

A Unit of Study on Literary Essays: From Quick Drafts to On-the-Run Revision

This writing unit of study runs alongside the thematic text set/interpretation unit, which teaches students to talk about their ideas, and support those ideas with evidence from parts of the stories they are reading. Specifically, that unit teaches them to interpret, to think across texts, and to read with an attentiveness to craft and its relation to the author's purpose. Kids in that unit will spend most of their time in reading workshop reading, but meanwhile in writing workshop, they'll be "speaking in essays," then writing fast drafts. For both reading and writing, you'll teach them to find and elaborate on evidence, and to compact parts of the story they have discusses really supports their idea.

Hopefully you will have already taught many crucial essay writing skills in a unit that supports students to work on the parts of essay writing. This new unit asks them to put the parts together, quickly, producing many fast draft essays. They won't agonize over these drafts, they won't finish all of them, they won't revise all of them – they'll keep writing or revising an essay every day or two, so that they get used to writing fluently and with increasing structure, coherency, and precision. As they write these fast drafts, you'll teach them some particular writing moves such as transitions, elaboration through quoting and paraphrasing, adding introductions and conclusions, and punctuation – all the while holding kids to speaking and writing within an essay structure of idea and evidence. Then after a week or two of these drafts, you'll move the students to writing quick compare and contrast essays, across more than one text. As you do this work, you'll help students hone the strategies you've been teaching so far, while showing them how to really analyze what's the same and what's different across the text examples they describe. Probably by the end of the unit you'll want to give students will have an opportunity to use revision strategies to bring one or two favorite essays to a finer sense of completion or publication.

The goals of this work are to master the essay form with the same ease with which they have mastered personal narrative. Most writers in our schools can whip out a personal narrative easily in a period. Students will become adept at cranking out a literary essay off of a fiction text or of a combination of texts, with ease. This art reflects their ability to think analytically, and to express their ideas in writing.

Bend One - The Essay Form

You'll want to be sure to match up your timing of this unit with that of the reading unit, so that the work you are asking kids to try in writing is also being supported as a way for students to prepare their book clubs and for read aloud conversations.

Session One: Speaking in Essays - Writing Quick Essays

In this session, you'll teach your students to 'write essays in the air,' or to 'speak in essays.' You can teach this with a read aloud text – revisiting an old favorite. Then students can continue by having conversations in which they speak in essay, about either the same favorite read aloud or another one and/or their book club books.

Eventually, you may want to bring a chart that supports readers growing ideas into your writing workshop. It may contain sentence starters for theme work. This could even be made into smaller table tents or taped-in printouts for the kids' notebooks so that they are remembering they can write tentative thesis statements that start. This list would start small, but grow as you add to it in reading workshop:

Sometimes people....but instead, people should....

I learned from (the character, the event) that in life, it is important to....

It seems as if the character is particularly...

The character changes from x...to...y...

Even if you....., you should.....

Don't forget that even if you....., you should....

This story teaches us not only about....., but also about...

When I first read this story, I thought it was about. But now I realize it's also about...

Day 1:

“Say an Essay” Work - Leading to Quick Essay Writing

Sometime before this work, you will need to have read aloud a provocative text—perhaps a picture book such as *The Paper Bag Princess* by Robert Munsch, or *Those Shoes* by Maribeth Boelts. The book can be a reread, and it can be discussed or not discussed. It may be started earlier and finished as the prelude to this work.

You may want to begin with just a bit of preliminary assessment work. One way to do this is to say to the class, “Students, we’re going to be learning today that any kind of writing can be SAID as well as written. Listen to me SAY a kind of writing, and see if you can determine what kind of writing this is.”

I used to love snow, but lately, I haven't liked snow at all. I haven't liked snow because it is hard on my schedule, my finances, and my health.

One reason that I no longer like snow is that it has made it very hard for me to stay on schedule. In the mornings, I leave just enough time to get to work, but then when I get to my car, I find it is buried in snow. I have to spend ten minutes brushing the snow off, and

then if I try to drive quickly to make up for lost time, I find myself careening around corners, almost landing in snow banks. So snow is bad for my schedule because it makes me get off to a late start to my day.

Another reason that I no longer like snow is that it is hard on my finances. The other day, I had to spend....

By this time, some students should have their hands in the air, and be ready to call out, “That’s an essay.” You needn’t continue the essay—the point will be made. “You are right. And just *said* an essay. Starting today, you’ll all be saying essays a lot.”

