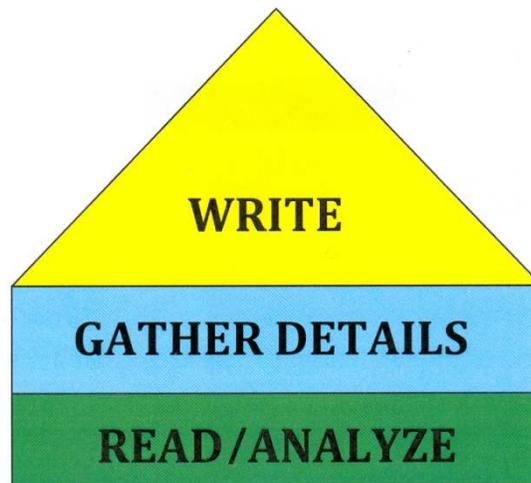

Building a Literary Analysis Essay



A literary analysis discusses the interpretation of a piece of literature. In order to meet the demands of the PPS Literary Analysis Common Assignment, students need to carefully examine and evaluate an aspect of a work of literature (Read/Analyze), draw a conclusion(s) from that analysis (Gather Details), and then write an essay (Write).

READING/ANALYZING – During this portion of the assignment teachers may choose to have students analyze the piece of literature as they read the first time or complete the analysis upon a second reading. Reading and analyzing at the same time is better done with a short story than with a novel. Analysis lessons in this section might include:

- ◆ Dialogue Journals
- ◆ Use of Sticky-Notes
- ◆ Color-Marking
- ◆ Charting Character Change

GATHERING DETAILS – Once students have completed their analysis of the selection, they should then begin to interpret their findings in order to draw a conclusion that will help focus their thesis for the essay. After determining a thesis, students should then return to their analysis and begin to gather only the details that support their thesis statement and that they will include in their essay. Lessons in this section might include:

- ◆ Creating a Thesis Statement
- ◆ Selecting Direct Quotations
- ◆ Eliminating Extra Information
- ◆ Using Graphic Organizers

WRITING – Now that students have determined a thesis statement and have gathered together the specific details that support their interpretation of the literature selection, they are ready to begin to write. Lessons in this section might include:

- ◆ Effective Leads
- ◆ Forming Paragraphs
- ◆ Use of Transition Words
- ◆ Establishing Context
- ◆ Embedding Quotations
- ◆ Revision

Literary Analysis - Introduction

This unit is designed to support the writing of a Literary Analysis essay (PPS Common Assignment). Teachers should keep in mind that before students start to write their analysis in essay form sufficient time should be spent reading, rereading, analyzing and gathering details. Also, in order for students to answer the prompt accurately and to analyze effectively the story must be well chosen to ensure that it fits the prompt. Because it is recommended that students read a selection and revisit the text multiple times, short stories are suggested for this assignment.

The lessons included in this unit reflect skills that can be taught throughout the year and are necessary for this mode of writing. Some of the lessons have been written with a specific prompt in mind, however most of the lessons can be adapted to fit your specific grade level and prompt.

The unit begins with teaching students to reflect and record thoughts as they read. Students are then taught to analyze the prompt and the components of a successful paper. Other lessons include writing a strong thesis, establishing a context, using evidence from the text, and properly embedding quotes. The unit concludes with a lesson on writing a strong conclusion. Additionally, there are three literary essay formats that provide the organization of the essay. Literary essay format 1 is for a 3-paragraph essay; format 2 is for a 4-paragraph paper; and format 3 is for 5 paragraphs. Use the format best suited to the skill level of your students. While this organizational tool can be used for all of the prompts, teachers teaching the 8th Grade Compare and Contrast prompt may wish to use a different graphic organizer that addresses compare and contrast organization.

Following is a list of the necessary steps to keep in mind as students are writing literary analysis essays:

1. Choose the text (story or poem)
2. Determine what element of the literature will be analyzed
3. Read the text several times and take notes
4. Brainstorm an idea for a thesis statement-the interpretation of the analysis
5. Decide on the argument to make and then gather evidence to support that argument
6. Begin to write, keeping in mind the following:
 - Write in the present tense
 - Use third person, i.e., he, she (avoid “I” or “You” statements)
 - Focus on the *analysis*; avoid writing a plot summary
 - Use literary terms (i.e., character, theme, setting, protagonist, conflict, etc.)
 - Support points with evidence from the text (i.e., well chosen direct quotes from the story)

“Good Reads” for Literary Analysis Assignment Suggested by PPS teachers

The following list of short stories was compiled by Portland Public Schools’ teachers and is meant to give suggestions of great literature for use in common assignments. In order for students to answer the prompt accurately and to analyze effectively, the story must be well chosen and ensure that it fits the prompt. These stories boldly exemplify the components needed for students to read, understand, and analyze well. Novels can be used for these assignments but, due to their length, make the teaching of the writing unit longer, and can prolong student need to retain certain specific information. Because these titles are short stories, students can read, reread, and reread again the text in a timely manner appropriate for this writing unit. Following this list is a list of Poems found in EMC that support the 8th grade Compare and Contrast prompt.

