

Writers Workshop Unit of Study
Middle School – Informational Essay



Comparing and Contrasting Perspectives on an Issue

Writers Workshop Unit of Study

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Writers Workshop Unit of Study

8th Grade – Informational Essay

Preface

The following unit supports and aligns to the Common Core State Standards. This research-based work is the outcome of a collective effort made by numerous secondary teachers from around the state of Michigan. Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) initiated a statewide collaborative project, bringing together educators from around the state to create and refine a K-12 English Language Arts model curriculum. This one unit is situated within a yearlong sequence of units. Depending upon the unit's placement in the yearlong Scope and Sequence, it will be important to recognize prior skills and content this unit expects learners to have. This unit also has a companion reading unit where readers closely study informational texts through a critical literacy lens. Each unit presents a string of teaching points that scaffold and spiral the content and skills. The unit is structured to be student-centered rather than teacher-driven. Sessions emphasize student engagement and strive to increase critical thinking and writing skills simultaneously. Writing and thinking processes are stressed and are equally important to the end writing product. Sessions are designed as a series of mini-lessons that allow time to write, practice, and conference. Through summative and formative assessments specific to each unit, students progress toward becoming independent thinkers and writers.

Significant input and feedback was gathered both in the initial conceptualizing of the unit and later revisions. Teachers from around the state piloted and/or reviewed the unit and their feedback and student artifacts helped in the revision process. A special thanks goes to lead unit writer Delia DeCourcy, who closely studied the CCSS and translated the standards into curriculum and practice. Throughout the yearlong collaborative project, teachers reviewing units are finding how students' habits of mind have shifted from task-oriented to big-picture thinking, utilizing a critical literacy lens. The following unit contends that significant reading from multiple resources is needed prior to a writer's developing a claim of scope and depth.

Informational Writing Unit Learning Progressions

	6	7	8
TEXT	Informational Essay: Cause and Effect Mentor Texts: Texts used in prior nonfiction unit; texts with headings and visuals; texts that address cause-and event-processes	Informational Essay: Historical Event Mentor Texts: Texts used in prior nonfiction unit; texts that address a significant historical event	Informational Essay: Compare/Contrast Mentor Texts: Texts used in prior non-fiction unit; texts that address a critical social issue
FOCUS	Explaining a Cause-and-Effect Phenomenon	Exploring an Historical Event	Explaining the Two Sides of a Critical Social Issue
Identify and Research a Topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define and explore cause and effect Analyze examples of nonfiction about cause and effect in the real world Identify and select a cause-and-effect topic Conduct online research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define and explore historical events Analyze nonfiction about historical events and the information provided Select an historical event to write about Conduct online research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define and explore comparison/contrast and critical issues Analyze examples of comparison/contrast on a critical issue Select a critical issue and identify its two sides Conduct online research
Synthesize Information and Determine an Organizational Pattern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select, organize, and structure information logically Determine a central idea Analyze key facts, details, quotations, and examples Draw conclusions to illustrate the importance of the topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select, organize, and structure information logically Determine a central idea Analyze key facts, details, quotations, and examples Use visuals to support facts, details, and analysis Create transitions between paragraphs to improve organization and flow Craft introductory and concluding paragraphs to provide the reader with context and importance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select, organize, and structure information logically Determine a central idea Analyze key facts, details, quotations, and examples Use visuals to support facts, details and analysis Create transitions between paragraphs to improve organization and flow Craft introductory and concluding paragraphs to provide the reader with context and importance
Create a Product to Inform an Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise to reconsider the central idea improve structure and organization, and expand or cut content Publish the product and reflect on the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise to reconsider the central idea improve structure and organization, and expand or cut content Publish the product and reflect on the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise to reconsider the central idea, improve structure and organization, and expand or cut content Publish the product and reflect on the process

	9	10	11	12
Text	Multiple Genres: Digital, Oral, and Print	Multiple Genres: Digital and Print	Articles: Digital and Print	Multiple Genres: Digital and Print
Focus of Research	Social Trends	Core Democratic Values	The Bill of Rights	Social Issues
Identify and Research a Topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify requirements of a research task and final product Examine essential questions to focus topic of research Review research to narrow the focus of further investigation Develop questions to gather relevant information Use different types of questions to find quality and relevant information Develop a system for primary research using quality research questions Develop a system for secondary research tracking sources and analyze information gathered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draw on prior knowledge of core democratic values to develop an inquiry Develop collaborative research skills to explore a subject in both breadth and depth Use a guided inquiry to cite explicit and inferred evidence on character traits, laws, and values Survey a series of sources (video and print) to identify key information to narrow a search for a potential topic Synthesize and categorize the results of sources to identify potential claims Identify elements (graphics, image, sound, words) of texts that represent or define the author's purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draw on prior knowledge about the Bill of Rights to develop an inquiry Independently manage a guided inquiry to cite explicit and inferred evidence on sub-topics related to the rights Independently survey a series of articles and websites to identify a research topic Read texts to identify stance and position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draw on prior knowledge about social issues to make decisions about social issues of interest to study Independently conduct preliminary research to focus a topic of interest Independently read texts to identify stance and position
Develop an Informed View	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine initial findings to determine what is interesting, relevant, and important Summarize and categorize existing research Develop a theory about a perspective on the topic Synthesize findings from primary research with information gathered in secondary research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct primary research, recognizing stances taken in texts or interviews Create visual texts to develop access to shared research data Identify diverse perspectives and evidence to support each perspective from primary research Generate visual texts that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose and craft a type of primary research that best suits the research topic Conduct primary research to gain insight into other people's experiences with the topic Conduct relevant secondary research to gain insight about the topic and related sub-topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independently conduct primary research to gain insight into other people's experiences with the chosen social issue Focus, organize, and extend research work using a thinking routine while conducting secondary research to gain insight from published researchers

		<p>represent knowledge gained through primary research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare, connect, categorize, evaluate, and elaborate upon data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a multi-draft reading process to go deeper into texts and evaluate texts and authors for validity • Synthesize information to create an informed view or stance on a topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate web-based resources for validity • Determine cause/effect of chosen social issue • Reflect on how one engages with ideas through interaction with texts and people to participate responsibly as a global citizen, and also how one can inform oneself about issues that impact daily lives
Reconcile Current Thinking with New Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reread to confirm or disconfirm a theory • Create a claim and identify evidence (facts, reasons, and/or examples) that supports the claim • Explain how the evidence or data supports the claim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider an audience • Engage in additional research • Revise claim to incorporate new information • Use the revised claim to organize supporting evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess supporting evidence and identify reasons for additional research • Engage in further research to confirm or disconfirm the claim • Revise claims to incorporate new information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construct an informed view on the causes and effects of a social problem and then find evidence that challenges or confirms that claim • Conduct further research to determine whether to/how to revise the informed claim • Identify implications of the social problem and possible solutions
Create a Product to Inform an Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize information logically for the product that will be created • Use proper documentation to avoid plagiarism • Prepare to present findings by making sure that the research question was answered, the task's requirements were fulfilled, and by rehearsing • Present findings • Self-evaluate the research product in order to become better researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select a product (collaborative or individual) appropriate for the research • Cite and format documentation and bibliography 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study informational essays to identify key decisions writers make • Draft an essay in order to inform an audience and to propose (a) solution(s) • Cite and format documentation and bibliography 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an effective multi-media product to publish findings and propose solutions for the social issue • Cite and format documentation and bibliography

Writers Workshop Unit of Study

Middle School – Informational Essay

Abstract

In this writing unit, students will compare and contrast two different perspectives on a critical issue by conveying ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content. After learning about the concepts of comparison and contrast, students will brainstorm critical issues that are characterized by contrasting perspectives and are of significant interest to them. They will record prior knowledge about these critical issues, perform directed exploration through research, and make a final decision about their essay topic. They will develop research questions about their critical issue and perform research to help them develop a central idea, which they will use to group relevant details, quotations, examples, and other information into categories. Students will then write a first draft using one of two comparison/contrast organizational structures, analyze information to explain the differences between the chosen perspectives, and transition between sentences and paragraphs. They will conclude with a paragraph that summarizes their findings and explains to the reader why this is important information and what the future of the debate might involve. Students will generate multiple revisions to strengthen the clarity of ideas, organization of the essay, and completeness of analysis. They will engage in peer review to give and receive constructive feedback that will assist with revision.

Philosophy and Notes about This Unit

This unit should follow a non-fiction unit in which the texts act as mentor texts for the writing unit. Issue-focused informational texts that are written in a lively manner would be ideal mentor texts, especially if they compare two differing perspectives on an issue.

Of particular importance is that students select an issue they are extremely interested in. This interest will translate not only to their motivation for this writing project, but also to their readers as students write with increased engagement and passion about their topic.

A foundational belief of this unit is that writing is a series of choices a writer makes—not a formula students follow or a worksheet they fill in. To that end, the handouts and sessions provide choice for the novice writer—choice in topic and organizational structure. If we provide our students with a rigid graphic organizer and ask them to fill it in, they are not learning to become independent writers and thinkers. Similarly, if we set them off to write without enough scaffolding, they will flounder. But by showing writers the various options available to them as novice crafters of an informational piece, they can make choices about their content and structure and continue to become more autonomous in their writing.

The mentor texts from the preceding reading unit and prewriting sessions in this writing unit are especially important in helping to establish students' writerly independence during the drafting phase. The introduction of mentor texts helps students understand what they are striving for, to see what is expected, and how all the pieces work together. In addition, engaging in a variety of pre-writing activities will allow students to explore, eliminate, and select information. This experimentation will keep the writing process from becoming formulaic. The content and structure of each student's informational essay should be unique to their topic and controlling idea.

The sessions recommend that you, the teacher, research and write alongside your students. As teachers of writing, we must model what it means to be a learner, researcher and writer. In doing so, we show that learning is worth engaging in. We model curiosity. And we illustrate that learning is a never-ending endeavor. By researching and writing with our students, we also model a passion for learning that can inspire their passion for their chosen topic during the informational essay unit. And we can speak first hand about the frustrations, difficulties, and victories of finding and organizing information, selecting the best structure, and revising to perfect a piece.

While this unit offers operational curriculum, realize that the writing process is malleable and will be different for each student. Teaching using Writing Workshop pedagogy is an art, not a science. On drafting and revising days, some students may be writing new material, others will be re-thinking and revising what they've already written, while others may be returning to research a point they haven't addressed yet in their draft. It's important to have flexibility with your students and their processes as they investigate their topics. This can look like chaos in a classroom, but if each student has a clear sense of what s/he needs to accomplish during a class period that is designated as a work day, they can be focused. One way of keeping track of your students is to keep an accountability sheet on a clipboard at the front of the room where they write down at the beginning of the class what they plan to accomplish that day. As they leave at the end of class, they then record whether or not they met their goal and if they didn't, what

they did accomplish. This tool will help you manage this moving machine with many parts, otherwise known as the writing workshop. The formative assessment mini-tasks will be an important tool for you in determining which students need more instruction, support, freedom, encouragement, and structure.

The unit asks students to reflect on their writing experience and choices at the end of the process. The inclusion of reflection is another move toward helping students become more independent thinkers and writers. As students become more aware of why they make the choices they make during a writing task and what the outcome of those choices are and how they arrived at their final product, they will become increasingly more confident as writers and thinkers, better able to direct their own learning process. The goal is for them to see the teacher as a resource in the writing process rather than the person who steers the ship.

Key Terms

Informational/Explanatory Writing - Informational/explanatory writing conveys information accurately and is organized around a central idea with a coherent focus, answering a question that typically addresses *what, how or why?*

Objective – Not influenced by personal feelings or opinions in considering and representing facts.

Critical Issues – Pressing issues that are hotly debated in politics, the media, and the community. They concern people’s freedoms, the way we live, and how society evolves.

Perspective - A particular attitude towards or way of regarding something; a point of view. When it comes to taking a side on an issue, this can also be termed a “stance.”

Brainstorming (Idea Generation) - a first stage process where the writer produces a list of ideas, topics, or arguments without crossing any possibilities off the list. The goal is to create a “storm” of creative energy to open up thinking about the writing task and access ideas the writer might not have realized she had. For resources on brainstorming techniques visit:

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/brainstorming.html>

Prior Knowledge –All the information the writer has stored in his/her brain about a selected topic. Writing down this information increases writerly confidence as a student begins a writing task, as well as readies the mind to accept and retain new information about the topic, thus helping the writer to make connections between prior knowledge and new knowledge.

Research Question – An overarching question that steers the research and writing of an essay. These questions should be open-ended and require research and thinking to craft a thorough response.

Central Idea – The overarching idea behind an informational essay. The term central idea can also be used in reference to a paragraph, where the central idea should sit in the topic sentence. In a compare/contrast essay about a critical issue, the central idea defines the key questions in the debate about the issue that will be addressed.

(Historical) Background – Information that provides context about the critical issue including when the debate began, who has been involved, major events, significant court cases and decisions, and legislation passed.

Compare/Contrast Organization – The most prominent methods of organizing this kind of essay are the block format and the point-by-point format.

Supporting Details- Facts, statistics, quotations, and examples that support the central idea of a paragraph.

Analysis – The explanation of how supporting details address the central idea; a discussion of how the two perspectives on the critical issue are different and similar.

Headings and Sub-headings – The titles given to each section of an essay, which appear in bold and divide information into categories. Sub-sections of information within these categories can be titled with related sub-headings.

Standards

Common Core Standards: Informational Writing: **The following College and Career Readiness (CCR) anchor standards apply to reading and writing in narrative template tasks. Refer to the 6-12 standards for grade-appropriate specifics that fit each task and module being developed. The standards numbers and general content remain the same across all grades, but details vary.**

Number		CCR Anchor Standards for Reading
2		Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
3		Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
9		Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
10		Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.
		CCR Anchor Standards for Writing Narrative
2		Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
4		Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
5		Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
7		Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
8		Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
9		Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
10		Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Overview of Sessions and Teaching Points

Pre-Unit Performance Task

To assess students' skills as writers of informational texts that examine contrasting perspectives on critical issues, students will write such an essay. Students should write on a topic that they have prior knowledge of and that interests them significantly. Teachers will assess the results of the pre-unit performance task using the Informational Essay Comparing & Contrasting Perspectives on an Issue Rubric, focusing on students' understanding of the chosen perspective and their ability to organize and analyze the information they provide. This performance task will help determine skill strengths and deficits of the class as a whole and of individual students and will help the teacher determine how much depth to go into regarding perspective, central idea, analysis, and essay organization.