Teachers, tell students that this first day of the writing unit will not follow a usual format. You’ll be doing a shared writing activity 25 minutes on the rug and then sending students to write for 15 minutes.

“Specifically, today, let’s try saying essays about the book we’ve been reading. I’m going to finish reading (whatever the book is—let’s say it is *The Paper Bag Princess*) and I want to you to be thinking about an idea you could develop about this book.” The ask students to jot ideas they have about the text in their notebooks. Don’t help them—let this be an assessment.

Teachers, you will have spent time this year helping students learn to interpret; they may develop interpretive ideas. But if your students haven’t yet had much practice interpreting, they’ll probably generate ideas about character traits. Some may simply retell—in which case, intervene to remind students of sources for ideas—drawing on whatever you have taught in earlier units.

You may need to say, “Remember, readers can get ideas by thinking about the character—what kind of person is this character? What does this person want and what gets in the way? Does the character want to fit in, to be accepted, or what, and what keeps the character from getting what he or she wants? Remember, you can think not just about the main character, but about relationships. What kind of relationships do you see in the book? What role does the secondary character play? What about the setting—does the setting affect the characters? What do the characters learn in this story? What can you learn from them?”

Then get them to jot the ideas they *now* have in their notebooks. This not free writing long entries, but writing an idea, growing a space, then, writing another idea.

Then, teachers, harvest some of these ideas, scrawling them on chart paper. For now, don’t fix them, just jot them. As you do this, notice the level of ideas that students have generated. If the ideas are mostly character traits, and they sixth graders, then you’ll have a lot of work to do in this unit! For now, however, you are trying to help kids learn essay structure, and you are not

extending their reading work. You'll want to take an idea that feels accessible to them, leaving the easiest and most obvious ideas for children to work on independently after you have worked with another accessible idea.

“So, some of you have put forth the idea that the main character in *The Paper Bag Princess* is determined. Let's work together to SAY an essay in support of that idea.”

Teachers, for now you will want the essay that the class co-creates to be a model that is within grasp for most or all of your class, so plan on writing (actually you will only *say* it, perhaps writing a few, key lines) an essay that is quite low-level and straightforward. Plan on coaching the class to state the claim, then to find places in the text to support the claim. Then, write a paragraph about each place; and finally, conclude the essay. It is more advanced to forecast all the instances or reasons you'll address in the upcoming essay, but you probably won't want to do that just now.

The goal of this work will be to help students participate in saying an essay, and to do so in ways that set them up to do this same work independently. So you'll give the class prompts that are transferable to another essay, developing another idea. The shared writing activity will take about 20 minutes with equal or less time for students to then write an essay.

If the class generates the idea that “She is determined,” you can say, “So would we start our essay like that—‘She is determined?’—or would we need to pretty it up, with the title of the book and all?” The kids will recognize that ‘She is determined’ won't do for the start to an essay. Be sure to get the whole class doing the work, writing in the air to partners, and don't do it yourself or call on one person only. “So say the start of our essay to your partner.”

Soon the class will have produced the start to the essay, “In Robert Munsch's picturebook, *The Paperbag Princess*, Elizabeth is determined.”

“Let's rehearse for our essay. We need to think of REASONS, right, or EXAMPLES—and we need to draw from parts of the story that support our claim. Look over your copy of the text and see if you can locate two or three places in the story that support the claim that the main character is determined.” As children talk, you might record the claim (Elizabeth is determined), and the directions: “Rehearse for the essay by thinking of reasons, or examples. Locate two or three parts of the story that support the claim.” Do a voiceover to remind students to draw from all parts of the story, including something that occurs early and something that occurs late in the story.

Two minutes later, ask one student to say the start of the essay again, and to then add on to the start of the essay, by saying “One example that shows that Elizabeth is determined is...”.

In Robert Munsch’s picturebook, *The Paper Bag Princess*, Elizabeth is determined.

One example (reason) that shows Elizabeth is *determined* is the time when Ronald was taken by the dragon and she decides to rescue Ronald.

Note that students repeat the story.

Now you will want to coach your students to do whatever you think is well within reach for many of them. You’re definitely going to need to help them elaborate, and to draw on details from the story to do so. “So writers, now we need to write about that part of the text, and how it shows that she is determined. And we need to think about details, about specific actions the character did and things the character said that makes our point. Go back to your partner and try stretching this part out by including detailed actions and words from this part of the text. Before you say this part of the essay, go find that part, reread it together, and point at and talk about the specifics that show she is determined.”