Name of Book/Story	Author	Grade Level	Prompt
“Eleven”	Sandra Cisneros	6	Character change
“Goodness of Matt Kaiser”	Avi	6	Character change
“Raymond’s Run”	Toni Cade Bambara	6	Character change
“All Summer in a Day”	Ray Bradbury	6	Conflict
“Rikki-Tikki-Tavi”	Rudyard Kipling	6	Conflict
“The Ugly Duckling”	A.A. Milne	6	Conflict

Literary Analysis: Charting Character Change

Teaching Point(s):

- Use focused questions and journal entries to track character change, motivation, and/or effects of change
- Analyze literature

Standard(s):

CC.1.4.6.B, CC.1.4.6.C, CC.1.4.6.D, CC.1.4.6.F

Materials:

- Short story
- Reading journals
- Chart paper and markers

Connection:

“Has something ever happened to you that caused a change in your life? Why do characters in novels go through changes, and how does it affect their life and who they are as a person?”

Give students a chance to respond.

“We have been learning about how an author develops a character through characterization. In this story, we are going to really focus on the main character. As we read this story, we are going to answer questions in our journals that will help us think about the character, their actions, and their motivations. I will write the questions on the data projector, and you will write them down in your journals. We will discuss the questions to predict what will happen in the next part of the story. After we read each section, you need to answer the questions in your journal.”

Modeling (I do):

- Write the questions you will have students answer for the first section of the story so that all students can see. Repeat this as you work through each section of the story.
- Questions begin with characterization of the character you want to focus on then move to what the character is going through, why they are acting the way they are (motivation), how do they change in the end and why, and what are the effects of those changes on the character and those around them.
- After reading the first section of the story, think aloud as you model the answering of the first question. Be sure to include the evidence from the text that supports your interpretation. You may wish to repeat this modeling as you work through the sections of the story.
- Hang up the finished charts in sequential order for students to visually see progression as the class is reading the story.

Guided Practice (We do):

- After modeling the first question, have the students work in their table groups to answer the second question. Remind the table groups to include the evidence from the text that supports their opinion.
- Then have the table groups make a list of what the character is like at the beginning of the story, based on their reading, their answers in their journals, and discussions.
- Table groups each share out, and then the whole class decides upon and makes a character chart on the person that lists their character traits, including evidence from the text that supports their opinions.
- During the conflict and the beginning changes in the character, the whole class repeats this process, charting the conflict for the character and their changes.
- At the end of the story, the whole class again makes a chart noting the changes in the character, the reasons for those changes, and the effects of those changes.

Independent Practice (You do):

- Students answer the two questions that are posed for each section of the story in their individual reading journals. Ask students to include support as they work in their journals.
- Students can recreate the larger group charts in their individual journals if they'd like.

Closure:

Students pair-share their answers to the two questions in the last 3 minutes of each class. Give feedback to the students on their answers.

Assessment – Check for Understanding

Teacher can collect students' journals to check that answers in the journals clearly reflect their comprehension of the story. Students' character analysis essays should clearly state the character's change, the motivation for that change, and there should be evidence from the text (based on the journal questions) to support their assertions.

Reflection:**Resources and References: (adapted from, acknowledgements)**

Literary Analysis: Examining Conflict or Theme Using Dialogue Journals

Teaching Point(s):

- Use dialogue journals to examine conflict or theme
- Analyze literature

Standard(s):

CC.1.4.6.B, CC.1.4.6.C, CC.1.4.6.D, CC.1.4.6.F, CC.1.4.6.S

Materials:

- Chart paper
- Sticky notes
- Reading journals
- Write-In Reader – “All Summer in a Day” (or other text)

Connection:

“Writing about what we think while we read helps us to capture the unique thoughts we have as readers. Writing about what we read helps us to monitor our comprehension. Using our journal entries will help us to further develop our ideas when we’re ready to write our essay.”