Prompt: Explain and explore the two sides of a critical issue in society by comparing and contrasting the two perspectives on the issue.

IDENTIFY AND RESEARCH A TOPIC

1. Informational Writing Strategies: Compare/Contrast

Writers of informational essays use many different strategies to convey information to the reader, including cause and effect, definition, compare and contrast, and classification. A compare/contrast structure looks at both the similarities (compare) and the differences (contrast) within a topic.

2. Informational Text Models: Compare/Contrast

Writers examine pieces by other writers to learn about informational essay strategies. Writers use a compare/contrast structure in informational essays to consider how things are both alike and different (i.e. perspectives on an issue, a decision to be made like a purchase or voting in an election).

SYNTHESIZE INFORMATION AND DEVELOP AND ORGANIZATIONAL PATTERN

3. Topic Brainstorming: Finding a Passion

Writers usually produce their best writing when focused on a topic they care about. They brainstorm and pre-write to identify and explore possible topics, then carefully select a topic based on their interests and the assignment.

4. Developing a Research Question

Writers develop research questions to focus their investigation of a topic. These questions should be open-ended and require research and considerable thinking to answer.

5. Researching & Organizing Information

Writers perform research to increase their knowledge of the chosen topic. They sort through their prior knowledge and research information, categorizing facts, details, quotations, and examples into categories and sub-categories.

6. Determining the Central Idea

Writers determine a central idea to focus the drafting of their essay. In an essay focused on compare/contrast, the central idea will point to both similarities and differences.

7. Finding a Structure

Writers of informational essays select a logical structure for their piece as they draft. With the compare/contrast pattern, writers use either the point-by-point or block method of organization.

8. Drafting Strong Informational Paragraphs

Informational essay writers select key facts, details, quotations, and examples to support the central idea in the topic sentence as they draft body paragraphs. They also analyze this information to help the audience make sense of the facts and link them to the central idea. And they use transitions within and between paragraphs to help readers understand the logical flow of ideas.

9. Using Visual to Support Facts, Details, and Analysis

Informational essay writers select, or craft, and carefully place pictures, graphs, charts, and headings and sub-headings to help the reader visually understand their central and supporting ideas.

10. Drafting Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs

Informational essay writers craft introductory and concluding paragraphs that make clear to the reader the importance of the topic. With the compare/contrast structure, the introductory paragraph briefly summarizes the topic, as well as the similarities and differences, while the concluding paragraph discusses why the topic is important.

CREATE A PRODUCT TO INFORM AN AUDIENCE

11. Revising & Peer Review

When they have completed a draft of their essay, informational essay writers may engage in peer review to get feedback on their writing. They may also use a reverse outline to determine the effectiveness of their piece. Using all this information, they formulate a revision plan, then make changes accordingly.

12. Publishing & Reflecting

To complete the writing process, writers must share their pieces with an audience—either in print or on the web—and then celebrate the accomplishment of completing a significant writing task. They then reflect on the writing process to become more independent writers in the future.

Summative Assessment Task

Is there an issue you are interested in and would like to know more about? Are there two contrasting sides to this issue? You might want to learn more about the death penalty, year-round school, or nuclear power debates. Now is your chance to show what you know about a topic like this and deepen your understanding of it. For this informational essay, you will compare and contrast two perspectives on a critical issue to gain a complete understanding of the topic.

After deciding on a topic, you will clarify the two contrasting perspectives (also known as stances). After recording all your prior knowledge, you'll develop research questions to guide your research and writing. Next, you'll determine what else you need to know to answer your question and set to work researching. Through research, you will develop a central idea about this issue, which will help you select and organize the most relevant details, quotations, examples, and other information about your topic in your first draft. You will then analyze your information to explain the similarities and differences in the two perspectives on your topic. In your concluding paragraph, be sure to summarize your findings and tell the reader why this is important information to have and how this issue might change over time.

Informational Essay Rubric – Comparing & Contrasting Perspectives on an Issue

Element	Advanced	On-Target	Novice
Content	<p>The writer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artfully presents the issue background, perspectives, key questions, and key terms in the introductory paragraph(s). Has crafted a central idea that concerns 2-3 of the most pressing questions regarding the critical issue. Thoughtfully presents an abundance of supporting details highly relevant to the central idea in the form of facts, quotations, examples, and statistics. Always carefully analyzes supporting details to explain how they answer key questions, define a perspective, and contrast with the opposing perspective. Consistently compares and contrasts the two perspectives on the critical issue using signal words and phrases. Uses the concluding paragraph to briefly summarize the two perspectives, to explain why this issue is so critical to society, and to discuss what the future debate over this issue might involve. 	<p>The writer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents the issue background, perspectives, key questions, and key terms in the introductory paragraph(s). Has crafted a central idea that concerns 1-2 of the most pressing questions regarding the critical issue. Presents supporting details highly relevant to the central idea in the form of facts, quotations, examples, and statistics. Often analyzes supporting details to explain how they answer key questions, define a perspective, and contrast with the opposing perspective. Often compares and contrasts the two perspectives on the critical issue using signal words and phrases. Uses the concluding paragraph to briefly summarize the two perspectives and explain why this issue is so critical to society. 	<p>The writer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents the issue background, perspectives, key questions, and key terms, but not all these crucial elements. Has crafted a central idea that does not concern key questions about the critical issue or chosen perspectives. Presents minimal supporting details relevant to the central idea in the form of facts, quotations, examples, and statistics. Occasionally or never analyzes supporting details to explain how they answer key questions, define a perspective, and contrast with the opposing perspective. Rarely or never compares and contrasts the two perspectives on the critical issue using signal words and phrases. Uses the concluding paragraph only to summarize what has already been explored in the essay.
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The chosen structure is the most effective means of conveying/supporting the controlling idea. Headings and sub-headings are effective titles and assist the reader in understanding how information is organized. The use of signal words and phrases create a logical flow between sentences and paragraphs. Each paragraph has a clear central idea that is presented in the topic sentence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The chosen structure is an effective means of conveying/supporting the controlling idea. Headings and sub-headings are effective titles and often assist the reader in understanding how information is organized. The use of signal words and phrases usually create a logical flow between sentences and paragraphs. Most paragraphs have a clear central idea that is presented in the topic sentence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The chosen structure is not the most effective means of conveying/supporting the controlling idea; or there is no clear structure to the essay. Headings and sub-headings create confusion for the reader about how information is organized. Signal words and phrases are rarely or never used to create a logical flow between sentences and paragraphs. Few paragraphs have a clear central idea that is presented in the topic sentence.
Style & Mechanics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing voice is engaging and consistently appropriate for the intended audience. The word choice is specific to the chosen topic. Sentence structures are varied and complex. The essay contains no errors in spelling or punctuation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing voice is engaging and usually appropriate for the intended audience. The word choice is somewhat specific to the chosen topic. Sentence structures are often varied and sometimes complex. The essay contains minimal spelling and punctuation errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing voice is not engaging or is not appropriate for the intended audience. The word choice is not specific to the chosen topic. Sentence structures are not varied or complex. The essay contains multiple spelling or punctuation errors.
Process Checklist	<p>The writer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brainstormed to discover multiple topics and selected one suited to the writing task. Researched to explore and refine his/her topic choice. Drafted to organize and analyze information. Revised his/her draft to achieve greater coherency and clarity. Edited for clarity and an error-free essay. 		

INFORMATIONAL ESSAY MENTOR TEXT STUDY	Session 1
Concept	Informational Writing Strategies: Compare/Contrast
Teaching Point	Writers of informational essays use many different strategies to convey information to the reader, including cause and effect, definition, compare and contrast, and classification. A compare/contrast structure looks at both the similarities (compare) and the differences (contrast) within a topic.
Suggested Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metaphor Cards Activity (paste the link into your browser to get it to open) http://nwrpdp.com/documents/pedagogy/Assessment/metaphor_cards_internet_version.pdf • Compare & Contrast handout, included after this session • Venn Diagram, included after this session • “A Smartphone Face Off” http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/10/04/technology/personaltech/a-smartphone-face-off.html <p>Optional – Advanced Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Two New Baseball Palaces, One Stoic, One Scrappy,” from the <i>New York Times</i> http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/03/arts/design/03stadia.html?_r=1 • “Bing, the Imitator, Often Goes Google One Better,” from the <i>New York Times</i> http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/09/technology/personaltech/09pogue.html
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the Metaphor Cards Activity and decide what objects or topics you want your students to develop metaphors for. Consider how to have them create metaphors of increasing complexity/difficulty in the activity through the objects/topics you select for them. • Review the Compare/Contrast handout. Devise word pairs that will be very interesting/entertaining to your students. • Select a real-world decision for the entire class to make when using the Venn Diagram. It may be a purchase, a decision about what high school to attend, what elective class to take, etc.
Active Engagement	<p>NOTE – If you have covered compare/contrast previously in the year, consider having students complete the Optional Activity at the end of this lesson rather than step #1 and #2 of this Lesson. Then proceed to step #3.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Comparing – Metaphor Cards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Share the teaching point. ○ Ask students: when do you compare and contrast in your own lives? ○ Explain that it’s often easy to see the differences between 2 things, but difficult to see the similarities between 2 very different things. So you’re going to practice this skill. ○ Provide directions for the Metaphor Card activity. (This activity assumes students are familiar with the concept of metaphor.) • Small Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students complete the Metaphor Card activity and select their best metaphor. ○ Have them prepare an explanation of the metaphor they plan to share with the class. • Full Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Share results of the Metaphor Card activity. 2. Comparing and Contrasting – Word Pairs & Mini Venn Diagrams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Introduce contrasting word pairs. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ lemons/ limes ▪ bread/crackers ▪ whales/fish ▪ iPod/CD player ▪ smart phone/cell phone ○ Using the Compare & Contrast handout, explain how to use a Venn diagram to find similarities and differences between the pairs. (Compare/Contrast handout) ○ Look at the model together. ○ Have students practice creating a mini Venn diagram using one of your contrasting word pairs. • Solo/Pairs

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Have students practice creating word pairs and mini Venn diagrams on their own. <p>3. Practicing Comparison Contrast for Real Word Decision-Making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Full Class<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Pass out the large Venn Diagram.○ Share and examine the article together--“A Smartphone Face Off”--or one like it. http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/10/04/technology/personaltech/a-smartphone-face-off.html<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Ask students to decide which phone they would buy and why.○ Introduce topics/products to be compared and contrasted or have the class decide on one together.• Small Group or Solo<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Have students identify the similarities and differences between the topics/products.○ Come back together as a class to share findings.○ Collect the large Venn diagrams to formatively assess students’ grasp of compare/contrast and how to use a Venn diagram.												
Independent Practice Formative Assessment Mini-Task	Mini-Task Rubric: Venn Diagram for Decision Making												
	<table><tr><td><i>Content</i></td><td><i>Advanced</i></td><td><i>On-Target</i></td><td><i>Novice</i></td></tr><tr><td>Similarities</td><td>-identified key similarities and other unlikely similarities</td><td>-identified key similarities</td><td>-identified only one or no similarities</td></tr><tr><td>Relationship between similarities and differences</td><td>- All similarities and differences correspond; identified multiple differences w/in the similarities</td><td>- All similarities and differences correspond.</td><td>-Many similarities and differences do not correspond.</td></tr></table>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Advanced</i>	<i>On-Target</i>	<i>Novice</i>	Similarities	-identified key similarities and other unlikely similarities	-identified key similarities	-identified only one or no similarities	Relationship between similarities and differences	- All similarities and differences correspond; identified multiple differences w/in the similarities	- All similarities and differences correspond.	-Many similarities and differences do not correspond.
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Similarities	-identified key similarities and other unlikely similarities	-identified key similarities	-identified only one or no similarities										
Relationship between similarities and differences	- All similarities and differences correspond; identified multiple differences w/in the similarities	- All similarities and differences correspond.	-Many similarities and differences do not correspond.										
Assessment	<p>Pre-unit assessment task:</p> <p>To assess students’ skills as writers of informational texts that examine contrasting perspectives on critical issues, students will write such an essay. Students should write on a topic that they have prior knowledge of and that interests them significantly. Teachers will assess the results of the pre-unit performance task using the Informational Essay Comparing & Contrasting Perspectives on an Issue Rubric, focusing on students’ understanding of the chosen perspective and their ability to organize and analyze the information they provide. This performance task will help determine skill strengths and deficits of the class as a whole and of individual students and will help the teacher determine how much depth to go into regarding perspective, central idea, analysis, and essay organization.</p> <p>Prompt: Explain and explore the two sides of a critical issue in society by comparing and contrasting the two perspectives on the issue.</p> <p>You can use the rubric, attached before session 1, to assess student performance.</p>												
Optional Activity – Advanced	<p>As an alternative to the first two steps in this session, you can have students read a compare/contrast article from the <i>New York Times</i> and have them chart the similarities and differences of the two topics on the Venn Diagram chart.</p> <p>Articles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Two New Baseball Palaces, One Stoic, One Scrappy” from the <i>New York Times</i> http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/03/arts/design/03stadia.html?_r=1• “Bing, the Imitator, Often Goes Google One Better” from the <i>New York Times</i> http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/09/technology/personaltech/09pogue.html <p>A. Reading #1 – read for the gist</p> <p>B. Reading #2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bracket the similarities between the two topics.• Star the differences between the two topics. <p>C. Venn Diagram – in pairs or as a class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chart the similarities and differences on the Venn Diagram handout. <p>D. Decide and Discuss – Which would you choose? How come?</p> <p>Have students proceed to step #3 of this lesson to generate their own decision-making Venn Diagram.</p>												

Compare & Contrast

To compare and contrast two topics means looking at the similarities and differences.

