Unit 3--Literary Essay

Content Area: **English Language Arts**
Course(s): **English Language Arts**
Time Period: **Marking Period 2**
Length: **3 to 4 weeks**
Status: **Published**

Unit Overview

In conjunction with reading lessons on fiction and literary nonfiction, students will comment on and analyze works that they have read. Literary essays will follow standard writing conventions and the structure of a formal, academic essay, and students will base their observations and extensions on instances and evidence from the texts they read. Literary essays should reflect not merely an understanding of the literature that students read, but also of literary conventions and elements in general. Very importantly, each student's writing must reflect a genuine curiosity about literature and its reflection of human truths and experience.

The literary essay unit is designed to provide students with the vital opportunity of seeing themselves as capable thinkers and decision-makers in the following ways:

- Students become more flexible in their writing and thinking as they track theories.
- Students develop a repertoire of strategies for analyzing character development, the author's purpose, craft, and thematic development within and across texts and/or genres.
- Students practice a variety of writing methods that establish a line of reasoning.
- Students engage with quality, grade-level texts, gaining in complexity.
- Students investigate the ways other writers write about complex ideas, synthesize the ideas of others in order to confirm or defunct their theories, and create an argumentative essay.

The unit can be divided into four parts:

- Theory building and creating a claim
- Organizing evidence to develop a line of reasoning and to support a claim
- Drafting and managing types of evidence
- Revising and editing

Standards

LA.RL.6.1	Cite textual evidence and make relevant connections to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
LA.RL.6.2	Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.
LA.RL.6.3	Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.
LA.RL.6.5	Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.
LA.RL.6.6	Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

LA.RI.6.1	Cite textual evidence and make relevant connections to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
LA.RI.6.2	Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.
LA.RI.6.3	Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).
LA.W.6.2.B	Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
LA.W.6.2.C	Use appropriate transitions to clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
LA.W.6.2.E	Establish and maintain a formal/academic style, approach, and form.
LA.W.6.2.F	Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the information or explanation presented.
LA.W.6.4	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, voice and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)
LA.W.6.5	With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
LA.W.6.6	Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of three pages in a single sitting.
LA.W.6.10	Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, metacognition/self correction, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.
LA.SL.6.1	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
LA.SL.6.1.B	Follow rules for collegial discussions, set specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.
LA.SL.6.1.D	Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing.
LA.L.6.1	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
LA.L.6.1.A	Ensure that pronouns are in the proper case (subjective, objective, possessive).
LA.L.6.1.B	Use intensive pronouns (e.g., myself, ourselves).
LA.L.6.1.C	Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in pronoun number and person.
LA.L.6.1.D	Recognize and correct vague pronouns (i.e., ones with unclear or ambiguous antecedents).
LA.L.6.1.E	Recognize variations from standard English in their own and others' writing and speaking, and identify and use strategies to improve expression in conventional language.
LA.L.6.2	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
LA.L.6.2.B	Spell correctly.
LA.L.6.5.A	Interpret figures of speech (e.g., personification) in context.
LA.L.6.6	Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

Essential Questions

1. Evaluating my previous experiences in writing literary essays, what goals should I set for myself for literary analysis?
2. How do I develop a thesis that compares and contrasts characters in a work of literature?
3. How should I structure my essay, which conventions should I employ, and which habits must I avoid?
4. Which forms of evidence should I include in my essay?
5. How can I make the most of advice that I receive from peers and my teacher?

How can we construct literary essays in such a way that we express our ideas clearly, support these ideas with logical evidence, and make compelling arguments about the literature we read – and come to new insights about the interconnectedness of what we're reading and the lives we live?

