



**Nevada Formative Writing Tools**

**Sixth Grade**

**Formative Writing Tasks**

**2014**

**GRADE**

**6**

# **Nevada Department of Education**

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## Introduction to the Writing Tasks

The Nevada Formative Writing Tasks (Formative Tasks) were developed to help students, teachers, and administrators implement the Nevada Academic Content Standards for English Language Arts (NACS for ELA) and prepare for the administration of the spring 2015 Smarter Balanced assessments. The tasks are intended to:

- Encourage students to read closely and analyze information;
- Enable students to produce effective and well-grounded writing for a range of purposes and audiences;
- Empower teachers to shift and improve instruction to meet the demands of the NACS;
- Inform teachers and students when timely adjustments can be made; and
- Provide an early look into the types of writing performance tasks expected on the Smarter Balanced assessments.

The Nevada Formative Writing Tasks illustrate the depth of understanding of the Nevada Academic Content Standards for English Language Arts that will be measured on the Smarter Balanced assessments.

The Formative Tasks are timed, on-demand, classroom writing assignments. They include uniform student directions for writing responses and uniform teacher directions for administering the tasks. Each task was carefully created for consistency of format, content, and administration procedures, allowing teachers to monitor student progress over time. This consistency also makes it possible for teachers to participate in collaborative groups to discuss student progress and refine delivery of writing instruction.

*“[Students] need to be able to use technology strategically when creating, refining, and collaborating on writing. They have to become adept at gathering information, evaluating sources, and citing material accurately, reporting findings from their research and analysis of sources in a clear and cogent manner. They must have the flexibility, concentration, and fluency to produce high-quality first-draft text under a tight deadline as well as the capacity to revisit and make improvements to a piece of writing over multiple drafts when circumstances encourage or require it.”*

Nevada Academic Content Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History, Social Studies, Science, & Technical Subjects (p. 41)

All fifth and eighth grade students are required by NRS 389.550 to participate in at least one Nevada Formative Writing Task during the 2013-14 school year. However, the NDE has provided multiple tasks for use in third through eighth grades, allowing teachers to monitor students at multiple points during the school year and adjust their instruction to match the needs of students.

To improve the consistency of evaluating the tasks and other classroom writing assignments, the NDE released The Nevada Formative Writing Tools: Grade 6 Evaluation Guides (Evaluation Guides) that include:

- Analytic writing rubrics developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium;
- Checklists to support teachers when learning the rubrics and documenting student progress;
- Student writing guides to support students in all phases of the writing process (before, during, and after); and
- A glossary of terms used in the *Evaluation Guides* to establish a common vocabulary for writing.

The Evaluation Guides identify a student's level of command for each of the five characteristics of writing and can be downloaded at

[http://www.doe.nv.gov/Nevada\\_State\\_Writing\\_Assessment/](http://www.doe.nv.gov/Nevada_State_Writing_Assessment/).

Knowing these levels will help teachers and students identify student strengths and areas to improve. The NDE encourages districts and schools to establish policies for how and when to use the rubrics and checklists for grading other classroom assignments.

However, the NDE **strongly** discourages teachers and schools from using the results of the Formative Tasks as part of their grading, since they were **not** designed as summative or interim assessments. Instead, teachers and schools should use the formative tasks to gather information needed to inform and enhance both teaching and learning.

Results from the Nevada Formative Writing Tasks will not be used to calculate a school's rating on the Nevada School Performance Framework. However, the NDE will collect and report participation rates on each school's report card (as required by NRS 389.550 ).

Since the results of the tasks are relatively low stakes for schools and teachers, keep them low stakes for students by not assigning grades to them.

## Guidelines for Administering the Tasks

**WHO:** All fifth and eighth grade students who are enrolled in public schools, including charter schools, are required to take at least one Formative Task during the 2013-14 school year. It is strongly recommended for students in third, fourth, sixth, and seventh grades. Students with disabilities and students classified as having limited English proficiency (LEP) must also participate.

Accommodations are made for IEP, LEP, and/or 504 students who have testing accommodation plans. The classroom teacher must make certain that all students with special needs receive permissible appropriate accommodations, as indicated in IEPs, LEPs, 504 plans, and Testing Accommodation Plans.

**WHAT:** The Formative Tasks have students read closely and analyze information to produce effective and well-grounded writing for a range of purposes and audiences. For the 2013-14 school year, the NDE provides tasks for the three text types in the NACS (opinion/argumentative, informative/explanatory, and narrative).

Since the tasks are formative, classroom teachers will evaluate their own students' responses using the Evaluation Guides provided by the NDE ([http://www.doe.nv.gov/Nevada\\_State\\_Writing\\_Assessment/](http://www.doe.nv.gov/Nevada_State_Writing_Assessment/)). It is strongly recommended that each task be evaluated twice: by the student's classroom teacher and by another teacher. This will facilitate collaborative teams that build a vision of good writing and can focus on using the results of the Formative Tasks to improve teaching and student learning.

**The NDE will neither score student responses nor collect student results. However, the NDE will collect participation data in May from each school and each classroom in accordance with NRS 389.550. Participation rates will be published on every school's Nevada Accountability Report.**

**WHERE:** It is strongly recommended that the Formative Tasks be administered by the student's classroom teacher in the regular classroom or computer lab.

**WHEN:** March 3, 2014, through May 9, 2014, is the timeframe for administering the Formative Tasks. Each district and school may determine exact testing days and times within this testing window. Please check with your district's test director for specific days and times within the mandated timeframe.

**WHY:** Descriptive feedback is widely considered an important element of improved writing performance. When students understand their **strengths and weaknesses** and are taught how to improve their writing, they learn faster and retain what they have learned longer.

The Formative Tasks and Evaluation Guides can help teachers provide constructive feedback and help students become self-regulated learners. Since the tasks and Evaluation Guides are based on the NACS and performance task specifications for the Smarter Balanced assessment, they also play an essential role in aligning teaching, learning, and assessment while allowing districts, schools, and teachers to use them to begin planning the shifts in instruction that will be required to help students meet the demands of the standards and prepare for the Smarter Balanced assessment in 2015.

## **HOW:**

The Formative Tasks are timed, on-demand classroom writing assignments. The tasks include uniform student directions for writing responses and uniform teacher directions for administering the tasks. The tasks have been carefully designed for consistency of format, content, and administration procedures, allowing teachers to monitor progress over time.

Each task is administered in two timed sessions that should not exceed 45 minutes each. Teachers may administer the sessions over two consecutive days or on the same day with a 15 minute break between sessions. The first 45 minute session involves introducing students to the writing task, helping students understand how the tasks will be evaluated, having students independently read information, and beginning to draft a well-grounded response. The second 45 minute session involves writing, revising, and editing their final draft.

Teachers should provide each student with a paper copy of the student directions for the selected task. Please check with your district to determine if the district has selected a task for the entire district to use. The NDE will not provide printed copies for schools.

Teachers may also provide each student with a copy of the Student Writing Guide that matches the writing mode of the task (i.e., the Grade 6 Student Writing Guide for Argumentative Writing for sixth grade students responding to the sixth grade argumentative tasks). These guides can be found in the Evaluation Guides at [http://www.doe.nv.gov/Nevada\\_State\\_Writing\\_Assessment/](http://www.doe.nv.gov/Nevada_State_Writing_Assessment/).

Since the 2015 administration of the Smarter Balanced assessment is computer based, students should use a word processor (i.e., Microsoft Word) to write their responses. Using technology to produce and publish writing is part of the NACS and keyboarding skills are introduced in second grade in the Nevada Computer and Technology Standards (2010).

Students may use spell check and grammar check. They should **not** use any other electronic resources, including the Internet, during the task. All students are expected to word process their responses to the Formative Tasks. Students with IEPs may use pre-approved electronic devices as designated in their IEPs and are consistent with their testing accommodations.

In addition, each student should have at least one blank sheet of paper (lined or unlined) and a pencil. Students can use these tools to plan their writing (i.e., individually brainstorm, create graphic organizers) and create their first drafts. However, students may also word process their first drafts on computers, if they prefer.

Students may also use highlighters and colored pencils for planning, revising, and editing.

Regular paper Standard English dictionaries are also allowed for all students. In addition, paper bilingual dictionaries with word-to-word translations are approved for LEP students identified to receive this accommodation and used previously as part of regular instruction. Teachers do **not** need to cover bulletin boards, posters, or other materials used as part of daily instruction.

**Teachers will NOT translate any part of the directions.**

**Teachers will NOT read any part of the student directions that call for the student to read, unless such accommodations are specified in a student's accommodation plan.**



## Teacher Checklist for Administering the Writing Tasks

Completing the following steps will help ensure successful administration of the Formative Tasks.

- ☐ Carefully read all of the contents of this manual.
- ☐ Check your district testing schedule for any specific test dates for your district.
- ☐ Check with your district to determine if they have selected a task for the entire district to administer.
- ☐ Check with the special education facilitators, LEP testing coordinators, and 504 building officers for any students who need to receive special accommodations.
- ☐ Ensure that procedures and materials for testing special student populations follow those specified by the Nevada Department of Education and that students with special needs receive the appropriate accommodations.
- ☐ Ensure that you have all of the materials for administering the formative task:
  - \_\_\_ Print copies of the student directions
  - \_\_\_ Optional: Print copies of the student guide that matches the task (i.e., opinion guide for opinion task) (see page 13-15 in *The Nevada Formative Writing Tools: Grade 6 Evaluation Guides* at [http://www.doe.nv.gov/Nevada\\_State\\_Writing\\_Assessment/](http://www.doe.nv.gov/Nevada_State_Writing_Assessment/))
  - \_\_\_ Pencils
  - \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
  - \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
  - \_\_\_ Bilingual dictionaries with word-for-word translations (only for LEP students approved to receive this accommodation and who use them as part of their classroom instruction)
  - \_\_\_ Highlighters and colored pencils or pens during testing sessions (if students have been using these during regular classroom instruction)
  - \_\_\_ Printer paper (optional for printing hard copies of student essays)
  - \_\_\_ Books for students to read if they finish early (paper only)
- ☐ Check computers to make sure they are ready.
- ☐ Check with your school/district for special procedures on how to save essays on the school/district network.
- ☐ Review computer procedures with your students:
  - \_\_\_ Open a new blank document
  - \_\_\_ Maintain default font size and color (i.e., 12 point and black)
  - \_\_\_ Save documents
  - \_\_\_ Print files
- ☐ Make arrangements with another teacher to exchange and evaluate tasks.
- ☐ Make plans for how you will provide feedback to students for improving their writing (i.e., conferences).

## Teacher Checklist for Evaluating the Writing Tasks

Completing the following steps will help ensure consistent evaluation of the Formative Tasks.

- ☐ Work with another teacher so that each student's essay is evaluated twice.
- ☐ Reread the Evaluation Guides (rubric or checklist) for the type of writing that matches the task (opinion/argumentative, informative/explanatory, or narrative) and highlight or underline key information. (Evaluation Guides can be downloaded at [http://www.doe.nv.gov/Nevada\\_State\\_Writing\\_Assessment/](http://www.doe.nv.gov/Nevada_State_Writing_Assessment/))
- ☐ Reread the exemplar papers for the type of writing that matches the task and review how the characteristics of the paper relate to the level of each trait. (Argumentative Exemplars can be downloaded at [http://www.doe.nv.gov/Nevada\\_State\\_Writing\\_Assessment/](http://www.doe.nv.gov/Nevada_State_Writing_Assessment/))
- ☐ Read entirely each essay before assigning a level for each of the five traits.
- ☐ Refer to the language in the rubric and the exemplar papers when assigning levels.
- ☐ Cover the first evaluator's levels before the essay is evaluated the second time (this is optional but many teachers find it helpful if they don't know how the first teacher evaluated the papers).
- ☐ Discuss the levels, understanding that it is normal for some traits to have some split levels (1-2 or 3-4).
- ☐ Discuss any discrepant levels. Levels are discrepant when one teacher evaluates a trait as proficient (4 or 3) and another teacher evaluates that same trait as not proficient (2 or 1).

When a trait is rated 1-3, 1-4, 2-3, or 2-4, both teachers should review the rubric, checklist, and exemplar papers to determine if the paper is proficient or not (for feedback purposes).

<b>Proficient</b> (Meets or Exceeds Standard)		<b>Not Proficient</b> (Below Standard or Emerging/Developing)	
4 Thorough Understanding	3 Adequate Understanding	2 Partial Understanding	1 Minimal Understanding

- ☐ Identify trends (i.e., overall, what traits were strong or weak) and how that will impact instruction.
- ☐ Prioritize the weakest trends and plan instruction to remediate weaknesses.

## Student Directions

### Grade 6 Argumentative Writing Task A

**YOUR ASSIGNMENT:** You will read two passages about the Loch Ness Monster. Take notes as you read. You will later write an argumentative essay about what you have read.

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**STEP 1****Read the passages and take notes on these sources.**

Read the following passages about the Loch Ness Monster. Take notes to use later while writing your essay. You may look back at the passages and your notes as often as you like.

- “The Loch Ness Monster”
- “The Legend of Nessie”

As you read, consider the evidence in the text both for and against the existence of the Loch Ness Monster.

---

**STEP 2****Plan and write your argumentative essay.**

Now, review your notes and sources, then plan and draft your essay on the following topic:

**Your class is planning to debate whether or not the Loch Ness Monster exists. Write a speech that argues either for or against the existence of the monster.**

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**STEP 3****Revise and edit your essay.**

The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:

- Statement of Purpose/Focus – how well you clearly state your claim on the topic and maintain your focus
- Organization – how well your ideas logically flow from the introduction to conclusion using effective transitions, and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Evidence – how well you provide evidence from sources about your claim and elaborate with specific information
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.

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GO ON

# The Legend of Nessie

by Peggy J. Parks

- 1 In an area of Scotland known as the Scottish Highlands, there is a lake called Loch Ness. It is a massive body of water: 24 miles (39km) long and more than a mile (1.6km) wide. The **loch** (the Scottish word for "lake") is surrounded by tree-covered mountains and steep banks. It is also ancient. It was carved out of the Earth by glaciers thousands of years ago. The water in the loch is pitch black. In fact, it is impossible to see more than a foot or two below the surface. The water is very cold, and in some places it is up to 800 feet (244m) deep. Shrouded in morning mist, the loch has a mysterious **aura** about it. The real mystery is not its enormous size, its black water, or its mist, however. It is the beast that is said to live there: Nessie, the Loch Ness Monster.

**aura:** feeling

## A Huge Creature with Humps

- 2 Most stories about the beast were considered Scottish folklore rather than fact. Scientists scoffed at the idea that such a creature could exist. Then in 1933, a new road was built along the Loch Ness shoreline. It provided a much clearer view of the water. Suddenly, reports of Nessie sightings began to soar.
- 3 Everyone who told of the beast had a slightly different story. There were many similarities, though. For instance, it was almost always described as either large or enormous. Some people estimated the creature's size to be about 20 feet (6.1m) long. Others thought it was much larger, perhaps as much as 50 feet (15m) long. It was said to resemble a dinosaur, with a long neck and a small, horselike head. A few observers reported seeing a long tail, as one person noted: "I saw the tail distinctly causing a great commotion, thrashing the water with much force." Many people saw humps on the creature's back. Some described the humps as round, while others insisted they were triangular.
- 4 In May 1933, an account by Mr. and Mrs. John McKay was published in a newspaper called the *Inverness Courier*. In the article, the writer referred to a "monster" in the loch. He wrote that the couple had observed it "rolling and plunging for fully a minute, its body resembling that of a whale, and the water cascading and churning like a simmering **cauldron**. Soon, however, it disappeared in a boiling mass of foam."
- 5 A few months later, there was a different sort of report. The beast had been spotted on land. The couple who saw it were Mr. and Mrs. Spicer. In a letter to the newspaper, Mr. Spicer said they had seen an "extraordinary form of an animal crossing the road...It did not move in the usual reptilian fashion but...it shot across the road until a ponderous body about four feet high came into view." He described the beast as dark gray in color, with a long neck a little thicker than an elephant's trunk. The Spicers both thought the creature resembled an enormous snail.

