusion thesis and told the reasons you have for it. Essay writers have mastered the basics, the step. That next step often means asking the readers take away from this essay? What do I want to leave them with?" Then, or questions, they know there are a few steps to get their message across.	

DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION FOR INDIVIDUALS AND SMALL GROUPS: IF . . . THEN . . . CONFERRING

*“Despite the uniqueness of each child, there are particular ways they struggle, and predictable ways you can help. We can use all we know about child development, learning progressions, writing craft, and grade-specific standards to anticipate and plan for the individualized instruction our students are apt to need.”*

# Narrative Writing



If . . .	After acknowledging what the student is doing well, you might say . . .	Leave the writer with . . .
<b>Structure and Cohesion</b>  <b>The writer is new to the writing workshop or this particular genre of writing.</b>  This writer struggles because narrative is a new genre for her—or she has been taught to write in ways that are different than those you are teaching. She may display certain skill sets (i.e., the ability to craft a strong plot line or to write with elaborate descriptive details) but lacks the vision of what she is being asked to produce. Most often, this means that she has not yet come to understanding the concept of a small, focused moment that is then elaborated upon. Her story is probably long and unfocused and is usually dominated by summary, not storytelling.	Someone famously once said, "You can't hit a target if you don't know what that target is." This is especially true for writers. They can't write well if they don't have a vision, a mental picture, of what they hope to produce. Today I want to teach you that one way writers learn about the kinds of writing they hope to produce is by studying mentor texts. They read a mentor text once, enjoying it as a story. Then, they read it again, this time asking, "How does this kind of story seem to go?" They label what they notice and then try it in their own writing.	Writers use mentor texts to help them imagine what they hope to write. They: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read the text and enjoy it as a good story.</li> <li>• Reread the text and ask, "How does this kind of story seem to go?"</li> <li>• Annotate what they notice. (It can be helpful to do this right on the text with arrows pointing to the various things you see!)</li> <li>• Try to do some of what they noticed in their own writing.</li> </ul>
<b>The student seems to paragraph randomly or not much at all.</b>  When you read this writer's piece, you are struck by the paragraphing. It may be that he seems to be paragraphing in haphazard ways, as if he knows he should be creating paragraphs but does not know why or when. Alternatively, this writer may not paragraph often enough, making the piece of writing difficult to follow. Regardless of the issue, it is likely that this student would benefit from learning about some of the reasons narrative writers paragraph and then trying out a few different alternatives in his own writing.	When I first read your piece, I was struck by all the beautiful writing you have. Once in a while, though, I felt like I couldn't enjoy what you were attempting to do as a writer (perhaps point to a particular place where the writer tried to create tension or show a time change), because you didn't use paragraphs. It can be hard for a reader to take in all that we do as writers, and paragraphs act like signals that say, "Pause. Take this in. Something just happened or is about to happen."  Today I want to teach you a few of the main reasons story writers use paragraphs. Specifically, writers often start new paragraphs when a new event is starting, when their story is switching to a new time or place, when a new character speaks, or when a very important part needs to be emphasized.	Make a new paragraph here: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very important part needs emphasis</li> <li>• New event</li> <li>• New time</li> <li>• New place</li> <li>• New character speaks</li> </ul>

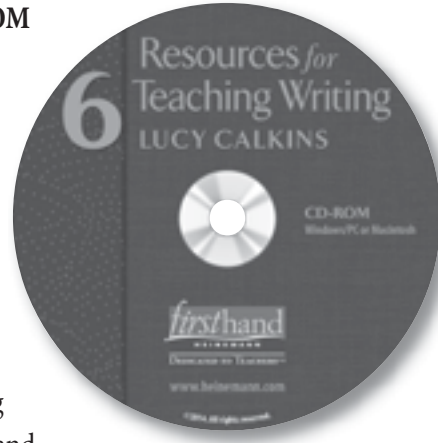
DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION FOR INDIVIDUALS AND SMALL GROUPS: IF . . . THEN . . . CONFERRING SCENARIOS