Modeling (I do):

Gather students together in the classroom library where they can sit closely together while you read and talk about your thinking. Have students bring with them their text, journal and pencil. Place chart board next to you with a T-chart drawn on it. Title it: “All Summer in a Day”. The left side should say “Text”, and the right side should say, “What the text makes me think”.

Set an expectation with the students that good readers often stop regularly (page by page even), and check their comprehension by making sure they are understanding what’s happening in the story. Not all readers write down what they are thinking, but because we are going to be writing an essay about this story, we are going to stop regularly and write down what we are thinking, and what is happening in the text that gives us those thoughts. Your chart paper should reflect what their reading notebook will soon look like.

If you haven’t modeled this type of “think aloud” before you will want to let your students know that you will be thinking while you read, stopping and writing when you have a notable thought.

Starting at the beginning of the text, read aloud. About mid-way down the page when Ray Bradbury is thoroughly describing a wet, rain soaked place, stop and write down a personal connection, “I feel this way about Portland when it’s so rainy and gray, like Venus, in January.” Place the sticky note on the right side of my T-Chart. On the left write down the page number, and paragraph reference. Continue to read and stop once again to write, “Maybe Margot feels depressed on Venus.” Again, write the page number and paragraph reference.

Guided Practice (We do):

After you have two modeled examples, ask the students do this work with a partner. For this part of the lesson pass around a sticky note pad and let kids have one sticky note each. Direct the students to reread from where you started, the first page of the text, with a partner sitting nearby. Each student will stop (at some point while they read) and write what he/she is thinking on the sticky note, adding their sticky notes to the T-Chart.

Students should take turns reading for one, maybe two pages. After all students have posted their thinking, review the chart and share out what you've gathered. Point out what is similar amongst the ideas, while also pointing out what is unique.

As students leave the carpet have them take their sticky note off the T-Chart. It can become the first note in their Reading Journal.

Independent Practice (You do):

Students should then go back to their desks set up their Reading Journals like the T-Chart. Once their journal is ready, students are ready to start reading. Depending on the length of the short story, students may be able to independently finish the text today, or this lesson may be continued on the following day(s).

Closure:

While students read, walk around the room to confer with individuals. This conference is a reading conference, but you'll want to monitor for what they write about. The question you might ask to get started is, "What parts of the story are you writing about?"

As you confer with students, look for examples to share with the class. Point out what is working in their note taking, what ideas they are expressing, and how these ideas develop amongst different readers/writers as they progress through the story.

Assessment – Check for Understanding

The student's Reading Journals document their understanding. As you confer, assess whether or not the student is understanding what they read, understanding what to write about, and what challenges students need to enhance or enrich their reading.

"I like to keep the T-chart up for the students to see as a model. Once students remove their sticky notes from the chart paper, however, the model doesn't exist (except for my two examples). It is best if some students who felt comfortable add to the chart paper while they read (while also writing in their journals) so that the journal model exists with more student examples."

Reflection:

Resources and References: (adapted from, acknowledgements)

Literary Essays: Writing About Reading, Lucy Calkins and Medea McEvoy

Literary Analysis: Understanding the Prompt for Literary Analysis

**This lesson can be adapted to fit all of the Common Assignment prompts*

Teaching Point(s):

- Deconstruct literary analysis prompts
- Re-write the literary analysis prompt in student friendly language

Standard(s):

CC.1.4.6.H, CC.1.4.6.I, CC.1.4.6.J, CC.1.4.6.K

Materials:

- 1 copy per student of the Language Arts Common Assignment prompt (hole punched if possible)
- Highlighters – 1 per student
- Pencils/pens
- Projector and document camera

Connection:

“We’ve become experts at analyzing literature this year and you are now going to have the opportunity to write a literature analysis essay. In order to be successful on this assignment, we first need to make sure we understand the prompt.”

Modeling (I do):

Project the prompt so that all students can see. As you read through the prompt use your highlighter to highlight the verbs/action words in each sentence. After you have finished then go back to the first highlighted word and think aloud about that the prompt is asking you to do first. “As I read the prompt to you, I’m going to highlight most of the verbs/action words in the sentence. Please highlight what I highlight. Then, we’ll discuss what these words mean and see if we need to re-phrase them in ways that make sense to you.”

Guided Practice (We do):

After you’ve read the prompt to them and they’ve highlighted the action words. Go back to the beginning and have students pick which words they’d like more explanation on. Call on volunteers to offer “easier” ways to say the same term (i.e. Compare and contrast as... “write how the two poems are the same and different” or instead of “evidence from the text” use “words/quotes from the story.”) Make sure to do the same for all of the sentences on the bulleted list at the bottom. For example, “Establish a context” can be written as “Write the name of the poem/story, the author and what it is about.”