**cauldron:** a large round metal pot for boiling liquids over a fire

## World-Famous Photograph

6 Although many people reported seeing Nessie, no one had any real proof that the monster existed. They had only their own personal stories to tell. Some produced photos that they claimed showed the monster. None were good enough to convince nonbelievers that there really was a monster. The photos were either too fuzzy or were obvious fakes.

7 In 1934, a physician named R. Kenneth Wilson produced a photograph of what he said was the Loch Ness Monster. According to Wilson, he was driving along the shore when he heard a great commotion in the water. Upon hearing the noise, he turned and saw an enormous beast emerge from the loch. He grabbed his camera and captured it on film. The photo appeared in the *London Daily Mail* newspaper on April 21, 1934. It clearly showed a large dinosaurlike creature with a long neck and a small head. Wilson's name, and his photograph, became famous.



The first purported photo of Nessie was published in *The Daily Mail* on April 21, 1934.

8 Few people doubted that the photograph was real. Even some who had been skeptical about the Loch Ness Monster began to wonder if they had been mistaken. The man who had taken the photo was a well-respected surgeon from London. There was no reason to believe he would make up the story, or create a fake photograph. Why would a reputable man do such a thing?

9 Sixty years after the photo was published, that question was answered. A man named Alastair Boyd did some detective work. He and another scientist discovered that Wilson had been part of an elaborate hoax. The "beast" shown swimming in Loch Ness was not a real beast at all. It was a toy submarine with a molded monsterlike neck and head attached to the top. What the photo actually showed was the toy floating in the loch. Newspapers all over the world quickly exposed it as a fake.

10 Boyd's findings did not make him a popular person. Many Scottish people were angry with him. Some claimed he had made the story up. They said he, not Wilson, was responsible for the *real* hoax. They even began calling him "the Nessie killer." After nurturing the Loch Ness mystery for nearly fifteen hundred years, people deeply resented the man who tried to destroy it.

"The Legend of Nessie" by Peggy J. Parks, from *Monsters: The Loch Ness Monster*. Copyright © 2005 by Thomson Gale. Reprinted by permission of Thomson Gale, a part of The Thomson Corporation. "Surgeons Photo of the Monster" in the public domain.

# The Loch Ness Monster

by Thomas Streissguth

- 1 By the end of the twentieth century, dozens of expeditions to Loch Ness had been organized by universities, research institutes, museums, and individuals who took a strong interest in the subject of the Loch Ness monster. Searchers used every device they could think of to scan the lake from one end to the other. Thousands of feet of film had been examined, and miles of graph paper had been analyzed for telltale shapes and sounds. But nobody found convincing evidence of Nessie's existence. The Loch Ness monster has turned out to be one of the most elusive quarries ever pursued by modern science. In the twenty-first century, the mystery remains.
- 2 Although physical evidence is lacking, the searchers have produced dozens of theories about the Loch Ness mystery. One theory stubbornly persists among many experts: The Loch Ness monster is a prehistoric dinosaur, perhaps a species of plesiosaur, a family of long-necked amphibians thought to be extinct. Somehow, this plesiosaur survived the mass extinction 65 million years ago and lives today in the murky waters of the lake, surviving on scarce resources and eluding all attempts to trap it.
- 3 But how did a plesiosaur show up in this lake? A species of plesiosaur, believers say, could have entered the Great Glen region and inhabited Loch Ness in prehistoric times. At some point, the lake was cut off from the sea, and a population of plesiosaurs was trapped. This could have happened during the last ice age, for example, when a glacier filling the glen gradually retreated to the northeast, leaving behind a deep valley that turned an arm of the sea into a landlocked, freshwater lake.
- 4 The survivors could also have entered the loch through an underwater tunnel or stream that at one time linked the Great Glen with the open sea. The tunnel theory is helped by the fact that the bottom and sides of Loch Ness are practically invisible to still photographs and film. Researchers still have not surveyed and mapped every corner of the deep lake, and new underwater caverns have been discovered by **sonar** surveys.
- 5 There are a few problems with the theory of the trapped plesiosaur as a cold-weather survivor. First, the dinosaur extinction that occurred was a worldwide phenomenon. Whatever happened to the dinosaurs happened to all of them, no matter where or how they lived. Although insects, reptiles, and fish survived, no dinosaurs did. If there were such creatures in the vicinity of Loch Ness, there should be some fossil remains of dinosaurs in the rock and **sediments** surrounding the lake, but there are none—or at least none have been found.

**sonar:**  
equipment on a ship that uses sound waves to find the position of objects under

**sediment:**  
material that sinks to the bottom of a lake

## Floating Objects, Dead and Alive

6 Another possible explanation for the Loch Ness monster is that it is a floating object, such as a tree trunk, heavy branch, an oil drum, or a mat of vegetation, that suddenly rises from the bottom of the lake to the surface. Some sightings may be animals, such as geese flying close to the surface, ordinary fish, or otters swimming underwater. Otters are excellent swimmers that can dive more than fifty feet deep and **submerge** for three minutes. They can grow to an impressive size but are quite shy of humans.

**submerge:** to go under water and be completely covered by it

7 The otter theory was put forward by Maurice Burton, a zoologist from the British Museum who explained his take on the Loch Ness phenomenon in a book titled *The Elusive Monster*. Burton and many scientists claim that monster sightings in Loch Ness are really otters seen at a distance and under poor sighting conditions. Small roe deer, a species that can also swim, may also be mistaken for Nessie. Roe deer sport antlers that strongly resemble the elongated neck of a plesiosaur. Is the neck of the Loch Ness monster actually the antlers of an innocent deer, plunging into the water in flight from a camera-wielding tourist or paranormal investigator?

8 Another possibility is that there are indeed unusual visitors to Loch Ness from time to time. These visitors arrive from the North Sea via the River Ness. Porpoises and whales, for example, are large, strong underwater swimmers that must come to the surface to breathe from time to time. A black, shiny-skinned porpoise breaching the surface, blowing out air, and then diving back underwater can be a very startling sight, especially when it appears in a place that it is not supposed to be. Seals live near water, but they can move quickly on land. A seal swimming rapidly near the surface could be taken for something much larger than it really is. A gray seal was the conclusion offered by Sir Edward Mountain after his twenty-man lookout on Loch Ness in 1934.

9 Many more possibilities exist. The Loch Ness monster may be a walrus, a giant sea turtle, or a giant salamander. Or it may be a sturgeon, which can grow to a length of nearly ten feet and which sometimes reaches the rivers and bays of Great Britain from its natural habitats in the open sea. Because sturgeons do that breed in rivers, they would spend only a short time inland before returning to the open sea—leaving behind an unexplained mystery to anyone who might spot one swimming near the surface.

## Hoaxes

10 The mystery of Loch Ness is made more complicated by hoaxes. Many experts taking a good, close look at the Loch Ness photographs suspect that some of them are fakes. On many occasions, the Loch Ness monster has been a kind of national practical joke played by hoaxers and their trick photographs. Since everyone knows the legend of Loch Ness, a few among the observers go there simply to fool the **gullible**, see their names in the newspaper, and have a bit of fun.

**gullible:** easily tricked

“The Loch Ness Monster” by Thomas Streissguth. Copyright © 2002 by Lucent Books. Reprinted by permission of Thomas Gale, a part of The Thomas Gale Group.



# **Directions for Administering the Grade 6 Argumentative Writing Task A**

## **Session 1 (45 minutes)**

### **1. Distribute the Materials**

**Do:** Hand out the materials students will need to complete the formative writing task:

- \_\_\_ Student Directions Argumentative Writing Task A
- \_\_\_ Grade 6 Student Guide to Argumentative Writing (optional)
- \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
- \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
- \_\_\_ Pencils
- \_\_\_ Highlighters, colored pencils or pens (optional)

### **2. Read the Directions Aloud to the Students**

**Say:** *Over two sessions, you will write an argumentative essay about the existence of the Loch Ness Monster. During the first session, you will have 45 minutes to read the directions, read some information about the Loch Ness Monster, read how the teachers will evaluate your essay, and begin planning and drafting your essay. During the second 45 minute session, you will finish drafting your essay and then revise and edit your final draft.*

*You have a pencil and blank paper to use for taking notes and planning your essay. You may write, highlight, and underline on the student directions and passages. You will write your essay using the word processor on the computer. You may use spell check and grammar check. However, you may **not** use any other programs on the computer, and you may **not** use the Internet.*

*Find the YOUR ASSIGNMENT section at the top of page 1 of the student directions. Read along while I read aloud. It says:*

*You will read two passages about the Loch Ness Monster. Take notes as you read. You will later write an argumentative essay about what you have read.*

*Next, find STEP 1. It says:*

***Read the passages and take notes on these sources.***

*Read the following passages about the Loch Ness Monster. Take notes to use later while writing your essay. You may look back at the passages and your notes as often as you like.*

- *“The Loch Ness Monster”*
- *“The Legend of Nessie”*

*As you read, consider the evidence in the text both for and against the existence of the Loch Ness Monster.*

*You will read this on your own; I will not read this to you.*



Now, find STEP 2. It says:

**Plan and write your argumentative essay.**

Now, review your notes and sources, then plan and draft your essay on the following topic:

**Your class is planning to debate whether or not the Loch Ness Monster exists. Write a speech that argues either for or against the existence of the monster.**

**3. Read the Evaluation Information**

**Say:** Find STEP 3 and read along as I tell you how your essay will be evaluated. It says:

**Revise and edit your essay.**

The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:

- Statement of Purpose/Focus – how well you clearly state your claim on the topic and maintain your focus
- Organization – how well your ideas logically flow from the introduction to conclusion using effective transitions, and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Evidence – how well you provide evidence from sources about your claim and elaborate with specific information
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.

**4. Answer Any Questions**

**Say:** I can read the directions as often as needed, but I cannot translate, edit your work, explain, or give examples on what or how to write. Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Do:** Answer questions by rereading the directions.

**5. Begin Planning and Drafting**

**Say:** Now, go back to STEP 1 of the student directions sheet. You have 45 minutes to read these passages, take notes, and start planning and drafting your essay. You should think about the information you have read, which should help you write your essay.

**Do:** Write the ending time on the board to let students know when the first session will end.

**Say:** *Now, read your assignment and begin your work. Manage your time carefully so that you have time to plan and draft your essay. I'll announce when you have 10 minutes left. You may begin.*

**Do:** Start timing now. Monitor the class to ensure students are working productively, not using any other programs on the computer, and not using the Internet.

If students finish early, encourage them to reread their work or silently read a book.

## **6. Announce 10 Minutes Remaining**

**Say:** *You have 10 minutes left.*

## **7. End Session 1**

**Say:** *Please stop writing. Save your work on the computer. Write your name on the top of your directions paper and the scratch paper. You will finish writing your essay during the next session.*

**Do:** If your next session will start on the next day, collect all materials. If your next session will continue on the same day, provide a 15 minute break before beginning the second session.

## **Session 2 (45 minutes)**

### **1. Distribute the Materials (if necessary)**

**Do:** Hand out the things students will need:

- \_\_\_ Student Directions Argumentative Writing Task A
- \_\_\_ Grade 6 Student Guide to Argumentative Writing (optional)
- \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
- \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
- \_\_\_ Pencils
- \_\_\_ Highlighters, colored pencils or pens (optional)

### **2. Review the Directions**

**Say:** *During the first session, you read some information about the Loch Ness Monster, took notes on these sources, and started planning and drafting an argumentative essay. Now, you will have 45 minutes to review, revise, and edit your essay. You may reread the passages and use the notes you wrote on your scratch paper. You will write your essay using the word processor on the computer. You may use spell check and grammar check. However, you may **not** use any other programs on the computer, and you may **not** use the Internet.*

*Let's review how your essay will be evaluated and then you can reread your essay and begin revising and editing. Find STEP 3 and read along as I tell you how your essay will be evaluated. It says: evaluated. It says:*

***Revise and edit your essay.***

*The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:*

- Statement of Purpose/Focus – how well you clearly state your claim on the topic and maintain your focus
- Organization – how well your ideas logically flow from the introduction to conclusion using effective transitions, and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Evidence – how well you provide evidence from sources about your claim and elaborate with specific information
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

*Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.*

### **3. Reread, Revise, and Edit**

**Say:** *Now, continue working on your essay. Manage your time carefully so that you can reread the essay you started during the last session, finish any drafting, and revise and edit for your final draft.*

**Do:** Write the ending time on the board to let students know when the second session will end.

**Say:** *I'll announce when you have 10 minutes left. You may continue writing your essay now.*

**Do:** Start timing now. Monitor the class to ensure students are working productively, not using any other programs on the computer, and not using the Internet.

If students finish early, encourage them to reread their work or silently read a book.

### **4. Announce 10 Minutes Remaining**

**Say:** *You have 10 minutes left. Please work quickly to finish your final draft. Remember, teachers reading your essay will only evaluate the final draft.*

### **5. End Session 2**

**Say:** *Please stop writing. Save your work on the computer. I will collect your pencils and scratch paper.*

**Do:** Collect student writing by asking students to print their essays, or email them to you, or drop them in your virtual inbox.

## Student Directions

### Grade 6 Argumentative Writing Task B

**YOUR ASSIGNMENT:** You will read two passages about the Loch Ness Monster. Take notes as you read. You will later write an argumentative essay about what you have read.

---

**STEP 1**

**Read the passages and take notes on these sources.**

Read the following passages about the Loch Ness Monster. Take notes to use later while writing your essay. You may look back at the passages and your notes as often as you like.

- “The Loch Ness Monster”
- “The Legend of Nessie”

As you read, consider whether or not scientists should continue to study the existence of the Loch Ness Monster.

---

**STEP 2**

**Plan and write your argumentative essay.**

Now, review your notes and sources, then plan and draft your essay on the following topic:

**Imagine that you are giving a speech to the students and teacher in your science class. Write a speech that argues either for or against continuing to study the existence of the Loch Ness Monster.**

---

**STEP 3**

**Revise and edit your essay.**

The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:

- Statement of Purpose/Focus – how well you clearly state your claim on the topic and maintain your focus
- Organization – how well your ideas logically flow from the introduction to conclusion using effective transitions, and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Evidence – how well you provide evidence from sources about your claim and elaborate with specific information
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.

GO ON

# The Legend of Nessie

by Peggy J. Parks

- 1 In an area of Scotland known as the Scottish Highlands, there is a lake called Loch Ness. It is a massive body of water: 24 miles (39km) long and more than a mile (1.6km) wide. The **loch** (the Scottish word for "lake") is surrounded by tree-covered mountains and steep banks. It is also ancient. It was carved out of the Earth by glaciers thousands of years ago. The water in the loch is pitch black. In fact, it is impossible to see more than a foot or two below the surface. The water is very cold, and in some places it is up to 800 feet (244m) deep. Shrouded in morning mist, the loch has a mysterious **aura** about it. The real mystery is not its enormous size, its black water, or its mist, however. It is the beast that is said to live there: Nessie, the Loch Ness Monster.

**aura:** feeling

## A Huge Creature with Humps

- 2 Most stories about the beast were considered Scottish folklore rather than fact. Scientists scoffed at the idea that such a creature could exist. Then in 1933, a new road was built along the Loch Ness shoreline. It provided a much clearer view of the water. Suddenly, reports of Nessie sightings began to soar.
- 3 Everyone who told of the beast had a slightly different story. There were many similarities, though. For instance, it was almost always described as either large or enormous. Some people estimated the creature's size to be about 20 feet (6.1m) long. Others thought it was much larger, perhaps as much as 50 feet (15m) long. It was said to resemble a dinosaur, with a long neck and a small, horselike head. A few observers reported seeing a long tail, as one person noted: "I saw the tail distinctly causing a great commotion, thrashing the water with much force." Many people saw humps on the creature's back. Some described the humps as round, while others insisted they were triangular.
- 4 In May 1933, an account by Mr. and Mrs. John McKay was published in a newspaper called the *Inverness Courier*. In the article, the writer referred to a "monster" in the loch. He wrote that the couple had observed it "rolling and plunging for fully a minute, its body resembling that of a whale, and the water cascading and churning like a simmering **cauldron**. Soon, however, it disappeared in a boiling mass of foam."
- 5 A few months later, there was a different sort of report. The beast had been spotted on land. The couple who saw it were Mr. and Mrs. Spicer. In a letter to the newspaper, Mr. Spicer said they had seen an "extraordinary form of an animal crossing the road...It did not move in the usual reptilian fashion but...it shot across the road until a ponderous body about four feet high came into view." He described the beast as dark gray in color, with a long neck a little thicker than an elephant's trunk. The Spicers both thought the creature resembled an enormous snail.