As children do that, you may want to jot your prompts, remembering that in a few minutes, they’ll be writing either their own version of the essay the class has said, or another essay on a different idea about the text.

Prompts for this work:

- State the claim like it is the start of an essay.
- Rehearse for the essay locating places in the text that support the claim.
- Take the first part of the text. Say, in a new paragraph, “One example (and repeat your claim) is when...”
- Cite detailed actions and words to show how the this first part of the book supports the claim, citing details.

Soon you will convene the class and someone will say aloud this part of the essay:

In Robert Munsch’s picture book, *The Paper Bag Princess*, Elizabeth is determined.

One example (reason) that shows Elizabeth is determined is the time when she figured out how to get through the dragon to Ronald. She said, “You can’t do that, you can’t do that” and she tricked the dragon. She got him to be exhausted so that he couldn’t fight her.

Today (or another day) you will want to coach readers to restate that this bit of evidence supports the main claim—that the character is determined. A sentence or two need to be added such as, “This shows that Elizabeth of *The Paperbag Princess* is determined and doesn’t give up.”

In the example above, the evidence—that she tricks the dragon—may actually not align perfectly to the main claim. This may show ingenuity more than determination. You will probably decide this is too subtle a point to make at this time, but on another day you will want to show kids that they can either revise their claim or rethink their evidence. The claim could be altered to say that the main character succeeds by outwitting others. That is subtle, however, and you could return to this essay a few days from now to make this high-level point.

Then coach students to select a second part of the story to use as evidence. If the child you call on to start this work selects a portion of the story that is only tangentially and somewhat related to the main claim, coach by saying, “Does the way this builds the main point hit you over the head, or is it not so obvious? If it is not an obvious connection, look for a part of the story that obviously supports your idea.”

If you and the class co-construct the next portion of this essay, make sure that you give the class larger chunks of work to do. “So now it is time for a second reason. Remember you need to go back to the claim and restate it, adding your next reason, your next example, and you need to refer to details in the text to make your point, and to close out your reason by going back to the main claim.”

Another day (one for some of you, on this day) you will want to show the class that it is great to end an essay with an extension. You could help them start the final section by saying, “Now, as I think about my idea that Elizabeth in *The Paperbag Princess* shows determination, I realize that...” and channel them to come to some new idea that stands on the shoulders of the first one. This sets them up to realize that essays can lead us towards new thoughts....and, in book club conversations, towards new spoken essays!

Then, you will want to send kids off to write whole essays themselves. Yes, they can do this in 15-20 minutes. Some will write the essay you’ve said, some can take on a new idea from the ideas generated, and write an essay about it.

You may not have time to do the second body paragraph together—in which case you can set it up, and leave the rest of the work for readers to do on their own. They have only TEN MINUTES to write—fast and furious. Lift up your watch, make this feel like the time pressure is going to be terrific, call “Go!” as if this is the starter gun. Later, you’ll point out to kids the sheer volume that they were able to produce in just seven minutes, and you’ll use this to hold them to higher standards of productivity.

As children write, you can do some fast-prompts. If one is retelling the text, say, “Don’t retell the whole story. What particular part illustrates your idea? Go to just that part.” If someone is writing without any elaboration, say, “Don’t just mention that a part supports your idea. Show how it supports your idea by citing little detailed actions or words, and then telling the reader how those actions or words make your point.”

Of course, once children have written these little essays, you’ll study their work to understand the instruction you need to provide. You may decide to do this same work every day for the next week, across the curriculum as well as during writing. If children can’t write structured essays quickly and easily, you don’t need to practice this solely within the writing workshop nor solely with essays pertaining to literature. If you are showing a film in social studies, tell children that afterwards, you’re going to ask them to say an essay in the air (or to write an essay) about something pertaining to the film. You can give them the thesis if you want. “You’ll be writing an essay about how the longhouse represents the values that are important to the Native Americans.” You can then pause the film at a key point or two, saying, “You may want to be taking notes in a boxes-and-bullets way to prepare for your essay. Let’s rewind, and this time see if this part of the film is giving you something to put into your essay—and take notes so you remember this.” Afterwards, you can coach them to listen with their pencils ready. If you like, you can position a couple of students to be taking their notes on a prominently positioned white board.

