

Writing for the Test

Draft March 3, 2011

An overview:

- **4th-8th graders** will be asked to write an essay that incorporates details from *two* texts.
- **3rd graders** will have what is being called “extended response”, but is actually just a short answer (4 sentences will do). *They do not need essay test prep.*
- Kids may be asked to respond to one of *four* kinds of **prompts**.
- There are *three* **structures** that students might use that will be helpful.
- We are revising the unit for Test Prep Writing. **Discard/disregard** the curriculum calendar that was written in the spring of 2010.

The four possible kinds of prompts:

1. Informational (Ex. “Both texts talk about the Gold Rush. Write an essay where you teach all about the challenges of living during this time...”)
2. Theme (Ex. “Both texts teach us that even though people are different they can still be friends. Explain how both of these texts show this...”)
3. Argument – as in, take a side (Ex. “Which would you rather have as a pet – a frog or a butterfly?”)
4. Compare and contrast (Ex. “Tell how these dogs are alike and different.”)

Three kinds of structures:

Structure A (for informational and thematic prompts) – “boxes and bullets”

1. Introduction
2. Body paragraph one: give evidence from text 1
3. Body paragraph two: give evidence from text 2
4. Optional body paragraph 3: (sometimes students have more evidence, from either text.)
5. Conclusion: come back to your thesis and provide insight

OR Structure B (for argument)

1. Introduction
2. Body paragraph one: prove and support your argument using evidence from first text
3. Body paragraph two: say why and how the evidence for the other side isn’t as good, giving details from the second text
4. Conclusion: come back to your original argument, showing that it is proved and providing additional insight

OR Structure C (for compare/contrast)

1. Introduction
2. Body paragraph one: describe similarities – give details from texts 1 and 2
3. Body paragraph two: describe differences – give details from texts 1 and 2
4. Conclusion: give additional insight, or say if they are, overall, more the same or more different

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The Unit:

Overview:

Bend 1 – structure A (start with shared writing with familiar texts, kids write two more alone in class, one for homework)

Bend 2 – structure B (kids write two in class, one for homework)

Bend 3 – structure C compare/contrast

Bend 4 – practice reading questions, honing thesis setting up plan, being flexible

Within Bends 1-3:

Day 1 – Read question first, read and annotate, write in the air (whole class). Go back and write it.

Day 2 – revise this first essay (probably for structure and transitions)

Day 3 – write a new one in the air with a partner – teacher heavily coaches them to use all they know. Stop talking and write it.

Day 4 – revise this second essay (probably for including detailed, relevant evidence)

Day 5 – plan one first, check with partner. Write it on your own (another ML on making sure your evidence matches *or* making sure your evidence is detailed). Kids write another one for homework over the weekend.

Example Questions:

Thematic and Informational – Boxes and Bullets

4th Grade 2009

The Swan in “Swan Song” and Jerry in “After the Error” both get into trouble because of the way they behave. How does the “Swan’s” Behavior get her into trouble? How does “Jerry’s” behavior get him into trouble? Explain what you can learn from the results of their behavior?

4th Grade 2006

In the Story “The Stolen Moon”, the bear and the Moon want the moon for different reasons. Explain what each character wants and why. How does the information from the “Sun and the Moon” show that it is impossible for the characters to get what they want?

5th Grade 2011 sample

In 1625, the Dutch founded New Amsterdam, later called New York City. The Dutch controlled New Amsterdam for about 40 years, but they influenced culture in New York for centuries. An important leader of New Amsterdam was Peter Stuyvesant. Write about the ways Peter Stuyvesant improved life for the Dutch town of New Amsterdam.

6th Grade 2010

Think about the difficulties faced by gold miners in “Gold Fever” and “Gold Miners’ Tale.” Write an essay in which you discuss the hardships of life as a gold miner or a gold “rusher.” Think about how “Thinking Like Edison” and “The Keyboard Fits like a Glove” both describe different types of inventions. Write an article in which you tell how reading these articles might encourage a reader to become an inventor.

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Argument – Point/Counterpoint

4th Grade - 2010

Imagine if the girl in the “Butterfly House” had found a tadpole instead of a butterfly. What would the girl have done to take care of the tadpole? Do you think it is more interesting to take care of a butterfly or a tadpole?

6th Grade - 2009

The main characters in “Climbin’ Ryan” and “Natalya’s Happy Hugged Hens” helped other people on different ways. Would you prefer to help the way Ryan does or the way Natalya does?

6th Grade – 2007

The authors of “Home Afloat” and “Living at the Bottom of the World” both live unusual lives. Write an essay in which you explain which lifestyle you would prefer and why.

8th Grade - 2010

The authors of “Rufus” and “The Gift of Reason” are both affected by the animals they write about. How does the author of “Rufus” change the way he or she thinks about “Rufus.” How does the author of the “Gift of Reason” change the way he thinks of animals? Which author seems more moved by the experience?

8th Grade – 2007

Write an essay in which you describe the benefits of a car that can run on air, the benefits of a clothes washer and a clothes dryer. In this essay include your opinion of which invention might have a greater impact on people’s lives and why?

Compare and Contrast

4th Grade 2008

The passage “What kind of Jobs Can Dogs Do” names three dogs that were heroes. Think about York in the story “Well Done York.” Chose one of the dogs in the story and tell how the dog and York were alike. Then tell how the dog and York were different.

6th Grade 2008

Pilots Harriet Quimby and Bessie Coleman were both brave women that faced many challenges. Write an essay in which you compare and contrast the challenges that each faced.

8th Grade 2009

Bill Waterson in “Drawing Calvin and Hobbes”, and Roald Dahl in “Lucky Break”, discuss their approaches to their work. Write an essay in which you discuss the similarities and differences between the work habits of Watterson and Dahl.

8th Grade – 2006

Adam Grimm and Michael Schuman used their creative abilities for different purposes. Write an essay in which you explain the difference in the boys’ motives for using their creative abilities. Then describe how each boy’s creativity led to success.