

Writing across core units

Over the course of a core unit, students will write 2-3 times a week for 10-12 minute increments. Throughout these practice opportunities, students respond to a prompt with clear, focused claims, paired with evidence from the text. These responses are autoscored for productivity, focus, use of evidence, and conventions by our automatic writing evaluation tool.

These short, sustained writing activities not only help students to build endurance and confidence as they sharpen and hone their writing skills, but also support their learning as they synthesize their comprehension of the text and practice responding to argumentative and informative writing prompts. Additionally, these writing activities will allow teachers the opportunity to monitor student writing and provide actionable feedback that celebrates student strengths, fosters growth, and encourages revision.

Formative writing prompts build and scaffold towards the end-of-unit summative essay, and students can draw from them as they develop their claims and select their evidence.

Appearing in the latter half of the unit, the Write an Essay Sub-Unit builds on the analytical reading and writing skills students have developed throughout the unit. Within 4-8 lessons, students will engage in the critical phases of the writing process as they learn about essay structure and prepare a multi-paragraph essay in response to an essay prompt.

The Write an Essay Sub-Unit is not considered by the AWE. Instead, a [Grade 6–8 Essay Rubric](#) is provided for teachers in the lesson materials to support their evaluation of this summative assessment. In this rubric, teachers will evaluate student essays for use of evidence, focus and logical structure, and conventions on a four-point scale. Unlike the AWE rubrics, these criteria consider whether or not student work is aligned to essay structure and features appropriate evidence from the unit text(s).

Sub-unit 4: Write an Essay ⓘ



LESSON 1
Writing a Claim & Body Paragraph 1



LESSON 2
Writing Body Paragraph 2



LESSON 3
Essay Flex Day



LESSON 4
Revising and Writing an Introduction



LESSON 5
Writing a Conclusion and Polishing the Essay

Grade 6–8 Essay Rubric

At the end of each unit, students write a longer, more developed essay over a sequence of 4–5 lessons. Students draw on their core lesson writing practice, in which they focus on one claim or claim-response to a prompt and develop text evidence to support their claim or idea. In the essay lessons, students then apply those skills to a more developed piece of writing, and also practice additional skills as they create an introduction, craft a strong claim statement, develop a conclusion, and revise and polish their writing for an audience.

This 6–8 rubric reflects students' core practice with focus, use of evidence, and conventions, as well as the particular skills they practice during these essay lessons.

Rubrics

Use of Evidence: Selecting, Describing, and Explaining

1 Needs Improvement	2 Developing Proficiency	3 Proficient	4 Exceeds Expectations
The evidence is not relevant or developed to support the claim. - The evidence selected is not relevant. - The key parts and elements of the evidence are not described. - There is not sufficient explanation of how the evidence supports the claim.	The evidence is somewhat relevant and developed to support the claim. - The evidence selected is somewhat relevant. - The key parts and elements of the evidence are somewhat described. - There is some explanation of how the evidence supports the claim.	The evidence is mostly relevant and clearly developed to support the claim. - The evidence selected is mostly relevant. - The key parts and elements of the evidence are described. - There is a mostly clear explanation of how the evidence supports the claim.	The evidence is relevant and well-developed to support the claim. - The evidence selected is relevant. - The key parts and elements of the evidence are described clearly. - There is a clear explanation of how the evidence supports the claim.

Identifying key lessons within a core unit

As you start to plan to teach a core unit, you will find the Summative Essay Prompt described in the Unit Overview. To learn more about this assessment, we recommend that you consult the Unit Formative and Summative Assessments article in the Teacher Preparation section of the Unit Overview page. There, you will find details about the type of essay students are expected to write, the prompt, and information about the Solo assignments within the Sub-Unit.