Save the essays that students write—perhaps each writer has a folder full of these—because eventually you will teach them certain things that essayists do, and you’ll want them to go back and revise each of their essays to meet these new criterion. For example, eventually you will remind students of the transitional words that they learned earlier in the year during the unit on personal essays, and you’ll ask them to reread the fast-essays they’ve been writing, checking that they’ve used transitional words between their paragraphs, and coaching them to do the necessary revisions. Because students will soon have a folder of 10 essays, they’ll have plenty of practice putting whatever you teach into those essays...and you can even give them feedback as they do this so that their transitions (or whatever else it is that you are teaching) become more sophisticated over time.

Once you have taught kids to say an essay, you can bring this language and this skill work into the book clubs that sometimes occupy the last 15 minutes of your reading workshop. You will also, of course, bring this language into your essay writing workshop—more on that later!

When kids are doing this in reading workshop book clubs, you can suggest that when kids talk in their book clubs, or with their partners, talk, and as they do this talking, you can call out some of the same prompts—“Don’t forget, you will want to think about parts of the story that go with

your idea. Make them parts that hit you over the head, and parts from throughout the story.”
“Don’t forget, you’ll want to show some detailed actions or words that make your point.”

Teachers, a note:

You’ll find that students often move most easily to ideas about characters (Gilly Hopkins can be cruel), and to ideas about lessons the characters learn (In *Fly Away Home*, Andrew learns to have hope), and to themes or life-lessons the stories teach (*Those Shoes* teaches that having a friend is more important than having the right clothes). One thing to watch for right from the start – that sometimes the ideas kids have are really only true at the very end of the story, which means that then they can only find one example, from the very end of the book. They particularly go for ideas like this off of short texts. For example, if you want to write about how Andrew learns to hope in in *Fly Away Home*, he doesn’t really become hopeful until the very last page of the story! Later, you can teach a template that will work in these instances, but for now steer kids subtly towards ideas that do have evidence throughout the story. For example, character traits that develop across a story, longer stories where lessons or themes are supported with more than one place in the story. If I’ve read aloud *Number the Stars*, for instance, kids can easily find multiple places where the main character learns to be brave, or where the story teaches that war makes kids grow up fast.

Day 2:

Day 2 will depend on day 1. If many of your writers haven’t done the concrete, simple work of writing paragraphs, using the body paragraph transitions, then you probably will want day 2 to invite flash revisions, and you list possible revisions, starting with those involving scissors and tape! Your teaching might sound like this “Writers, as I look over Bob’s flash draft from yesterday, I see he wrote a ton! Great job! But here’s the thing. Do you see how it goes all the way down the page, without any breaks?! Here’s the thing. The writer has a responsibility to the reader to break our writing into smaller sections, or paragraphs. In essays, a new paragraph usually comes whenever there is a new idea, or a new example. So let’s see if we can help Bob. If we look at his flash draft, let me see, as soon he moved to his first example, which was the moment in the story when he needed to indent! And when he moved to his second example, which is a different moment, I should have indented or skipped a line, to show I was starting a new example, and thus a new paragraph.” You could also help them to write with **details from the text** in their paragraphs. Teach them that after revising, they can write a whole new flash draft, this time doing those things from the start, on the run.

“Writers try out a number of ideas, and we try supporting those ideas with examples from more than one part of the story. Just as we would if we were having a conversation with a book club, or telling a friend about our idea, we write the idea as a full sentence (not just a phrase), and then

we try to write... 'For example'...and we describe a part of the story that seems like a strong example of our idea. Then we try writing: 'Another example'...and we describe another part of the story. We'll probably need our story open in front of us, so we can turn to specific pages or parts that we want to describe in detail.

Teachers, you may want to demonstrate how you do all the stuff you've been teaching, quickly, by doing them with another teacher and asking students to be researchers and name what you are doing. Let's see...I'm thinking about *Fly Away Home*...and I'm thinking about how Andrew often feels invisible in *Fly Away Home*. Let me see if that works. I'll try saying aloud a couple of places where Andrew feels invisible...let's see. Andrew feels invisible. For example, Andrew feels invisible when he and his dad move from one airline to another every day. They do that so that no-one will notice them – so they'll be invisible. Yup, that works. Now let me see. Another example of when Andrew feels invisible is...hmm...oh, when he and his dad wear only blue clothes. They do that so they'll be invisible to the guards. Ok, now I know my idea works, and I've got some examples. Now I'll start writing those down quickly, and I'll turn to the story, to write more details. See...it's only three or four minutes in, and I'm writing already!