- **Bend I**: *How can I develop and support a strong claim about characters by re-reading closely, writing to think, and analyzing the evidence I find?*
- **Bend II:** *How can I quickly draw on what I already know about literary essay structure and craft to draft, revise, and edit an essay about a text?*
- **Bend III:** *How can I draft and revise compare-and-contrast essays by looking for patterns in similarities and differences, applying what I know about revision, and fine tuning sentences in my writing?*

Application of Knowledge: Students will know that…

- A literary comparison/contrast essay requires not only assertions but evidence from the text.
- Appropriate vocabulary, tone, and writing conventions enhance a writer's credibility with an academic audience.
- Basic skills such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation apply to all writing.
- Clear and coherent writing illustrates development, organization, and style that are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Conferences are two-way discussions whose frank interchange of ideas facilitates good writing.
- Daily practice in writing is essential for development of skills and enjoyment.
- Personal pronouns have case and number in relation to their antecedents.
- Writing is a process that unfolds over time, beginning with ideas, taking refinement over several drafts, and improving with inspiration from outside texts as well as with consultations with peers and teachers.

Application of Skills: Students will be able to…

- Apply personal pronouns properly in relation to their antecedents.

- Apply the basic skills of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation properly to their writing.
- Assist and receive assistance from peers in developing ideas, writing, revising, and editing.
- Compare and contrast characters by providing textual evidence.
- Complete at least the final phase of their work using digital and cloud capabilities and produce final products in digital form.
- Consider characters, events, and concepts in relationship to each other within a text.
- Interpret on both literal and inferential levels.
- Observe formal writing conventions, suiting vocabulary and tone to an academic audience.
- Participate in meaningful peer and teacher conferences, providing and evaluating advice and applying it as appropriate.
- Provide a clear introduction, a thoughtful and elaborate body, and a solid conclusion, all coherently supporting an explicit thesis statement.
- Use appropriate transitions to optimize continuity.
- Use evidence to back up their literary analysis.
- Use punctuation to set off parenthetical elements.
- Write on a daily basis toward the completion of an extended research-based project.

Teaching Points and Suggested Activities

The following teaching points and activities are adapted from the "The Literary Essay: From Character to Compare/Contrast" unit in *Units of Study in Argument, Information and Narrative Writing, Grades 6-8* (Calkins et al., 2014) and serve as a loose framework for teachers, who will add and or emphasize based on their student's needs.

Teaching Points

Bend I: Writing Strong Literary Essays

Essay Boot Camp

- 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.

Growing Big Ideas from Details about Characters

- 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.

Writing to Discover What a Character Really Wants

- 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.

Crafting Claims

- Essayists mull over their ideas about the character and then choose one they can craft into a claim that feels thinking and writing about and that may eventually drive an essay.

Conveying Evidence: Summarizing, Storytelling, and Quoting

- Students that essayists reread the text through the lens of the claim, searching for the most compelling evidence that can support it.

Studying a Mentor Text to Construct Literary Essays

- Writers can study published literary essays to learn techniques and structures to bring to the work of drafting their own essays.

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

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

Looking for Themes in the Trouble of a Text

- Literary essayists look for themes in texts by identifying and analyzing the problems that characters face and considering the inherent lessons.

Drafting Using All that You Know

- When essayists sit down to draft, they often draft quickly, piecing together all the necessary parts and drawing on everything they know.

First Impressions and Closing Remarks

- 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.

Quoting Texts

- 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.

Editing Inquiry Centers

- Editors can learn about conventions by studying mentor texts.

Bend III: Writing Compare-and-Contrast Essays

Building the Muscles to Compare and Contrast

- 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.

Comparing and Contrasting Themes across Texts

- Essayists write compare-and-contrast essays by thinking across texts about similarities and differences among themes.

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

- Essayists use what they already know about essay writing, as well as a variety of resources to revise their compare-and-contrast essays.

Identifying Run-Ons and Sentence Fragments

- Essayists fine-tune their writing by finding and fixing run-ons and sentence fragments.

Celebrating Literary Essays

- Writers find different ways to share and celebrate their completed literary essays.

"The Literary Essay: From Character to Compare/Contrast." *Units of Study in Argument, Information and Narrative Writing, Grade 6.* Lucy Calkins, TCRWP

Alternate Teaching Points:

- Literary essayists write and talk to make connections to form theories about a character. They test their theories by looking for examples from the text. Literary essayists reread in order to test their theories. They may change their theories after discovering new evidence.

- Literary essayists review their evidence and create a supportable claim. They identify reasons and examples to explain and support the claim, and evaluate their examples to identify which examples best support and explain their claim.