3

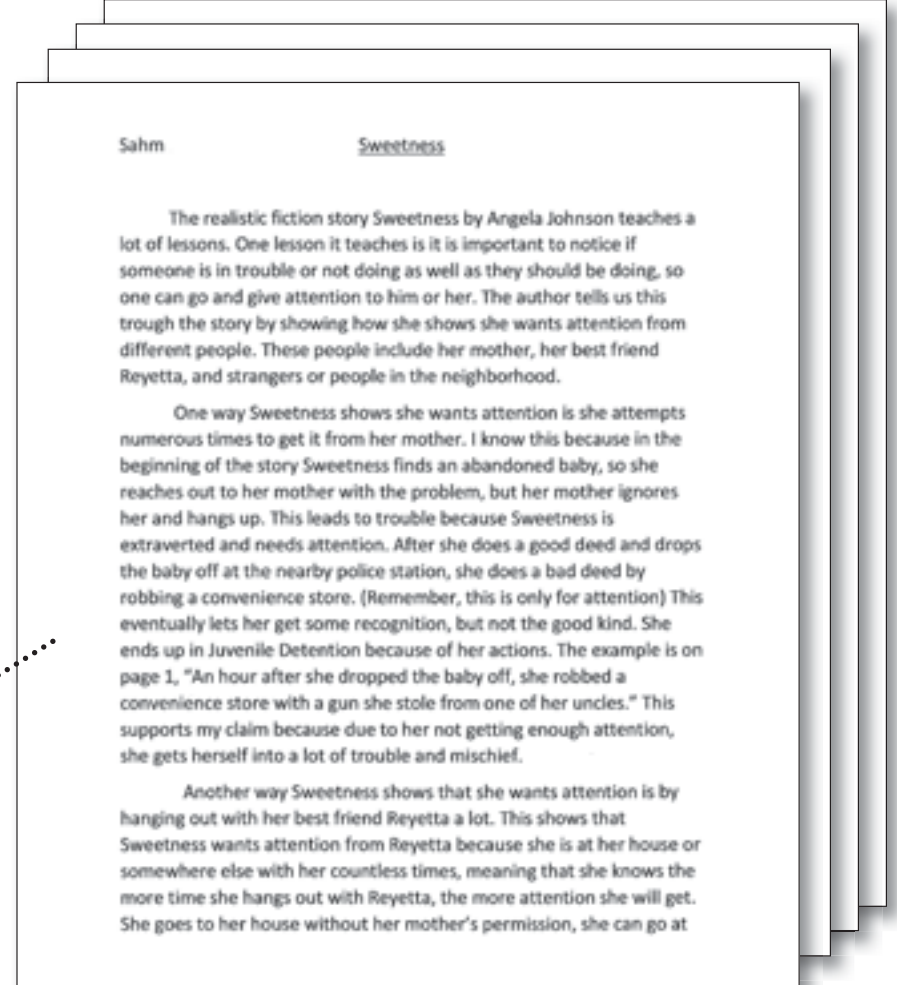


# Resources for Teaching Writing CD-ROM

The *Resources for Teaching Writing* CD-ROM for Grade 6 provides unit-specific print resources to support your teaching throughout the year. You'll find a rich assortment of instructional tools including **learning progressions, checklists and rubrics, correlations to the CCSS, and teaching charts.** Offering daily support, these resources will help you establish a structured learning environment that fosters independence and self-direction.



Student writing samples illustrate different ways different students have exemplified the standard and highlight essential features of each writing genre.



*“The writing workshop needs to be simple and predictable enough that your youngsters can learn to carry on within it independently. The materials and teaching tools you provide students will help you establish such a predictable, structured learning environment.”*