**cauldron:** a large round metal pot for boiling liquids over a fire

## World-Famous Photograph

6 Although many people reported seeing Nessie, no one had any real proof that the monster existed. They had only their own personal stories to tell. Some produced photos that they claimed showed the monster. None were good enough to convince nonbelievers that there really was a monster. The photos were either too fuzzy or were obvious fakes.

7 In 1934, a physician named R. Kenneth Wilson produced a photograph of what he said was the Loch Ness Monster. According to Wilson, he was driving along the shore when he heard a great commotion in the water. Upon hearing the noise, he turned and saw an enormous beast emerge from the loch. He grabbed his camera and captured it on film. The photo appeared in the *London Daily Mail* newspaper on April 21, 1934. It clearly showed a large dinosaurlike creature with a long neck and a small head. Wilson's name, and his photograph, became famous.



The first purported photo of Nessie was published in *The Daily Mail* on April 21, 1934.

8 Few people doubted that the photograph was real. Even some who had been skeptical about the Loch Ness Monster began to wonder if they had been mistaken. The man who had taken the photo was a well-respected surgeon from London. There was no reason to believe he would make up the story, or create a fake photograph. Why would a reputable man do such a thing?

9 Sixty years after the photo was published, that question was answered. A man named Alastair Boyd did some detective work. He and another scientist discovered that Wilson had been part of an elaborate hoax. The "beast" shown swimming in Loch Ness was not a real beast at all. It was a toy submarine with a molded monsterlike neck and head attached to the top. What the photo actually showed was the toy floating in the loch. Newspapers all over the world quickly exposed it as a fake.

10 Boyd's findings did not make him a popular person. Many Scottish people were angry with him. Some claimed he had made the story up. They said he, not Wilson, was responsible for the *real* hoax. They even began calling him "the Nessie killer." After nurturing the Loch Ness mystery for nearly fifteen hundred years, people deeply resented the man who tried to destroy it.

"The Legend of Nessie" by Peggy J. Parks, from *Monsters: The Loch Ness Monster*. Copyright © 2005 by Thomson Gale. Reprinted by permission of Thomson Gale, a part of The Thomson Corporation. "Surgeons Photo of the Monster" in the public domain.

# The Loch Ness Monster

by Thomas Streissguth

- 1 By the end of the twentieth century, dozens of expeditions to Loch Ness had been organized by universities, research institutes, museums, and individuals who took a strong interest in the subject of the Loch Ness monster. Searchers used every device they could think of to scan the lake from one end to the other. Thousands of feet of film had been examined, and miles of graph paper had been analyzed for telltale shapes and sounds. But nobody found convincing evidence of Nessie's existence. The Loch Ness monster has turned out to be one of the most elusive quarries ever pursued by modern science. In the twenty-first century, the mystery remains.
- 2 Although physical evidence is lacking, the searchers have produced dozens of theories about the Loch Ness mystery. One theory stubbornly persists among many experts: The Loch Ness monster is a prehistoric dinosaur, perhaps a species of plesiosaur, a family of long-necked amphibians thought to be extinct. Somehow, this plesiosaur survived the mass extinction 65 million years ago and lives today in the murky waters of the lake, surviving on scarce resources and eluding all attempts to trap it.
- 3 But how did a plesiosaur show up in this lake? A species of plesiosaur, believers say, could have entered the Great Glen region and inhabited Loch Ness in prehistoric times. At some point, the lake was cut off from the sea, and a population of plesiosaurs was trapped. This could have happened during the last ice age, for example, when a glacier filling the glen gradually retreated to the northeast, leaving behind a deep valley that turned an arm of the sea into a landlocked, freshwater lake.
- 4 The survivors could also have entered the loch through an underwater tunnel or stream that at one time linked the Great Glen with the open sea. The tunnel theory is helped by the fact that the bottom and sides of Loch Ness are practically invisible to still photographs and film. Researchers still have not surveyed and mapped every corner of the deep lake, and new underwater caverns have been discovered by **sonar** surveys.
- 5 There are a few problems with the theory of the trapped plesiosaur as a cold-weather survivor. First, the dinosaur extinction that occurred was a worldwide phenomenon. Whatever happened to the dinosaurs happened to all of them, no matter where or how they lived. Although insects, reptiles, and fish survived, no dinosaurs did. If there were such creatures in the vicinity of Loch Ness, there should be some fossil remains of dinosaurs in the rock and **sediments** surrounding the lake, but there are none—or at least none have been found.

**sonar:**  
equipment on a ship that uses sound waves to find the position of objects under

**sediment:**  
material that sinks to the bottom of a lake

## Floating Objects, Dead and Alive

6 Another possible explanation for the Loch Ness monster is that it is a floating object, such as a tree trunk, heavy branch, an oil drum, or a mat of vegetation, that suddenly rises from the bottom of the lake to the surface. Some sightings may be animals, such as geese flying close to the surface, ordinary fish, or otters swimming underwater. Otters are excellent swimmers that can dive more than fifty feet deep and **submerge** for three minutes. They can grow to an impressive size but are quite shy of humans.

**submerge:** to go under water and be completely covered by it

7 The otter theory was put forward by Maurice Burton, a zoologist from the British Museum who explained his take on the Loch Ness phenomenon in a book titled *The Elusive Monster*. Burton and many scientists claim that monster sightings in Loch Ness are really otters seen at a distance and under poor sighting conditions. Small roe deer, a species that can also swim, may also be mistaken for Nessie. Roe deer sport antlers that strongly resemble the elongated neck of a plesiosaur. Is the neck of the Loch Ness monster actually the antlers of an innocent deer, plunging into the water in flight from a camera-wielding tourist or paranormal investigator?

8 Another possibility is that there are indeed unusual visitors to Loch Ness from time to time. These visitors arrive from the North Sea via the River Ness. Porpoises and whales, for example, are large, strong underwater swimmers that must come to the surface to breathe from time to time. A black, shiny-skinned porpoise breaching the surface, blowing out air, and then diving back underwater can be a very startling sight, especially when it appears in a place that it is not supposed to be. Seals live near water, but they can move quickly on land. A seal swimming rapidly near the surface could be taken for something much larger than it really is. A gray seal was the conclusion offered by Sir Edward Mountain after his twenty-man lookout on Loch Ness in 1934.

9 Many more possibilities exist. The Loch Ness monster may be a walrus, a giant sea turtle, or a giant salamander. Or it may be a sturgeon, which can grow to a length of nearly ten feet and which sometimes reaches the rivers and bays of Great Britain from its natural habitats in the open sea. Because sturgeons do that breed in rivers, they would spend only a short time inland before returning to the open sea—leaving behind an unexplained mystery to anyone who might spot one swimming near the surface.

## Hoaxes

10 The mystery of Loch Ness is made more complicated by hoaxes. Many experts taking a good, close look at the Loch Ness photographs suspect that some of them are fakes. On many occasions, the Loch Ness monster has been a kind of national practical joke played by hoaxers and their trick photographs. Since everyone knows the legend of Loch Ness, a few among the observers go there simply to fool the **gullible**, see their names in the newspaper, and have a bit of fun.

**gullible:** easily tricked

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# **Directions for Administering the Grade 6 Argumentative Writing Task B**

## **Session 1 (45 minutes)**

### **1. Distribute the Materials**

**Do:** Hand out the materials students will need to complete the formative writing task:

- \_\_\_ Student Directions Argumentative Writing Task B
- \_\_\_ Grade 6 Student Guide to Argumentative Writing (optional)
- \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
- \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
- \_\_\_ Pencils
- \_\_\_ Highlighters, colored pencils or pens (optional)

### **2. Read the Directions Aloud to the Students**

**Say:** *Over two sessions, you will write an argumentative essay about whether or not scientists should continue to study the existence of the Loch Ness Monster. During the first session, you will have 45 minutes to read the directions, read some information about the Loch Ness Monster, read how the teachers will evaluate your essay, and begin planning and drafting your essay. During the second 45 minute session, you will finish drafting your essay and then revise and edit your final draft.*

*You have a pencil and blank paper to use for taking notes and planning your essay. You may write, highlight, and underline on the student directions and passages. You will write your essay using the word processor on the computer. You may use spell check and grammar check. However, you may **not** use any other programs on the computer, and you may **not** use the Internet.*

*Find the YOUR ASSIGNMENT section at the top of page 1 of the student directions. Read along while I read aloud. It says:*

*You will read two passages about the Loch Ness Monster. Take notes as you read. You will later write an argumentative essay about what you have read.*

*Next, find STEP 1. It says:*

***Read the passages and take notes on these sources.***

*Read the following passages about the Loch Ness Monster. Take notes to use later while writing your essay. You may look back at the passages and your notes as often as you like.*

- *“The Loch Ness Monster”*
- *“The Legend of Nessie”*

*As you read, consider whether or not scientists should continue to study the existence of the Loch Ness Monster.*

*You will read this on your own; I will not read this to you.*

Now, find STEP 2. It says:

**Plan and write your argumentative essay.**

Now, review your notes and sources, then plan and draft your essay on the following topic:

**Imagine that you are giving a speech to the students and teacher in your science class. Write a speech that argues either for or against continuing to study the existence of the Loch Ness Monster.**

**3. Read the Evaluation Information**

**Say:** Find STEP 3 and read along as I tell you how your essay will be evaluated. It says:

**Revise and edit your essay.**

The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:

- Statement of Purpose/Focus – how well you clearly state your claim on the topic and maintain your focus
- Organization – how well your ideas logically flow from the introduction to conclusion using effective transitions, and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Evidence – how well you provide evidence from sources about your claim and elaborate with specific information
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.

**4. Answer Any Questions**

**Say:** I can read the directions as often as needed, but I cannot translate, edit your work, explain, or give examples on what or how to write. Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Do:** Answer questions by rereading the directions.

**5. Begin Planning and Drafting**

**Say:** Now, go back to STEP 1 of the student directions sheet. You have 45 minutes to read these passages, take notes, and start planning and drafting your essay. You should think about the information you have read, which should help you write your essay.

**Do:** Write the ending time on the board to let students know when the first session will end.

**Say:** *Now, read your assignment and begin your work. Manage your time carefully so that you have time to plan and draft your essay. I'll announce when you have 10 minutes left. You may begin.*

**Do:** Start timing now. Monitor the class to ensure students are working productively, not using any other programs on the computer, and not using the Internet.

If students finish early, encourage them to reread their work or silently read a book.

## **6. Announce 10 Minutes Remaining**

**Say:** *You have 10 minutes left.*

## **7. End Session 1**

**Say:** *Please stop writing. Save your work on the computer. Write your name on the top of your directions paper and the scratch paper. You will finish writing your essay during the next session.*

**Do:** If your next session will start on the next day, collect all materials. If your next session will continue on the same day, provide a 15 minute break before beginning the second session.

## **Session 2 (45 minutes)**

### **1. Distribute the Materials (if necessary)**

**Do:** Hand out the things students will need:

- \_\_\_ Student Directions Argumentative Writing Task B
- \_\_\_ Grade 6 Student Guide to Argumentative Writing (optional)
- \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
- \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
- \_\_\_ Pencils
- \_\_\_ Highlighters, colored pencils or pens (optional)

### **2. Review the Directions**

**Say:** *During the first session, you read some information about the Loch Ness Monster, took notes on these sources, and started planning and drafting an argumentative essay. Now, you will have 45 minutes to review, revise, and edit your essay. You may reread the passages and use the notes you wrote on your scratch paper. You will write your essay using the word processor on the computer. You may use spell check and grammar check. However, you may **not** use any other programs on the computer, and you may **not** use the Internet.*

*Let's review how your essay will be evaluated and then you can reread your essay and begin revising and editing. Find STEP 3 and read along as I tell you how your essay will be evaluated. It says: evaluated. It says:*

***Revise and edit your essay.***

*The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:*

- Statement of Purpose/Focus – *how well you clearly state your claim on the topic and maintain your focus*
- Organization – *how well your ideas logically flow from the introduction to conclusion using effective transitions, and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay*
- Elaboration of Evidence – *how well you provide evidence from sources about your claim and elaborate with specific information*
- Language and Vocabulary – *how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose*
- Conventions – *how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling*

*Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.*

### **3. Reread, Revise, and Edit**

**Say:** *Now, continue working on your essay. Manage your time carefully so that you can reread the essay you started during the last session, finish any drafting, and revise and edit for your final draft.*

**Do:** Write the ending time on the board to let students know when the second session will end.

**Say:** *I'll announce when you have 10 minutes left. You may continue writing your essay now.*

**Do:** Start timing now. Monitor the class to ensure students are working productively, not using any other programs on the computer, and not using the Internet.

If students finish early, encourage them to reread their work or silently read a book.

### **4. Announce 10 Minutes Remaining**

**Say:** *You have 10 minutes left. Please work quickly to finish your final draft. Remember, teachers reading your essay will only evaluate the final draft.*

### **5. End Session 2**

**Say:** *Please stop writing. Save your work on the computer. I will collect your pencils and scratch paper.*

**Do:** Collect student writing by asking students to print their essays, or email them to you, or drop them in your virtual inbox.

## Student Directions

### Grade 6 Argumentative Writing Task C

**YOUR** You will read a passage about the coast redwoods. Take notes as you read.  
**ASSIGNMENT:** You will later write an argumentative essay based on what you have read.

---

**STEP 1****Read the passages and take notes on these sources.**

Read the following passage about the coast redwood. Take notes to use later when writing your essay. You may look back at the passage and your notes as often as you like.

- “Skywalking for Science: Aloft in Redwood Space”

As you read, consider whether the title of the passage is appropriate for the content.

---

**STEP 2****Plan and write your argumentative essay.**

Now, review your notes and sources, then plan and draft your essay on the following topic:

**Imagine that you are writing a letter to the author of the article. In your letter, argue whether the article’s title is or is not appropriate for its content.**

---

**STEP 3****Revise and edit your essay.**

The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:

- Statement of Purpose/Focus – how well you clearly state your claim on the topic and maintain your focus
- Organization – how well your ideas logically flow from the introduction to conclusion using effective transitions, and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Evidence – how well you provide evidence from sources about your claim and elaborate with specific information
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.

GO ON

# Skywalking for Science: Aloft in Redwood Space

by Jeanne Miller

## An Aerial World

- 1 The coast redwood is one of three surviving species of redwoods (the others are the giant sequoia in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California and the dawn redwoods in China). It grows only in a narrow band along the Pacific coast between central California and southern Oregon, a 450-mile belt where rain and fog provide enough moisture to sustain the giants. They are the tallest trees on Earth and have been around for 10 million years. Some coast redwoods living today may be as old as 2,000 years. The oldest and largest ones survive in old-growth forests, most of which are protected in parks or reserves. These are the trees that Dr. Stephen Sillett and his colleagues study.
- 2 Redwoods are remarkable for their ability to stay alive, whatever happens. If some accident exposes the living tissue under the bark, a sprout grows from the wound. Thus, if a limb breaks off, another limb arises in its place. If the top of the trunk dies and falls off, another trunk shoots up from that spot. And if that trunk breaks off, another trunk will grow. The crown of an old redwood often has many trunks, each with its own set of branches.
- 3 This complex structure, trunk upon trunk, limb upon limb, creates pockets where dry redwood needles collect. Fungi grow on the dead needles and decompose them into soil. Into this soil drop airborne seeds and spores. Plants sprout, mature, reproduce, and die, enriching the soil and making it ever deeper. In the redwood **canopy**, nestled in nooks and crannies and on flat limbs, Sillett and his tree-climbing team have discovered rhododendrons in bloom as well as miniature trees of many species: hemlocks, Douglas firs, and tan-oaks among them. They've even found an eight-foot Sitka spruce rooted on a limb of a redwood. Dense aerial gardens of ferns host a variety of animal life, including slugs, snails, and salamanders. These fern mats store moisture that supports much of the canopy life.