- Literary essayists reread to find additional evidence to support the claim. Literary essayists select and organize their evidence to create a plan for drafting. They organize the evidence in a way that logically builds their argument.

- Literary essayists draft body paragraphs by presenting evidence through paraphrase and direct quotes. Literary essayists connect the various types of evidence in the body paragraphs with transitions and

key words. They also connect body paragraphs in the essay with transitions and key words.

- Literary essayists review their plan and body paragraphs; then they write an introductory paragraph that states the claim (thesis statement).
- Literary essayists reread their first draft (introduction and body paragraphs); then they write a concluding paragraph.
- Literary essayists use feedback to identify strengths and set goals for revision.

The following additional teaching points address the objectives of this unit and standards in the Common Core not specifically approached by the Calkins resource:

- Spelling, capitalization, and punctuation
- Literary devices--spotlight on irony
- Relationships between characters, concepts, and events
- Making inferences
- Transition words and phrases
- Verb voice and mood
- Using the ellipsis in quotes to indicate missing words
- Priorities for peer and teacher conferences
- Digital and cloud resources for composing, revising, editing, and publishing
- Making personal pronouns agree with their antecedents
- Using punctuation to set off parenthetical elements.

Assessments

Assessment in this unit takes three forms: diagnostic, formative, and summative. Assessment rubrics are available in Lucy Calkins's Reading and Writing Project resource kits, but teachers may also develop their own rubrics in order to include more specific elements of knowledge and skills listed in this unit summary.

Additionally, student self-assessment and peer assessment should take place whenever possible--again, in all three forms: diagnostic, formative, and summative. Removing the traditional emphasis on teacher assessment enables students to take more initiative and become self-directed.

Also, whenever possible, teacher assessment should take place in the context of a conference, or at least be followed up by a conference. This reinforces expectations, advice, assistance, and ultimately, growth.

<u>Diagnostic Assessments</u>

Review of student's portfolio from the previous school year, particularly literary essays

On-demand literary essay: Read the following story by O. Henry, and explain how the author uses at least two literary devices.

Formative Assessments (Informal)

Daily observation of students' participation and products during the active participation segment of each mini-lesson.

Students' questions, comments, suggestions to teacher

Comments, corrections, and records from peer conferences between students

Formative Assessments (Formal)

Teacher-student conferences

Summative Assessment

Published literary essays

On-demand literary essays

Activities to Differentiate Instruction

While in most categories of writing, the Writing Workshop framework enables students to generate story ideas based on their own interests and experiences, literary essays pose a challenge in this regard. The topics of literary analysis are not as abundant as, for example, the story ideas students could generate when preparing to write a narrative. However, the unit sequence of this curriculum provides that students arrive at this task after creating their own literature and writing a formal essay. Also, teachers may elect to offer students the opportunity to write literary essays based on stories or books of their own individual choosing.

The Reading and Writing Project unit on literary essays serves as an additional resource for differentiation, providing instructional frameworks for essays on literary themes, writer's craft, and literary comparison. While in general concept, those three types of literary analysis are listed in ascending order from least to most abstract, teachers must work with individual students to help them express ideas in all types of essays at the depth appropriate to the students' abilities. Additionally, teachers will emphasize more basic unit objectives (e.g. spelling, punctuation, essay organization) with students whose writing abilities are below or near the norm while challenging students of greater ability to write about the figurative and inferential dimensions of the literature they read. These are merely some strategies that teachers will employ in suiting the writing

experience to each student's interests, abilities, and needs.

For further differentiation, the active participation component of mini-lessons enables a teacher to move around and observe students at work on concepts and strategies that were presented in a whole-class format. The teacher can intervene at his or her discretion. Likewise, a sharing component of many lessons will allow for a sampling of work from multiple students. A greater flow of ideas and products brings about a more thorough appeal to the individual dispositions and learning styles of students listening. Also, this unit will culminate in a publishing/celebrating day on which students put their individual skills and products on display.

