

Personal Narrative and Literary Essay

Content Area: **English Language Arts**
Course(s): **Creative Writing**
Time Period: **5 weeks**
Length: **5 weeks**
Status: **Published**

Unit Overview

This unit is usually the start of the semester, as it is generally the most accessible. Teachers can either have the students choose from the two big assignments or have the students do both. Essentially, the students read examples of different approaches to the personal and literary essay genre. From the personal essay genre, selections span topics like identity, memory, and change. Essays in the literary essay genre shift more towards performance-oriented or exploratory topics; here students will explore topics like death, boredom, obscene luxury. The chief difference, however, is the writers approach to the topic at hand. In the personal essay, the writer herself is exploring an experience or personal revelation. In the literary essay, the writer is interested in exploring an idea as it presents itself in life or culture; however, the writer is not necessarily interested in approaching that topic or channeling the discussion of that topic through a personal experience.

Texts used in this unit are listed below; however, the instructor should be always on the lookout for fresh, interesting approaches to the genre which is currently hugely popular and readily available. Magazines like *The New Yorker*, *Harpers*, *N+1* and *Lapham's Quarterly* are almost always good starting places, with each issue of the latter two being about single thematic topics. That said, the more range of topics and voices that can be introduced into the reading aspects of the unit will help to unlock those topics and voices in the students.

Main assignments for this unit include the personal essay, the literary essay, close-readings of essays, and journaling about possible topics of interest. Assignments about specific skills (I.e., description in writing, etc) occur over the entire course and are used as necessary.

Transfer and Understanding

Students will understand the following:

- Ways in which they might adjust their sentence structure and length to adjust tone to a desired effect.
- Ways in which they might use their words of different origin, tone, and mood to adjust tone to a desired effect.
- Ways in which they might follow a traditional structure to build to or from a specific topic, and how that structure clarifies the topic and creates a specific effect.
- Ways in which manipulating the structure of an essay can play with the reader's expectations, and how to balance typical and atypical structure.
- When and how to use metaphor, simile, specific or unique description, imagery, symbol, and specific detail to move through the ideas and emotions they wish to in the way they aim to move through them.
- That self-criticism is important and necessary to be successful at the above.

Essential Questions

Students will continually consider the following:

- Why did this essay need to be written? What is fresh to the approach the author is taking?
- How does the author build in the meaning, symbolism, clues, et cetera into the story?
- What literary techniques does a writer use to build and explore the ideas and tone of the essay?
- What ideas in one's own writing must be expanded, altered, or omitted to serve the essay in either what the writer actually intends of the essay or what the essay might ideally become?
- Why might I be reluctant to change something about my writing, and how can I move past that to make the writing better?
- How might a sentence or paragraph be manipulated or adjusted get the feeling of that sentence or paragraph closer to what the essay either is or is desired to be?
- How does the structure or shape of the essay adjust or contribute to the essay topic or subtopic?

Application of Knowledge and Skill

Students will be able to do the following:

Students will be able to independently using their learning to do the following in both reading another's text and writing their own essays:

- Identify and analyze the techniques specific writers use to explore their topics.
- Examine and analyze how sentence style and length contributes to authorial voice or the texture or tone of an essay.
- Examine and analyze how an author organizes the narrative or argument structure to build her ideas.
- Examine and analyze how an author plays with expectations of narrative or argument structure so that that structure might be manipulated or shifted to surprise the reader, and to understand the effect that shift in structure has on the topic, meaning, etc.
- Examine and analyze areas in which an author used detailed description of varying lengths and the effects those descriptions have.
- Examine and analyze situations in which an author employs specific, original detail of varying lengths and the effects that specificity has.
- Examine and analyze situations in which an author employs specific, original metaphor/simile of varying lengths and the effects that metaphor/simile has.
- Examine and analyze the techniques used to introduce and build the importance of a symbol in the essay.
- Students will write and self-critically revise their own attempts at personal and literary essays using the skills in analysis practiced above.

Students will apply their knowledge to create or accurately and thoughtfully complete the following:

- Critiques of professional writers' essays or chapter excerpts.
- Close-readings (that is, marking up texts) of texts, with emphasis on the writer's technique.
- Pre-writing exercises developing various literary elements to use in their formal essays.
- Personal essay – Essay about a personal, usually transformative experience.
- Literary essay – Essay about an idea or cultural moment, usually with some non-traditional or fresh approach or "reading" of the topic.
- Critiques of fellow-students' and their own writing.

