Unit 4 Writing: An Introduction to Literary Essay

Content Area: **English Language Arts**
Course(s):
Time Period: **Trimester 3**
Length: **7-8 Weeks**
Status: **Published**

Brief Summary of Unit

Grade 3, Unit 4: Literary Essay introduces students to the literary essay genre across three distinct instruction bends focused on character traits, character changes, and the biographies of real people. Students learn to formulate a clear claim or thesis statement and support it by gathering text-based evidence and analyzing story illustrations. Throughout the drafting process, students refine their writing by incorporating transitions, retelling scenes with vivid detail, and inserting direct quotes. Finally, they evaluate their writing using checklists and collaborate with peers to compile and publish their essays in class literary journals.

This unit is designed to be part of a developmental progression across grade levels and make interdisciplinary connections across content areas including physical and social sciences, technology, career readiness, cultural awareness, and global citizenship. During this course, students are provided with opportunities to develop skills that pertain to a variety of careers.

Revision Date: June 2026

Pacing Guide

Please refer to the Language Arts Writing Workshop pacing guide for grade 3 in the curriculum folder. Sentence Study is paced and aligned within the Syntax, Style, Grammar and Conventions section. Please refer to this folder for the scope and sequence as well as specific lessons and materials for Sentence Study.

A sample K-5 Literacy Schedule Across a Week is accessible in instructional materials section of the Grades K-5 folder.

Standards

The identified standards reflect a developmental progression across grades/ levels and make interdisciplinary connections across content areas including social sciences, technology, career readiness, cultural awareness and global citizenship.

These mandates may be hit through the selection of choice literature:

Amistad Commission

This unit also reflects the goals of the Department of Education and the Amistad Commission including the infusion of the history of Africans and African-Americans into the curriculum in order to provide an accurate, complete, and inclusive history regarding the importance of African-Americans to the growth and development of American society in a global context.

Asian American and Pacific Islander History Law

This unit includes instructional materials that highlight the history and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in accordance with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards in Social Studies.

New Jersey Diversity and Inclusion Law

In accordance with New Jersey's Chapter 32 Diversity and Inclusion Law, this unit includes instructional mater

economic diversity, equity, inclusion, tolerance, and belonging in connection with race and ethnicity, disabilitie

The standards that follow are relevant to this course in addition to the associated content-based standards listed below:

Language Domain

- L.WF.3.2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of encoding and spelling.
- L.WF.3.3: Demonstrate command of the conventions of writing including those listed under grade two foundational skills.
- L.KL.3.1: Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.
- L.VI.3.3: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

Reading Domain

- RL.CR.3.1: Ask and answer questions and make relevant connections to demonstrate understanding of a literary text, referring explicitly to textual evidence as the basis for the answers.
- RI.CR.3.1: Ask and answer questions and make relevant connections to demonstrate understanding of an informational text, referring explicitly to textual evidence as the basis for the answers.
- RI.CI.3.2: Recount in oral and written form the key details from a multi-paragraph informational text and explain how they support the main idea.
- RL.IT.3.3: Describe the development of individual character's traits, motivations, or feelings and explain how their actions contribute to the plot within a text.
- RI.IT.3.3: Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect.
- RL.TS.3.4: Utilize and reference features of a text when writing or speaking about a text, referring to parts of stories, dramas, and poems, using terms such as chapter, scene, and stanza; describe how each successive part builds on earlier sections.
- RI.TS.3.4: Utilize and reference features of a text when writing or speaking about a text, using text features (e.g., graphics, images, captions, headings) and search tools (e.g., key words, sidebars,

hyperlinks) to locate and integrate information relevant to a given topic efficiently.
- RL.PP.3.5: Distinguish their own point of view from that of the narrator or those of the characters.
- RL.MF.3.6: Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).

Writing Domain

- W.AW.3.1: Write opinion texts to present an idea with reasons and information.
- W.NW.3.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events with basic story elements.
- W.WP.3.4: With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing.
- W.WR.3.5: Generate questions about a topic and independently locate related information from at least two reference sources (print and non-print) to obtain information on that topic.
- W.SE.3.6: Use discussion, books, or media resources to gather ideas, outline them, and prioritize the information to include while planning to write about a topic.
- W.RW.3.7: Engage in independent and task-based writing for both short and extended periods of time, producing written work routinely.

Speaking & Listening Domain

- SL.PE.3.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- SL.II.3.2: Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- SL.PI.3.4: Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace.
- SL.UM.3.5: Use multimedia to demonstrate fluid reading at an understandable pace; add visual displays when appropriate to emphasize or enhance certain facts or details.