**canopy:** the uppermost layer in a forest

## Mapping Redwoods

- 4 Sillett and his colleagues want to understand how these trees operate and what their limits are. They've installed sensors in several trees to collect data on light, temperature, humidity, wind, and sap flow. In addition, he and his students measure the diameter and position of all the woody parts of the redwoods. Sillett uses these numbers to construct 3-D diagrams of each tree. He hopes to be able to explain someday how and why the trees are different from one another.
- 5 The researchers want to know how water moves through their trunks and branches. It takes water a few weeks to get from the redwood's roots to its top, traveling up through microscopic channels in the trunk. Water molecules have a tendency to cling to one another, so as a water



molecule rises it pulls the next molecule with it. When water evaporates from the leaves at the top of the tree, more water rises to replace it. But it's a fight against gravity, and scientists think there's a limit to how high the water can be pulled. And that puts a limit on how high a tree can get. Coast redwoods have an advantage over many trees, in that they are bathed in fog on summer mornings. Scientists working with Sillett have discovered that 25 percent to 50 percent of a coast redwood's water comes from summer fog, much of it taken up by the canopy soil.

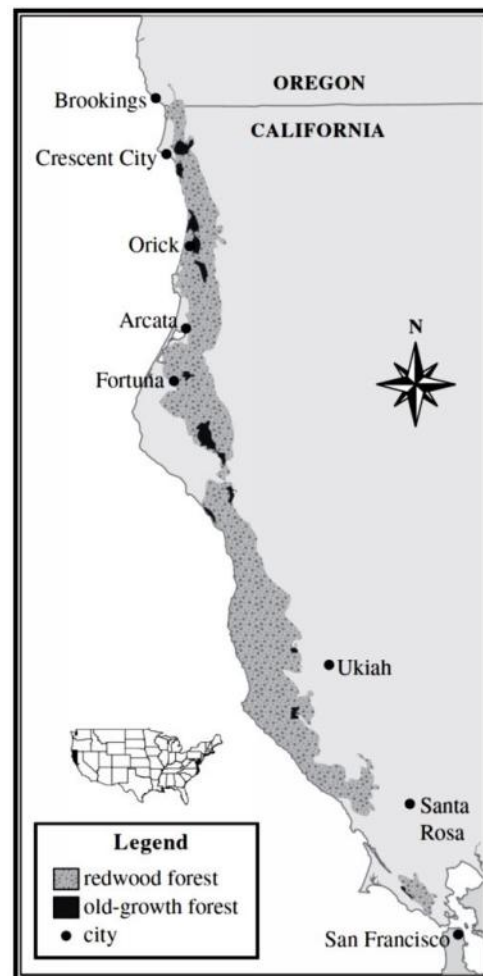
## Taming the Tallest Trees

6 The very tallest redwoods all grow in a few state parks and a national park along the northernmost coast of California. There are four trees over 370 feet in height and Sillett has climbed them all. *Laser range finders*, devices that use laser beams to measure distance to an object, can determine the height of a tree within a few feet. However, the only really accurate measurement comes with climbing to the top and dropping a measuring tape to the ground. The tallest tree in the world was discovered in 2006 in Redwood National Park in Humboldt County, California. Sillett measured it at 379.1 feet high. That's the height of a 37-story building.

7 Canopy researchers face many difficulties, and getting to the top of a tree is just one of them. Hiking through an old-growth redwood forest is the first challenge. These are temperate rainforests, which, like their tropical cousins, have abundant rainfall. The forest floor is thick with lush undergrowth. Fallen redwood trunks, some as much as twelve feet in diameter, often lie in the way. It can take hours of bushwhacking to go just a mile.

8 Sillett has made an art of climbing the ancient redwoods, but he can't completely eliminate the danger. It requires extreme discipline and focus to stay safe that high off the ground. A moment of inattention can result in a fatal fall. Redwoods drop dead branches without notice. Climbers call these "widow makers." Even if you're paying attention, you could become the victim of dead wood.

9 Just as important to Sillett and his team as their own safety is the safety of the fragile ecosystems in the canopy and of the tree itself. Sillett calls this area "redwood space." The climbers hang in harnesses from ropes when they're in the trees to avoid putting their full weight on the branches they're exploring. These rope systems allow them to move all around the crown, even to the tips of the farthest branches. Traveling over these webs of ropes is known as "skywalking."



"Skywalking for Science: Aloft in Redwood Space" by Jeanne Miller. From *Odyssey*, April 2011 issue. Copyright © 2011 by Carus Publishing Company. Reprinted by permission of Cobblestone Publishing.

# **Directions for Administering the Grade 6 Argumentative Writing Task C**

## **Session 1 (45 minutes)**

### **1. Distribute the Materials**

**Do:** Hand out the materials students will need to complete the formative writing task:

- \_\_\_ Student Directions Argumentative Writing Task C
- \_\_\_ Grade 6 Student Guide to Argumentative Writing (optional)
- \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
- \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
- \_\_\_ Pencils
- \_\_\_ Highlighters, colored pencils or pens (optional)

### **2. Read the Directions Aloud to the Students**

**Say:** *Over two sessions, you will write an argumentative essay about whether the title of an article is appropriate for the content. During the first session, you will have 45 minutes to read the directions, read an article, read how the teachers will evaluate your essay, and begin planning and drafting your essay. During the second 45 minute session, you will finish drafting your essay and then revise and edit your final draft.*

*You have a pencil and blank paper to use for taking notes and planning your essay. You may write, highlight, and underline on the student directions and passage. You will write your essay using the word processor on the computer. You may use spell check and grammar check. However, you may **not** use any other programs on the computer, and you may **not** use the Internet.*

*Find the YOUR ASSIGNMENT section at the top of page 1 of the student directions. Read along while I read aloud. It says:*

*You will read a passage about the coast redwoods. Take notes as you read.  
You will later write an argumentative essay based on what you have read.*

*Next, find STEP 1. It says:*

***Read the passages and take notes on these sources.***

*Read the following passage about the coast redwood. Take notes to use later when writing your essay. You may look back at the passage and your notes as often as you like.*

- *“Skywalking for Science: Aloft in Redwood Space”*

*As you read, consider whether the title of the passage is appropriate for the content.*

*You will read this on your own; I will not read this to you.*



Now, find STEP 2. It says:

**Plan and write your argumentative essay.**

Now, review your notes and sources, then plan and draft your essay on the following topic:

**Imagine that you are writing a letter to the author of the article. In your letter, argue whether the article's title is or is not appropriate for its content.**

**3. Read the Evaluation Information**

**Say:** Find STEP 3 and read along as I tell you how your essay will be evaluated. It says:

**Revise and edit your essay.**

The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:

- Statement of Purpose/Focus – how well you clearly state your claim on the topic and maintain your focus
- Organization – how well your ideas logically flow from the introduction to conclusion using effective transitions, and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Evidence – how well you provide evidence from sources about your claim and elaborate with specific information
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.

**4. Answer Any Questions**

**Say:** I can read the directions as often as needed, but I cannot translate, edit your work, explain, or give examples on what or how to write. Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Do:** Answer questions by rereading the directions.

**5. Begin Planning and Drafting**

**Say:** Now, go back to STEP 1 of the student directions sheet. You have 45 minutes to read the article, take notes, and start planning and drafting your essay. You should think about the information you have read, which should help you write your essay.

**Do:** Write the ending time on the board to let students know when the first session will end.

**Say:** Now, read your assignment and begin your work. Manage your time carefully so that you have time to plan and draft your essay. I'll announce when you have 10 minutes left. You may begin.

**Do:** Start timing now. Monitor the class to ensure students are working productively, not using any other programs on the computer, and not using the Internet.

If students finish early, encourage them to reread their work or silently read a book.

## 6. Announce 10 Minutes Remaining

**Say:** *You have 10 minutes left.*

## 7. End Session 1

**Say:** *Please stop writing. Save your work on the computer. Write your name on the top of your directions paper and the scratch paper. You will finish writing your essay during the next session.*

**Do:** If your next session will start on the next day, collect all materials. If your next session will continue on the same day, provide a 15 minute break before beginning the second session.

## **Session 2 (45 minutes)**

### 1. Distribute the Materials (if necessary)

**Do:** Hand out the things students will need:

- \_\_\_ Student Directions Argumentative Writing Task C
- \_\_\_ Grade 6 Student Guide to Argumentative Writing (optional)
- \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
- \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
- \_\_\_ Pencils
- \_\_\_ Highlighters, colored pencils or pens (optional)

### 2. Review the Directions

**Say:** *During the first session, you read an article about the coast redwoods, took notes on this source, and started planning and drafting an argumentative essay. Now, you will have 45 minutes to review, revise, and edit your essay. You may reread the passage and use the notes you wrote on your scratch paper. You will write your essay using the word processor on the computer. You may use spell check and grammar check. However, you may **not** use any other programs on the computer, and you may **not** use the Internet.*

*Let's review how your essay will be evaluated and then you can reread your essay and begin revising and editing. Find STEP 3 and read along as I tell you how your essay will be evaluated. It says: evaluated. It says:*

***Revise and edit your essay.***

*The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:*

- Statement of Purpose/Focus – how well you clearly state your claim on the topic and maintain your focus

- Organization – how well your ideas logically flow from the introduction to conclusion using effective transitions, and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Evidence – how well you provide evidence from sources about your claim and elaborate with specific information
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

*Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.*

### **3. Reread, Revise, and Edit**

**Say:** *Now, continue working on your essay. Manage your time carefully so that you can reread the essay you started during the last session, finish any drafting, and revise and edit for your final draft.*

**Do:** Write the ending time on the board to let students know when the second session will end.

**Say:** *I'll announce when you have 10 minutes left. You may continue writing your essay now.*

**Do:** Start timing now. Monitor the class to ensure students are working productively, not using any other programs on the computer, and not using the Internet.

If students finish early, encourage them to reread their work or silently read a book.

### **4. Announce 10 Minutes Remaining**

**Say:** *You have 10 minutes left. Please work quickly to finish your final draft. Remember, teachers reading your essay will only evaluate the final draft.*

### **5. End Session 2**

**Say:** *Please stop writing. Save your work on the computer. I will collect your pencils and scratch paper.*

**Do:** Collect student writing by asking students to print their essays, or email them to you, or drop them in your virtual inbox.

## Student Directions

### Grade 6 Informative/Explanatory Writing Task A

**YOUR ASSIGNMENT:** You will read two passages about a newly discovered ancient human species. Take notes as you read. You will later write an informative essay on what you have read.

---

**STEP 1****Read the passages and take notes on these sources.**

Read the following passages about the newly discovered ancient human species, *Homo floresiensis*. Take notes to use later while writing your essay. You may look back at the passages and your notes as often as you like.

- “A Big Discovery about Little People”
- “Small Wonder”

As you read, consider the key information in each article.

---

**STEP 2****Plan and write your informative essay.**

Now, review your notes and sources, then plan and draft your essay on the following topic:

**Explain why anthropologists believe the fossils found on the island of Flores are a new human species.**

---

**STEP 3****Revise and edit your essay.**

The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:

- Statement of Purpose/Focus – how well you clearly state and maintain your controlling idea or main idea
- Organization – how well the ideas progress from the introduction to the conclusion using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Evidence – how well you provide evidence from sources about your topic and elaborate with specific information
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.

---

**GO ON** 

# A Big Discovery about Little People

by Peter Brown and Emily Sohn

1 Long ago, many species of humanlike creatures shared space on Earth. These different types of humans walked upright and had intelligent minds. At some point, however, all but one of those species went extinct. We, members of the species *Homo sapiens* (*H. sapiens*), were the sole survivors.

For years, scientists thought they knew when *H. sapiens* became the only kind of human species in existence. The scientists thought that the big change happened about 24,000 years ago, with the extinction of the Neandertals (*Homo neanderthalensis*).

Recently, however, scientists have found evidence of a previously undiscovered species of humans. The scientists made the find on the island of Flores in Indonesia.

The newly discovered species, called *Homo floresiensis* after the island of its discovery and nicknamed "hobbit" because of its tiny size, lived as recently as 12,000 years ago. Many scientists consider the hobbit to be the most important discovery in anthropology in 50 years.

5 The finds on Flores indicate that for thousands of years, "we were not alone as a human species," says Bert Roberts, a senior research fellow at the University of Wollongong in Australia. "Until very recently, there would have been another type of walking, talking, interacting kind of human running around the planet," he adds. Roberts was a member of the team that discovered *H. floresiensis*.

## Finding Hobbits

The first signs of the hobbit's existence emerged in 2001, when a team of Australian and Indonesian researchers started finding small teeth and bones on Flores. The scientists were looking for *H. sapiens* fossils at the time.

At first, the scientists didn't suspect anything unusual. They thought that the small fossils belonged to *H. sapiens* children.

Then, on the last day of the digging season in September 2003, an Indonesian researcher named Thomas Sutikna stumbled across what looked like the top of a skull in the ground. To protect the fossil, he dug out the entire block of sand surrounding it.

"It was only when he started uncovering what was in this block of sand that [the team] realized [he] had [found] a whole new human species," Roberts says. Skulls often reveal more about a species than other bones can, he adds, and this skull was a **clinger**. "This really was something completely, remarkably new."

**clinger:** a fact that finally persuades someone

- 10 The tiny skull looked different from any *Homo* skull ever unearthed. It had a sloping forehead and thick ridges above the eye sockets. It had a receding chin. Its brain—about 23 cubic inches in volume—was just one-fourth as big as a modern human brain.

Further excavations revealed that the creature's skeleton was different from that of *H. sapiens*, too. The skull and bones belonged to a woman who was about 30 years old and about 3 feet tall—the size of a typical 4-year-old today. Her feet were flat and broad. And she had long arms, with hands that hung down to her knees.

Those features resembled those of some of our ancient ancestors who lived 2 or 3 million years ago, says Chris Turney, a research fellow at the University of Wollongong who became involved soon after the discovery. So, he expected the new fossils to be that old, too.

Much to everyone's surprise, Turner's analysis of the skeleton showed that the bones were just 18,000 years old. The hobbit was a completely new species of human. What's more scientists had never seen anything like it living so recently. It was a huge discovery.

"I was blown away by this," Turney says. "I just walked around with a great big grin all day."

## The Great Debate

- 15 The scientists announced their find in 2004. Some anthropologists, like Turner, were amazed by the news. But critics quickly disputed the findings. They claimed that the new skeleton was not a new species. It was simply a member of our own species suffering from a disease called microcephaly. Among other symptoms and deformities, people with microcephaly have smaller than average heads and bodies.

The debate gained steam. Meanwhile, further digging in the island's limestone caves turned up bones from eight other hobbitlike people with similar bone structures. Analyses revealed that these individuals lived between 95,000 and 12,000 years ago, strengthening the case that the scientists had indeed discovered a new species. As Roberts says, it would be very unusual that an entire population would have microcephaly over that many years.

Most scientists do now believe that *H. floresiensis* was indeed a separate species from *H. sapiens*, Roberts says. "I'd say 99.5 percent [of scientists] are in our favor," he claims.

## Getting to the Bones of the Matter

Because of arguments between researchers, further excavations, which could answer the many remaining questions about the hobbits, stopped in 2004. But now, the anthropologists are ready to pick up their shovels again. This June and July, digging on Flores will resume.

The researchers hope to find more skeletons with features similar to those of *H. floresiensis*,

as well as samples of DNA, which should "settle the dispute once and for all," Roberts says. More fossils would also give more details about the lives of the hobbits.

- 20 Evidence to date suggests that the hobbits were clever, despite their small brains, Roberts says. Explorations of the sites where the bones were found shows that the hobbits used specialized stone tools. They hunted komodo dragons and pygmy elephants. They could make fires. And they found a way to travel to Flores, probably from the mainland of Asia, on their own.

Despite the enthusiasm of Roberts and many others, scientists still cannot prove *that H. sapiens* and *H. floresiensis* lived on Flores at the same time. Only more digging, and additional studies of the bones, will resolve this question.