# Common Core Standards Aligning with Grade 6 Unit 2: The Literary Essay

Session	Writing Standards	Reading Standards	Speaking & Listening Standards	Language Standards
1	W.6.1.a,b,c,d,e; W.6.4, W.6.5	RL.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.3, RL.6.5, RL.6.10	SL.6.1, SL.6.2, SL.6.6	L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3
2	W.6.1.a,b	RL.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.3, RL.6.10	SL.6.1, SL.6.6	L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3
3	W.6.1.a,b; W.6.2, W.6.3.b, W.6.10	RL.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.3, RL.6.4	SL.6.1, SL.6.3, SL.6.4, SL.6.6	L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3
4	W.6.1.a,b,c	RL.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.3, RL.6.4	SL.6.1	L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3, L.6.6
5	W.6.1, W.6.9.a	RL.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.3, RL.6.10	SL.6.1, SL.6.2, SL.6.3	L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3
6	W.6.1, W.6.4, W.6.5, W.6.9.a, W.6.10	RL.6.1, RL.6.2	SL.6.1, SL.6.3	L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3, L.6.6
7	W.6.1.a,b,c; W.6.5, W.7.1.a	RL.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.3	SL.6.1, SL.6.4, SL.6.6	L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3
8	W.6.1, W.6.4, W.6.5, W.6.10	RL.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.3, RL.6.10	SL.6.1	L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3, L.6.6
9	W.6.1, W.6.4, W.6.5, W.6.10	RL.6.1, RL.6.2	SL.6.1	L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3
10	W.6.1.a,e; W.6.4, W.6.5	RL.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.5	SL.6.1, SL.6.3, SL.6.4	L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3, L.6.6
11	W.6.1.b,c; W.6.4, W.6.9.a	RL.6.10	SL.6.1	L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3
12	W.6.1, W.6.5	RL.6.1, RL.6.3	SL.6.1, SL.6.2, SL.6.4	L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3, L.6.5, L.6.6
13	W.6.2, W.6.4, W.6.9.a, W.6.10	RL.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.10	SL.6.1	L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3
14	W.6.2, W.6.5, W.6.9.a	RL.6.2	SL.6.1	L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3
15	W.6.2, W.6.5, W.6.9.a	RL.6.10	SL.6.1, SL.6.6	L.6.1, L.6.2, L.6.3
16	W.6.2, W.6.5	RL.6.10		
17	W.6.2, W.6.5, W.6.6, W.6.10			

\*bold indicates major emphasis

Because writing workshop instruction involves students in writing, reading, speaking and listening, and language development, each session in each unit of study is correlated to the full Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts.

## How to Write a Literary Essay About Character

- Reread selected bits.
- Notice details, think, talk, write to explore: "Why this detail?"
- Think, "What does the character really want?" and write long.
- It can help to use thought prompts (Maybe... Perhaps...)
- Think about the deep down, internal motivations.
- Once you have an idea and some evidence, reread again, reread more of the text, reread more closely, and expect your original idea will change.

## Boxes-and-Bullets Essay Structure

**Claim**  
(A character) is (a trait) because (one reason), (another reason), and above all, because (a third reason)

### Body paragraph 1

The first reason why [character] is [trait] is because...

- For example, A
  - \* This shows... or \* This illustrates...
  - Then explain how the example fits the claim.
  - Then repeat your claim.
- For example, B
  - \* This shows that... because...

### Body paragraphs 2 and 3

\* Another reason why [character] is [trait] is that...  
OR \* Although one reason is... another reason is...

- For example, A
- For example, B
  - \* This shows that... because...

**Conclusion**  
Restate the claim.

generate an idea about the character that sees the whole character and the whole text.  
or the most compelling evidence that can support it, then add it to your essay like this:  
cite some parts of the text.  
try-tell other parts.  
analyze yet other parts.

A wide range of fresh-from-the-classroom instructional charts model proven teaching artifacts that are easy to copy and customize.

# Implementation and Professional Development Options

In addition to offering curricular support, the Units of Study series also includes **embedded professional development**. Through its regular coaching tips and detailed descriptions of carefully crafted teaching moves and language, essential aspects of the teaching are underscored and explained at every turn in every section. The professional development embedded in this series can be further enhanced through online, on-site, and off-site opportunities. Also, visit [www.unitsofstudy.com](http://www.unitsofstudy.com).

## ► Online from TCRWP

**Implementation Webinar:** A trained consultant can help you unpack your new Units of Study. Whether you want to jump right in and start teaching, or first explore the workshop's guiding principles and practices, this webinar will help you get started your way.

*For additional information visit [unitsofstudy.com](http://unitsofstudy.com)*

**Classroom Videos:** More than 50 live-from-the-classroom videos let you eavesdrop on Lucy and her colleagues as they teach argument/opinion, information, and narrative writing. These clips model the Common Core minilessons, conferences, and shares you will engage in as you teach these units of study.

*View these videos at [vimeo.com/tcrwp/albums](http://vimeo.com/tcrwp/albums)*

**Study Guide:** A step-by-step guide offers professional learning communities a collegial platform to explore the series' features and components; also to plan their next steps. *Visit [unitsofstudy.com](http://unitsofstudy.com) to download your copy today*

**Resources:** The Project posts important and useful resources throughout the year, along with examples of writing that students at every grade level, K–8, did during last year's units of study. *Visit [readingandwritingproject.com/resources.html](http://readingandwritingproject.com/resources.html)*

**Twitter Chats and Book Talks:** On Wednesdays from 7:30–8:30 PM EST join Lucy and her colleagues for live chat sessions on topics supporting literacy instruction. *Follow them at @tcrwp or search #TCRWP or #TCRWP Coaching*  
*Visit [readingandwritingproject.com](http://readingandwritingproject.com) for full support*

## ► On-Site

### Implementation Support for Units of Study from TCRWP staff developers

Invite one of Lucy's colleagues to come to your school for a professional development day. The sessions will help teachers unpack the series' components, grasp the big picture of leading effective workshop teaching, and gain an understanding of how to integrate assessment into the curriculum.