- Compare = similarities
- Contrast = differences

Using a Venn Diagram

1. Find the similarity.
2. Identify the difference regarding that similarity.
3. Repeat this process as many times as possible.

Let's Practice – Word Pairs

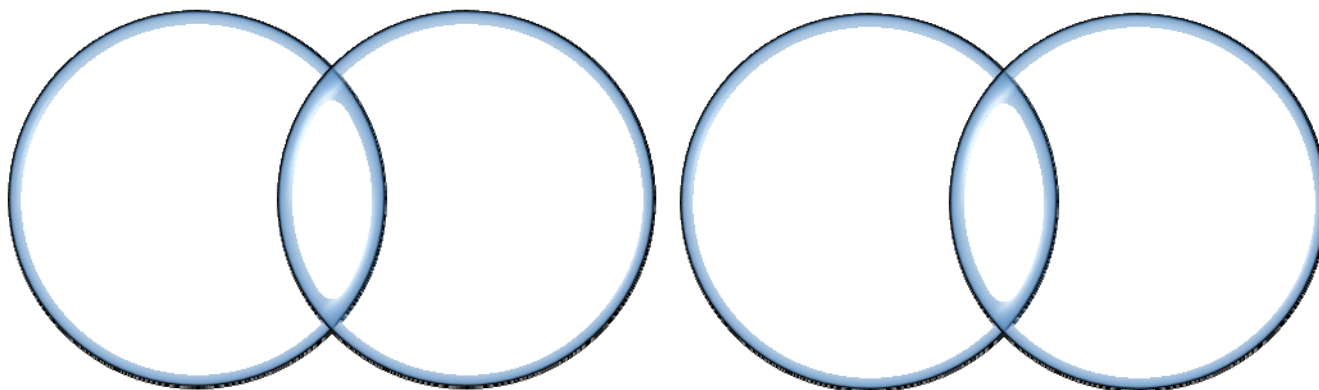
iPod		CD Player
<i>Differences</i>	<i>Similarities</i>	<i>Differences</i>
1. can play music, videos, podcasts	1. DIGITAL DEVICE	1. only plays music
2. can strap/clip on body/clothes	2. PORTABLE	2. heavier – must carry
3. user can download & create playlists on device, can share playlists with other users	3. USER CONTROL OVER MUSIC	3. download and burn songs to cd

You Try!

Generate Two Interesting Word Pairs

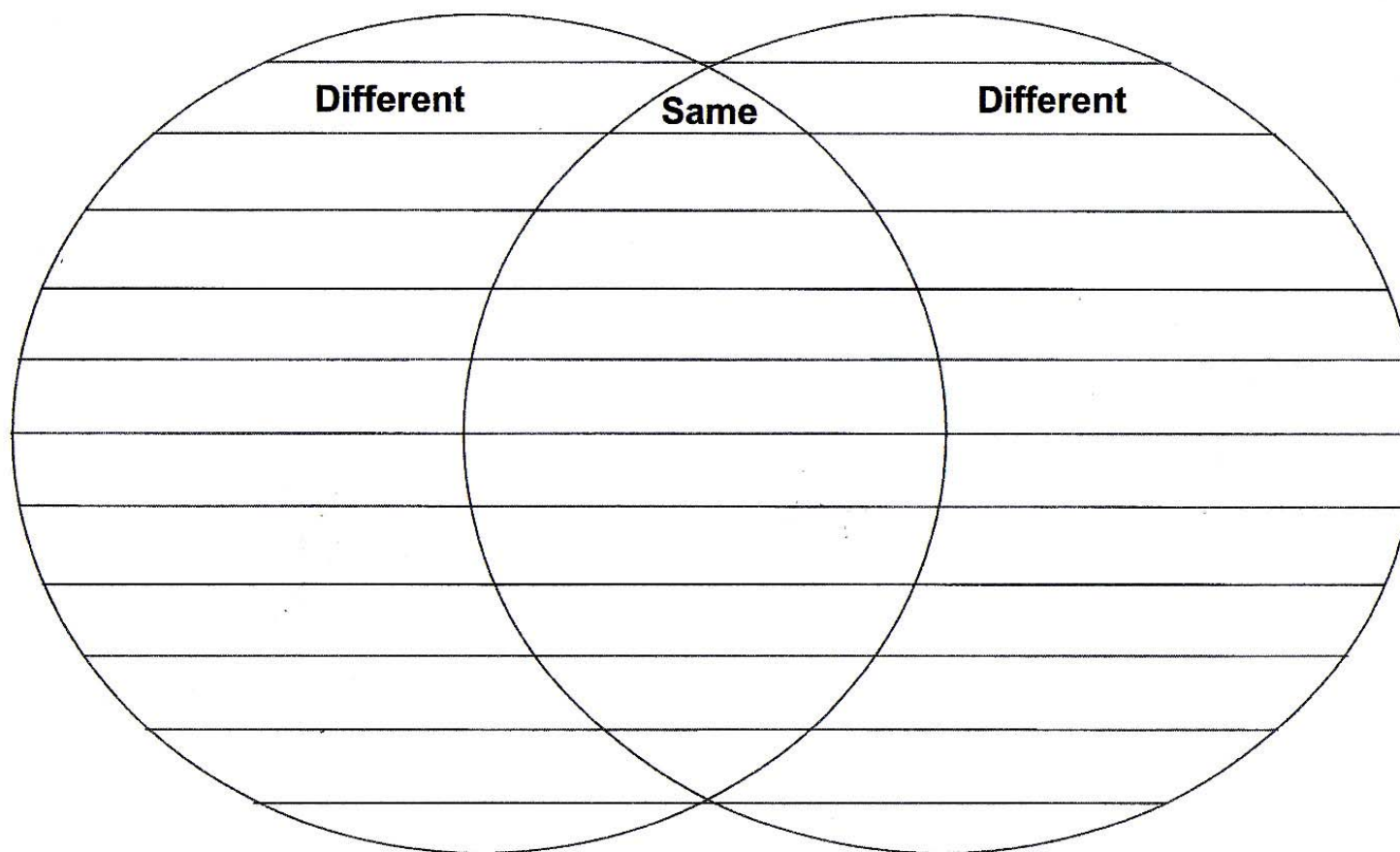
- 1.
- 2.

Fill in the Mini Venn Diagrams



Venn Diagram

Topic: _____



	Session 2
Concept	Informational Text Models: Compare/Contrast
Teaching Point	Writers examine pieces by other writers to learn about informational essay strategies. Writers use a compare/contrast structure in informational essays to consider how things are both alike and different (i.e. perspectives on an issue, a decision to be made like a purchase or voting in an election).
Suggested Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terms Anchor Chart, included after this session • Issue, Background, Perspectives, & Key Questions handout, included after this session • Possible articles to teach perspective and background: • “Do Single Sex Schools Make Kids Sexist?” http://theweek.com/article/index/219658/do-single-sex-schools-make-kids-sexist • “The Tebow Laws: Should Home-Schooled Kids Play Sports for Public Schools?” http://theweek.com/article/index/224595/the-tebow-laws-should-homeschooled-kids-play-sports-for-public-schools • “Should Schools Teach Character?” http://theweek.com/article/index/219405/should-schools-teach-character • “Homework Revolt: Time to Give Kids a Break?” http://theweek.com/article/index/216366/homework-revolt-time-to-give-kids-a-break http://theweek.com/article/index/216775/what-happens-if-homework-no-longer-matters • Article for Key Questions activity: http://www.education.com/magazine/article/School_Vouchers/ • Possible articles for Issue Overview Close Reading exercise: • “School Vouchers 101: An Overview of This Year’s Hottest Campaign Debate” on Education World website http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin167.shtml • “Single Gender Classes: Are They Better?” from the Education World website http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr215.shtml • “An Impassioned Debate: an Overview of the Death Penalty in America” from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life http://www.pewforum.org/Death-Penalty/An-Impassioned-Debate-An-Overview-of-the-Death-Penalty-in-America.aspx • “Stem Cell Research at the Crossroads of Religion and Politics” from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life http://www.pewforum.org/Science-and-Bioethics/Stem-Cell-Research-at-the-Crossroads-of-Religion-and-Politics.aspx
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the Terms Anchor Chart. • Review the Issue, Background, Perspectives, & Key Questions handout and select accompanying articles. • Select an article for the Issue Overview Close Reading exercise.
Active Engagement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Where Are We Headed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefly explain the writing assignment students are about to begin working on. Let students know that this kind of comparison/contrast about the stances on a critical issue is a form of writing used by government agencies to make policy decisions and by non-profits and the media to objectively inform the public about issues. This kind of text is sometimes called an Issue Overview. 2. Where Are We Headed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefly explain the writing assignment students are about to begin working on. Let students know that this kind of comparison/contrast about the stances on a critical issue is a form of writing used by government agencies to make policy decisions and by non-profits and the media to objectively inform the public about issues. This kind of text is sometimes called an Issue Overview.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Emphasize the differences between argument writing and informational writing. Students are not writing arguments in which they attempt to change the reader’s mind but instead, they are providing the reader with objective information so the reader can make up his or her mind about the issue. The goal is to be as unbiased in the writing of the informational text. <p>3. Critical Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Full Class<ul style="list-style-type: none">Share the teaching point.Define the term “critical issue” using the Terms Anchor Chart.Have the class generate a brief list of critical issues.For each item ask: what makes this issue critical in our society or community? <p>4. Background & Perspectives on an Issue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Full Class<ul style="list-style-type: none">Define the terms “perspective” and “(historical) background” using the Terms Anchor ChartHave students read one of the recommended articles from <i>The Week</i> that outlines the recent background on an issue and 3 perspectives on it.Using the Issue, Background, Perspectives, & Key Questions handout have students<ul style="list-style-type: none">Bullet point and paraphrase the most important background pointsParaphrase the 3 perspectives discussed <p>5. Key Questions/Sub-topics about an Issue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Full Class<ul style="list-style-type: none">Explain that key questions about an issue are often the sub-topics of an issue debate if they are stated as a sentence rather than a question. It’s useful to identify them as questions when it comes to researching and writing because we research and write to answer questions.Summarize the school voucher debate for students.Look at the article “The School Voucher Debate” together. http://www.education.com/magazine/article/School_Vouchers/<ul style="list-style-type: none">Point out the headings that indicate the subtopics of the issue.Have students read each paragraph, then phrase each subtopic in the form of a question. Ask: “What is they key question outlined in this paragraph?” Answers should look something like:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Does the competition for students created by the voucher program improve school quality?Will vouchers create more accountability for private and public schools?Does the inclusion of religious schools in voucher programs violate the separation of church and state?Should vouchers only be available to poor and working class families?Will voucher programs diversify public schools?								
Independent Practice Formative Assessment Mini-task	<p>1. Issue Overview Close Reading Exercise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Solo<ul style="list-style-type: none">Give students an Issue Overview to read. Text suggestions are in the “preparation” section.If you feel students are not ready to do this exercise on their own, have them work in pairs or small groups. An alternative is to differentiate the readings by ability level.Have students annotate and paraphrase using the Issue Overview Close Reading handout. <p>Mini-Task Rubric: Issue Overview Close Reading Exercise</p> <table><tr><th>Content</th><th>Advanced</th><th>On-Target</th><th>Novice</th></tr><tr><td>Critical Issue</td><td>-Identified</td><td>- Identified</td><td>- Not identified</td></tr></table>	Content	Advanced	On-Target	Novice	Critical Issue	-Identified	- Identified	- Not identified
Content	Advanced	On-Target	Novice						
Critical Issue	-Identified	- Identified	- Not identified						

	Perspectives	- Identified clearly with stances stated in detail	-Identified with stances stated	-Not clearly identified	
	Background	-3 points paraphrased are most important to the debate	-3 points are well paraphrased, at least 2 are key to the debate	-Points are not paraphrased (verbatim) and/or are not accurate	
	Key Questions/Topics	-Identifies all key questions	-Identifies most key questions	-Identifies only one or no key questions	
	Perspectives on Key Questions and Subtopics	-Clearly identifies and eloquently states each perspective's stance on each question	-Clearly identifies and communicates most of the stances related to the key questions	- Struggles to identify the stances on most of the key questions	

Comparing & Contrasting Perspectives on a Critical Issue

Terms Anchor Chart

Critical Issues – Pressing issues that are hotly debated in politics, the media, and the community. They concern people’s freedoms, the way we live, and how society evolves.

Perspective - A particular attitude toward or way of regarding something; a point of view. When it comes to taking a side on an issue, this can also be termed a “stance.”

(Historical) Background – Information that provides context about the critical issue, including when the debate began, who has been involved, significant court cases and decisions, and legislation passed.

Central Idea – The overarching idea behind an informational essay. In a compare/contrast essay about a critical issue, the central idea defines the key questions in the debate about the issue that will be addressed.

Issue, Background, Perspectives, & Key Questions

The **Critical Issue** is:

Important **Background** Bullet Points

Paraphrase the **2 or 3 Perspectives** – What is each stance on the critical issue? Be specific.

1.

2.

3.

The **Critical Issue** is:

Key Questions about the Critical Issue:

1.

2.

3.

Issue Overview Close Reading

Directions:

- A. Carefully read the Issue Overview. As you read, try to identify the critical issue, important background, perspectives on the issue, and key questions/subtopics by marking and annotating the text.
- B. Read the text a second time and answer the questions below.

- 1. What is the **critical issue**?
- 2. What are the **perspectives** on the issue that are discussed?
- 3. Paraphrase the 3 most important points made about the **background** of this issue.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

- 4. **CONTRAST:** Identify the **key questions/subtopics** on the issue that are discussed and outline each perspective’s stance on that question/subtopic.

Key Question/subtopic	Perspective A	Perspective B

- 5. **COMPARISON:** Do Perspectives A and B share any similarities in their stances?