Independent Practice (You do):

N/A The students can keep this document with their draft of their literary analysis paper. As you meet with them, refer to this document to make sure they’re meeting all of the assignment criteria.

Closure:

Later on, after you've modeled how to write this assignment yourself, show the students how your own paper meets all of the criteria on the prompt.

Assessment – Check for Understanding

Students will turn in their first draft attached to this prompt. When you meet with them and guide them on revision, refer to which criteria they've met and which they are weak on or are missing entirely.

Reflection:**Resources and References: (adapted from, acknowledgements)**

6-8th grade literary analysis prompts are on-line on the ppsinside webpage

Grades 6-8 Language Arts Common Literacy Assignment

Grade	Prompt- Option 1	Prompt – Option II	
6	<p>Focus: Character Change</p> <p>From a work of literature that you have read, select a character that experiences a change. Analyze how the character changed by looking at the character’s speech, actions, thoughts, and/or physical features, or by what other s say or think about him/her. write a paper discussing how the character changed using evidence from the text.</p>	<p>Focus: Conflict</p> <p>From a work of literature that you have read, identify a central conflict, either internal or external. Analyze why the conflict occurred. Write a paper discussing the reasons for the conflict using evidence from the text.</p>	<p>To complete any of these assignments a student must be able to do the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish a context. Develop and include a thesis statement. 2. Elaborate on the details of the analysis. 3. Support the thesis statement with evidence from the text. 4. Conclude.
7	<p>Focus: Character Motivation</p> <p>From a work of literature that you have read, select a character that experiences a change. Analyze the character to determine the motivation for the change. Write a paper discussing what motivated the character to change using evidence from the text.</p>	<p>Focus: Theme</p> <p>From a work of literature that you have read, identify a theme. Describe the theme, and analyze how the theme is revealed by the author. Write a paper discussing the theme using evidence from the text.</p>	
8	<p>Focus: Effects of Change</p> <p>From a work of literature that you have read, select a character that experiences a change. Analyze the effects of the change upon the character or those around him/her. Write a paper discussing the effects of the change using evidence from the text.</p>	<p>Focus: Poetry – Compare and Contrast</p> <p>Choose two poems that share some similar qualities. Compare and contrast the subject matter and theme(s) of these poems. Write a paper analyzing the similarities and differences using evidence from the text.</p>	

Sample Scored Essay with Commentary

Type of Paper: Literary Analysis – Character Change

Title: “Ana Rosa’s Changes”

Grade Level: 6th

Trait	Score	Rationale
Ideas and Content	4	The writing has a clear main idea and an established context with supporting details that are relevant, but may be overly general. The writing includes an accurate analysis of how the character changed.
Organization	4	The writing is organized with clear sequencing and paragraph breaks. Transitions are used but may be formulaic. The organization helps the reader, despite some weaknesses.
Voice	4	A voice is present and there is a suitable level of closeness to or distance from the audience.
Word Choice	4	Words effectively convey the intended message, but don’t necessarily energize the writing.
Sentence Fluency	4	The writing has a natural sound and the reader can move easily through the piece. There is strong control over simple sentence structures, but variable control over more complex sentences.
Conventions	4	The writing demonstrates control over standard writing conventions, although a wide range is not used. there is moderate need for editing.

Ana Rosa's Changes

In the story "The Color of my Words" Ana Rosa is a 12 year old girl who lives in the Dominican Republic with her family. Ana Rosa changes from being a shy, quiet dreamer to a confident young lady who begins to live her dream.

In the beginning of the story Ana Rosa is a dreamer. Her biggest dream is to become a writer but in the Dominican Republic only the president is allowed to write. She once asked herself, "Couldn't I say what I wished on paper?" She also says "... I already knew what I wanted to do in my future ... I could be anything I wanted to be – even a writer with words for everything...: Writing wasn't the only thing Ana Rosa dreamed about. Ana Rosa also dreamed about dancing. In the story she says, "In my dreams I could dance like a fairy, smooth and beautiful with dresses that floated around my knees."

In addition to being a dreamer Ana Rosa is a very quiet and observant girl. Even though she feels like speaking her mind at times she finds it better to just keep quiet. At one point in the story she wants to say, "No you idiots, I didn't imagine anything." But instead she stays quiet. She often sits in her Gri Gri tree observing her neighborhood.