9.4.5.CI.1	Use appropriate communication technologies to collaborate with individuals with diverse perspectives about a local and/or global climate change issue and deliberate about possible solutions (e.g., W.4.6, 3.MD.B.3,7.1.NM.IPERS.6).
9.4.5.CI.3	Participate in a brainstorming session with individuals with diverse perspectives to expand one's thinking about a topic of curiosity (e.g., 8.2.5.ED.2, 1.5.5.CR1a).
9.4.5.TL.3	Format a document using a word processing application to enhance text, change page formatting, and include appropriate images graphics, or symbols.

Performing Arts Standards

1.4.5.Cr1: (a). Create roles, imagined worlds, and improvised stories in a drama/theatre work articulating the physical qualities of characters, visual details of imagined worlds, and given circumstances of improvised stories in a drama/theatre work. (b). Imagine, articulate, and design ideas for costumes, props, and sets that support the story, given circumstances, and characters in a drama/theatre work. (c). Imagine how a character's inner thoughts impact their actions and collaborate to determine how characters might move and speak to support the story and given circumstances in drama/theatre work.

1.4.5.Cr3: (a). Collaborate with peers to revise, refine, adapt, and improve ideas to fit the given parameters of an improvised or scripted drama/theatre work through self and collaborative review. (b). Use and adapt sounds and

movements in a guided drama experience. (c). Refine technical choices by creating innovative solutions to design and technical problems that arise in rehearsal for a drama/theatre work.

1.4.5.Pr5: (a). Describe and apply dramatic elements of dialogue, action, character emotion, and theme in the

performance and/or creation of a drama/theatre work. (b). Physically and intellectually investigate how movement and vocal choices are incorporated and make meaning in drama/theatre work.

1.4.5.Re7: (a). Identify, explain, and demonstrate an understanding of both artistic choices and personal reactions made in a drama/theatre work through participation and observation.

1.4.5.Re8: (a). Develop and implement a plan to evaluate drama/theatre work. (b). Analyze technical elements from

multiple drama/theatre works and assess how the technical elements may support or represent the themes or central ideas of drama/theatre works. (c). Evaluate and analyze how a character’s choices and character's circumstances impact an audience’s perspective in a drama/theatre work.

1.4.5.Re9: (a). Compare and contrast multiple personal experiences when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work. and justify responses to drama/theatre work based on personal experience. (b). Explain responses to characters based on cultural perspectives when participating in or observing drama/theatre work. (c). Identify and discuss physiological changes connected to emotions on posture, gesture, breathing, and vocal intonation in drama/theatre work.

1.4.5.Cn10: (a). Explain how drama/theatre connects oneself to a community or culture and identify the ways drama/theatre work reflects the perspectives of a community or culture.

Essential Questions

- Bend 1: How can we write literary essays about characters’ feelings and traits?
- Bend 2: How can we write literary essays about character change?

- Bend 3: How can we write literary essays about biographies?

Students Will Know/Students Will Be Skilled At

By the end of this unit, students…

- Understand the specific genre of literary essays and follow a standard essay structure.
- Formulate a clear claim or thesis statement about a character's traits, feelings, or changes.
- Gather and include 2-3 specific pieces of evidence from the text to support a claim.
- Incorporate linking and transitional phrases (e.g., "For example," "In the beginning") to connect ideas and improve flow.
- Retell story moments using vivid, precise language to help the reader visualize the scene.
- Create strong endings that restate the claim and leave the reader with a personal connection or a compliment to the author/character.
- Analyze and write about how a character's feelings shift from the beginning to the end of a story.
- Apply literary essay techniques to narrative nonfiction and real people.
- "Talk in essay" by practicing their arguments aloud before committing them to paper.
- Use checklists and exemplars to evaluate their own work and set specific revision goals.
- Follow a multi-step "recipe" (generating ideas, gathering evidence, jotting a plan) independently for new essays.
- Use an editing checklist to polish work for publication, focusing on one "lens" at a time (e.g., punctuation, subject-verb agreement)

Evidence/Performance Tasks

Students demonstrate differentiated proficiency through both formative and summative assessments in the classroom. Based on individual student readiness and performance, assessments can be implemented as formative and/or summative.

Developmental progression across years in both reading and writing is evidenced by multiple benchmark assessment screeners, administered three times per year. Follow up diagnostic assessments are used to target skill remediation. Student proficiency allows for additional or alternative assessment based on demonstration

or absence of skill.

The performance tasks listed below are examples of the types of assessments teachers may use in the classroom and the data collected by the district to track student progress.