DEVELOPING & EXPANDING A TOPIC	Session 3
Concept	Topic Brainstorming: Finding a Passion
Quotation	<p>“Motivation is at the heart of writing...Go where your interest lies or your affection or your passion.” - William Zinsser from <i>On Writing Well</i></p> <p>“Kids need time to explore topics before we ask them to formulate definitive research questions. Often they don’t know which questions to ask early in the research process, because they don’t know enough. They can investigate topics, build background knowledge, and learn as they research, becoming more knowledgeable and more curious, gathering important questions along the way. I have seen kids go to great lengths to find answers to questions that compel them.” –Carol Newman, a school librarian in Boulder, Colorado</p>
Teaching Point	Writers usually produce their best writing when focused on a topic they care about. They brainstorm and pre-write to identify and explore possible topics, then carefully select a topic based on their interests and the assignment.
Suggested Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical Issues Categories Anchor Chart, included after the session • Sample Topics Brainstorm List, included after the session • Copies, transparencies or scans to be projected of your (the teacher’s) Writer’s Notebook to share: the two lists on critical issues and your directed exploration and prior knowledge about 3 topics of interest. • Websites for possible topics http://www.middleschooldebate.com/topics/topicresearch.htm http://www.idebate.org/debatabase/topic_index.php • Directed Exploration & Recording Prior Knowledge handout, included after the session
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the Writer’s Notebook activities as outlined in this lesson. • Review the Sample Topics Brainstorm List, Critical Issues Categories Anchor Chart, and Directed Exploration & Recording Prior Knowledge handout
Active Engagement	<p>1. Brainstorming Topics for the Informational Essay</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full Class: How to Brainstorm <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Share the teaching point and the definition of brainstorming to reinforce that at this stage of the writing process, students should be open to all possibilities. ○ Share your lists from your Writer’s Notebook that answer these questions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ WHAT CRITICAL ISSUES DO YOU KNOW ABOUT? ○ WHAT CRITICAL ISSUES DO YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT? • Small Group: Brainstorming Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review the Critical Issues Categories Anchor Chart and ask groups to brainstorm critical issues in each category to pool their ideas about possible topics. ○ Have them visit the sites below as needed to expand their lists. http://www.middleschooldebate.com/topics/topicresearch.htm http://www.idebate.org/debatabase/topic_index.php
Independent Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solo: Issues of Focus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have students generate their two lists in their writers’ notebooks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ WHAT CRITICAL ISSUES DO YOU KNOW ABOUT? ▪ WHAT CRITICAL ISSUES DO YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT? ○ Have students read back through their lists and put a star next to any topic they feel especially interested in or passionate about and highlight topics are repeated from one list to another.

Active Engagement	<p>2. Directed Exploration and Recording Prior Knowledge</p> <p>Full Class: Modeling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Review the Directed Exploration & Recording Prior Knowledge handout. You may want to review the compare/contrast chart and remind students of the work they did previously with this kind of chart.○ Talk through the Directed Exploration and Recording Prior Knowledge for your 3 topics of focus. <p>Solo: Independent Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ In their writers’ notebooks, have students answer the questions on the handout by recording prior knowledge and researching their 3 selected critical issues.												
Independent Practice Formative Assessment Mini-Task	<p>3. Pass Out of Class</p> <p>Have students write their 3 critical issue choices on a notecard with the 2 identified perspectives with each. They should star the one they are most interested in.</p> <table><tr><th>Element</th><th>Advanced</th><th>On-Target</th><th>Novice</th></tr><tr><td>Critical Issues</td><td>- Identified & is excited about several</td><td>- Identified 3 & is excited about one</td><td>- None defined, or the issues are not critical or debatable</td></tr><tr><td>2 Perspectives</td><td>- Has identified contrasting perspectives on each issue in a detailed manner</td><td>- Has identified contrasting perspectives on each issue</td><td>- Unclear what the possible contrasting perspectives are on all or some of the issues</td></tr></table>	Element	Advanced	On-Target	Novice	Critical Issues	- Identified & is excited about several	- Identified 3 & is excited about one	- None defined, or the issues are not critical or debatable	2 Perspectives	- Has identified contrasting perspectives on each issue in a detailed manner	- Has identified contrasting perspectives on each issue	- Unclear what the possible contrasting perspectives are on all or some of the issues
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**Critical Issues Categories
Anchor Chart**

EDUCATION

CULTURE

POLITICS

SCIENCE

Sample Topic Brainstorm List – Critical National Issues

EDUCATION

Homework Load
Charter Schools
Homeschooling
Teacher/Student Friendships on Facebook
School Vouchers
Teaching Evolution in Schools
Year-Round School
Cell Phones in School
Junk Food Sales in Schools
Single-Sex Instruction in Public Schools

CULTURE

Effects of Violent Video Games
Banning Cell Phone Use in Cars

POLITICS

Death Penalty
Abortion
Immigration
Mandatory Seat Belt Law – backseat
Mandatory Helmet Law - motorcycles
National Health Care
Gay Marriage
Euthanasia
Gun Control
Ban on Nuclear Weapons Testing
Public Smoking Ban
Affirmative Action

SCIENCE

Animal Testing
Nuclear Power
Teaching Evolution in Schools
Cloning
Wind Energy

Directed Exploration & Recording Prior Knowledge

Directions: Answer the questions on this handout in your Writer's Notebook for each of the 3 critical issues you are considering.

THE CRITICAL ISSUE

1. What is the issue?
2. Why/how is it critical to people's freedoms, the way we live, and how society evolves?

THE CRITICAL ISSUE Example - Homework Load

1. The issue: homework load for elementary school students
2. The issue is critical because it concerns how much young students learn, the time they spend outside of school, and how they spend it.

CONTRASTING PERSPECTIVES

(To answer these questions, you may need to perform more research or you may have this prior knowledge.)

3. What are two contrasting perspectives on this issue?
 - What is the stance?
 - Who are the groups who have taken these sides?
4. What do the two perspectives believe about the critical issue?

(Create a compare/contrast table or Venn Diagram in your Writer's Notebook to answer this question.)

CONTRASTING PERSPECTIVES Example – Homework Load

3. What are two contrasting perspectives (sides) on this issue?
 - A. Elementary school children should have less homework -> Concerned parents, students
 - B. Elementary school children should continue to have at least an hour of homework each night -> Concerned parents, teachers, education advocates
4. See the compare/contrast chart below.

Less Homework	SUBTOPIC	Same/More Homework
Homework tends to be busy work at the elementary level.	Purpose of Homework	Homework plays an important role in reinforcing concepts learned during the school day. Homework instills a strong work ethic in children and teaches them to work independently.
Homework does not directly affect gains in student achievement – the quality of teaching does.	Student Performance/Achievement	The U.S. has fallen behind other countries in reading and math scores.
The time spent in school should be quality learning time so when they go home, students can play and spend time with their families. Too much time spent on schoolwork does not allow children to be children.	Time	Homework helps teach students how to begin to manage their own time outside of school.

Narrowing Down Your Choices

In your Writer's Notebook:

- Put a star next to the critical issue that interests you the most.
- Put a smiley face next to the specific perspectives you are able to find the most information about. Be sure to perform Internet searches to determine this.
- Notice which critical issue and its perspectives have both a star and a smiley face. That's probably the one to go with!

Your #1 Critical Issue – Reliable Information

- How much reliable information is there about each side/stance of the critical issue on the Web?
 - Search more narrowly for information on the contrasting perspectives.
 - Is there a variety of info or is it the same info on each site?
 - Record your key sources in your Writer's Notebook.

	Session 4										
Concept	Developing Research Questions										
Quotation	<p>“All students should learn how to formulate their own questions. All teachers can easily teach this skill as part of their regular practice...The skill of being able to generate a wide range of questions and strategies about how to use them effectively is rarely, if ever, deliberately taught. In fact, it has too often been limited to students who have access to an elite education. Our goal is to democratize the teaching of an essential thinking and learning skill that is also an essential democratic skill.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">-from <i>Make Just One Change</i> by Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana</p>										
Teaching Point	Writers develop research questions to focus their investigation of a topic. These questions should be open-ended and require research and considerable thinking to answer.										
Suggested Materials	Copies of Devising and Using Research Questions handout, included after the session.										
Preparation	Gather or devise sample research and information questions about a critical issue that your students will find interesting. These could concern the topics that you shared from your Writer’s Notebook.										
Active Engagement	<p>1. Research Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Full Class & Solo: Creating Questions<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Share the teaching point.○ Review the sample research questions on the Devising and Using Research Questions handout and share some you have generated.○ Using the critical issue students have selected for the essay and the contrasting perspectives they have defined, have students create two research questions that will drive their research—one about each perspective on the critical issue.										
Independent Practice – Formative Assessment Mini-Task	At this point in the research and writing process, have students turn in a notecard to you with the following information. Let them know this is a formative assessment.										
	<div><p style="text-align: center;">Final Topic Selection and Reflection</p><p>The critical issue I plan to write about is:</p><p>The research questions I devised are:</p></div>										
	<p>Mini-Task Rubric</p> <table><tr><td><i>Concept/Skill</i></td><td><i>Advanced</i></td><td><i>On-target</i></td><td><i>Novice</i></td></tr><tr><td>Research Questions</td><td>- Analytical and open-ended. - Multiple questions. -Pertain directly to the contrasting perspectives.</td><td>- Analytical and open ended. - Pertain directly to the contrasting perspectives.</td><td>- Devised a factual question rather than an inquiry question.</td></tr></table>				<i>Concept/Skill</i>	<i>Advanced</i>	<i>On-target</i>	<i>Novice</i>	Research Questions	- Analytical and open-ended. - Multiple questions. -Pertain directly to the contrasting perspectives.	- Analytical and open ended. - Pertain directly to the contrasting perspectives.
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Devising and Using Research Questions

What is a research question?

Research questions help writers focus their investigation of a topic for an informational text. A research question is an overarching question that steers the research and writing of an essay. These questions should:

- Not be easily answered
 - There are no simple answers for these questions. It takes a lot of facts and explanation to answer an inquiry question.
- Be analytical in nature
 - Inquiry questions are “why” and “how” questions, which means a writer must gather information and analyze it in order for the reader to understand the answer to the inquiry question.
- Be open ended
 - Open-ended questions can’t be answered with simple facts because they are complex.
- Require research and thinking to craft an adequate response

Sample research questions – Perspectives on Homework Load

Perspective: Less Homework

1. Why do teachers assign homework?
2. How does having a lot of homework negatively affect students and their families?

Perspective: the Same or More Homework

1. Why do teachers assign homework?
2. How does homework increase or help student learning?

TO DO:

Devise at least one research question for each perspective on your critical issue. Write your research questions in your Writer’s Notebook.

What is an information question?

Information questions are fact-based questions at the lowest level of question asking. The answers to these questions help answer the research question.

Types of information questions about critical issues:

- **Where?**
 - What towns, cities, states, and countries is this issue affecting?
- **When?**
 - When did the debate over this issue begin?
 - What is the timeline of events in terms of legislation, court cases, protest, debate in the public and the media?
- **Who?**
 - Who does this critical issue affect?
 - Who is making the decisions about the policies, laws, and ongoing situation involved with this issue?
 - Who are the parties involved in the debate?
- **What?**
 - What has happened to prove this is a critical issue?
 - What can be done to change the situation?
- **How?**
 - How widespread are the circumstances?
 - How will the issue grow worse or better (according to the contrasting perspectives)?

Sample information questions – about Homework Load

Perspective: Less Homework

Research Question: Why do teachers assign homework?

Information Questions:

- How much homework does the average elementary student have?
- What kind of work is assigned in each subject?
- What is the goal of these assignments?
- How much variety is there across assignments each night/week?
- How does this vary teacher to teacher and school to school?

Inquiry Question: How does having a lot of homework negatively affect students and their families?

Information Questions:

- What does homework load limit students from doing in terms of activities and family time?
- Are students losing sleep because of too much homework?
- Does homework completion create anxiety in young students?

Perspective: Same/More Homework

Research Question: Why do teachers assign homework?

Information Questions:

- How much homework does the average elementary student have?
- What kind of work is assigned in each subject?
- What is the goal of these assignments?
- How much variety is there across assignments each night/week?
- How does this vary teacher to teacher and school to school?

Research Question: How does homework increase or help student learning?

Information Questions:

- Do students who do more homework have higher test scores?
- What skills and habits does homework help develop?
- Does homework promote independent learning?
- What are the long-term effects of regular homework completion?

TO DO:

Read over all your prior knowledge and information gathered in your initial research. Next, write down all the information questions you think you need to answer in order to write a strong essay that fully responds to your research question(s). Information questions should be quite specific, like the questions above.

TO DO:

Share your research questions and information questions with a partner. Ask for their help in refining your research questions and generating further relevant information questions.

NEXT STEP:

Perform more research to get your questions answered!