**Large group:** \$3500–\$5000/day, all inclusive for 50–150 people

**Small group:** \$3000–\$3500/day, all inclusive

**Webinar:** free for individuals and groups of any size

#### *For additional information, contact:*

Judith Chin, TCRWP Coordinator of Strategic Development at

[Judith.chin@readingandwritingproject.com](mailto:Judith.chin@readingandwritingproject.com) or call 212.678.3327

### Multi-Day Training with one cohort of educators

Invite a TCRWP staff developer to work in your school or district with a cohort of educators for multiple days. For each area of staff development in which you choose to focus, the Project provides resources such as curriculum maps, curriculum calendars, and planning templates.

**Small group:** \$2000–\$2500/day, plus travel expenses

### Multi-Day Institute for 40–300 educators

Host a "Homegrown Institute" for reading or writing instruction, reading instruction, or content literacy instruction. Tailored to your district's needs, the instruction and materials are specialized for K–2, 3–5, or 6–8 sections of up to 25 participants each.

**Institute:** \$2000–\$2500/day per staff developer, plus travel expenses. 4–5 days. Calculate one staff developer/25 participants/day

#### *For additional information, contact:*

Kathy Neville, Executive Administrator at

[Kathy@readingandwritingproject.com](mailto:Kathy@readingandwritingproject.com) or call 917.484.1482

## ► Off-Site

### Multi-day Institutes at Teachers College

Visit Teachers College for a series of institutes lead by world-renowned teacher-educators and other all-stars in the field of literacy and learning. Institutes include small and large group sections that are designed to help teachers, coaches, and administrators establish and sustain vibrant and vigorous models of best practice.

■ **Institutes for The Teaching of Reading and on The Teaching of Writing.** Half of the day in large group sections, half in small interactive sections. Cost: \$750 per person.

■ **Institute for Literacy Coaches.** One institute focuses on the Common Core's call to accelerate writing development, one focuses on reading instruction. Cost: \$775 per person.

■ **Mini Institute for Content Area Literacy Instruction.** This 4-day institute helps participants lead literacy-rich instruction in science (K–2) and social studies (3–8). Keynotes from literacy leaders and small group sections with grade-level colleagues. Cost \$625 per person.

#### *For additional information, contact*

Lisa Cazzola, Project Coordinator at

[lisa@readingandwritingproject.com](mailto:lisa@readingandwritingproject.com) or call 212.678.3195

*For registrations and applications go to [readingandwritingproject.com/institutes.html](http://readingandwritingproject.com/institutes.html)*



# UNITS OF STUDY<sup>in</sup> Argument, Information, *and* Narrative Writing

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Designed for teachers, school leaders, and professional learning communities looking to navigate the gap between their current literacy practices and the ideals of the Common Core, *Pathways to the Common Core*:

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- provides an implementation guide for crafting standards-based instruction
- details a plan for creating systems of continuous improvement.



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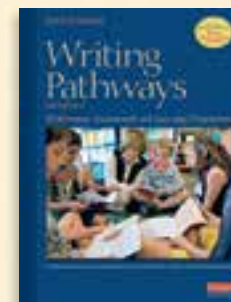
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# UNITS OF STUDY<sup>in</sup> Argument, Information, *and* Narrative Writing

## ABOUT THE GRADE 6 AUTHORS

**Lucy Calkins** is the Founding Director of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project at Teachers College, Columbia University. For more than thirty years, the Project has been both a think tank, developing state-of-the-art teaching methods, and a provider of professional development. As the leader of this renowned organization, Lucy works closely with policy makers, school principals, and teachers to initiate and support school-wide and system-wide reform in the teaching of reading and writing. Lucy is also the Robinson Professor of Children's Literacy at Teachers College, Columbia University, where she codirects the Literacy Specialist Program. Lucy's many books include the seminal *Art of Teaching Writing* (Heinemann 1994) and the Units of Study for Teaching Reading, grades 3–5 series (Heinemann 2010). *Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Achievement* (Heinemann 2012) is currently #8 on the New York Times' list of best-selling education books.