Formative:

- Answer essential questions
- Teacher observations/conferring notes
- Turn and talks
- Partnerships rehearsing their writing
- Peer Conferences
- Writer's Notebook (quick writes/drafts/prewrites)
- Teacher checklists using mini-lessons for measurable skills
- Writing Conferences: Individual and small group
- Writing Partnership work and discussions
- Writing folders with student work
- Writing pieces to note the growth need of the writer
- Observations
- Listening in on partnership discussion of writing piece
- Drafts online (Google Docs)
- Writing Club work and discussions

Summative:

- Students should have 2-3 final pieces to score not including the post assessment.
- Published pieces
- Embedded sentence patterns in writing pieces as modeled and practiced through mentor sentence study
- Score grammar and spelling in final drafts only
- Student portfolios
- During publishing students read their piece to assess oral speaking and reading skills
- Rubrics: created for the standards-based report card as well as teacher-created.
- Standards should be addressed as reported on the Standards-Based Report Card

Benchmark:

- Benchmark writing assessments: opinion, narrative, and informational, scored using rubrics, district-created and provided.
- Located in the shared Grades K-5 Language Arts folder on the Google Drive, reported three times per year

Learning Plan

Our upper elementary writing instruction follows a balanced literacy approach including a number of strategies and techniques in Writing Workshop. These include mini-lessons, shared writing, independent writing, small group strategy instruction, one-to-one conferencing, partnerships and/or writing clubs. Writing Workshop emphasizes immersion, independence, and choice. Individual conferences with each student will address specific needs of the writer. Each unit ends with a celebration of learning where children share their writing with others in the school community.

To assist students in reaching the goals for this unit, teachers will guide them through the following steps:

- Immersing students to study the purpose, structure, and characteristics of writing while generating possible writing ideas
- Choosing topics by considering focused areas of expertise
- Organizing information and writing pieces
- Elaborating to increase writing volume and to add a variety of detail
- Revising and editing to prepare for publishing

Through mentor text, students will be immersed in text type in order to recognize text features and structures of the particular type of writing. It is suggested that students form writing partnerships with the goal of collaborating and supporting each other throughout the writing process. Grammar and conventions mini lessons will be taught throughout this unit.

Lessons should follow the mini-lesson format:

- Teaching point(s) for each lesson
- Connection: Connects new learning to previous learning/lessons
- Teach/Modeling: Uses ‘think alouds’ when modeling what you expect students to do
- Guided Practice/Active Engagement: Guides students through practice of the teaching point
- Link to Independent Practice: Helps writers understand the purpose for the writing they are about to do and the skills/craft they will be practicing/applying independently as good writers
- Independent Writing/Student Conferences: Provides time for students to do independent writing while teacher confers with individual students, works with small groups, or writing clubs.
- Closure/Sharing: Pull students back together and recognize the work they have done relating to the teaching point.

The architecture of a writing conference includes:

- Research
- Decide
- Teach and Coach with guided practice
- Link

Sentence Study

Mentor Sentence study will be taught across the week to teach syntax, diction, grammar, and punctuation. Student will learn how to write like an author by mimicking specific entence patterns and applying it to their own writing. Please refer to this folder for the scope and sequence as well as specific lessons.

Teachers may personalize instruction during this unit and address the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations, or cultural backgrounds of individual students.

Before Beginning This Unit . . .

Before beginning this unit:

- Prepare anchor charts
- Prepare paper choices for students in a Writing Center
- Review the mentor texts and videos (Pip, Dust Buddies, Joy and Heron, Hair Love, Piper, Lou, Watercress, The Girl Who Thought in Pictures.)
- Prepare the teacher demonstration texts (Bend 1: Literary Essay about Pip, Bend 2: Literary Essay about Watercress, Bend 3: Literary Essay about Temple Grandin)
- Prepare to give the On-Demand Assessment

Detailed Curriculum Map

Teaching Points and lessons are located in the K-5 folder under Grade 3 Curriculum for Language Arts. These curriculum unit guides include not only aligned teaching points to standards, but also specific lessons and appropriate resources. Guidelines for preparing to teach the unit as well as goals for the end of the unit are outlined. Academic vocabulary and prerequisite skills are identified. Essential questions and possible assessments are detailed as well.

Materials

The materials used in this course allow for integration of a variety of instructional, enrichment, and intervention materials that support student learners at all levels in the school and home environments. Associated web content and media sources are infused into the unit as applicable and available.

Instructional Materials

The instructional materials which correspond with this unit are linked in the detailed curriculum map under resources and housed in the Grades K-5 folder under grade 3.

The core materials for this unit include the Units of Study in Writing for grade 3, The Reading and Writing

Project at Mossflower, 2026.

Please refer to this folder for specific materials for Sentence Study.