Academic Vocabulary

- Metaphor
- Simile
- Detail
- Description
- Noun
- Verb
- Adjective
- Adverb
- Structure
- Mood
- Tone
- Induction
- Deduction

Learning Goal 1

Students will understand and be able to employ specific sentence, paragraph, and full-essay structure, and they will understand how that structure contributes to a desired literary effect.

Target 1

Students will be able to analyze specific structural elements of a published texts and their effects on the freshness of texts being analyzed.

LA.RL.11-12.2	Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
LA.RL.11-12.3	Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
LA.RL.11-12.5	Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.
LA.RI.11-12.2	Determine two or more central ideas of a text, and analyze their development and how they interact to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.
LA.RI.11-12.3	Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.
LA.RI.11-12.5	Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her

exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

Target 2

Students will analyze the relationship between structural technique and desired theme/effect in a published text.

LA.RL.11-12.2	Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
LA.RL.11-12.3	Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
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LA.RI.11-12.5	Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

Target 3

Students will employ knowledge of the range of structural elements of an essay to their own essay.

LA.W.11-12.1	Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
LA.W.11-12.1.A	Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
LA.W.11-12.1.C	Use transitions (e.g., words, phrases, clauses) to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.

Learning Goal 2

Students will understand and be able to employ knowledge of when and how to use metaphor, simile, specific or unique description, imagery, symbol, and specific detail to move through the ideas and emotions they wish to in the way they aim to move through them.

Target 1

Students will be able to analyze specific literary techniques (such as metaphor, simile, specific/unique description, imagery, symbol, and specific detail) in a literary work under study.

LA.RL.11-12.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (e.g., Shakespeare as well as other authors.)
LA.RL.11-12.6	Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).
LA.RI.11-12.6	Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.
LA.L.11-12.5.A	Interpret figures of speech (e.g., hyperbole, paradox) in context and analyze their role in the text.
LA.L.11-12.6	Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

Target 2

Students will analyze the relationship and appropriateness of specific literary techniques in relation to the theme, topic, and effect that the text hopes to achieve.

LA.RL.11-12.6	Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).
LA.RI.11-12.6	Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.
LA.L.11-12.5.A	Interpret figures of speech (e.g., hyperbole, paradox) in context and analyze their role in the text.
LA.L.11-12.6	Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

Target 3

Students will employ knowledge of the range of literary elements of an essay to their own essay.

LA.W.11-12.1.C	Use transitions (e.g., words, phrases, clauses) to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.
LA.W.11-12.1.D	Establish and maintain a style and tone appropriate to the audience and purpose (e.g., formal and objective for academic writing) while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

LA.W.11-12.3.A	Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.
LA.W.11-12.3.B	Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
LA.W.11-12.3.C	Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution).
LA.W.11-12.3.D	Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.
LA.L.11-12.6	Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

Learning Goal 3

Students will understand and be able to effective word choice to achieve desired drive or tone in the text.

Formative Assessment and Performance Opportunities

- Discussion
- Handouts/Worksheets
- Journaling
- Text Mark-Ups/Close-Readings
- Personal Essay Revision
- Literary Essay Revision
- Do Nows/Closures/Daily Writes

Summative Assessment

- Personal Essay
- Literary Essay

Differentiation

- Allow for shorter responses on daily written assignments
- Grouping students with others of greater ability

Enrichment

- Write longer works
- Compile, edit literary magazine for the class.

Unit Resources

- Background notes on above academic terms
 - Marcel Proust's madeline cookie excerpt from "Swann's Way" from *In Search of Lost Time*
 - David Foster Wallace's "Shipping Out" (aka "A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never do Again")
 - David Sedaris' "Tricked"
 - Karl Ove on Eating Cereal from *My Struggle*
 - Virginia Woolf's "The Death of the Moth"
 - E.B. White's "Once More to the Lake"
 - Karl Ove Knausgaard's "Apples" and "Loneliness" from *Autumn*
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- Background Notes
 - Original Texts
 - Video
 - Vocabulary words and examples