You might work with *Fly Away Home* and say something like this as part of your work:
“Writers, I'm not going to recopy his draft from yesterday. For now, he is just going to use scissors (or a slash mark) to mark new paragraphs. Or sometimes writers like to make a box around paragraphs. The main thing is to always make our writing look more like an essay, by inserting paragraphs as we go.”

Other Days:

Students will have started or completed their second essay on day 2 or 3. In the essays they are continuing to write and in essays they have already outlined they can think about transitions.

Teacher, dig out the chart you used to remind students of helpful transition phrases, from your personal or persuasive essay unit of study, if you have one. Or, generate a quick list, with your students, of transitions they remember and have used before. And/or, “speak in essay form,” as a demonstration, and have them listen for some of them transitions. You might want to include some of the following, as transitional phrases, and as vocabulary for ‘shows’:

Some helpful transitions that alert your reader to new parts of your essay

One example...

Another example...

An early example

A later example (when their examples move chronologically through the story)

On the one hand...

On the other hand... (when their idea is about character changing, or character complexity)

At first I thought...For example...

Later, however, I realized that...For example... (when their idea is about a realization)

For instance...another instance...moreover, in yet another instance...

Small group work for advanced writers: Some helpful words for ‘show’ as in: ‘For example, one part of the story that *shows* how Andrew feels invisible is when...’

Shows

Illustrates

Demonstrates

Depicts

Reveals

Portrays

Displays

Expresses

Makes it plain

Exhibits

Establishes

Writing Conclusions (Teachers, you’ll want to keep students writing new literary essays, day after day. One way to get energy for this is to draw on what your students are doing in the reading workshop. For example, you could suggest that their next literary essay be about their book club book)

Another Session: Writing Introductions

“Readers, we’re a little bit like basketball players who are getting better every day, so that our overall game is getting better. Like how many of you now know that experienced essay writers automatically add in paragraphs as we draft? Great. How many of you know that experienced essay writing automatically say the title of the text and the author? Great.

Today I want to teach you that experienced essay writers also automatically draft introductions and conclusions. To do this, remember your reader, and think about what the reader would like to know...

For example, you can also expect that your reader hasn't read the story. So it's helpful to just tell them, in one sentence (or two for older writers) what the story is about. Watch me do this. The trick is not to go on and on, retelling the story – you have two sentences to do this in. Here goes... 'Fly Away Home by Eve Bunting, is a story about a boy named Andrew, who is homeless and lives in an airport with his father.' Ok, now you give this a try with *Those Shoes*, okay. Partners, listen to each other to make sure that you're staying concise, or brief.

“Writers, just as we can begin our essays with introductions, we can also add conclusions at the end of our essays. The easiest way to do this is simply to say something like, “and so, it's clear that...and you restate your idea. If you want, you might try saying something in addition about why your idea feels important, either in your life or in the world, or you might add something about what it's all making you feel. I might, for instance, write something like... ‘And so, Andrew feels invisible when he has to move around, and when he has to wear certain clothes. It seems extra sad, that the kind of things that might often give a child joy, such as walking around with his dad, or wearing special clothes, make this boy feel so awful. It makes me wonder if other children who are homeless feel that way.”

Quoting, Paraphrasing, Punctuating

Teachers, we've provided some ideas for how the rest of the unit might go – but you'll want to make the language of the lessons, and your demonstration texts, match what you've started with. In general, you can expect that students will need some attention to what it looks like on the page to quote, and how to lead into a quotation by telling what part of the text the quote is from. You can definitely expect that they'll need some coaching in paraphrasing part of the story – both in choosing the part that really shows their idea, and also in refraining from retelling the whole story when they only want and need the part!

So here are some more ideas for instruction. You can also look to 'Breathing Life Into Essays.' In addition, as some of our pilot classrooms advance this unit, we'll be providing revised teaching points and sample essays. Some of these sessions could be Midworkshops, or shares, as well - they may not need to be a minilesson.

Paraphrasing with detail, specificity, and brevity

When essayists retell part of the story, we try to give specific details from the text. We also try to stay focused on the part of the story that best supports our idea. For instance, if our idea is: “Elizabeth is determined throughout the story.” and our first bullet is “She's determined when she doesn't stop looking for Ronald just because she has no clothes.” We can retell just that part of the story in a way that stretches out the part where she shows determination. We might write “When a dragon destroys everything Elizabeth owns, even her clothes, Elizabeth doesn't give up.