"A Big Discovery about Little People" by Peter Brown and Emily Sohn. From *Science News for Kids*, June 6, 2007 issue. Copyright ©2007 by Science News for Kids. Reprinted by permission of Science News.

# Small Wonder: The Discovery of Ancient Tiny People is One Big Find

by Kirsten Weir

1        *Once upon a time, a group of hairy, elf-sized men and women lived on an island far away. In the shadows of a towering volcano, they pursued with sharp spears the pygmy elephants, enormous dagger-toothed lizards, and golden retriever-sized rats that also inhabited the island.*

A scene from a fairy tale? Nope. Scientists recently unearthed the remains of the smallest and strangest humans ever found. The find is shaking up the field of *anthropology*, the scientific study of the origin, behavior, and physical and cultural development of humans.

## Island Hobbits

The peculiar mini people, nicknamed "hobbits" by the researchers who discovered them, lived thousands of years ago on Flores, an island in Indonesia. The researchers found the first set of remains in a limestone cave on the island and assumed that the bones were those of a child. Just 1 meter (3 feet) tall, the individual was about the same size as a modern 3-year-old!

Studying the bones more closely, codiscoverers Peter Brown and Mike Morwood from the University of New England in Australia realized that the skeleton belonged to a full-grown 30-year-old female who walked *bipedally*. Bipedes, including modern humans and their close ancestors, walk upright on two feet. Since that discovery, Brown and Morwood have pulled the remains of six other tiny people from the cave. They have named the people *Homo floresiensis*, or "Flores Man."

5        Brown and Morwood believe that the Flores species was a downsized version of *Homo erectus*, an early human species that lived roughly 1.5 million to 50,000 years ago. Previous archaeological digs have turned up evidence that *H. erectus* arrived on Flores by 840,000 years ago. Marooned on the island, the species apparently began to evolve a body better suited to life on Flores, eventually developing into the tiny *H. floresiensis*.

Islands are often home to "extreme" animals, such as the huge Komodo dragons that inhabit another Indonesian island. Only a few animal species ever successfully migrate from mainlands to distant islands. When they do, they often evolve unusually large or small body sizes to take advantage of vacant *niches* on the island that, on the crowded mainland, are filled by other species. A niche is the particular area that an organism occupies within a habitat. Mammals isolated on islands often evolve smaller bodies, which are easier to maintain on an island's limited food supply.

The scaled-down size of the Flores people isn't the only reason that anthropologists are excited about the find. The *H. floresiensis* bones range in age from 95,000 to just 13,000 years old. Modern humans, *Homo sapiens*, are thought to have migrated to Australia by at least 40,000 years





ago. So *H. sapiens* and *H. floresiensis* lived right around the corner from each other for as long as 30,000 years!

So far, scientists haven't found evidence that *H. sapiens* and *H. floresiensis* cohabited Flores. But they haven't ruled out the possibility.

## Fancy Tools

In the cave on Flores, Brown and Morwood discovered a variety of stone tools they believe were made by the Flores people. The tools, which include cutting and chopping utensils as well as small blades that might have been attached to wooden spears, were much more complex than any tools known to have been made by *H. erectus*.

- 10 Also found in the cave were the charred bones of pygmy elephants and other animals—evidence that the Floresians hunted and cooked their food. Although the elephants were small, they still weighed more than a ton. Morwood says the tiny hunters must have worked together to take the elephants down. He believes the Flores people also possessed some form of language that helped them coordinate hunts and fashion their sophisticated tools. Such traits are especially impressive in a people whose brains were slightly smaller than those of chimpanzees!

## Ebu Gogo

The newfound bones may hold more clues about the Flores people. Researchers plan to try to extract DNA from the bones, hoping to clarify the relationship between *H. floresiensis* and other human species. Whether or not the attempt is successful, one thing is certain: The tiny Flores people continued to thrive for thousands of years after other early human species disappeared around the globe.

Then, about 12,000 years ago, a volcanic eruption on Flores wiped out many of the island's unusual species, including the pygmy elephants. The Flores people, too, seem to have **perished** in the blast.

**perish:** to die, especially in a sudden or terrible way

Or did they? Modern inhabitants of Flores tell detailed stories about small, hairy humans called Ebu Gogo, who murmured to one another in an unfamiliar language. According to legend, the Ebu Gogo lived in caves until just a few hundred years ago. Maybe that's just a myth. Or maybe our ancient relatives weren't so ancient after all.

"Small Wonder" by Kirsten Weir. From *Current Science*, January 21, 2005 issue. Copyright © 2005 by Weekly Reader Corporation. Reprinted by permission of Scholastic Inc.

# **Directions for Administering the Grade 6 Informative/Explanatory Writing Task A**

## **Session 1 (45 minutes)**

### **1. Distribute the Materials**

**Do:** Hand out the materials students will need to complete the formative writing task:

- \_\_\_ Student Directions Informative/Explanatory Writing Task A
- \_\_\_ Grade 6 Student Guide to Informative/Explanatory Writing (optional)
- \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
- \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
- \_\_\_ Pencils
- \_\_\_ Highlighters, colored pencils or pens (optional)

### **2. Read the Directions Aloud to the Students**

**Say:** *Over two sessions, you will write an explanatory essay about a newly discovered ancient human species. During the first session, you will have 45 minutes to read the directions, read some information about the newly discovered human species, read how the teachers will evaluate your essay, and begin planning and drafting your essay. During the second 45 minute session, you will finish drafting your essay and then revise and edit your final draft.*

*You have a pencil and blank paper to use for taking notes and planning your essay. You may write, highlight, and underline on the student directions and passages. You will write your essay using the word processor on the computer. You may use spell check and grammar check. However, you may **not** use any other programs on the computer, and you may **not** use the Internet.*

*Find the YOUR ASSIGNMENT section at the top of page 1 of the student directions. Read along while I read aloud. It says:*

*You will read two passages about a newly discovered ancient human species. Take notes as you read. You will later write an informative essay on what you have read.*

*Next, find STEP 1. It says:*

***Read the passages and take notes on these sources.***

*Read the following passages about the newly discovered ancient human species, Homo floresiensis. Take notes to use later while writing your essay. You may look back at the passages and your notes as often as you like.*

- *“A Big Discovery about Little People”*
- *“Small Wonder”*

*As you read, consider the key information in each article.*

*You will read this on your own; I will not read this to you.*

*Now, find STEP 2. It says:*

***Plan and write your informative essay.***

*Now, review your notes and sources, then plan and draft your essay on the following topic:*

***Explain why anthropologists believe the fossils found on the island of Flores are a new human species.***

**3. Read the Evaluation Information**

**Say:** *Find STEP 3 and read along as I tell you how your essay will be evaluated. It says:*

***Revise and edit your essay.***

*The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:*

- *Statement of Purpose/Focus* – *how well you clearly state and maintain your controlling idea or main idea*
- *Organization* – *how well the ideas progress from the introduction to the conclusion using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay*
- *Elaboration of Evidence* – *how well you provide evidence from sources about your topic and elaborate with specific information*
- *Language and Vocabulary* – *how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose*
- *Conventions* – *how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling*

*Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.*

**4. Answer Any Questions**

**Say:** *I can read the directions as often as needed, but I cannot translate, edit your work, explain, or give examples on what or how to write. Do you have any questions before we begin?*

**Do:** Answer questions by rereading the directions.

**5. Begin Planning and Drafting**

**Say:** *Now, go back to STEP 1 of the student directions sheet. You have 45 minutes to read these passages, take notes, and start planning and drafting your essay. You should think about the information you have read, which should help you write your essay.*

**Do:** Write the ending time on the board to let students know when the first session will end.

**Say:** *Now, read your assignment and begin your work. Manage your time carefully so that you have time to plan and draft your essay. I'll announce when you have 10 minutes left. You may begin.*

**Do:** Start timing now. Monitor the class to ensure students are working productively, not using any other programs on the computer, and not using the Internet.

If students finish early, encourage them to reread their work or silently read a book.

## **6. Announce 10 Minutes Remaining**

**Say:** *You have 10 minutes left.*

## **7. End Session 1**

**Say:** *Please stop writing. Save your work on the computer. Write your name on the top of your directions paper and the scratch paper. You will finish writing your essay during the next session.*

**Do:** If your next session will start on the next day, collect all materials. If your next session will continue on the same day, provide a 15 minute break before beginning the second session.

## **Session 2 (45 minutes)**

### **1. Distribute the Materials (if necessary)**

**Do:** Hand out the things students will need:

- \_\_\_ Student Directions Informative/Explanatory Writing Task A
- \_\_\_ Grade 6 Student Guide to Informative/Explanatory Writing (optional)
- \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
- \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
- \_\_\_ Pencils
- \_\_\_ Highlighters, colored pencils or pens (optional)

### **2. Review the Directions**

**Say:** *During the first session, you read some information about a newly discovered human species, took notes on these sources, and started planning and drafting an informative/explanatory essay. Now, you will have 45 minutes to review, revise, and edit your essay. You may reread the passages and use the notes you wrote on your scratch paper. You will write your essay using the word processor on the computer. You may use spell check and grammar check. However, you may **not** use any other programs on the computer, and you may **not** use the Internet.*

*Let's review how your essay will be evaluated and then you can reread your essay and begin revising and editing. Find STEP 3 and read along as I tell you how your essay will be evaluated. It says: evaluated. It says:*

***Revise and edit your essay.***

*The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:*

- Statement of Purpose/Focus – how well you clearly state and maintain your controlling idea or main idea
- Organization – how well the ideas progress from the introduction to the conclusion using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Evidence – how well you provide evidence from sources about your topic and elaborate with specific information
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

*Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.*

### **3. Reread, Revise, and Edit**

**Say:** *Now, continue working on your essay. Manage your time carefully so that you can reread the essay you started during the last session, finish any drafting, and revise and edit for your final draft.*

**Do:** Write the ending time on the board to let students know when the second session will end.

**Say:** *I'll announce when you have 10 minutes left. You may continue writing your essay now.*

**Do:** Start timing now. Monitor the class to ensure students are working productively, not using any other programs on the computer, and not using the Internet.

If students finish early, encourage them to reread their work or silently read a book.

### **4. Announce 10 Minutes Remaining**

**Say:** *You have 10 minutes left. Please work quickly to finish your final draft. Remember, teachers reading your essay will only evaluate the final draft.*

### **5. End Session 2**

**Say:** *Please stop writing. Save your work on the computer. I will collect your pencils and scratch paper.*

**Do:** Collect student writing by asking students to print their essays, or email them to you, or drop them in your virtual inbox.

## Student Directions

### Grade 6 Informative/Explanatory Writing Task B

**YOUR ASSIGNMENT:** You will read two passages about a newly discovered ancient human species. Take notes as you read. You will later write an informative essay comparing how the authors of the two articles develop ideas.

---

**STEP 1****Read the passages and take notes on these sources.**

Read the following passages about the newly discovered ancient human species *Homo floresiensis*. Take notes to use later while writing your essay. You may look back at the passages and your notes as often as you like.

- “A Big Discovery about Little People”
- “Small Wonder”

As you read, consider how the authors of each passage develop ideas, including the authors’ style of writing.

---

**STEP 2****Plan and write your Informative/Explanatory essay.**

Now, review your notes and sources, then plan and draft your essay on the following topic:

**Compare how the authors of the two articles develop their ideas. Consider both their writing styles and the kinds of information they include. You should *not* argue that one is better than the other; focus your writing on comparing the two.**

---

**STEP 3****Revise and edit your essay.**

The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:

- Statement of Purpose/Focus – how well you clearly state and maintain your controlling idea or main idea
- Organization – how well the ideas progress from the introduction to the conclusion using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Evidence – how well you provide evidence from sources about your topic and elaborate with specific information
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.

GO ON

# A Big Discovery about Little People

by Peter Brown and Emily Sohn

- 1 Long ago, many species of humanlike creatures shared space on Earth. These different types of humans walked upright and had intelligent minds. At some point, however, all but one of those species went extinct. We, members of the species *Homo sapiens* (*H. sapiens*), were the sole survivors.

For years, scientists thought they knew when *H. sapiens* became the only kind of human species in existence. The scientists thought that the big change happened about 24,000 years ago, with the extinction of the Neandertals (*Homo neanderthalensis*).

Recently, however, scientists have found evidence of a previously undiscovered species of humans. The scientists made the find on the island of Flores in Indonesia.

The newly discovered species, called *Homo floresiensis* after the island of its discovery and nicknamed "hobbit" because of its tiny size, lived as recently as 12,000 years ago. Many scientists consider the hobbit to be the most important discovery in anthropology in 50 years.

- 5 The finds on Flores indicate that for thousands of years, "we were not alone as a human species," says Bert Roberts, a senior research fellow at the University of Wollongong in Australia. "Until very recently, there would have been another type of walking, talking, interacting kind of human running around the planet," he adds. Roberts was a member of the team that discovered *H. floresiensis*.

## Finding Hobbits

The first signs of the hobbit's existence emerged in 2001, when a team of Australian and Indonesian researchers started finding small teeth and bones on Flores. The scientists were looking for *H. sapiens* fossils at the time.

At first, the scientists didn't suspect anything unusual. They thought that the small fossils belonged to *H. sapiens* children.

Then, on the last day of the digging season in September 2003, an Indonesian researcher named Thomas Sutikna stumbled across what looked like the top of a skull in the ground. To protect the fossil, he dug out the entire block of sand surrounding it.

"It was only when he started uncovering what was in this block of sand that [the team] realized [he] had [found] a whole new human species," Roberts says. Skulls often reveal more about a species than other bones can, he adds, and this skull was a **clinch**er. "This really was something completely, remarkably new."

**clinch**er: a fact that finally persuades someone

- 10 The tiny skull looked different from any *Homo* skull ever unearthed. It had a sloping forehead and thick ridges above the eye sockets. It had a receding chin. Its brain—about 23 cubic inches in volume—was just one-fourth as big as a modern human brain.

Further excavations revealed that the creature's skeleton was different from that of *H. sapiens*, too. The skull and bones belonged to a woman who was about 30 years old and about 3 feet tall—the size of a typical 4-year-old today. Her feet were flat and broad. And she had long arms, with hands that hung down to her knees.

Those features resembled those of some of our ancient ancestors who lived 2 or 3 million years ago, says Chris Turney, a research fellow at the University of Wollongong who became involved soon after the discovery. So, he expected the new fossils to be that old, too.

Much to everyone's surprise, Turner's analysis of the skeleton showed that the bones were just 18,000 years old. The hobbit was a completely new species of human. What's more scientists had never seen anything like it living so recently. It was a huge discovery.

"I was blown away by this," Turney says. "I just walked around with a great big grin all day."

## The Great Debate

- 15 The scientists announced their find in 2004. Some anthropologists, like Turner, were amazed by the news. But critics quickly disputed the findings. They claimed that the new skeleton was not a new species. It was simply a member of our own species suffering from a disease called microcephaly. Among other symptoms and deformities, people with microcephaly have smaller than average heads and bodies.

The debate gained steam. Meanwhile, further digging in the island's limestone caves turned up bones from eight other hobbitlike people with similar bone structures. Analyses revealed that these individuals lived between 95,000 and 12,000 years ago, strengthening the case that the scientists had indeed discovered a new species. As Roberts says, it would be very unusual that an entire population would have microcephaly over that many years.

Most scientists do now believe that *H. floresiensis* was indeed a separate species from *H. sapiens*, Roberts says. "I'd say 99.5 percent [of scientists] are in our favor," he claims.

## Getting to the Bones of the Matter

Because of arguments between researchers, further excavations, which could answer the many remaining questions about the hobbits, stopped in 2004. But now, the anthropologists are ready to pick up their shovels again. This June and July, digging on Flores will resume.

The researchers hope to find more skeletons with features similar to those of *H. floresiensis*,



as well as samples of DNA, which should "settle the dispute once and for all," Roberts says. More fossils would also give more details about the lives of the hobbits.

- 20 Evidence to date suggests that the hobbits were clever, despite their small brains, Roberts says. Explorations of the sites where the bones were found shows that the hobbits used specialized stone tools. They hunted komodo dragons and pygmy elephants. They could make fires. And they found a way to travel to Flores, probably from the mainland of Asia, on their own.