	Session 5
Concept	Researching & Organizing Information
Teaching Point	Writers perform research to increase their knowledge of the chosen topic. They sort through their prior knowledge and research information, categorizing facts, details, quotations, and examples into categories and sub-categories.
Suggested Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining Topics and Sub-Topics handout, included after the session • http://debatepedia.idebate.org/en/index.php/Debate: Education vouchers
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the Determining Topics and Sub-Topics handout • Check out the site http://debatepedia.idebate.org/en/index.php/Debate: Education vouchers • Find sources on your critical issue. • Annotate a source based on your research questions. • Determine categories and subcategories of information in that source.
Active Engagement	1. Research: Finding Credible Sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review search techniques and qualities of credible sources as needed. ○ Share a few of the sources you would use for your critical issue and explain how you determined that they relate to your research questions based on skimming text features and topic sentences. ○ Point students in the direction of these websites to start: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ http://www.procon.org ○ http://dbp.idebate.org/en/index.php/Welcome to Debatepedia%21
Independent Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students research to find sources and evaluate their relevance to their research questions, as well as revise their research questions based on the information they find. <p>Note: This is a good time to conduct mini-conferences to assist with topic selection and narrowing, as well as research question revision and formulation.</p>
Active Engagement	2. Annotating Sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Model annotating to answer a research question and highlighting your source in different colors based on the PRO and CON perspective. This can be done either onscreen or using a document camera.
Independent Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students annotate their sources based on their research question and information questions using the techniques reviewed. ○ Remind students to notice and highlight all needed citation information.
Active Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sifting & Sorting Information • Full Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Look at debatepedia.org together as a model for categorizing information on a critical issue: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ http://debatepedia.idebate.org/en/index.php/Debate: Education vouchers ▪ Pro vs. Con – contrasting perspectives ▪ Titles in gray are topics and key questions in the debate. ▪ Titles at each bullet point are subtopics. ○ Model sifting and sorting information into categories using the source you annotated earlier in this session. What topics and sub-topics emerged? ○ Ask students to record in their writer's notebooks what topics and sub-topics seem to be emerging about their critical issues based on their initial reading and research. ○ Share the Determining Topics and Sub-Topics handout. Explain that students will create a table of their own in their writers' notebooks modeled after this one after they sort their information into categories and sub-categories.
Independent Practice – Formative Assessment Mini-Task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solo: Putting Information in Categories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students cut up their sources (or cut and paste onscreen), putting all their PRO info together and all their CON info together, then they sort into small categories and sub-categories.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Remind them that their main topics will hopefully be the key questions (central idea) that they have identified, but that there will be subtopics to address as well. ○ When they're happy with their categories and sub-categories, students create a chart like the one in the Determining Topics and Sub-Topics handout in their writers' notebooks. They should also note what further information they need to find to answer their research and information questions. 			
	Mini-Task Rubric			
		Advanced	On-Target	Novice
	Categories/Topics	-Reflect all aspects of the research questions	- Reflect most aspects of the research questions	- Reflect some aspects of the research questions
	Sub-categories/Sub-topics	-Multiple for each category -Indicate the thoughtful arrangement of information -Reflect the more intricate concerns of each perspective on the critical issue	-Most categories have sub-categories that group information logically -Indicate the fairly thoughtful arrangement of information	-Lacking or minimal number of sub-categories -Subcategories do not fit under chosen category

Determining Categories and Sub-Categories (Topic & Sub-Topics) *SCHOOL VOUCHERS*

Topics – key questions in the critical issue debate

Research Questions:

- How do school vouchers promote or destroy school choice?
- Do school vouchers create competition for public schools?

Sub-topics – more detailed points about the topic

TOPIC: DEFINITION	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> state-funded scholarships that pay for students to attend private school rather than public school private schools must meet minimum standards established by legislatures in order to accept voucher recipients 	
TOPIC: BACKGROUND INFO	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> history of school voucher use in states key court cases that have been heard 	
PRO – in favor of vouchers	CON – against vouchers
TOPIC: CHOICE	
CONTRAST	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopic – give parents/students power in selecting schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopic – choice can be given within the public system without involving private schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopic- more access to all schools is always a good thing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopic- because private schools can deny students, the choice is an illusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopic – choice increases student achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopic – there is no evidence or research to prove that vouchers have increased student achievement
COMPARE	
Common Ground for the 2 Sides: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All students deserve an excellent education. Access to good education for people of all economic levels is important. 	
TOPIC: COMPETITION	
CONTRAST	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopic – vouchers create competition, which forces school reform and greater effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopic – cooperation improves schools more significantly than competition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopic – reform means hiring more effective teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopic – public schools that don't have the same funds as private schools have their best students taken away by vouchers
COMPARE	
Common Ground of the 2 Sides: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools should be high quality with good resources and effective teachers. 	

	Session 6															
Concept	Determining the Central Idea															
Teaching Point	Writers determine a central idea to focus the drafting of their essay. In an essay focused on compare/contrast, the central idea will point to both similarities and differences.															
Suggested Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Central Idea for a Critical Issue Overview handout, included after the session• Your own central idea developed for your chosen critical issue															
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the lesson and the Central Idea for a Critical Issue Overview handout• Check out the websites www.debatepedia.idebate.org/ and http://www.procon.org for other key questions on critical issues.• Craft a central idea for your critical issue that will act as a model for the students.															
Active Engagement	<div><div>1. Sample Central Idea</div><div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Full Class<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Share your central idea model.○ Ask the students to make observations about what your central idea about two stances on a critical issue includes.○ Use the Central Idea for a Critical Issue Overview handout to explain the teaching point and provide a model process for students to write their own central idea statement.○ Provide additional models as necessary.</div><div>2. Developing a Central Idea</div><div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Solo: Review Your Research Information<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Ask students to review the following in their writers’ notebooks:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prior knowledge on the topic• Research question• Information questions• All research notes</div><div>Have them complete the free-writing prompt on the handout with the goal of completing this notecard that is their pass out of class.</div></div>															
Independent Practice Formative Assessment Mini-task	<div><div>STUDENT NAME</div><div>Critical Issue:</div><div>My research questions were:</div><div>The 2-3 key questions my essay will address are:</div><div>My central idea is:</div></div> <div><div>Mini-Task Rubric</div><table><tr><td>Content</td><td>Advanced</td><td>On-Target</td><td>Novice</td></tr><tr><td>Key questions</td><td><ul style="list-style-type: none">• A long list of questions identified</td><td><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multiple identified</td><td><ul style="list-style-type: none">• One or none identified</td></tr><tr><td>Central idea</td><td><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eloquently translated the chosen 2-3 key questions into a single statement</td><td><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Translated 2 questions into a single statement.</td><td><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Struggled to translate questions into a statement—original questions/topics are unclear</td></tr></table></div>				Content	Advanced	On-Target	Novice	Key questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A long list of questions identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multiple identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One or none identified	Central idea	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eloquently translated the chosen 2-3 key questions into a single statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Translated 2 questions into a single statement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Struggled to translate questions into a statement—original questions/topics are unclear
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Central Idea for a Critical Issue Overview

Central Idea: an overarching idea in an informational essay that determines what information the reader will receive.

In an informational essay that examines contrasting perspectives on a critical issue,

the central idea identifies the key questions in the debate surrounding the critical issue.

SAMPLE CRITICAL ISSUE – SCHOOL VOUCHERS

Education Vouchers (from debatepedia.org)

Background

A voucher system is an alternative method of funding education. Instead of tax revenue being distributed to state-run schools, parents are issued vouchers, which can be spent on education in any school, privately or publicly run. Schools therefore compete for pupils and the funds that come with them. Such a scheme was originally put forward by Milton Friedman in the 1950s and now systems of voucher funding are in place in several American states and European municipalities. In the United States, President Barack Obama has said that he is open to the idea of education vouchers, if they can be demonstrated to improve student achievement.

Key Questions

Many questions frame the public debate over education vouchers. The debate asks what role the state should play in the education system.

- Should parents have more choice over where their children are educated?
- Or should state funds remain under state control instead of being given to private schools?
- Do choice and competition through education vouchers help improve academic achievement?
- Do choices and competition improve the efficiency and effectiveness of schools?
- Do education vouchers help reduce inequality between schools?
- Or do they favor wealthy students and worsen divisions between social groups?
- Can education vouchers improve local control, and is this an improvement over more federal regulation and standards in schools?
- Are education vouchers consistent with the separation of church and state?
- Are education vouchers, overall, good public policy, and an improvement on the status quo?

That's A LOT of questions! And you can't write about them all in your essay on school vouchers. So it's a good idea to pick 2-3 **key questions** and to focus on those. These are probably questions/topics that came up again and again in your research. They might also be very similar to your research questions!

SAMPLE CENTRAL IDEA - SCHOOL VOUCHERS

So, let's select 2-3 key questions/topics to work with from the long list above. And the winning key questions about school vouchers are:

- Do choices and competition through education vouchers help improve academic achievement?
- Do choices and competition improve the efficiency and effectiveness of schools?

Now, we have to **translate** the key questions into a statement that will act as the central idea for an informational essay:

Supporters and detractors of school vouchers alike debate whether the choice vouchers create actually increases competition between public and private schools and if this can improve students' academic achievement and public schools' effectiveness.

WRITE

Now it's time for you to determine your central idea.

1. Review your
 - Prior knowledge
 - Research questions
 - Information questions
 - All research notes to answer the question in bold below.
2. In your Writer's Notebook, free write about this question:

What are the key topics and questions surrounding the debate on my critical issue?

3. You may have a list of up to ten questions, but you only have enough room to address 2-3 key questions in your essay. Select 2-3 of the most pressing key questions/topics and draft a 2-3 sentence central idea.
4. Share it with your teacher by completing the pass out of class notecard.

	Session 7																
Concept	Finding a Structure																
Teaching Point	Writers of informational essays select a logical structure for their piece as they draft. With the compare/contrast pattern, writers use either the point-by-point or block method of organization.																
Suggested Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compare/Contrast Organization Anchor Chart, included after the session• Compare/Contrast Organization: Perspectives on a Critical Issue handout, included after the session																
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the Compare/Contrast Organization Anchor Chart.• Review the outlines provided in the Compare/Contrast Organization: Perspectives on a Critical Issue handout or create your own to use as a model for students.																
Active Engagement	<p>Selecting a Format: Block or Point-by-Point?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Full Class<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Introduce the two formats using the Compare/Contrast Organization Anchor Chart○ Ask students to come up with metaphors or analogies to describe the two formats in relation to one another. This is a brief compare/contrast activity that will assess how well they grasp the differences and similarities between the two formats. They might compare the formats to<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Two vehicles▪ Type of buildings or structures▪ Foods○ Share the sample outlines and have students notice and verbalize the differences between the two.○ Ask: which format do you think works best for this topic? How come?<p>Alternately, you could give the students the two outlines of the school voucher essay without the main titles on them to decide which format is block and which is point-by-point.</p>																
Independent Practice Formative Assessment Mini-Task	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Solo<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ In their notebooks, have students experiment with the different formats for their critical issue and essay.○ Ask them to come to a decision about their organization and to create an outline with topics and subtopics like the model they looked at.○ The outline should be accompanied by an explanation of why this is the format they chose for their critical issue – why does it make sense? <p>Mini-Task Rubric:</p> <table><tr><th>Content</th><th>Advanced</th><th>On-Target</th><th>Novice</th></tr><tr><td>Selected format</td><td>-makes sense for the chosen issue and topics/subtopics</td><td>-makes sense for the chosen issue and topics/subtopics</td><td>- illogical for the chosen issue and topics/subtopics</td></tr><tr><td>Outline of topics and sub-topics</td><td>- highly detailed and includes multiple paragraphs for each topic/subtopic</td><td>- all points covered in logical order</td><td>- inconsistent with format or missing some paragraphs</td></tr><tr><td>Explanation</td><td>- thorough and carefully considered; weighs the benefits of both formats</td><td>-thoroughly explains why the chosen format was selected</td><td>- missing or unclear</td></tr></table>	Content	Advanced	On-Target	Novice	Selected format	-makes sense for the chosen issue and topics/subtopics	-makes sense for the chosen issue and topics/subtopics	- illogical for the chosen issue and topics/subtopics	Outline of topics and sub-topics	- highly detailed and includes multiple paragraphs for each topic/subtopic	- all points covered in logical order	- inconsistent with format or missing some paragraphs	Explanation	- thorough and carefully considered; weighs the benefits of both formats	-thoroughly explains why the chosen format was selected	- missing or unclear
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Explanation	- thorough and carefully considered; weighs the benefits of both formats	-thoroughly explains why the chosen format was selected	- missing or unclear														

Compare/Contrast Organization Anchor Chart

Block Format

PERSPECTIVE #1

- Topic A
- Topic B
- Topic C

PERSPECTIVE #2

- Topic A
- Topic B
- Topic C

Point-by-Point Format

TOPIC A

- Perspective #1
- Perspective #2

TOPIC B

- Perspective #1
- Perspective #2

TOPIC C

- Perspective #1
- Perspective #2

Compare/Contrast Organization: Perspectives on a Critical Issue

How do you decide which format to use?

Point-by-Point – when the topics for each perspective are the same; this format emphasizes the topics associated with the issue.

Block – when the contrasting perspectives are most concerned with different topics; this format emphasizes the contrasting nature of the two perspectives.

Either One – when you outline your essay both ways and either one works! At this point, you must decide if you want to highlight the topics that concern the issue or the contrasting perspectives.

Let's look at a model: School Vouchers

Controlling idea: Supporters and detractors of school vouchers alike debate whether the choice vouchers create actually increases competition between public and private schools and if this can improve students' academic achievement and public schools' effectiveness.

Block Format

Introduction
Body Paragraph – In Favor of Vouchers Topic – CHOICE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopics – power and access
Body Paragraph – In Favor of Vouchers Topic – CHOICE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopic – student achievement
Body Paragraph – In Favor of Vouchers Topic – COMPETITION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopics – school reform and hiring
Body Paragraph – Against Vouchers TOPIC – CHOICE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopic – power and access
Body Paragraph – Against Vouchers TOPIC – CHOICE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopic – student achievement
Body Paragraph – Against Vouchers TOPIC – COMPETITION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopic – cooperation and funding
Conclusion

Point-by-Point Format

Introduction
Body Paragraph > in favor of vouchers TOPIC - CHOICE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopics – power and access
Body Paragraph > against vouchers TOPIC - CHOICE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopics – power and access
Body Paragraph > in favor of vouchers TOPIC - CHOICE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopic - student achievement
Body Paragraph > against vouchers TOPIC - CHOICE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopic- student achievement
Body Paragraph > in favor of vouchers TOPIC - COMPETITION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopics- school reform and hiring
Body Paragraph > against vouchers TOPIC - COMPETITION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> subtopics- cooperation and funding
Conclusion

Question: Which format do you think works better? How come?