She has no clothes! She’s used to dressing like a princess, and suddenly she has not even a stitch of clothing. But that doesn’t stop her. She finds a rough, boxy paper bag and puts that on. She is so determined to find Ronald that she loses all concern for her appearance.”

The Art of Quotation

Literary essayists are good at backing up our claims with quotes. When we give the reader a thesis statement, we pick up evidence straight from the book to support it. When giving reasons for our thesis statement, we make these stronger by using a quotation straight out of the book itself. We use quotation marks to show that this is taken right from the book, and we give a little context for the quote – we don’t just throw it in there on its own!

Writers write before and after a quote to set the reader up for the part that’s being quoted and to follow up with an explanation of how this quote connects to the thesis. We can use set-up phrases like:

- In the following passage...
- In this scene...
- In the first part of the story...
- On page...

We can use follow-up phrases like:

- This clearly shows...
- From this scene, it is clear that...
- This illustrates/demonstrates...

If your students can handle this: Topic sentences, or ‘forecasting for the reader’

Good essayists try to make things really clear to the reader by revising to include forecasting sentences. The first time through, in a quick draft, we were thinking as we were writing. But when we re-read our essays, we can go back and make sure that we are including forecasting sentences at important points, especially at the beginning of paragraphs. These sentences let the reader know what the next part will mostly be about. So we might go back and write: “Elizabeth is determined even when the dragon destroys her clothes.” at the start of one body paragraph, making sure the rest of the paragraph is about that part. And we might go back and write: “Elizabeth is determined even when she has to walk through a scary, burned trail.” at the start of another body paragraph. We watch to make sure our language matches in each part. If we start saying all of sudden... “Elizabeth is brave, also, when she tricks the dragon,” then the reader isn’t sure if we are changing our thesis, or if we’re starting a new essay!

A New Bend: Compare/Contrast Essays

In this bend, students will begin the work of writing about more than one text, carrying a common thesis statement across more than one set of characters, events, and settings. You will be modeling and practicing this in talk during reading workshop, but at the beginning of this bend, you will want to use some of writing workshop time to continue this thinking work and give them extra time to ‘rehearse’ their essay work by more ‘speaking in essays,’ before turning to writing. As the unit progresses, you will want to spend less time with this rehearsal stage and give them more time to write independently. At the end, you may want to give an on-demand to see how automatic the work has become.

For the first day or two, students will likely be writing using the read aloud as one possible point of comparison, along with previous read alouds as comparison texts. They may then move into finding their own texts to compare, using their book clubs to think through and develop interesting connections. They may follow the same pattern for the first week as the previous week in writing workshop, where much of the work is ‘writing in the air’ to rehearse the compare/contrast moves, then moving to quick writing to get down the essay that they have just created together.

Below is a (partial) chart of some possible purposes for comparing texts. If your students have been doing well with higher level thematic work in the preceding week, you may not want to go back to character work to teach comparisons. However, if you still have some students or a majority of students who are working on character-based interpretation, you may start with character comparisons across texts as an entry point. More sophisticated work will treat characters as one possible element to compare, but not focus solely on them, as themes cut across multiple story elements.

Writers Compare More than One Text In Order to...

- Show similarities and differences in the way characters deal with difficulty
- Show similarities and differences in the way authors treat a common theme
- Show similarities and differences in the way authors take on a genre
- Use the information or perspective of an informational text to support or critique a literary text

Comparing characters as one muscle for analyzing texts

Literary essayists look for similarities and differences between characters in the same text, and in characters across texts. We can pay particular attention to how characters deal with difficult situations, knowing that all characters face trouble, but the way a particular character overcomes

trouble is likely to be similar in some ways and different in others from the paths other characters take. We can seek out characters who share some similarities so that we are not merely writing about opposite types.

MWTP or new session: In writing across texts, literary essayists push to both compare *and* contrast. It's not enough to say that two characters, or two stories, are very similar. We want to push to see where they line up very closely and where, in fact, they diverge. We can try writing about this in different ways in our notebooks, using graphic organizers as a jumping-off point, but then writing long to say more. This is how we may start to see different meanings in the texts than if we were looking at only one of them in isolation. Our essay may sound like: "Although both Opal in *Because of Winn Dixie* and Doris in 'Stray' are lonely, they are lonely for different reasons."