For many years, **Stacey Fell** was an English teacher as well as a literacy coach at MS 131, a middle school in lower Manhattan. After completing her EdD in Curriculum and Teaching at Columbia University's Teachers College, Stacey joined TCRWP as a staff developer. She has worked closely with middle school educators throughout New York City and Seattle to create thriving reading and writing workshops for young adolescents. Currently, Stacey teaches 8th grade Humanities at Tompkins Square Middle School, a progressive middle school in New York City's East Village. Stacey has published several journal articles and was a contributing author to *Forever After: New York City Teachers on 9/11*.



**Alexandra Marron**, coauthor of four other books in this series, is a Staff Developer, Researcher, and Writer-in-Residence at TCRWP. Her responsibilities include leading a yearlong study group for master teachers, presenting at conferences, teaching at summer institutes, and above all helping teachers and principals in dozens of schools lead state-of-the-art reading and writing workshops. Ali has played a leadership role in developing learning progressions in argument writing, and participates in a study group on the subject, sponsored by the Council of Chief School Officers, involving ETS and TCRWP. Prior to this work, she taught at PS 6, and while there contributed to the book *Practical Punctuation: Lessons on Rule Making and Rule Breaking in Elementary Writing* (Heinemann 2008.)



As a Lead Staff Developer at TCRWP, **Kate Roberts** supports middle schools nationally and internationally. A former middle school teacher, Kate encourages educators to teach reading and writing through powerful and engaging units of study, rallying students to work towards rigorous and attainable goals. Above all, she helps teachers hold on to their love of kids and teaching. Kate is the coauthor (with Christopher Lehman) of *Falling in Love with Close Reading* (Heinemann 2013), as well as the cofounder of the blog *indent*. A proponent of social media, Kate works tirelessly to connect educators and to help make possible what sometimes appears impossible.



As Senior Deputy Director at TCRWP, **Kathleen Tolan** has special responsibility for the Project's work with the teaching of reading. She organizes instruction for staff developers and for teachers in the Project's four summer institutes, and plays a lead role in the content literacy institute. Kathleen also provides staff development at schools in the South Bronx, Harlem, Manhattan, and Scarsdale, and each of those schools has become a TCRWP teaching site. Kathleen is a coauthor of the 4th grade writing unit of study *The Literary Essay*, of five books in the Units of Study for Teaching Reading, Grades 3–5 series (Heinemann 2010), and she is featured in most of TCRWP's videos.



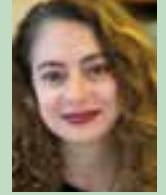
As a Lead Staff Developer with TCRWP, **Maggie Beattie Roberts** is committed to helping teachers tap into the power of their own reading and writing. Maggie has led research and development to help teachers use digital literacy and technology, including popular media, to help young people grasp fundamental concepts. She has also pioneered new work in content-area literacy. Maggie began her career in the heart of Chicago, and did her graduate studies in the Literacy Specialist Program at Columbia University's Teachers College. She is a frequent speaker at national conferences, and leads school- and city-wide staff development around the country. Maggie also is a coauthor of the 3rd grade writing unit of study *Once Upon a Time: Adapting and Writing Fairy Tales*.



**Emily Strang-Campbell** is a staff developer at TCRWP. In that role, she supports schools across New York City, New Jersey, and the nation. Before joining the Project, Emily's classroom at The Clinton School for Writers and Artists was frequently used as a Project lab site for NYC teachers and visiting educators from across the country. Her students' writing and performance work is featured in several TCRWP projects and videos. Emily earned her Master's Degree from New York University, with a dual certification in Educational Theatre and English in the secondary classroom. She also received her MFA in Theatre Arts from Brooklyn College.



**Audra Kirshbaum Robb** is the Director of Performance Assessments at TCRWP. Audra has degrees in Comparative Literature and English Education, and taught middle school English Language Arts in New York City before joining the Project as a staff developer. Since then, she has become the resident expert on assessment at the Project. Audra led TCRWP's participation in pilot studies with the New York City Department of Education on the design, implementation, and instructional use of Common Core-aligned reading—writing performance assessments. She has worked closely with the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE) on several projects. Audra also frequently leads workshops on incorporating poetry into ELA and content-area curriculum.



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