To ensure that your students are adequately prepared for this task, we highly recommend that you then review the Reading & Writing Assignments article to identify key passages and prompts that will provide scaffolding for your students. While it is critical for students to engage fully in the close reading and writing practice within these lessons, it is equally important that teachers prioritize these formative writing pieces in their review and feedback cycle – encouraging students to revise these pieces where needed to ensure that they have ample opportunities to practice, improve, and refine their writing skills in anticipation of the essay assignment. In the space below you will find key lessons that we have identified for Unit 7A: Red Scarf Girl & Narrative.

Essay Prompt:

How does Ji-li change over the course of her story?

Sub-Unit 3 Lesson 4:

“That poor guy,” I finally said. “He should know better than to dress that way, but I’d just die if somebody cut my pants open in front of everybody like that.” (74). In this last moment of the scene, Ji-li feels a mix of emotions. Describe her different emotions. Use evidence from anywhere in the scene to support your ideas.

Sub-Unit 3 Lesson 5:

Most of Ji-li’s classmates had no trouble writing da-zi-bao that criticize their teachers, but Ji-li couldn’t. Why were some of Ji-li’s classmates so eager to write da-zi-bao? Why was it so hard for Ji-li? How did Ji-li’s position differ from those around her?

Sub-Unit 3 Lesson 9:

Compare how Ji-li felt in her home at the beginning of the story to how she felt after the Red Guards searched her home. Use details from the setting to support your ideas.

Write an Essay Sub-Unit: Overview

The Write an Essay Sub-Unit has unique features and structures, and will vary over the course of the school year as students develop and sharpen their writing skills. The information on this page will support you in understanding these nuances as you engage in planning and prepare to teach this Sub-Unit with students.

Sub-Unit Structure

Lessons are structured to help students develop organizational skills, beginning with the body paragraphs, then circling back to the introduction and conclusion. The reason behind this approach is to allow students to draw from their formative writing prompts as they select evidence and craft a multi-paragraph essay where the structure supports the development of their central claim or idea. You will find more information about the rationale behind the Sub-Unit Structure on the Lesson Brief page for the first lesson in each Write an Essay Sub-Unit.

Collections Units

The research-based Collection units provide the same regular routines and essay activities as the other core units, but also have students conduct short research projects where they develop a research question, identify relevant and credible sources of information, and integrate information into a short piece of writing. As you examine the Write an Essay Sub-Unit within a Collections Unit, you will notice that these Sub-Units are longer (8 lessons) as they include lessons that are focused on citations and developing a Works Cited page, a Media Project, and timeline or media presentation.

Essay Flex Days

Essay Flex Day lessons offer flexibility so that you can guide each student to select the revision activities that will benefit them most. Essay Flex Day Activities include whole-class reflections that support students in inventorying their own progress to define their next steps. Individual activities are focused explicitly on routines and skills that students have developed throughout the Write an Essay Sub-Units over the course of the year. These lessons also give teachers the opportunity to engage in conferences with their students and provide useful tools like the [Essay Graphic Organizer](#) or [Essay Rubric](#) to support students as they work to improve their writing.

Essay Solos

Many Solos in the Essay Lessons ask students to revisit or continue to work on their essays after class. Students writing essays in the digital lessons will need access to the digital curriculum to complete these Solos, and will not be able to complete them on a mobile device (phone). There are no assigned Solos for students writing essays in Writing Journals; any Solo work is at your discretion.

Write an Essay Sub-Unit: Prompts & Progression of skills

Grade 7

Unit	Essay type	Prompt				
Unit 7A: Red Scarf Girl & Narrative	Informative	How does Ji-li change over the course of her story?				
Sub-Unit 4		Lesson 1: Focus on the Body Paragraph	Lesson 2: Deepening your ideas	Lesson 3: The Introduction	Lesson 4: Smoothing out Rough Spots: The Editor's Checklist	Lesson 5: Looking back on Ji-li's Life
Unit 7B: Character & Conflict	Informative	Choose to write about either Walter or Mama. Describe one way your character changes from the beginning to the end of the play.				
Sub-Unit 4		Lesson 1: Essay First Steps	Lesson 2: Writing the Body Paragraphs	Lesson 3: Transitions	Lesson 4: Claims and Introductions	Lesson 5: Conclusions, Editing, and Polishing