In the middle of the story two events take place where we begin to see Ana Rosa change. The first one is when she finally gets a chance to write a story for her community. Ana Rosa is excited when she finds out that she gets to write, but when she stands up in front of the neighbors to share her quiet, shy side comes out and this goes through her mind. "... everyone watched me and waited. I stood trembling holding that note with my story close to my heart. I knew right then this was it. The world would find out about me." This is the beginning of her becoming confident in her writing and she's willing to share it. The second event that influenced Ana Rosa to change is when she learned to dance. She felt like she was the only Dominican who couldn't dance and one day her Papi finally taught her to dance. At first Ana Rosa wasn't sure about learning how to dance because she didn't believe that it would be possible for her to learn. But as soon as her Papi talked her into it and she began to feel the music she said, "We began to dance, and I slowly felt the meringue beat slipping into my Dominican bones just the way it's supposed to." She begins to develop confidence in her personality and her abilities.

Towards the end of the story Ana Rosa finds out her Papi isn't really her Papi. She feels overwhelmed and devastated but instead of taking her sadness and devastation and keeping inside, she decides to transform them into words, into a poem. When Ana Rosa decides she will write a poem she says, "...I was a writer wasn't I?...I had power over them. I could make words into anything I wanted." Ana Rosa now sees herself as a writer. It's no longer just a dream. She becomes more sure of herself and her future. When her community asks her to write an article to go into the newspaper Ana Rosa agrees even though her mom doesn't want her to. She felt bad but thought she was doing the right thing. She says, "I hated making my Mami so unhappy. I

felt guilty walking through the house and seeing her worried eyes following me...”

In the end of the story Ana Rosa’s brother dies and she has a hard time accepting it. Eventually Ana Rosa decides to do what she loves best: to write and share his story. She wants to tell the world about her big brother but she can only do it because she changed from being a shy, quiet dreamer to a confident young writer even though it wasn’t easy.

Sample Scored Essay with Commentary

Type of Paper: Literary Analysis – Conflict

Title: “All Summer in a Day”

Grade Level: 6th

Trait	Score	Rationale
Ideas and Content	4	The writing has a clear main idea and an established context. There is an accurate analysis of why the conflict occurred. The supporting details are relevant, but may be overly general.
Organization	4	The writing is clear and coherent with natural sequencing and paragraph breaks making it easy to follow with details that fit where placed.
Voice	4	A voice is present and there is a suitable level of closeness to the audience.
Word Choice	4	Words effectively convey the intended message and the writer employs a variety of words that are functional and appropriate to audience and purpose.
Sentence Fluency	4	Sentence patterns are somewhat varied, contributing to ease in oral reading. The writing has a natural sound and the reader can easily move through the piece.
Conventions	4	The writing demonstrates control of standard writing conventions and there is moderate need for editing.

All Summer in a Day

Summer is something most people look forward to all year long. In the story “All Summer in a Day” by Ray Bradbury on the planet Venus summer comes out once every seven years for just one hour. For Margot this is a tragedy. She loves the sun and she remembers it the most out of all the kids because she lived on Earth for four years. Margot only sings songs about the sun. She is very different from everyone else. The jealousy that other kids feel results in a conflict on the day the sun blooms for just one hour.

Margot has many differences from other children; the sun is something she needs. Margot needs her pale snow face to get color and her yellow hair to glimmer in the sun, but most of all she needs to move back to Earth where she will be happy.

The day had come that all children were looking forward to. The sun was going to come out, but how does this affect the conflict of the story? Margot wrote a poem about the sun the day before: “The sun is a flower that blooms for just one hour.” The children don’t believe Margot wrote the poem they didn’t think she knew about the sun. Even so she knew she was the most excited. It was her time, but when she tells the children more of what she remembers about the sun and describes it like a penny, like a fire in the stove, the other kids become envious. They can’t take the differences Margot has so as a joke they lock her in the closet.

When the rain abruptly stops the children’s minds forget about the pale face girl in the closet. They didn’t hear her muffled cries. They opened the doors and went out in the sun. The children squinted at the brightness and enjoyed the flaming ball in the sky. When the first raindrop falls, the kids remember. They look at each other in disappointment. Their faces went black as they remembered Margot’s love for the sun. As they open the door to the closet and slowly let Margot out they feel her sorrow.

In the short story “All Summer in a Day” you experience the jealousy the other kids had when Margot knew all about the sun and they didn’t. When the conflict comes you realize what the one hour of sun coming out meant to Margot. You also realize why Margot gets lost in the rain and the never stopping noise. Her many differences spread her apart from the others in the classroom and that creates the conflict.