	Session 8
Concept	Drafting Strong Informational Paragraphs
Teaching Point	Informational essay writers select key facts, details, quotations, and examples to support the central idea in the topic sentence as they draft body paragraphs. They also analyze this information to help the audience make sense of the facts and link them to the central idea. And they use transitions within and between paragraphs to help readers understand the logical flow of ideas.
Suggested Materials	Body Paragraph Anchor Chart – Compare/Contrast , included after the session Sample Body Paragraph handout, included after the session Transition Words and Phrases handout, included after the session Citing Sources handout, included after the session
Preparation	Review the handouts and experiment with body paragraphs for your own informational essay.
Active Engagement	1. Body Paragraph Content and Format <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Introduce the different format and discuss with students options for organizing their information on each topic. ○ Share and think aloud through some of your body paragraphs. ○ Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of each format and have students share their initial thinking about which format they might choose for their critical issue and why. ○ Review concept/ use of transitions as needed, using the Transition Words and Phrases handout. ○ Review Citing Sources handout. • Small Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Groups examine the sample body paragraphs and identify their parts. For an extra challenge, delete the format titles and have students identify formats as well.
Independent Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students draft body paragraphs and solicit peer feedback as they experiment of format and internal paragraph organization. ○ Note: this drafting time is a good opportunity to conduct mini-conferences with individuals or small groups of students.

Body Paragraph Anchor Chart – Compare/Contrast

Block Format – 2 Body Paragraphs

TOPIC SENTENCE: central idea about Perspective #1/Topic A

Supporting Details about Perspective #1's stance on Topic A

Analysis

Transition Sentence/ Phrase

TOPIC SENTENCE: central idea about Perspective #1/Topic B

Supporting Details about Perspective #1's stance on Topic B

Analysis

Point-by-Point Format – 2 Body Paragraphs

TOPIC SENTENCE: central idea about Perspective #1/Topic A

Supporting Details about Perspective #1's stance on Topic A

Analysis

Transition Sentence/ Phrase

TOPIC SENTENCE: central idea about Perspective #2/Topic A

Supporting Details about Perspective #2's stance on Topic A

Analysis - how and why the two stances are different and similar

Sample Body Paragraphs – Compare/Contrast on a Critical Issue

Directions: Using the Body Paragraph Anchor Chart, identify all the parts of these body paragraphs.

Block Format

According to supporters, school vouchers provide school choice for all students, not just wealthy families. The voucher program in New Zealand benefited students in both the private and public schools by putting funding in the hands of families instead of government officials, supporting the belief that parents—not the government—are best able to make decisions about education for their children (debatepedia.org). Wealthy parents can and often do choose private schools for their reputation and results. However, middle- and low-income families who cannot afford the private tuition usually have only one option—the public school in their area, which may be low performing or lacking in resources. Supporters of vouchers contend that all parents should have a choice in making a decision about their child’s schooling.

In addition to providing school choice for all, voucher supporters insist that this program increases competition, raising the quality of education in all schools. Nobel Prize winning economist Milton Friedman argued for the modern concept of vouchers in the 1950s, stating that competition would improve schools and cost efficiency (debatepedia.org). They introduce competition by giving parents and students the choice to leave bad schools in favor of better schools. The argument goes that competition forces public schools to act more resourcefully, creatively, and efficiently to enhance their competitiveness relative to other schools. So vouchers provide an incentive for schools to increase the quality of the education they offer, which improves student achievement and success.

Point-by-Point Format

According to supporters, school vouchers provide school choice for all students, not just wealthy families. The voucher program in New Zealand benefited students in both the private and public schools by putting funding in the hands of families instead of government officials, supporting the belief that parents—not the government—are best able to make decisions about education for their children (debatepedia.org). Wealthy parents can and often do choose private schools for their reputation and results. However, middle- and low-income families who cannot afford the private tuition usually have only one option—the public school in their area, which may be low performing or lacking in resources. Supporters of vouchers contend that all parents should have a choice in making a decision about their child’s schooling.

However, critics of vouchers insist that they do not provide all public school students the choice to attend private schools. Private schools can deny applicants entry. As the Minnesota Education Association explains, “Vouchers fail to offer the ‘choice’ that proponents claim. The ‘choice’ remains with the private schools that will continue to pick and choose the students they wish to accept and reject. Public schools open their doors to all students” (schoolchoice.org). So while all involved in the school voucher debate may agree that many private schools provide a quality education, critics believe that providing vouchers will not fix the problem of school choice for all.

Transition Words and Phrases

Comparing ideas	in the same way, likewise, similarly, similar to, also, again
Contrasting ideas	at the same time, but, conversely, even so, even though, however, in contrast, nevertheless, nonetheless, on the one hand, on the other hand, still, yet, in comparison, in contrast, on the contrary, as opposed to, despite, unlike, although, conversely
Adding information	also, and, as well, besides, equally important, finally, furthermore, in addition, moreover, then, too
Conceding a point	agreed, certainly, granted, obviously, of course, to be sure
Providing an example	as an illustration, as can be seen by, for example, for instance, in other words, namely, specifically, to illustrate
Relating time and order of ideas	afterward, before, currently, eventually, finally, first, (second, third, fourth, fifth?), immediately, in the future, in the past, later, less important, meanwhile, most important, next, often, sometimes, soon, subsequently, then, today, when
Resulting from the previous idea	accordingly, as a result, consequently, so, thereby, therefore, thus
Showing relative location	adjacent, at the side, between, here, in the back, in the background, in the distance, in the foreground, in the front, nearby, there, to the side
Summarizing ideas	finally, hence, in brief, in conclusion, in short, in summary, that is, that is to say, to sum up

Citing Sources

What does it mean to cite a source?

- An **in-text citation** is a note in an essay that tells the reader where a piece of information or an idea came from.
- In-text citations always appear in (parentheses).
Here's an example:

Year-round schools have lower drop-out rates (2%) than traditional schools (5%) (StatisticBrain.com).

- At the end of an essay, a writer includes a **list of works cited** that gives details about all the in-text citations.

Why do writers cite sources?

- To avoid plagiarism--the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as your own. Writers must give other writers credit for information and ideas that they borrow.
- To prove that the evidence is real and credible.
- To inform the reader about where to find more information on the topic.

What gets cited?

- Quoted information from a secondary source.
- Paraphrased information from a secondary source.
- Information obtained in an interview.
- Any idea that is not your own.

How do you cite a website?

When you find effective evidence on the Internet, record the following information in this exact order:

Author and/or editor names (if available)
Article name in quotation marks (if applicable)
Title of the website
Name of institution/organization publishing the site (use n.p if no publisher is listed)
Date of resource creation (use n.d. if no date is listed)
Type of resource
Date you accessed the material.

Works Cited Entry – create the entry by listing the information above in the exact same order.

EXAMPLE:

“Year-Round Schooling.” *Education Week*. 3 Aug. 2004. Web. 6 May 2011.

In-Text Citation

- Insert the in-text citation before the period at the end of the sentence in which the quotation or paraphrase appears.
- For any in-text citation, include the first item that appears in the works cited entry that corresponds to the citation (e.g. author name, article name, website name).

EXAMPLE:

As an article in *Education Week* points out, “Unlike their peers in schools with traditional schedules, students in year-round schools do not have a long summer vacation. To complicate matters, in some of those schools, not all students are on year-round schedules” (“Year-Round Schooling”).

You Try!

- A. Insert an in-text citation into one of the sentences in your paragraph that has information from a secondary source.
- B. Create a works cited entry at the end of your essay for the in-text citation.

	Session 9
Concept	Using Visuals to Support Facts, Details, and Analysis
Teaching Point	Informational essay writers select, or craft, and carefully place pictures, graphs, charts, and headings and sub-headings to help the reader visually understand their central and supporting ideas.
Suggested Materials	Informational websites to compare and contrast http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standardized_test http://standardizedtests.procon.org or select two sites on the same or similar topic to have students analyze Comparing and Contrasting Visual Effectiveness handout, included after the session
Preparation	Review the websites and their use of the visual elements
Active Engagement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Compare/Contrast: How Visuals Support or Detract from an Informational Text <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ask students to compare and contrast the two informational websites' use of visual elements. They are evaluating the effectiveness of the use of these visual elements. • Full Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Debrief findings as a full class. ○ Be sure to discuss how the visuals support or detract from the central ideas of the pieces. ○ Ask students to consider how they will use headings, charts, graphs and images to help convey information. Provide them some time to search online and create a visual plan for their essay.

Comparing and Contrasting Visual Effectiveness

Evaluate each site's use of the following visual elements. How effective is each element in terms of its relevance to and support of the central idea/topic? How did the sites take similar and different approaches?

Site #1	Visual Elements	Site #2
	Headings & Sub-Headings	
	Images (including captions)	
	Charts and Graphs	
	Page Layout/Format	

	Session 10																															
Concept	Drafting Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs																															
Teaching Point	Informational essay writers craft introductory and concluding paragraphs that make clear to the reader the importance of the topic. With the compare/contrast structure, the introductory paragraph briefly summarizes the topic, as well as the similarities and differences, while the concluding paragraph discusses why the topic is important.																															
Suggested Materials	Introductory Paragraphs handout, included after the session Concluding Paragraphs handout, included after the session																															
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Review the teacher version of the handout, which contains annotations.Write your own introductory and concluding paragraphs to share with students as models.																															
Active Engagement	<p>1. What’s in an Introduction & Conclusion?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Full Class<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ask your students why introductions and conclusions are important and what they think should be included in the introduction and conclusion of their essay on a critical issue. How can these two paragraphs compliment one another?Share and think through the introductory paragraph for your compare/contrast essay.Pass out the Introductory Paragraphs handout.Review the names and purpose of each paragraph element.Ask your students what order they would put these elements in – discuss this order and what happens when the order is shifted around. There is no right answer here, but some orders are more logical than others.Pairs/Small Groups → Full Class<ul style="list-style-type: none">Have students work together to annotate the mentor text.Review the annotations as a class.																															
Independent Practice Formative Assessment Mini-Task	<p>2. Crafting the Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Solo<ul style="list-style-type: none">Students draft their paragraphs and share with a partner for initial feedback as time allows. <p>Mini-Task Rubric: Draft of the Introductory Paragraph</p> <table><tr><td>Content</td><td>Advanced</td><td>On-Target</td><td>Novice</td></tr><tr><td>Critical Issue Background</td><td>-Succinctly explains the key events, legislation and court cases; provides clear context. -Tells why the issue is critical.</td><td>- Explains the key events, legislation and court cases; provides clear context.</td><td>-Points to a key event or court case but struggles to provide clear context.</td></tr><tr><td>Perspectives Described</td><td>-Eloquently defines the contrasting perspectives and their stances on the issue.</td><td>-Defines the contrasting perspectives and their stances on the issue.</td><td>-Does not clearly define the contrasting perspectives and their stances on the issue.</td></tr><tr><td>Key Terms</td><td>-Mentioned in title, thumbnail sketch, and controlling idea.</td><td>-Mentioned in thumbnail sketch and controlling idea.</td><td>-Not mentioned in the intro paragraph.</td></tr><tr><td>Central Idea</td><td>-Addresses 2-3 of the key questions with eloquence.</td><td>- Addresses 2 key questions.</td><td>- Addresses 1 or none of the key questions.</td></tr><tr><td>Style & Flow</td><td>- Sentences and ideas flow seamlessly.</td><td>- Sentences and ideas flow seamlessly with one or two small exceptions.</td><td>- Sentences and ideas are disjointed.</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>				Content	Advanced	On-Target	Novice	Critical Issue Background	-Succinctly explains the key events, legislation and court cases; provides clear context. -Tells why the issue is critical.	- Explains the key events, legislation and court cases; provides clear context.	-Points to a key event or court case but struggles to provide clear context.	Perspectives Described	-Eloquently defines the contrasting perspectives and their stances on the issue.	-Defines the contrasting perspectives and their stances on the issue.	-Does not clearly define the contrasting perspectives and their stances on the issue.	Key Terms	-Mentioned in title, thumbnail sketch, and controlling idea.	-Mentioned in thumbnail sketch and controlling idea.	-Not mentioned in the intro paragraph.	Central Idea	-Addresses 2-3 of the key questions with eloquence.	- Addresses 2 key questions.	- Addresses 1 or none of the key questions.	Style & Flow	- Sentences and ideas flow seamlessly.	- Sentences and ideas flow seamlessly with one or two small exceptions.	- Sentences and ideas are disjointed.				
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Active Engagement	<p>3.Crafting the Conclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Full Class<ul style="list-style-type: none">Share and think through the concluding paragraph for your essay.Discuss the elements of the Concluding Paragraphs handout, including how to summarize the two stances on the critical issue without stating the central idea verbatim, and directions for writing about why an issue is important.																															

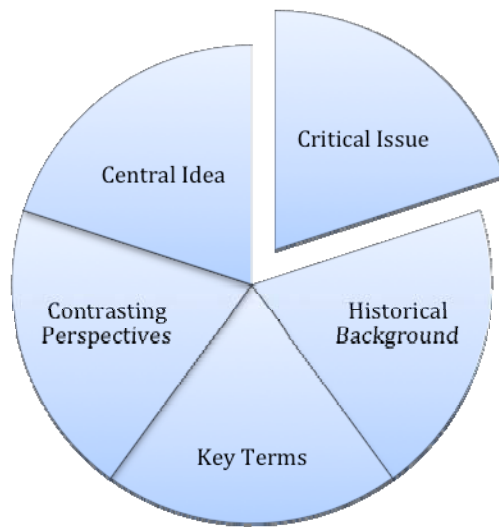
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ After students read and annotate the sample concluding paragraph on the handout, discuss as a class.
Independent Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students draft their paragraphs and share with a partner for initial feedback as time allows.

Introductory Paragraphs

Goals of an Introductory Paragraph in an Informational Essay:

- to grab the reader's attention by raising their curiosity
- to make clear the topic you will be writing about

Introductions can be more than one paragraph in length. For a compare/contrast essay on a critical issue, consider all the information your reader needs before diving into an explanation of the two sides of the issue. Your introduction should do the following things—but **you** must decide in what order... To achieve the goals above, you must include:



Drafting Strategies

DEFINE the CRITICAL ISSUE

PROVIDE (HISTORICAL) BACKGROUND

- Name the most important events, court cases, and legislation that have defined this issue.
- Explain how the issue began and has progressed.