Write an Essay Sub-Unit: Prompts & Progression of skills

Grade 7

Unit	Essay type	Prompt				
Unit 7C: Brain Science	Informative	<i>Compare and contrast Phineas's behavior and brain to those of an adolescent.</i>				
Sub-Unit 4		Lesson 1: Writing a Claim & Body Paragraph 1	Lesson 2: Writing Body Paragraph 2	Lesson 3: Essay Flex Day	Lesson 4: Revising and Writing an Introduction	Lesson 5: Writing a Conclusion and Polishing the Essay
Unit 7D: Poetry & Poe	Argumentative	<i>Can you trust that the narrator is accurately describing what's happening in the story or poem? Why or why not?</i>				
Sub-Unit 5		Lesson 1: Making a Claim	Lesson 2: Writing Body Paragraphs	Lesson 3: Essay Flex Day	Lesson 4: Revising and Writing an Introduction	Lesson 5: Writing a Conclusion and Editing the Essay

Write an Essay Sub-Unit: Prompts & Progression of skills

Grade 7

Unit	Essay type	Prompt
Unit 7E: Frida & Diego Collection	Student Choice	Informative Essay Prompt: <i>Frida Kahlo:</i> <i>The Early Years</i> Why did Frida Kahlo begin painting? How did this circumstance affect the type of paintings that she did? What did that mean for her long-term career? Write an informative essay about the beginning and development of Frida’s artistic work. <i>As you conduct your research in both the Collection and on the Internet, be sure to look for relevant facts, concrete details, and clear evidence to support your claim.</i>
		Argumentative Essay Prompt: <i>Who has the right to decide what public art should be: the artist or the public?</i> <i>There was a controversy surrounding Diego Rivera’s mural, Detroit Industry. Why did many people object to this work of art? What role does the public play when a work of art is being commissioned for a public space? What role does the artist play? Should Rivera have followed the demands of the public or was he right to follow his artistic instincts?</i> <i>You will write an argumentative essay stating your claim that either Rivera was right to follow his artistic vision or the public was right to demand that he paint the mural they envisioned. Be sure to identify at least 2 sources you can use in your work. As you conduct your research in both the Collection and on the Internet, be sure to look for relevant facts, concrete details, and clear evidence to support your claim.</i>
Sub-Unit 5		Lesson 1: Gathering Evidence Lesson 2: Making a Claim and Writing a Body Paragraph Lesson 3: Writing a Body Paragraph and an Introduction Lesson 4: Revising and Writing a Conclusion Lesson 5: Finishing and Editing the Essay Lesson 6: Creating Citations and a Works Cited List Lesson 7: Media Project Lesson 8: Media Presentations

Write an Essay Sub-Unit: Prompts & Progression of skills

Grade 7

Unit	Essay type	Prompt							
Unit 7F: The Gold Rush Collection	Student Choice	Informative Essay Prompt: <i>Who was John Sutter? Who was Elsa Jane Guerin? Choose one of these two famous figures from the gold rush era and start digging. Where did this person come from? Did he or she strike it rich? Has his or her legacy had a lasting impact on the state of California? Conduct research and write an informative essay on one of these fascinating characters from the Old West.</i>				Argumentative Essay Prompt: <i>Was the gold rush good for the state of California? Like all things, it depends on how you look at it. Who benefited from the gold rush (remember to consider different populations such as Native Americans and immigrants)? How and why? How did the gold rush affect California in the short term? How did it shape the California we know today? Conduct research and write an argumentative essay that persuades the reader of your point of view.</i>			
		Lesson 1: Gathering Evidence	Lesson 2: Making a Claim and Writing a Body Paragraph	Lesson 3: Writing a Body Paragraph and an Introduction	Lesson 4: Revising and Writing a Conclusion	Lesson 5: Finishing and Editing the Essay	Lesson 6: Creating Citations and a Works Cited List	Lesson 7: Media Project	Lesson 8: Media Presentations