Despite the enthusiasm of Roberts and many others, scientists still cannot prove *that H. sapiens* and *H. floresiensis* lived on Flores at the same time. Only more digging, and additional studies of the bones, will resolve this question.

"A Big Discovery about Little People" by Peter Brown and Emily Sohn. From *Science News for Kids*, June 6, 2007 issue. Copyright ©2007 by Science News for Kids. Reprinted by permission of Science News.

# Small Wonder: The Discovery of Ancient Tiny People is One Big Find

by Kirsten Weir

1        *Once upon a time, a group of hairy, elf-sized men and women lived on an island far away. In the shadows of a towering volcano, they pursued with sharp spears the pygmy elephants, enormous dagger-toothed lizards, and golden retriever-sized rats that also inhabited the island.*

A scene from a fairy tale? Nope. Scientists recently unearthed the remains of the smallest and strangest humans ever found. The find is shaking up the field of *anthropology*, the scientific study of the origin, behavior, and physical and cultural development of humans.

## Island Hobbits

The peculiar mini people, nicknamed "hobbits" by the researchers who discovered them, lived thousands of years ago on Flores, an island in Indonesia. The researchers found the first set of remains in a limestone cave on the island and assumed that the bones were those of a child. Just 1 meter (3 feet) tall, the individual was about the same size as a modern 3-year-old!

Studying the bones more closely, codiscoverers Peter Brown and Mike Morwood from the University of New England in Australia realized that the skeleton belonged to a full-grown 30-year-old female who walked *bipedally*. Bipedes, including modern humans and their close ancestors, walk upright on two feet. Since that discovery, Brown and Morwood have pulled the remains of six other tiny people from the cave. They have named the people *Homo floresiensis*, or "Flores Man."

5        Brown and Morwood believe that the Flores species was a downsized version of *Homo erectus*, an early human species that lived roughly 1.5 million to 50,000 years ago. Previous archaeological digs have turned up evidence that *H. erectus* arrived on Flores by 840,000 years ago. Marooned on the island, the species apparently began to evolve a body better suited to life on Flores, eventually developing into the tiny *H. floresiensis*.

Islands are often home to "extreme" animals, such as the huge Komodo dragons that inhabit another Indonesian island. Only a few animal species ever successfully migrate from mainlands to distant islands. When they do, they often evolve unusually large or small body sizes to take advantage of vacant *niches* on the island that, on the crowded mainland, are filled by other species. A niche is the particular area that an organism occupies within a habitat. Mammals isolated on islands often evolve smaller bodies, which are easier to maintain on an island's limited food supply.

The scaled-down size of the Flores people isn't the only reason that anthropologists are excited about the find. The *H. floresiensis* bones range in age from 95,000 to just 13,000 years old. Modern humans, *Homo sapiens*, are thought to have migrated to Australia by at least 40,000 years

ago. So *H. sapiens* and *H. floresiensis* lived right around the corner from each other for as long as 30,000 years!

So far, scientists haven't found evidence that *H. sapiens* and *H. floresiensis* cohabited Flores. But they haven't ruled out the possibility.

## Fancy Tools

In the cave on Flores, Brown and Morwood discovered a variety of stone tools they believe were made by the Flores people. The tools, which include cutting and chopping utensils as well as small blades that might have been attached to wooden spears, were much more complex than any tools known to have been made by *H. erectus*.

- 10 Also found in the cave were the charred bones of pygmy elephants and other animals—evidence that the Floresians hunted and cooked their food. Although the elephants were small, they still weighed more than a ton. Morwood says the tiny hunters must have worked together to take the elephants down. He believes the Flores people also possessed some form of language that helped them coordinate hunts and fashion their sophisticated tools. Such traits are especially impressive in a people whose brains were slightly smaller than those of chimpanzees!

## Ebu Gogo

The newfound bones may hold more clues about the Flores people. Researchers plan to try to extract DNA from the bones, hoping to clarify the relationship between *H. floresiensis* and other human species. Whether or not the attempt is successful, one thing is certain: The tiny Flores people continued to thrive for thousands of years after other early human species disappeared around the globe.

Then, about 12,000 years ago, a volcanic eruption on Flores wiped out many of the island's unusual species, including the pygmy elephants. The Flores people, too, seem to have **perished** in the blast.

**perish:** to die, especially in a sudden or terrible way

Or did they? Modern inhabitants of Flores tell detailed stories about small, hairy humans called Ebu Gogo, who murmured to one another in an unfamiliar language. According to legend, the Ebu Gogo lived in caves until just a few hundred years ago. Maybe that's just a myth. Or maybe our ancient relatives weren't so ancient after all.

"Small Wonder" by Kirsten Weir. From *Current Science*, January 21, 2005 issue. Copyright © 2005 by Weekly Reader Corporation. Reprinted by permission of Scholastic Inc.

# **Directions for Administering the Grade 6 Informative/Explanatory Writing Task B**

## **Session 1 (45 minutes)**

### **1. Distribute the Materials**

**Do:** Hand out the materials students will need to complete the formative writing task:

- \_\_\_ Student Directions Informative/Explanatory Writing Task B
- \_\_\_ Grade 6 Student Guide to Informative/Explanatory Writing (optional)
- \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
- \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
- \_\_\_ Pencils
- \_\_\_ Highlighters, colored pencils or pens (optional)

### **2. Read the Directions Aloud to the Students**

**Say:** *Over two sessions, you will write an informative essay comparing how the authors of two articles develop ideas. During the first session, you will have 45 minutes to read the directions, read some information about a newly discovered human species, read how the teachers will evaluate your essay, and begin planning and drafting your essay. During the second 45 minute session, you will finish drafting your essay and then revise and edit your final draft.*

*You have a pencil and blank paper to use for taking notes and planning your essay. You may write, highlight, and underline on the student directions and passages. You will write your essay using the word processor on the computer. You may use spell check and grammar check. However, you may **not** use any other programs on the computer, and you may **not** use the Internet.*

*Find the YOUR ASSIGNMENT section at the top of page 1 of the student directions. Read along while I read aloud. It says:*

*You will read two passages about a newly discovered ancient human species. Take notes as you read. You will later write an informative essay comparing how the authors of the two articles develop ideas.*

*Next, find STEP 1. It says:*

***Read the passages and take notes on these sources.***

*Read the following passages about the newly discovered ancient human species Homo floresiensis. Take notes to use later while writing your essay. You may look back at the passages and your notes as often as you like.*

- *“A Big Discovery about Little People”*
- *“Small Wonder”*

*As you read, consider how the authors of each passage develop ideas, including the authors’ style of writing.*

*You will read this on your own; I will not read this to you.*

*Now, find STEP 2. It says:*

***Plan and write your Informative/Explanatory essay.***

*Now, review your notes and sources, then plan and draft your essay on the following topic:*

***Compare how the authors of the two articles develop their ideas. Consider both their writing styles and the kinds of information they include. You should not argue that one is better than the other; focus your writing on comparing the two.***

**3. Read the Evaluation Information**

**Say:** *Find STEP 3 and read along as I tell you how your essay will be evaluated. It says:*

***Revise and edit your essay.***

*The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:*

- *Statement of Purpose/Focus* – *how well you clearly state and maintain your controlling idea or main idea*
- *Organization* – *how well the ideas progress from the introduction to the conclusion using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay*
- *Elaboration of Evidence* – *how well you provide evidence from sources about your topic and elaborate with specific information*
- *Language and Vocabulary* – *how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose*
- *Conventions* – *how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling*

*Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.*

**4. Answer Any Questions**

**Say:** *I can read the directions as often as needed, but I cannot translate, edit your work, explain, or give examples on what or how to write. Do you have any questions before we begin?*

**Do:** *Answer questions by rereading the directions.*

**5. Begin Planning and Drafting**

**Say:** *Now, go back to STEP 1 of the student directions sheet. You have 45 minutes to read these passages, take notes, and start planning and drafting your essay. You should think about the information you have read, which should help you write your essay.*

**Do:** *Write the ending time on the board to let students know when the first session will end.*

**Say:** *Now, read your assignment and begin your work. Manage your time carefully so that you have time to plan and draft your essay. I'll announce when you have 10 minutes left. You may begin.*

**Do:** Start timing now. Monitor the class to ensure students are working productively, not using any other programs on the computer, and not using the Internet.

If students finish early, encourage them to reread their work or silently read a book.

## **6. Announce 10 Minutes Remaining**

**Say:** *You have 10 minutes left.*

## **7. End Session 1**

**Say:** *Please stop writing. Save your work on the computer. Write your name on the top of your directions paper and the scratch paper. You will finish writing your essay during the next session.*

**Do:** If your next session will start on the next day, collect all materials. If your next session will continue on the same day, provide a 15 minute break before beginning the second session.

## **Session 2 (45 minutes)**

### **1. Distribute the Materials (if necessary)**

**Do:** Hand out the things students will need:

- \_\_\_ Student Directions Informative/Explanatory Writing Task B
- \_\_\_ Grade 6 Student Guide to Informative/Explanatory Writing (optional)
- \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
- \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
- \_\_\_ Pencils
- \_\_\_ Highlighters, colored pencils or pens (optional)

### **2. Review the Directions**

**Say:** *During the first session, you read some information about a newly discovered human species, took notes on these sources, and started planning and drafting an informative/explanatory essay. Now, you will have 45 minutes to review, revise, and edit your essay. You may reread the passages and use the notes you wrote on your scratch paper. You will write your essay using the word processor on the computer. You may use spell check and grammar check. However, you may **not** use any other programs on the computer, and you may **not** use the Internet.*

*Let's review how your essay will be evaluated and then you can reread your essay and begin revising and editing. Find STEP 3 and read along as I tell you how your essay will be evaluated. It says: evaluated. It says:*

***Revise and edit your essay.***

*The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:*

- Statement of Purpose/Focus – how well you clearly state and maintain your controlling idea or main idea
- Organization – how well the ideas progress from the introduction to the conclusion using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Evidence – how well you provide evidence from sources about your topic and elaborate with specific information
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

*Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.*

### **3. Reread, Revise, and Edit**

**Say:** *Now, continue working on your essay. Manage your time carefully so that you can reread the essay you started during the last session, finish any drafting, and revise and edit for your final draft.*

**Do:** Write the ending time on the board to let students know when the second session will end.

**Say:** *I'll announce when you have 10 minutes left. You may continue writing your essay now.*

**Do:** Start timing now. Monitor the class to ensure students are working productively, not using any other programs on the computer, and not using the Internet.

If students finish early, encourage them to reread their work or silently read a book.

### **4. Announce 10 Minutes Remaining**

**Say:** *You have 10 minutes left. Please work quickly to finish your final draft. Remember, teachers reading your essay will only evaluate the final draft.*

### **5. End Session 2**

**Say:** *Please stop writing. Save your work on the computer. I will collect your pencils and scratch paper.*

**Do:** Collect student writing by asking students to print their essays, or email them to you, or drop them in your virtual inbox.

## Student Directions

### Grade 6 Informative/Explanatory Writing Task C

**YOUR** You will read a passage about the coast redwoods. Take notes as you read.  
**ASSIGNMENT:** You will later write an informative essay about what you have read.

---

**STEP 1**

**Read the passages and take notes on these sources.**

Read the following passage about the coast redwood. Take notes to use later while writing your essay. You may look back at the passage and your notes as often as you like.

- “Skywalking for Science: Aloft in Redwood Space”

As you read, think about how the author supports her ideas.

---

**STEP 2**

**Plan and write your Informative.**

Now, review your notes and source, then plan and draft your essay on the following topic:

**Explain how the author supports the claim that redwood trees are remarkable.**

---

**STEP 3**

**Revise and edit your essay.**

The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:

- Statement of Purpose/Focus – how well you clearly state and maintain your controlling idea or main idea
- Organization – how well the ideas progress from the introduction to the conclusion using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Evidence – how well you provide evidence from sources about your topic and elaborate with specific information
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.

GO ON



# Skywalking for Science: Aloft in Redwood Space

by Jeanne Miller

## An Aerial World

- 1 The coast redwood is one of three surviving species of redwoods (the others are the giant sequoia in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California and the dawn redwoods in China). It grows only in a narrow band along the Pacific coast between central California and southern Oregon, a 450-mile belt where rain and fog provide enough moisture to sustain the giants. They are the tallest trees on Earth and have been around for 10 million years. Some coast redwoods living today may be as old as 2,000 years. The oldest and largest ones survive in old-growth forests, most of which are protected in parks or reserves. These are the trees that Dr. Stephen Sillett and his colleagues study.
- 2 Redwoods are remarkable for their ability to stay alive, whatever happens. If some accident exposes the living tissue under the bark, a sprout grows from the wound. Thus, if a limb breaks off, another limb arises in its place. If the top of the trunk dies and falls off, another trunk shoots up from that spot. And if that trunk breaks off, another trunk will grow. The crown of an old redwood often has many trunks, each with its own set of branches.
- 3 This complex structure, trunk upon trunk, limb upon limb, creates pockets where dry redwood needles collect. Fungi grow on the dead needles and decompose them into soil. Into this soil drop airborne seeds and spores. Plants sprout, mature, reproduce, and die, enriching the soil and making it ever deeper. In the redwood **canopy**, nestled in nooks and crannies and on flat limbs, Sillett and his tree-climbing team have discovered rhododendrons in bloom as well as miniature trees of many species: hemlocks, Douglas firs, and tan-oaks among them. They've even found an eight-foot Sitka spruce rooted on a limb of a redwood. Dense aerial gardens of ferns host a variety of animal life, including slugs, snails, and salamanders. These fern mats store moisture that supports much of the canopy life.

**canopy:** the uppermost layer in a forest

## Mapping Redwoods

- 4 Sillett and his colleagues want to understand how these trees operate and what their limits are. They've installed sensors in several trees to collect data on light, temperature, humidity, wind, and sap flow. In addition, he and his students measure the diameter and position of all the woody parts of the redwoods. Sillett uses these numbers to construct 3-D diagrams of each tree. He hopes to be able to explain someday how and why the trees are different from one another.
- 5 The researchers want to know how water moves through their trunks and branches. It takes water a few weeks to get from the redwood's roots to its top, traveling up through microscopic channels in the trunk. Water molecules have a tendency to cling to one another, so as a water

molecule rises it pulls the next molecule with it. When water evaporates from the leaves at the top of the tree, more water rises to replace it. But it's a fight against gravity, and scientists think there's a limit to how high the water can be pulled. And that puts a limit on how high a tree can get. Coast redwoods have an advantage over many trees, in that they are bathed in fog on summer mornings. Scientists working with Sillett have discovered that 25 percent to 50 percent of a coast redwood's water comes from summer fog, much of it taken up by the canopy soil.

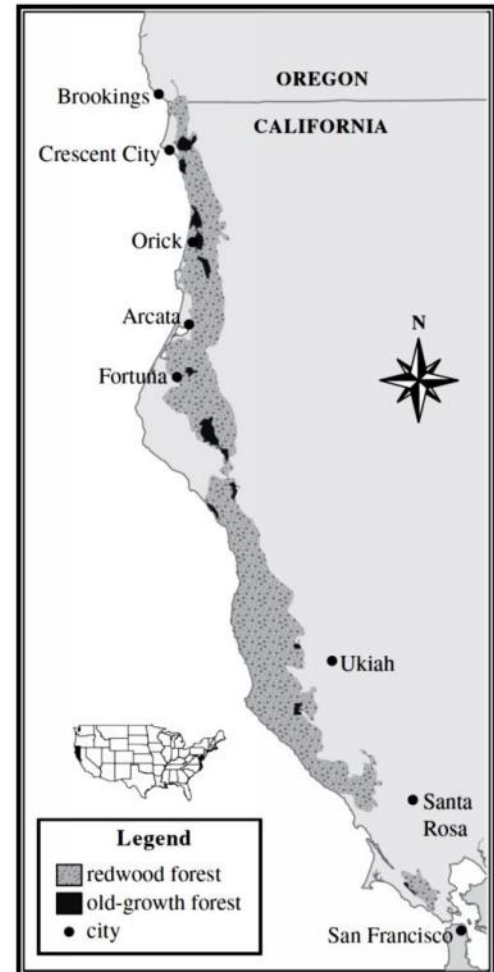
## Taming the Tallest Trees

6 The very tallest redwoods all grow in a few state parks and a national park along the northernmost coast of California. There are four trees over 370 feet in height and Sillett has climbed them all. *Laser range finders*, devices that use laser beams to measure distance to an object, can determine the height of a tree within a few feet. However, the only really accurate measurement comes with climbing to the top and dropping a measuring tape to the ground. The tallest tree in the world was discovered in 2006 in Redwood National Park in Humboldt County, California. Sillett measured it at 379.1 feet high. That's the height of a 37-story building.