Revising thesis statements

Literary essayists revise thesis statements to make sure they are phrasing the thesis in a way that really goes with both texts. We might try out several versions of a life lesson or theme and ask ourselves: which version of this seems to really connect to both texts? Often we will have to take out any words that are directly from the text, like characters' names, and instead use more general words like "people", so that the lesson really applies. So instead of saying that a lesson from *The Paper Bag Princess* is that "Elizabeth only finds her true strength when disaster strikes," we could say "Disaster brings out people's true strength," which then might apply to *Tiger Rising* as well.

MWTP or new session: Literary Essayists use what they know about where to look for significance in one text to find evidence for connections across texts. We can always look closely at places where characters have strong feelings, or where they go through some kind of change. When we're looking for ways to support how texts are similar or different, we're likely to find rich support in moments of emotion or transformation.

Outlining Before Drafting – When Our Essays Move Across Texts

Literary Essayists make quick outlines to plan out how they will support their comparison work across texts. If the thesis statement is "*Those Shoes* and 'Stray' are both stories that teach us to value what we have," we may create a boxes and bullets outline with a box around the thesis, then a block essay outline, where one body paragraph is dedicated to *Those Shoes* and one to 'Stray,' with bullets for the parts of the stories that evoke this idea. However, if the thesis is "*Those Shoes* and 'Stray' both teach a message of acceptance, but teach that message in very different ways," then the outline might follow a point-by-point structure, with one body paragraph about the similarities between the texts and one about the differences between them. We can try out multiple outlines for different thesis statements as a way to see which essays we have the most evidence to support.

MWTP: Literary Essayists push to find many supports for their thesis statement. It may take a while to find an outline that really works for a particular thesis. If my box is “These two texts share a theme,” then my bullets might show three reasons why I think this. Or my bullets might show two or three different aspects of this theme that the two texts show. Or my bullets might show two ways in which the texts treat the theme similarly, and one way in which they treat the theme differently. We try many versions of an outline to see what will work best.

Analyzing and Comparing, Not Simply Describing

Essayists use the language of comparison to clarify how they are setting one character or theme next to another. When writers place two things next to each other we often rely on the use of the “-er” suffix or the words *more* or *less*, the use of the comparative *than* (not confusing it with *then*) to bring out their similarities or differences: “Gilly has an easier life than Rob because...” or “Basketball has more difficult rules than football because...” or “Kate diCamillo’s heroines are spunkier than the heroine in this other book. I notice this because....

Possible Midworkshop Interruption: Transitions for Comparative Essays

Literary Essayists stack their body paragraphs with evidence from more than one text and writing that makes clear the connection between the pieces of evidence. We can use phrases like:

- Just as in [the other text], in [this text].....
- In a similar passage, [this character from this text] says the following:
- [This character] acts quite differently. Instead of _____ she _____.
- Unlike [one character], [this character] _____

Session Twelve: Forecasting in the Introduction – A Return to Topic Sentences

Literary Essayists write introductions that end with a clear statement of the thesis, and forecasting sentences that preview how the body paragraphs are going to go. So if the thesis is “Gilly is mean,” we might follow that statement in several ways. We could write: “She is mean in two different ways.” Or we could write: “There are two reasons why she’s mean in this book.” Or we could write “There are two places in the book where she’s mean.” If we are comparing Gilly and Amber, we might say, “Both Gilly and Amber are mean, but they are mean for different reasons. Gilly is mean because she is afraid, and Amber is mean because she is lonely.”

Some Possible Revision Strategies and Bringing to Publication

At this point, your students will have drafted lots of flash drafts of essays. It’s worth spending some time now, if you have a few days at the end of the unit, on revisions that make a difference in literary essay. Ideally, you are still encouraging students to be able to do this work in a relatively short time frame so that, given a little time to make some changes, they will have some

strategies they can turn to that take only 5 or 10 minutes to accomplish, rather than work that stretches over days. Students can choose a few of the essays they have worked on across the unit to revise for publication. They may choose either one-text or compare-contrast essays for revision.

Ideas for these sessions:

- Deciding when to paraphrase and when to cite directly
- Making more sophisticated transitions
- Writing one-sentence retellings of texts to include in the introduction
- Including the title of any texts and the author(s)' names in the introduction
- Editing for punctuation of citations and capitalization and underlining in titles
- Building out conclusions that illustrate the significance of the thesis statement and/or relate to real life