DEFINE KEY TERMS

- Give the meaning of any technical terms concerning the issue that the reader might need in order to understand the essay.

DESCRIBE the CONTRASTING PERSPECTIVES

- Explain the two stances on the issue and how they differ.

STATE the CENTRAL IDEA

- Outline 2-3 key questions/topics surrounding the debate over this issue

Let's Look at a Mentor Text

Annotate:

- Put [brackets] around the critical issue.
- Put (parentheses) around the background information.
- Put a * next to the definition of key terms.
- Highlight the first instance when the contrasting perspectives are defined.
- Underline the central idea.

An Education Debate: School Vouchers

Adapted from "Publicly Funded School Voucher Programs"

National Council of State Legislatures website <http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/educ/school-choice-vouchers.aspx>

One of the most controversial and widely discussed issues in education today is the use of public funding to pay for private education through vouchers, otherwise known as school vouchers. On June 27, 2002, the United States Supreme Court in *Zelman, Superintendent of Public Instruction of Ohio, et al, v. Simmons-Harris et al.*, ruled, in a 5-4 vote, that vouchers did not violate the Establishment Clause, thus leading the way for voucher programs throughout the United States. And on a state level, the Supreme Court of the state of Wisconsin ruled on June 10th, 1998, that the expanded Milwaukee voucher program--which will allow up to 15,000 children to attend any religious or other private school--does not violate either the state or federal constitutions. Yet in 2006, the Florida Supreme Court struck down legislation known as the Florida Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP), which would have implemented a system of school vouchers in Florida.

The school voucher programs continue in many states. Supporters contend that voucher programs allow low-income children in poor performing schools the opportunity to attend private schools, thereby boosting competition and forcing public school improvement. Critics argue that these options weaken the public school system by diverting resources to non-public schools and pose a threat to the separation of church and state. Key issues in the debate include whether vouchers boost student achievement and if they increase competition between public and private schools, resulting in greater school effectiveness.

You Try!

Using the Drafting Strategies, write a rough draft of an introductory paragraph for your essay. Remember, this is your first draft. Experiment with organization and what facts to put in the background section. Okay--start writing!

Introductory Paragraphs (teacher version)

Let's Look at a Mentor Text

Annotate:

- Put [brackets] around the critical issue.
- Put (parentheses) around the background information.
- Put a * next to the definition of key terms.
- Highlight the first instance when the contrasting perspectives are defined.
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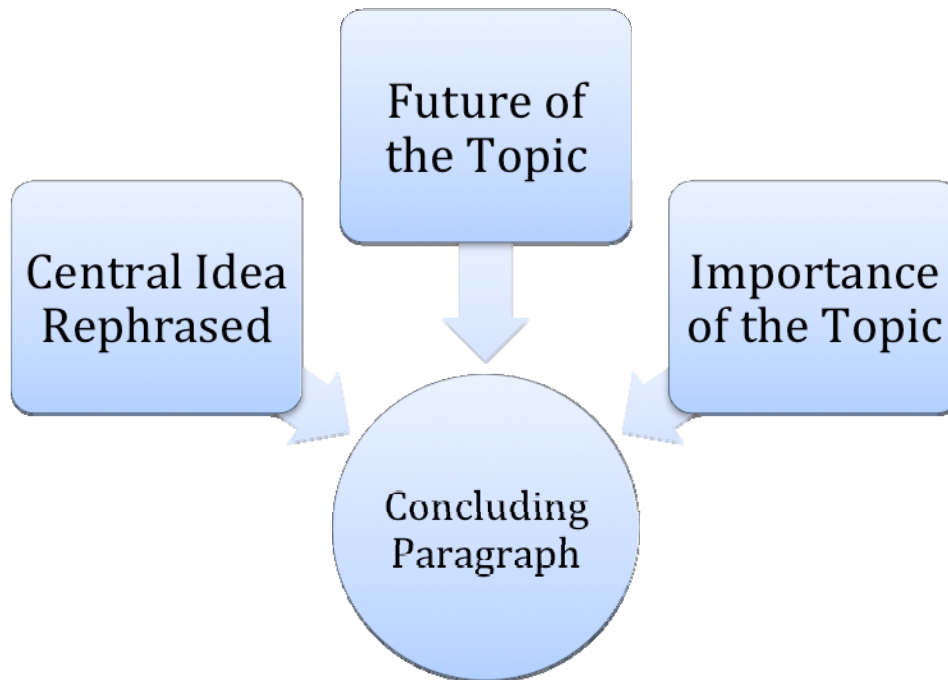
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The school voucher continues in many states. Supporters contend that voucher programs allow low-income children in poor performing schools the opportunity to attend private schools, thereby boosting competition and forcing public school improvement. Critics argue that these options weaken the public school system by diverting resources to non-public schools and pose a threat to the separation of church and state. Key issues in the debate include whether vouchers boost student achievement and if they increase competition between public and private schools, resulting in greater school effectiveness.

Concluding Paragraphs

Goals of a Concluding Paragraph in an Informational Essay:

- To secure your central idea by summarizing it in new, fresh language
- To look to the future of the topic
- To make clear the importance of the topic for the reader and/or society



Drafting Strategies for the Concluding Paragraph of This Informational Essay

TWO STANCES

Briefly summarize the two stances on the critical issue and/or the central idea.

FUTURE DEBATE

Discuss what the future debate over this issue might involve based on what you have read and what you have determined from your research.

IMPORTANCE TO SOCIETY/CULTURE

Explain why this issue is so important to a society or culture – how it has or could change things.

Let's Look at a Mentor Text

Annotate:

- Put [brackets] around rephrasing of the central idea and the two stances.
- Put (parentheses) around the discussion of future debate.
- Underline the explanation of why this issue is important to society and culture.
- Circle key words and phrase that point to future debate and the importance of the issue in society.

The school voucher debate rages on in many states as supporters insist that these monies provide much needed opportunities for better education to low-income families and students who attend low-performing schools. But opponents of school vouchers claim that using public funds for students to attend private schools weakens our public education system and also threatens the separation of church and state, since 85% of private schools are religious. The debate is not likely to end any time soon as supporters of vouchers broaden the discussion into the issue of school choice—students should have the choice to attend any school they wish that provides the best learning environment for them. This may include religious education depending on their beliefs and practices. Yet opponents of vouchers continue to fight hard against their implementation because of the long-term effects they could have on our public education system—both in terms of syphoning off money to private schools and using public funds to support religious practice and instruction. We have seen some of the effects of this debate over public versus private already as private business moves into public education. Hundreds of public charter schools are now managed by private companies. While some people argue this improves the quality of public education, others contend that we should not give taxpayer dollars to private companies to do the work school districts are already set up to do. Where do you stand on school vouchers and how will you vote when and if the issue shows up on your voting ballot?

You Try!

Using the Drafting Strategies, write a rough draft of a concluding paragraph for your essay. Remember, this is your first draft. Experiment with organization and content. Okay-start writing!

	Session 11
Concept	Peer Review & Revision
Teaching Point	When they have completed a draft of their essay, informational essay writers may engage in peer review to get feedback on their writing. They may also use a reverse outline to determine the effectiveness of their piece. Using all this information, they formulate a revision plan, then make changes accordingly.
Suggested Materials	Peer Review handout, included after the session Reverse Outline and Revision Plan handout, included after the session

Peer Review

Critiquer's Name _____

The Writer's Name _____ Essay Title _____

Your job is to help the writer improve his/her paper. You must be honest in your feedback in a constructive way that will assist the writer. Be respectful and kind.

1. Read the essay through once without marking on it.
2. As you read the essay a second time, answer the questions below.
3. Discuss your feedback face to face with the writer.

General Praise
What did you find most interesting about this essay? How come?
Introduction
Immediately defines the critical issue? yes no
Adequate background on the critical issue? Is the context clear? yes no
Are key terms defined? yes no Are there any terms you need defined? What are they?
Are the contrasting perspectives described? yes no
Is the central idea stated? yes no
Provide praise for specific elements of the introduction that are working well in this draft. What did you like the most?
Provide suggestions for how the writer can improve any of the elements of the introduction that are missing or are confusing.
Body Paragraphs
Provide praise for the body paragraphs. Which paragraph is the strongest? How come?
Do all the topic sentences make clear what the follow paragraph is about? If not, underline topic sentences on the draft that need attention. Make a note in the margin about why they need attention.
Put <input type="checkbox"/> check marks <input type="checkbox"/> next to supporting details that are especially interesting and best support the central idea.
Put *stars* next to analysis that is especially strong in explaining the relationship between the central idea, the supporting details, and the perspective being discussed.
Which body paragraph needs the most attention? How come? Explain below.
Overall Organization

How is the essay organized? block format point-by-point not sure
Does the essay flow logically from one paragraph to the next? Are there transition phrases and sentences? yes no not sure Explain your answer below.
Put your suggestions for moving paragraphs around here:
Concluding Paragraph
Does the paragraph briefly summarize the two contrasting perspectives on the issue? yes no
Does the paragraph explain how the issue is important to society or culture? yes no
Does the paragraph explain what the future of this debate might involve? yes no
Provide praise for specific elements of the concluding paragraph that are working well.
Provide suggestions for how the writer can improve any of the elements of the concluding paragraph that are missing or are confusing. Questions can be helpful here—what else did you want to know?
Title
Does it point to the critical issue or central idea? yes no
Give the writer 1-2 suggestions for a creative title.

Reverse Outline and Revision Plan

Reverse Outline

Why Revise?

Taking stock of the work and thinking you have done in a draft will help you revise more effectively. Whether you wrote the draft yesterday or a week ago, it's always important to return to it and read through it thoroughly to figure out what is working, what should be cut, what needs development, and how to re-organize to make your controlling idea more clear.

How?

To figure out if the content and organization of your piece are working, you will first create a reverse outline of your essay. How do you do that?

1. Read each paragraph carefully and thoroughly.
2. As you read, make a note next to each paragraph that summarizes what it's about (3 or 4 words)
3. Then, underline the topic sentence for that paragraph and decide if it reflects what you wrote in the margin. If your summary and the topic sentence don't match up, put an arrow next to your topic sentence to note that it needs attention.
4. When you've finished reading and summarizing, go back and read through all your margin summaries.

Ask yourself:

- a. Do the ideas and information flow here?
- b. What would happen if I put the paragraphs in a different order? Would my controlling idea be clearer?
- c. What seems to be missing?
- d. Is there anything I have spent too much time explaining?

Revision Plan

Take stock of what you'll do next by:

1. Re-reading the peer review feedback.
2. Making a list below or in your Writer's Notebook of all the changes you will make to your essay. What should you do first?

	Session 12
Concept	Publishing & Reflecting
Teaching Point	To complete the writing process, writers must share their pieces with an audience—either in print or on the web—and then celebrate the accomplishment of completing a significant writing task. They then reflect on the writing process to become more independent writers in the future.
Suggested Materials	Post Revision Reflection Questions , included after the session
Resources	<p>Free Online Platforms</p> <p>http://www.wikispaces.com/</p> <p>http://issuu.com/</p> <p>http://www.livebinders.com/</p> <p>Publications</p> <p>http://www.teenink.com/submit</p>

Post Revision Reflection Questions

In your Writer's Notebook, reflect on these questions:

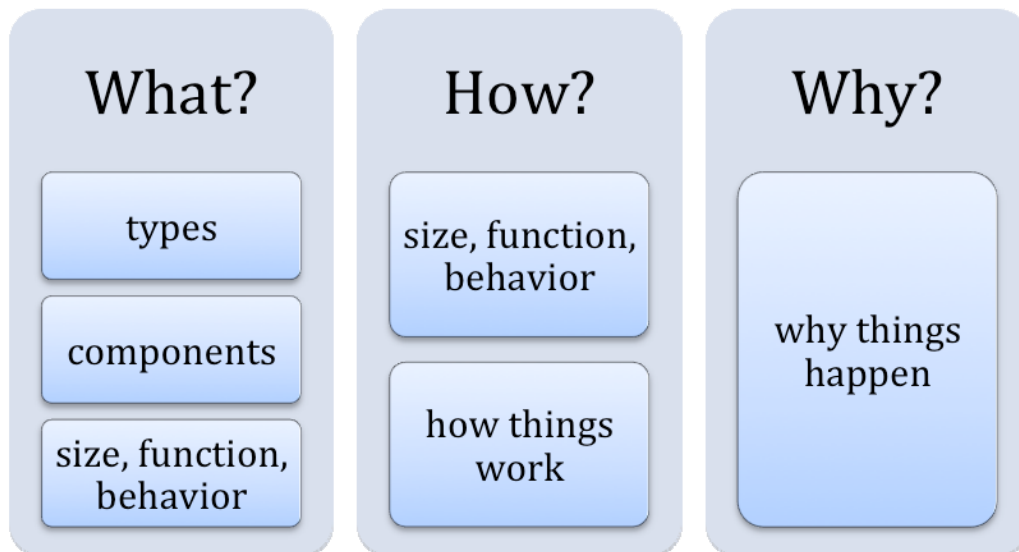
- What was the most exciting part of writing your informational essay? How come?
- What was the most difficult part of writing your informational essay? How come?
- If you still had more time to revise your piece, what would you work on/change?
- What did you learn about yourself as a writer?
- What will you do differently next time you write an essay?

What is Informational/Explanatory Writing?