Teacher Resources

- Heinemann Online Flight Materials
- *The Writing Strategies Book*, Jennifer Serravallo
- *Feedback that Moves Writers Forward,* Patty McGee
- *Patterns of Power*, Jeff Anderson
- *Mechanically Inclined*, Jeff Anderson
- The Story of My Thining, Gretchen Bernabei
- Trail of Breadcrumbs Website
- Two Writing Teachers Blog
- *Assessing Writers*, Carl Anderson
- Cranford Public School Grades K-5 Google Folder for instructional materials

Suggested Strategies for Modifications and Accommodations

Content specific accomodations and modifications as well as Career Ready Practices are listed here for all students, including: Special Education, English Language Learners, At Risk of School Failure, Gifted and Talented, Students with 504.

The structure of writing workshop is designed to differentiate and address specific goals and learning for each reader:

- The unit includes presentation of material through multiple modalities such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic to address the unique learning styles of all students.
- The teacher will assign, assess and modify if necessary to address the specific needs of the learner.
- Students have individualized choice of topics within each unit.
- Individual conferences with each student will address specific needs of the writer.

Possible accommodations during writing workshop include, but are not limited to:

- Use visual presentations of all materials to include organizers, charts, word walls.
- Work in partnerships
- Give responses in a form (verbal or written) that is easier for the student
- Take additional time to compete a task or project
- Take frequent breaks

- Use an alarm to help with time management
- Mark text with a highlighter or other manipulative such as a post-it
- Receive help coordinating assignments
- Answering fewer questions or completing shorter tasks
- Create alternate assignments or homework
- Provide distinct steps in a process; elminate unnecessary steps, as needed.
- Manage executive function by scaffolding process and amending deadlines
- Access speech to text function on computer

Possible modifications to content during writing workshop include, but are not limited to:

- Refer to the Strategies for Striving Students in the K-8 folder for specific appropriate interventions.
- Adhere to all modifications and accomodations as prescribed in IEP and 504 plans.

Framework for Alternative Setting (LEAP Program at Lincoln School)

In our K–5 alternative school setting, each class consists of students who require a highly personalized approach to reading instruction. The district's core Writing Units of Study will continue to serve as the primary writing curriculum framework; however, lessons will be further adapted to ensure accessibility and engagement for all learners. Teachers will use a combination of pacing adjustments, flexible timing, and individualized goal setting to meet students at their current skill levels. Instruction will be delivered through a blend of whole-group, small-group, and one-on-one settings, with intentional scaffolds in place to build confidence and reduce frustration.

To adapt any writing unit for an alternative school serving students with school avoidance, anxiety, behavior challenges, and social constraints, teachers should employ flexible, supportive modifications while aligning with grade-level writing standards (focusing on organization, elaboration, and mechanics) and speaking/listening standards (focusing on collaborative discussions).

- Timing Adjustments: Extend the pacing of instructional blocks or bends (e.g., extending a typical 2-week drafting phase to 3 weeks) with shorter daily writing sessions (20–30 minutes). Incorporate calming transitions or choice-based entry activities to ease transition anxiety.
- Activity Modifications: During the initial brainstorming and topic-generation phase, use sensory-friendly methods like drawing, sketching, or voice recording instead of demanding whole-group sharing. During structural planning, provide pre-made graphic organizers tailored to the specific genre's layout (e.g., chronological, narrative plot maps, or thesis-and-reason structures) and allow low-stakes, paired verbal rehearsals to build confidence. For the revision phase, incorporate supportive one-on-one teacher conferring for feedback, replacing peer review sessions with optional self-reflection journals. Simplify checklists and rubrics with visual icons, and offer flexible writing alternatives like dictated drafts or digital speech-to-text tools for students with severe writing aversion.
- Intervention Programs: Integrate comprehension-focused frameworks (such as Visualizing and Verbalizing) to unpack exemplar texts, structured foundations programs (like UFLI) for keyword jotting and sentence-level drafting, and systematic phonics/morphology programs (like Sonday System) during conventions exploration (e.g., mechanics, grammar, and parts of speech).
- NJTSS Framework: Implement Tier 1 universal supports, such as explicit modeling of introductions, transitions, and conclusions with visual aids; Tier 2 targeted small-group interventions for elaboration and planning, tracked via regular anecdotal notes; and Tier 3 intensive individualized sessions for goal-setting and revision, prioritizing emotional safety and student agency.

- Data Analysis: Leverage formative assessments (e.g., conferring notes, on-demand writing samples) and summative pre/post benchmarks to personalize pacing, ensuring students produce structured, cohesive compositions in a nurturing environment that celebrates writing progress through low-pressure, voluntary sharing.