7 Canopy researchers face many difficulties, and getting to the top of a tree is just one of them. Hiking through an old-growth redwood forest is the first challenge. These are temperate rainforests, which, like their tropical cousins, have abundant rainfall. The forest floor is thick with lush undergrowth. Fallen redwood trunks, some as much as twelve feet in diameter, often lie in the way. It can take hours of bushwhacking to go just a mile.

8 Sillett has made an art of climbing the ancient redwoods, but he can't completely eliminate the danger. It requires extreme discipline and focus to stay safe that high off the ground. A moment of inattention can result in a fatal fall. Redwoods drop dead branches without notice. Climbers call these "widow makers." Even if you're paying attention, you could become the victim of dead wood.

9 Just as important to Sillett and his team as their own safety is the safety of the fragile ecosystems in the canopy and of the tree itself. Sillett calls this area "redwood space." The climbers hang in harnesses from ropes when they're in the trees to avoid putting their full weight on the branches they're exploring. These rope systems allow them to move all around the crown, even to the tips of the farthest branches. Traveling over these webs of ropes is known as "skywalking."



"Skywalking for Science: Aloft in Redwood Space" by Jeanne Miller. From *Odyssey*, April 2011 issue. Copyright © 2011 by Carus Publishing Company. Reprinted by permission of Cobblestone Publishing.

# **Directions for Administering the Grade 6 Informative/Explanatory Writing Task C**

## **Session 1 (45 minutes)**

### **1. Distribute the Materials**

**Do:** Hand out the materials students will need to complete the formative writing task:

- \_\_\_ Student Directions Informative/Explanatory Writing Task C
- \_\_\_ Grade 6 Student Guide to Informative/Explanatory Writing (optional)
- \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
- \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
- \_\_\_ Pencils
- \_\_\_ Highlighters, colored pencils or pens (optional)

### **2. Read the Directions Aloud to the Students**

**Say:** *Over two sessions, you will write an informative/explanatory essay about how an author support's his ideas. During the first session, you will have 45 minutes to read the directions, read some information about the coast redwoods, read how the teachers will evaluate your essay, and begin planning and drafting your essay. During the second 45 minute session, you will finish drafting your essay and then revise and edit your final draft.*

*You have a pencil and blank paper to use for taking notes and planning your essay. You may write, highlight, and underline on the student directions and passage. You will write your essay using the word processor on the computer. You may use spell check and grammar check. However, you may **not** use any other programs on the computer, and you may **not** use the Internet.*

*Find the YOUR ASSIGNMENT section at the top of page 1 of the student directions. Read along while I read aloud. It says:*

*You will read a passage about the coast redwoods. Take notes as you read.  
You will later write an informative essay about what you have read.*

*Next, find STEP 1. It says:*

***Read the passages and take notes on these sources.***

*Read the following passage about the coast redwood. Take notes to use later while writing your essay. You may look back at the passage and your notes as often as you like.*

- *“Skywalking for Science: Aloft in Redwood Space”*

*As you read, think about how the author supports her ideas.*

*You will read this on your own; I will not read this to you.*

*Now, find STEP 2. It says:*

### ***Plan and write your Informative.***

*Now, review your notes and source, then plan and draft your essay on the following topic:*

***Explain how the author supports the claim that redwood trees are remarkable.***

### **3. Read the Evaluation Information**

**Say:** *Find STEP 3 and read along as I tell you how your essay will be evaluated. It says:*

#### ***Revise and edit your essay.***

*The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:*

- *Statement of Purpose/Focus* – *how well you clearly state and maintain your controlling idea or main idea*
- *Organization* – *how well the ideas progress from the introduction to the conclusion using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay*
- *Elaboration of Evidence* – *how well you provide evidence from sources about your topic and elaborate with specific information*
- *Language and Vocabulary* – *how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose*
- *Conventions* – *how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling*

*Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.*

### **4. Answer Any Questions**

**Say:** *I can read the directions as often as needed, but I cannot translate, edit your work, explain, or give examples on what or how to write. Do you have any questions before we begin?*

**Do:** Answer questions by rereading the directions.

### **5. Begin Planning and Drafting**

**Say:** *Now, go back to STEP 1 of the student directions sheet. You have 45 minutes to read this passage, take notes, and start planning and drafting your essay. You should think about the information you have read, which should help you write your essay.*

**Do:** Write the ending time on the board to let students know when the first session will end.

**Say:** *Now, read your assignment and begin your work. Manage your time carefully so that you have time to plan and draft your essay. I'll announce when you have 10 minutes left. You may begin.*

**Do:** Start timing now. Monitor the class to ensure students are working productively, not using any other programs on the computer, and not using the Internet.

If students finish early, encourage them to reread their work or silently read a book.

## 6. Announce 10 Minutes Remaining

**Say:** *You have 10 minutes left.*

## 7. End Session 1

**Say:** *Please stop writing. Save your work on the computer. Write your name on the top of your directions paper and the scratch paper. You will finish writing your essay during the next session.*

**Do:** If your next session will start on the next day, collect all materials. If your next session will continue on the same day, provide a 15 minute break before beginning the second session.

## **Session 2 (45 minutes)**

### 1. Distribute the Materials (if necessary)

**Do:** Hand out the things students will need:

- \_\_\_ Student Directions Informative/Explanatory Writing Task C
- \_\_\_ Grade 6 Student Guide to Informative/Explanatory Writing (optional)
- \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
- \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
- \_\_\_ Pencils
- \_\_\_ Highlighters, colored pencils or pens (optional)

### 2. Review the Directions

**Say:** *During the first session, you read some information about the coast redwoods, took notes on this source, and started planning and drafting an informative/explanatory essay. Now, you will have 45 minutes to review, revise, and edit your essay. You may reread the passage and use the notes you wrote on your scratch paper. You will write your essay using the word processor on the computer. You may use spell check and grammar check. However, you may **not** use any other programs on the computer, and you may **not** use the Internet.*

*Let's review how your essay will be evaluated and then you can reread your essay and begin revising and editing. Find STEP 3 and read along as I tell you how your essay will be evaluated. It says: evaluated. It says:*

***Revise and edit your essay.***

*The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:*

- Statement of Purpose/Focus – how well you clearly state and maintain your controlling idea or main idea

- Organization – how well the ideas progress from the introduction to the conclusion using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Evidence – how well you provide evidence from sources about your topic and elaborate with specific information
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express ideas using precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

*Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.*

### **3. Reread, Revise, and Edit**

**Say:** *Now, continue working on your essay. Manage your time carefully so that you can reread the essay you started during the last session, finish any drafting, and revise and edit for your final draft.*

**Do:** Write the ending time on the board to let students know when the second session will end.

**Say:** *I'll announce when you have 10 minutes left. You may continue writing your essay now.*

**Do:** Start timing now. Monitor the class to ensure students are working productively, not using any other programs on the computer, and not using the Internet.

If students finish early, encourage them to reread their work or silently read a book.

### **4. Announce 10 Minutes Remaining**

**Say:** *You have 10 minutes left. Please work quickly to finish your final draft. Remember, teachers reading your essay will only evaluate the final draft.*

### **5. End Session 2**

**Say:** *Please stop writing. Save your work on the computer. I will collect your pencils and scratch paper.*

**Do:** Collect student writing by asking students to print their essays, or email them to you, or drop them in your virtual inbox.

## Student Directions

### Grade 6 Narrative Writing Task A

**YOUR ASSIGNMENT:** You will read two passages about a long-standing mystery. Take notes as you read. You will later write a short story based on what you have read.

---

**STEP 1**

**Read the passages and take notes on these sources.**

Read the following passages about the disappearance of the passengers and crew aboard the *Mary Celeste*. Take notes to use later while writing your essay. You may look back at the passages and your notes as often as you like.

- “The Mary Celeste”
- “Letter from Captain Benjamin S. Briggs to his Mother”

As you read, consider information you might use to write a short story describing the final hours aboard the *Mary Celeste*.

---

**STEP 2**

**Plan and write your narrative essay.**

Now, review your notes and sources, then plan and draft your essay on the following topic:

**Write a short story describing the final hours aboard the *Mary Celeste* before the passengers abandoned ship. Be sure you include information from the passages you read.**

---

**STEP 3**

**Revise and edit your narrative.**

The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:

- Narrative Focus – how well you maintain your focus and establish a setting, narrator and/or characters, and point of view
- Organization – how well the events logically flow from beginning to end using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Narrative – how well you elaborate with details, dialogue, and description to advance the story or illustrate the experience
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express experiences or events using sensory, concrete, and figurative language that is appropriate for your purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.

GO ON

# The Mary Celeste

- 1 On the 7 November, 1872, Captain Benjamin Briggs set sail from New York on a routine journey across the Atlantic. A robust 37 year old from New England, Briggs was an experienced Captain and had made many trips to Europe before. He was travelling with his wife, Sarah, and their two year old daughter.

## The Ship

- 2 The *Mary Celeste* was a 12 year old brigantine originally called *Amazon*. It was 103 feet long and weighed 280 tons. Briggs was part owner of the vessel which had been purchased at an auction for \$3,000 and had undergone extensive repairs. When it set sail in November, the craft was carrying 1,700 barrels of alcohol. This was in effect only a half load, but Briggs had every reason to expect a healthy profit on arrival in Genoa, Italy.

## The Voyage

- 3 On the 15 November another brigantine, the *Dei Gratia*, set sail from New York. This was a British owned vessel, and Captain Morehouse was a friend of Benjamin Briggs. The two men had met up briefly before the *Mary Celeste* had departed, and both ships were bound for Europe.
- 4 The voyage of the *Dei Gratia* passed smoothly for the first two weeks. Then, on 4 December, the crew spotted another ship drifting aimlessly off the coast of Portugal. Captain Morehouse signaled the vessel, but there was no response. The *Dei Gratia* drew closer and Morehouse was alarmed to discover that the ship belonged to Captain Briggs. It was the *Mary Celeste*.

## The Mystery

- 5 The craft was boarded and found to be completely deserted. The crew had apparently abandoned ship some nine days earlier. The life boat was gone and the brigantine had drifted some 700 miles from the last point recorded in the ship's log. A final entry, written in draft form on the 25 November, detailed a minor course correction: 'At 8 eastern point bore SSW 6 miles distant'.
- 6 Captain Morehouse could find no logical reason why the ship had been abandoned. Though some water had seeped in at the bottom of the craft, the *Mary Celeste* had suffered no serious structural damage. There was plenty of food and water on board - six months supply, in fact. According to the log, no-one had suffered any ill-health or mental disturbance. Since the cargo was fully intact, apart from one barrel of alcohol which had been slightly damaged, piracy was also ruled out. To leave a perfectly healthy ship mid-voyage and to take your chance in a small life boat in the middle of the Atlantic seemed the height of lunacy.
- 7 Nonetheless, sometime on the 25 November, 1872, Captain Briggs, his wife, their daughter, and the eightstrong crew had indeed abandoned ship. They were never to be seen again.



- 8 A skeleton crew was placed aboard the Mary Celeste and the vessel arrived in Gibraltar alongside the Dei Gratia on 13 December. An enquiry was held into the affair. The British officials in Gibraltar were suspicious of Captain Morehouse, suspecting that he might be in league with Briggs in some kind of fraudulent salvage claim. There was no evidence to justify this suspicion, however, and despite intensive questioning none of the men who had boarded the ship were able to cast any light on the mystery. The enquiry ended without a firm conclusion, and Morehouse received his dues for the recovery of the vessel.

## The Theories

- 9 In the time since its abandonment, many theories have been put forward to explain what happened on board the Mary Celeste.
- The initial hypothesis, that Briggs had somehow planned to abandon the ship in collusion with Morehouse, has been discounted by many people. The fact that neither Briggs nor his family were ever heard from again make allegations of fraud somewhat spurious.
  - Another suggestion is that the vessel was struck by a ferocious storm. While this would certainly explain the three and a half feet of water discovered in the hold, the ship was not badly damaged and it would have been foolhardy to abandon it on the off-chance that it might suffer further damage.
  - Other commentators have drawn attention to the food on board ship. The bread being eaten on the Mary Celeste was made from rye rather than wheat. Rye, when wet, breeds a kind of fungus which causes blindness and insanity when ingested. This theory suggests that the half-crazed crew crammed themselves into the lifeboat and abandoned ship, happily leaving most of their possessions behind them.

"The Mary Celeste" from h2g2.com.

## Letter from Captain Benjamin S. Briggs to his Mother

*This is a letter that Captain Briggs wrote the day that the Mary Celeste left on her final voyage.*

New York, Nov. 3d, 1872

My dear Mother:

1        Its been a long time since I have written you a letter and I should like to give you a real  
interesting one but I hardly know what to say except that I am well and the rest of us ditto, It is such a  
long time since I composed other than business epistles.

2        It seems to me to have been a great while since I left home, but it is only over two weeks but  
in that time my mind has been filled with business cares and I am again launched away into the busy  
whirl of business life from which I have so long been laid aside. For a few days it was tedious,  
perplexing, and very tiresome but now I have got fairly settled down to it and it sets lightly and seems  
to run more smoothly and my appetite keeps good and I hope I shan't lose any flesh. It seems real  
homelike since Sarah and Sophia got here, and we enjoy our little quarters.

3        On Thurs. we had a call from Willis and his wife. Took Sophia and went with them on a ride up  
to Central Park. Sophia behaved splendid and seem to enjoy the ride as much as any of us. It is the  
only time they have been away from the vessel. On account of the horse disease the horse cars have  
not been running on this side of the city, so we have not been able to go and make any calls as we  
were so far away from anyone to go on foot and to hire a private carriage would at least \$10.00 a trip  
which we didn't feel able to pay and we couldn't carry Sophia and walk a mile or two which we should  
have had to do to get a ferry for Ivamac(?) or E-port. It has been very confining for S. but when we  
get back I hope we can make up for it.

4        We seem to have a very good mate and steward and I hope I shall have a pleasant voyage. We  
both have missed Arthur and I believe we should have sent for him if I could of thought of a good  
place to stow him away. Sophia calls for him occasionally and wants to see him in the Album which by  
the way is a favorite book of hers.

5        She knows your picture in both albums and points and says Gamma Bis, She seems real smart,  
has gotten over her bad cold she had when she came and has a first rate appetite for hash and bread  
and butter. I think the voyage will do her lots of good. We enjoy our melodeon and have some good  
sings. I was in hopes that Oli might get in before I left but I'm afraid not now.

6        We finished loading last night and shall leave on Tuesday morning if we don't get off  
tomorrow night, the Lord willing. Our vessel is in beautiful trim and I hope we shal have a fine  
passage but I have never been in her before and cant say how she'll sail. Shall want to write us in  
about 20 days to Genoa, care of Am. Consul and about 20 days after to Messina care of Am. Consul

who will forward it to us if we don't go there.

7 I wrote to James to pay you and A's board and rent. If he forgets call on hom also for any money that may be necessary for clothes. Please get Eben to see his skates are all right and the holes in his new thick boot heels. I hope he'll keep well as I think if he does he'll be some help as well as company for you. Love to Hannah. Sophie calls Aunt Hannah often. I wish I had a picture so she could remember the countenance as well as the name.

8 Hoping to be with you in the spring with much love

I am Yours affectionately

Benj

"Letter from Captain Benjamin S. Briggs to his Mother" in the public domain.