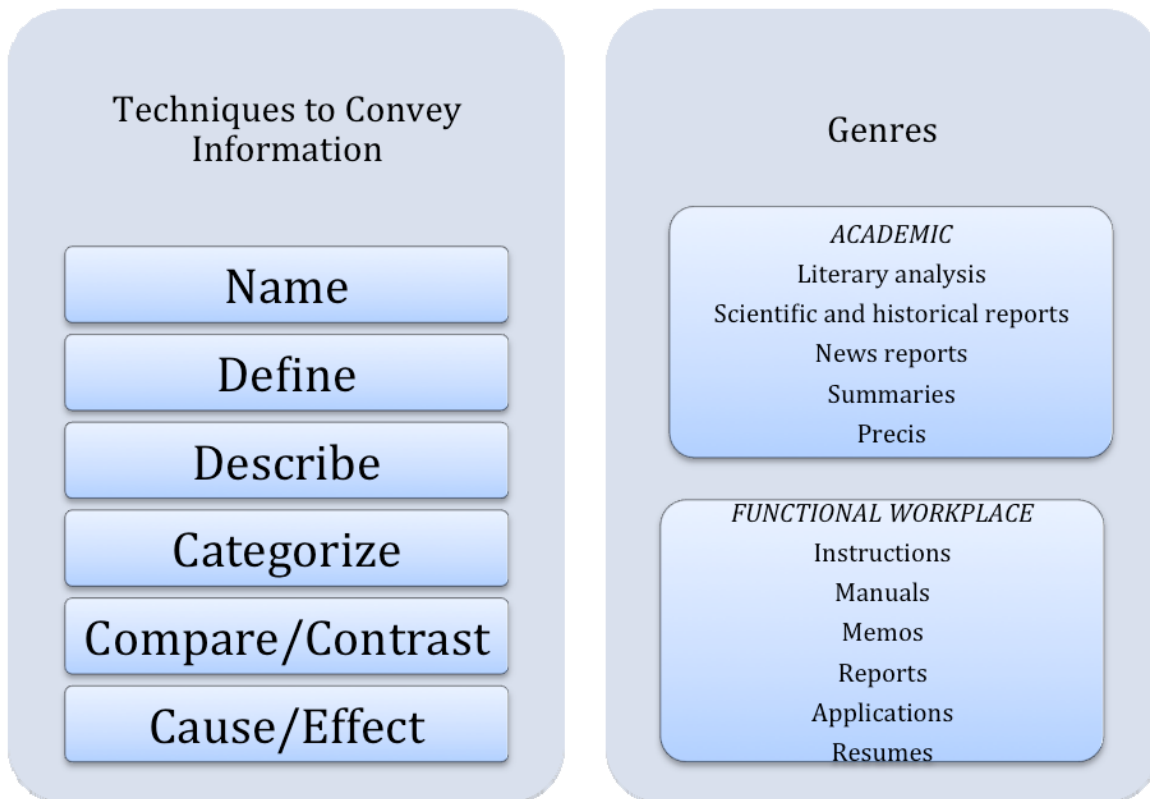
Informational/explanatory writing conveys information accurately and is organized around a controlling idea with a coherent focus. When a reader engages with an informational text, s/he assumes the text is accurate and true. This assumption of truth is the foundation of the informational text teaching, clarifying or exploring for the reader.

Purposes of Informational /Explanatory Writing		
Writer: TO TEACH	Writer: TO CLARIFY	Writer: TO EXPLORE
Reader: Increase Knowledge	Reader: Increase understanding of a procedure or process	Reader: Enhance comprehension of a concept

Thus, the content of an informational or explanatory piece focuses on answering a question that addresses WHAT, HOW or WHY?



As a result, students will employ a variety of techniques to convey information (see the graphic below) as they produce an informational text. These are the rhetorical approaches they will need in order to teach, clarify, and explore. The genres that engage informational writing and these techniques are also in the graphic.



from page 23 – Appendix A, CCSS

How Does Informational Writing Differ from Argument Writing?

As Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards explains:

Although information is provided in both arguments and explanations, the two types of writing have different aims. Arguments seek to make people believe that something is true or to persuade people to change their beliefs or behavior. Explanations, on the other hand, start with the assumption of truthfulness and answer questions about why or how. Their aim is to make the reader understand rather than to persuade him or her to accept a certain point of view. In short, arguments are used for persuasion and explanations for clarification.

Like arguments, explanations provide information about causes, contexts, and consequences of processes, phenomena, states of affairs, objects, terminology, and so on. However, in an argument, the writer not only gives information but also presents a case with the “pros” (supporting ideas) and “cons” (opposing ideas) on a debatable issue.

Thus, writers of informational texts do not present a debatable claim, but rather select a lens through which to look at information.

The CCSS that Inform the Middle School Informational Writing Units

Reading

RI.1 - Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

RI.7 - Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

RI.9 - Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

RI.10 - Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Writing

W.2 - Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

W.4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

W.5 - Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

W.8 - Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

W.9 - Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

W.10 - Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audience.

How Do Students Approach the Informational Writing Process?

Topics

In her work on the Common Core and informational writing, Lucy Calkins emphasizes the importance of students' writing about a topic they are passionate about. "An information writer's purpose, then, is to help readers become informed on a topic that feels very important to the writer" (Calkins, Curriculum Plan, Grade 6, Writing Workshop). The depth of the writer's engagement will likely determine the depth of the reader's engagement with the topic. As we know as teachers, when we are excited about what we're teaching, our students tend to be as well. So as writers and teachers, our students need to get their readers excited about their chosen topic. And thus, as Calkins explains, "the unit, then, assumes that students are writing about self-chosen topics of great individual interest."

The point here is for students to draw on prior knowledge as they begin their exploration of a topic, then pull in information gleaned from primary and secondary sources. They must then determine the focus they wish to take when writing about this topic. As the Common Core, Appendix A, tells us, “With practice, students become better able to develop a controlling idea and a coherent focus on a topic and more skilled at selecting and incorporating relevant examples, facts, and details into their writing.”

Calkins also discusses the development of topic selection in terms of specificity. As a student progresses as a writer, her topics become more specific, as do her controlling ideas:

Students progress, with experience and instruction, from writing rather cursorily about very broad, generic topics toward being able to zoom in on more specific topics and therefore write with a greater density of relevant information. Eventually, experienced writers learn that they can focus not just on a smaller subject but on a particular angle on (or aspect of) that subject. That is, for students writing a six- to seven-page book, usually those writing on the topic of tigers will work with less sophistication than those writing on the topic of the hunting patterns of the Bengal tiger. (53)

Categories and Analysis

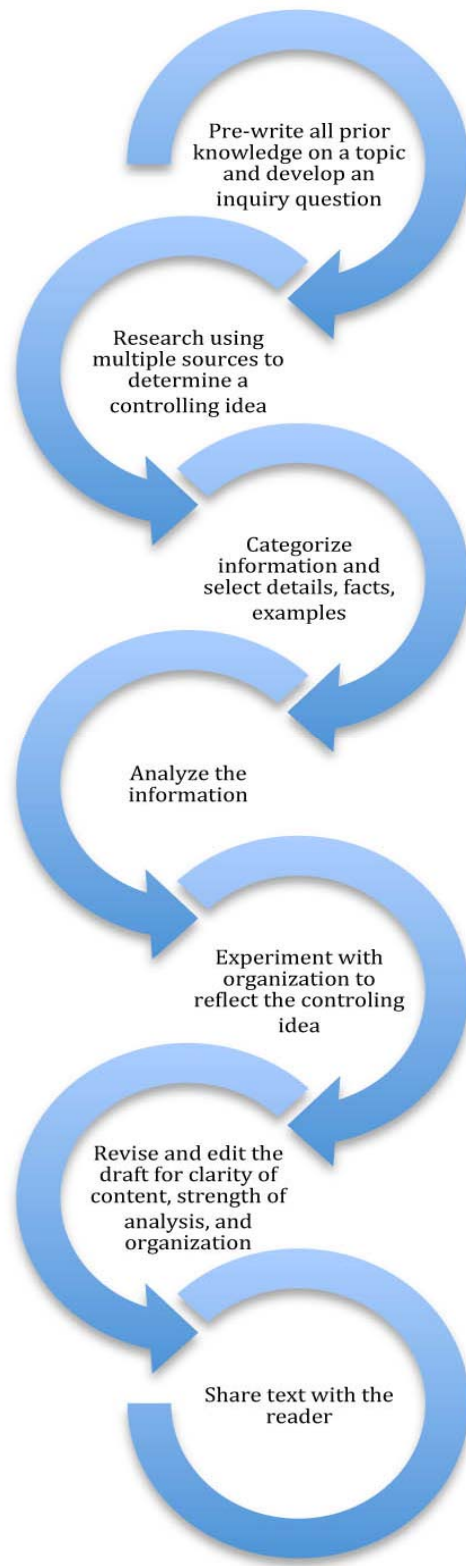
In addition, informational writing requires that writers put information into categories. These categories should only be determined after significant generative pre-writing and/or research. The analysis of this information will be based on the technique they are engaging (definition, cause and effect, etc.). For example, the student writing about why she attends school might need to define key terms like “learning,” “extra-curriculars,” and “floating schedule,” then explain their importance. As they progress as writers, students will become more sophisticated in their use of multiple techniques to convey information in a single piece.

Organization

The controlling idea of an informational essay does not simply determine the purpose of the piece, but also implies or indicates a possible organizational structure. If students are writing about why kids must attend school, they could organize their piece around the progression of a standard school day. While there is never one single, correct way to structure a writing piece, there are more and less logical structures. In this unit, students should be encouraged to explore a variety of organizational structures. This can begin with putting information into various categories and developing headings and sub-headings for those categories. To experiment with structure, students can move these headings around to determine how different methods of organization affect the logic and focus of their piece.

The graphic below highlights key steps in the informational writing process.

Grades 6-8 Informational Writing Process



Resources

Teaching the Informational Text – Pedagogical and Theoretical Resources

Common Core State Standards Appendix A

<http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards>

A Curricular Plan for the Writing Workshop – Grade 6 by Lucy Calkins

<http://www.heinemann.com/products/E04313.aspx>

Nonfiction Matters: Reading, Writing, and Research in Grades 3-8 by Stephanie Harvey

http://www.amazon.com/Nonfiction-Matters-Reading-Writing-Research/dp/1571100725/ref=lh_ni_t

“*The Times* and the Common Core Standards: Reading Strategies for ‘Informational Text’” from The Learning Network, *NY Times* Teaching and Learning Blog

<http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/06/14/the-times-and-the-common-core-standards-reading-strategies-for-informational-text/>

“Conferring in the Writing Workshop” by Salch and Marino, article published by NCTE

<http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Journals/ST/ST0062January01.pdf>

(Must be an NCTE member or previous customer to use this link - see PDF attached to this unit for the text of the article named above.)

Teaching Compare/Contrast

Writing Fix: Compare and Contrast Guide – Northern Nevada Writing Project

http://writingfix.com/WAC/comparison_contrast.htm - lessons

Read Write Think Comparison Contrast Guide

<http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/compcontrast/>

www.diffen.com - Compare and Contrast *anything*

Debatepedia – a wiki sponsored by the International Debate Education Association that is an encyclopedia of pro and con arguments on critical issues

http://debatepedia.idebate.org/en/index.php/Welcome_to_Debatepedia%21

Mentor Texts: Compare/Contrast

“Bing, the Imitator, Often Goes Google One Better” by David Pogue

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/09/technology/personaltech/09pogue.html?_r=1

Room for Debate – *The New York Times* various perspectives on a single topic, let your students do the comparing and contrasting <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate>

- Should College Be for Everyone?
<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/03/01/should-college-be-for-everyone>
- Are People Getting Dumber?
<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/02/26/are-people-getting-dumber>
- Recipe for a Pop Star: Lana Del Ray
<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/02/17/is-lana-del-rey-the-future-of-pop-stardom>
- Should Homeschoolers Play for High School Teams?
<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/02/08/should-home-schoolers-play-for-the-high-school-team>
- Single-Sex Schools – Separate But Equal?
<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/10/17/single-sex-schools-separate-but-equal>

Education Issues

“School Vouchers 101: An Overview of This Year’s Hottest Campaign Debate” on Education World website

http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin167.shtml

“Vouchers” *Education Week*

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/vouchers/>

Same-Sex Schools

“Single Gender Classes: Are They Better?” from the Education World website

http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr215.shtml

Gay Marriage

“An Overview of the Same-Sex Marriage Debate” from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life

<http://www.pewforum.org/Gay-Marriage-and-Homosexuality/An-Overview-of-the-Same-Sex-Marriage-Debate.aspx>

Abortion

“Americans and Abortion: an Overview” from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life

<http://www.pewforum.org/Abortion/Americans-and-Abortion-An-Overview.aspx>

Death Penalty

“An Impassioned Debate: an Overview of the Death Penalty in America” from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life

<http://www.pewforum.org/Death-Penalty/An-Impassioned-Debate-An-Overview-of-the-Death-Penalty-in-America.aspx>

Stem Cell Research

“Stem Cell Research at the Crossroads of Religion and Politics” from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life

<http://www.pewforum.org/Science-and-Bioethics/Stem-Cell-Research-at-the-Crossroads-of-Religion-and-Politics.aspx>

Resources for Finding Mentor Texts

Bibliography (with links) of non-fiction articles for middle school students from the Columbia Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project

http://readingandwritingproject.com/public/themes/rwproject/resources/booklists/nonfiction%20sets/Middle_School_Nonfiction_Text_Sets.pdf (paste the link into your browser)

Bibliography of non-fiction books, articles, and videos on high interest topics from the Columbia Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project

http://readingandwritingproject.com/public/themes/rwproject/resources/booklists/nonfiction%20sets/High_interest_nonfiction_sets_-_edit.pdf (paste the link into your browser)

Calliope – world history for kids (ages 9-14)

<http://www.cricketmag.com/CAL-CALLIOPE-Magazine-for-Kids-ages-9-14>

Cobblestone – American History for kids (ages 9-14)

<http://www.cricketmag.com/COB-COBBLESTONE-Magazine-for-Kids-ages-9-14>

http://www.cobblestonepub.com/resources_cob_tgs.html

Muse – past and present, history, science and the arts (ages 9-14)

<http://www.cricketmag.com/MUS-MUSE-Magazine-for-Kids-ages-9-14>

National Geographic - cultural, scientific, geographic, anthropological, and historical investigations of past and present events.

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/>

National Geographic Explorer for Kids (Pathfinder edition for grades 4-6)

<http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngexplorer/>

Smithsonian Magazine

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/>

Teen Ink - essays written by kids for kids

<http://www.teenink.com/nonfiction/academic/top/>

Time for Kids

<http://www.timeforkids.com/>