Supplementing this, teachers must promote various strategies during all phases of the writing process. Students will have opportunities to work alone, in pairs, and in groups. They will choose either to compose in a traditional pen-on-paper mode or to compose, revise, edit, and publish digitally.

Conferences also provide a critical opportunity for students to receive individual attention and instruction. Small-group conferences with a teacher will allow for a diverse mix of ideas and advice that students can apply to their work whether it was specifically given to them or not, and the discussion is often easier to follow and takes place in closer proximity to individual students than whole-class instruction. Of course, at several stages in the writing process, the teacher will hold conferences with individual students for formative and summative purposes.

In compliance with 504 plans and IEP's, teachers will review applicable documents, consult appropriate personnel connected with special-needs students' cases, work closely with inclusion teachers and classroom aides, and communicate with parents in an effort to see to the specific needs of all students.

In some cases, most often in GATE classes, teachers may elect to have students compile their literary essays into a true publication. This will require many individual students to work in specialized capacities such as copy editors, section editors, editors-in-chief, and layout and design specialists. Over several instructional units, additional students will serve as archivists.

Integrated/Cross-Disciplinary Instruction

Literary essays will be written about fiction and literary fiction on a variety of topics, each of which will apply to content areas across the curriculum. The following are some fiction and nonfiction selections from the Prentice Hall Literature text for grade 6, along with the pertinent content areas.

Teachers may also assign literary essays on book-length selections. When assigning essays based on students'

independent reading books, they will emphasize the affinity of the books' topics with other content areas. Also, students may receive an assignment based on a book they read as a class. The following are the grade 8 book-length selections and the content areas to which they pertain:

- *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor (fiction--social studies)
- *Cathedral* by David Macaulay (nonfiction--social studies, STEM)
- *Black Ships Before Troy* by Rosemary Sutcliff--GATE selection (fiction--social studies)

While some teachers will provide instruction that includes specific concepts from various content areas, all should direct students to specific text and online resources pertinent to various content areas. Also, teachers will consult grade-level content area teachers on concepts covered in their classes, allowing subjects, lessons, and experiences to reinforce each other.

Suggested Mentor Texts and Other Resources

Grade 6 teachers will provide students with mentor texts of their own writing and exemplars written by students in previous years. Additionally, the Calkins resource listed below contains exemplars for literary essays.

Resources:

"Style Guidelines for Formal Essays." A resource composed by GBMS ELA teachers and distributed to students.

Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing:

- "The Literary Essay: From Character to Compare/Contrast." *Units of Study in Argument, Information and Narrative Writing, Grade 6.* Lucy Calkins, TCRWP
- *A Guide to the Common Core Writing Workshop, Intermediate Grades*. Lucy Calkins, TCRWP
- *Writing Pathways, Grades K-8, Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions*. Lucy Calkins, TCRWP
- *If...Then... Curriculum*, Grade 6 (Assessment-Based Instruction). Lucy Calkins, TCRWP
- *Resources for Teaching Writing* (DVD). Lucy Calkins, TCRWP

21st Century Skills

CRP.K-12.CRP2.1	Career-ready individuals readily access and use the knowledge and skills acquired through experience and education to be more productive. They make connections between abstract concepts with real-world applications, and they make correct insights about when it is appropriate to apply the use of an academic skill in a workplace situation.
CRP.K-12.CRP4.1	Career-ready individuals communicate thoughts, ideas, and action plans with clarity, whether using written, verbal, and/or visual methods. They communicate in the workplace with clarity and purpose to make maximum use of their own and others' time. They are excellent writers; they master conventions, word choice, and organization, and use effective tone and presentation skills to articulate ideas. They are skilled at interacting with others; they are active listeners and speak clearly and with purpose. Career-ready individuals think about the audience for their communication and prepare accordingly to ensure the desired outcome.
CRP.K-12.CRP11.1	Career-ready individuals find and maximize the productive value of existing and new technology to accomplish workplace tasks and solve workplace problems. They are flexible and adaptive in acquiring new technology. They are proficient with ubiquitous technology applications. They understand the inherent risks-personal and organizational-of technology applications, and they take actions to prevent or mitigate these risks.