# **Directions for Administering the Grade 6 Narrative Writing Task A**

## **Session 1 (45 minutes)**

### **1. Distribute the Materials**

**Do:** Hand out the materials students will need to complete the formative writing task:

- \_\_\_ Student Directions Narrative Writing Task A
- \_\_\_ Grade 6 Student Guide to Narrative Writing (optional)
- \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
- \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
- \_\_\_ Pencils
- \_\_\_ Highlighters, colored pencils or pens (optional)

### **2. Read the Directions Aloud to the Students**

**Say:** *Over two sessions, you will write a narrative about the disappearance of the passengers and crew on the Mary Celeste. During the first session, you will have 45 minutes to read the directions, read some information about the Mary Celeste, read how the teachers will evaluate your essay, and begin planning and drafting your essay. During the second 45 minute session, you will finish drafting your essay and then revise and edit your final draft.*

*You have a pencil and blank paper to use for taking notes and planning your essay. You may write, highlight, and underline on the student directions and passages. You will write your essay using the word processor on the computer. You may use spell check and grammar check. However, you may **not** use any other programs on the computer, and you may **not** use the Internet.*

*Find the YOUR ASSIGNMENT section at the top of page 1 of the student directions. Read along while I read aloud. It says:*

*You will read two passages about a long-standing mystery. Take notes as you read. You will later write a short story based on what you have read.*

*Next, find STEP 1. It says:*

***Read the passages and take notes on these sources.***

*Read the following passages about the disappearance of the passengers and crew aboard the Mary Celeste. Take notes to use later while writing your essay. You may look back at the passages and your notes as often as you like.*

- *“The Mary Celeste”*
- *“Letter from Captain Benjamin S. Briggs to his Mother”*

*As you read, consider information you might use to write a short story describing the final hours aboard the Mary Celeste.*

*You will read this on your own; I will not read this to you.*

*Now, find STEP 2. It says:*

***Plan and write your narrative essay.***

*Now, review your notes and sources, then plan and draft your essay on the following topic:*

***Write a short story describing the final hours aboard the Mary Celeste before the passengers abandoned ship. Be sure you include information from the passages you read.***

**3. Read the Evaluation Information**

**Say:** *Find STEP 3 and read along as I tell you how your essay will be evaluated. It says:*

***Revise and edit your narrative.***

*The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:*

- *Narrative Focus* – *how well you maintain your focus and establish a setting, narrator and/or characters, and point of view*
- *Organization* – *how well the events logically flow from beginning to end using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay*
- *Elaboration of Narrative* – *how well you elaborate with details, dialogue, and description to advance the story or illustrate the experience*
- *Language and Vocabulary* – *how well you effectively express experiences or events using sensory, concrete, and figurative language that is appropriate for your purpose*
- *Conventions* – *how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling*

*Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.*

**4. Answer Any Questions**

**Say:** *I can read the directions as often as needed, but I cannot translate, edit your work, explain, or give examples on what or how to write. Do you have any questions before we begin?*

**Do:** Answer questions by rereading the directions.

**5. Begin Planning and Drafting**

**Say:** *Now, go back to STEP 1 of the student directions sheet. You have 45 minutes to read these passages, take notes, and start planning and drafting your essay. You should think about the information you have read, which should help you write your essay.*

**Do:** Write the ending time on the board to let students know when the first session will end.

**Say:** *Now, read your assignment and begin your work. Manage your time carefully so that you have time to plan and draft your essay. I'll announce when you have 10 minutes left. You may begin.*

**Do:** Start timing now. Monitor the class to ensure students are working productively, not using any other programs on the computer, and not using the Internet.

If students finish early, encourage them to reread their work or silently read a book.

## **6. Announce 10 Minutes Remaining**

**Say:** *You have 10 minutes left.*

## **7. End Session 1**

**Say:** *Please stop writing. Save your work on the computer. Write your name on the top of your directions paper and the scratch paper. You will finish writing your essay during the next session.*

**Do:** If your next session will start on the next day, collect all materials. If your next session will continue on the same day, provide a 15 minute break before beginning the second session.

## **Session 2 (45 minutes)**

### **1. Distribute the Materials (if necessary)**

**Do:** Hand out the things students will need:

- \_\_\_ Student Directions Narrative Writing Task A
- \_\_\_ Grade 6 Student Guide to Narrative Writing (optional)
- \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
- \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
- \_\_\_ Pencils
- \_\_\_ Highlighters, colored pencils or pens (optional)

### **2. Review the Directions**

**Say:** *During the first session, you read some information about the Mary Celeste, took notes on these sources, and started planning and drafting a narrative. Now, you will have 45 minutes to review, revise, and edit your essay. You may reread the passages and use the notes you wrote on your scratch paper. You will write your essay using the word processor on the computer. You may use spell check and grammar check. However, you may **not** use any other programs on the computer, and you may **not** use the Internet.*

*Let's review how your essay will be evaluated and then you can reread your essay and begin revising and editing. Find STEP 3 and read along as I tell you how your essay will be evaluated. It says: evaluated. It says:*

***Revise and edit your narrative.***

*The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:*

- Narrative Focus – how well you maintain your focus and establish a setting, narrator and/or characters, and point of view
- Organization – how well the events logically flow from beginning to end using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Narrative – how well you elaborate with details, dialogue, and description to advance the story or illustrate the experience
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express experiences or events using sensory, concrete, and figurative language that is appropriate for your purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

*Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.*

### 3. Reread, Revise, and Edit

**Say:** *Now, continue working on your essay. Manage your time carefully so that you can reread the essay you started during the last session, finish any drafting, and revise and edit for your final draft.*

**Do:** Write the ending time on the board to let students know when the second session will end.

**Say:** *I'll announce when you have 10 minutes left. You may continue writing your essay now.*

**Do:** Start timing now. Monitor the class to ensure students are working productively, not using any other programs on the computer, and not using the Internet.

If students finish early, encourage them to reread their work or silently read a book.

### 4. Announce 10 Minutes Remaining

**Say:** *You have 10 minutes left. Please work quickly to finish your final draft. Remember, teachers reading your essay will only evaluate the final draft.*

### 5. End Session 2

**Say:** *Please stop writing. Save your work on the computer. I will collect your pencils and scratch paper.*

**Do:** Collect student writing by asking students to print their essays, or email them to you, or drop them in your virtual inbox.

## Student Directions

### Grade 6 Narrative Writing Task B

**YOUR** You will read a passage about a long-standing mystery. Take notes as you read.  
**ASSIGNMENT:** You will later write a short story based on what you have read.

---

**STEP 1**

**Read the passages and take notes on these sources.**

Read the following passage about the disappearance of the passengers and crew aboard the *Mary Celeste*. Take notes to use later while writing your essay. You may look back at the passages and your notes as often as you like

- “The Mary Celeste”

As you read, consider information you might use to write a short story describing the discovery of the abandoned *Mary Celeste*.

---

**STEP 2**

**Plan and write your narrative essay.**

Now, review your notes and source, then plan and draft your essay on the following topic:

**Imagine you were a member of the crew on the *Dia Gratia*, the boat that discovered the *Mary Celeste*. Write a short story describing the discovery. Be sure to include information from the passages you read.**

---

**STEP 3**

**Revise and edit your narrative.**

The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:

- Narrative Focus – how well you maintain your focus and establish a setting, narrator and/or characters, and point of view
- Organization – how well the events logically flow from beginning to end using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Narrative – how well you elaborate with details, dialogue, and description to advance the story or illustrate the experience
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express experiences or events using sensory, concrete, and figurative language that is appropriate for your purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.

GO ON



## The Mary Celeste

- 1 On the 7 November, 1872, Captain Benjamin Briggs set sail from New York on a routine journey across the Atlantic. A robust 37 year old from New England, Briggs was an experienced Captain and had made many trips to Europe before. He was travelling with his wife, Sarah, and their two year old daughter.

### The Ship

- 2 The *Mary Celeste* was a 12 year old brigantine originally called *Amazon*. It was 103 feet long and weighed 280 tons. Briggs was part owner of the vessel which had been purchased at an auction for \$3,000 and had undergone extensive repairs. When it set sail in November, the craft was carrying 1,700 barrels of alcohol. This was in effect only a half load, but Briggs had every reason to expect a healthy profit on arrival in Genoa, Italy.

### The Voyage

- 3 On the 15 November another brigantine, the *Dei Gratia*, set sail from New York. This was a British owned vessel, and Captain Morehouse was a friend of Benjamin Briggs. The two men had met up briefly before the *Mary Celeste* had departed, and both ships were bound for Europe.
- 4 The voyage of the *Dei Gratia* passed smoothly for the first two weeks. Then, on 4 December, the crew spotted another ship drifting aimlessly off the coast of Portugal. Captain Morehouse signaled the vessel, but there was no response. The *Dei Gratia* drew closer and Morehouse was alarmed to discover that the ship belonged to Captain Briggs. It was the *Mary Celeste*.

### The Mystery

- 5 The craft was boarded and found to be completely deserted. The crew had apparently abandoned ship some nine days earlier. The life boat was gone and the brigantine had drifted some 700 miles from the last point recorded in the ship's log. A final entry, written in draft form on the 25 November, detailed a minor course correction: 'At 8 eastern point bore SSW 6 miles distant'.
- 6 Captain Morehouse could find no logical reason why the ship had been abandoned. Though some water had seeped in at the bottom of the craft, the *Mary Celeste* had suffered no serious structural damage. There was plenty of food and water on board - six months supply, in fact. According to the log, no-one had suffered any ill-health or mental disturbance. Since the cargo was fully intact, apart from one barrel of alcohol which had been slightly damaged, piracy was also ruled out. To leave a perfectly healthy ship mid-voyage and to take your chance in a small life boat in the middle of the Atlantic seemed the height of lunacy.
- 7 Nonetheless, sometime on the 25 November, 1872, Captain Briggs, his wife, their daughter, and the eightstrong crew had indeed abandoned ship. They were never to be seen again.

- 8 A skeleton crew was placed aboard the Mary Celeste and the vessel arrived in Gibraltar alongside the Dei Gratia on 13 December. An enquiry was held into the affair. The British officials in Gibraltar were suspicious of Captain Morehouse, suspecting that he might be in league with Briggs in some kind of fraudulent salvage claim. There was no evidence to justify this suspicion, however, and despite intensive questioning none of the men who had boarded the ship were able to cast any light on the mystery. The enquiry ended without a firm conclusion, and Morehouse received his dues for the recovery of the vessel.

## The Theories

- 9 In the time since its abandonment, many theories have been put forward to explain what happened on board the Mary Celeste.
- The initial hypothesis, that Briggs had somehow planned to abandon the ship in collusion with Morehouse, has been discounted by many people. The fact that neither Briggs nor his family were ever heard from again make allegations of fraud somewhat spurious.
  - Another suggestion is that the vessel was struck by a ferocious storm. While this would certainly explain the three and a half feet of water discovered in the hold, the ship was not badly damaged and it would have been foolhardy to abandon it on the off-chance that it might suffer further damage.
  - Other commentators have drawn attention to the food on board ship. The bread being eaten on the Mary Celeste was made from rye rather than wheat. Rye, when wet, breeds a kind of fungus which causes blindness and insanity when ingested. This theory suggests that the half-crazed crew crammed themselves into the lifeboat and abandoned ship, happily leaving most of their possessions behind them.

"The Mary Celeste" from h2g2.com.

## Letter from Captain Benjamin S. Briggs to his Mother

*This is a letter that Captain Briggs wrote the day that the Mary Celeste left on her final voyage.*

New York, Nov. 3d, 1872

My dear Mother:

1        Its been a long time since I have written you a letter and I should like to give you a real interesting one but I hardly know what to say except that I am well and the rest of us ditto, It is such a long time since I composed other than business epistles.

2        It seems to me to have been a great while since I left home, but it is only over two weeks but in that time my mind has been filled with business cares and I am again launched away into the busy whirl of business life from which I have so long been laid aside. For a few days it was tedious, perplexing, and very tiresome but now I have got fairly settled down to it and it sets lightly and seems to run more smoothly and my appetite keeps good and I hope I shan't lose any flesh. It seems real homelike since Sarah and Sophia got here, and we enjoy our little quarters.

3        On Thurs. we had a call from Willis and his wife. Took Sophia and went with them on a ride up to Central Park. Sophia behaved splendid and seem to enjoy the ride as much as any of us. It is the only time they have been away from the vessel. On account of the horse disease the horse cars have not been running on this side of the city, so we have not been able to go and make any calls as we were so far away from anyone to go on foot and to hire a private carriage would at least \$10.00 a trip which we didn't feel able to pay and we couldn't carry Sophia and walk a mile or two which we should have had to do to get a ferry for Ivamacs(?) or E-port. It has been very confining for S. but when we get back I hope we can make up for it.

4        We seem to have a very good mate and steward and I hope I shall have a pleasant voyage. We both have missed Arthur and I believe we should have sent for him if I could of thought of a good place to stow him away. Sophia calls for him occasionally and wants to see him in the Album which by the way is a favorite book of hers.

5        She knows your picture in both albums and points and says Gamma Bis, She seems real smart, has gotten over her bad cold she had when she came and has a first rate appetite for hash and bread and butter. I think the voyage will do her lots of good. We enjoy our melodeon and have some good sings. I was in hopes that Oli might get in before I left but I'm afraid not now.

6        We finished loading last night and shall leave on Tuesday morning if we don't get off tomorrow night, the Lord willing. Our vessel is in beautiful trim and I hope we shal have a fine passage but I have never been in her before and cant say how she'll sail. Shall want to write us in about 20 days to Genoa, care of Am. Consul and about 20 days after to Messina care of Am. Consul

who will forward it to us if we don't go there.

7           I wrote to James to pay you and A's board and rent. If he forgets call on hom also for any money that may be necessary for clothes. Please get Eben to see his skates are all right and the holes in his new thick boot heels. I hope he'll keep well as I think if he does he'll be some help as well as company for you. Love to Hannah. Sophie calls Aunt Hannah often. I wish I had a picture so she could remember the countenance as well as the name.

8           Hoping to be with you in the spring with much love

I am Yours affectionately

Benj

"Letter from Captain Benjamin S. Briggs to his Mother" in the public domain.

# **Directions for Administering the Grade 6 Narrative Writing Task B**

## **Session 1 (45 minutes)**

### **1. Distribute the Materials**

**Do:** Hand out the materials students will need to complete the formative writing task:

- \_\_\_ Student Directions Narrative Writing Task B
- \_\_\_ Grade 6 Student Guide to Narrative Writing (optional)
- \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
- \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
- \_\_\_ Pencils
- \_\_\_ Highlighters, colored pencils or pens (optional)

### **2. Read the Directions Aloud to the Students**

**Say:** *Over two sessions, you will write a narrative about the disappearance of the passengers and crew on the Mary Celeste. During the first session, you will have 45 minutes to read the directions, read some information about the Mary Celeste, read how the teachers will evaluate your essay, and begin planning and drafting your essay. During the second 45 minute session, you will finish drafting your essay and then revise and edit your final draft.*

*You have a pencil and blank paper to use for taking notes and planning your essay. You may write, highlight, and underline on the student directions and passages. You will write your essay using the word processor on the computer. You may use spell check and grammar check. However, you may **not** use any other programs on the computer, and you may **not** use the Internet.*

*Find the YOUR ASSIGNMENT section at the top of page 1 of the student directions. Read along while I read aloud. It says:*

*You will read a passage about a long-standing mystery. Take notes as you read. You will later write a short story describing based on what you have read.*

*Next, find STEP 1. It says:*

***Read the passages and take notes on these sources.***

*Read the following passage about the disappearance of the passengers and crew aboard the Mary Celeste. Take notes to use later while writing your essay. You may look back at the passages and your notes as often as you like*

- *“The Mary Celeste”*

*As you read, consider information you might use to write a short story describing the discovery of the abandoned Mary Celeste.*

*You will read this on your own; I will not read this to you.*

Now, find STEP 2. It says:

**Plan and write your narrative essay.**

Now, review your notes and source, then plan and draft your essay on the following topic:

**Imagine you were a member of the crew on the *Dia Gratia*, the boat that discovered the *Mary Celeste*. Write a short story describing the discovery. Be sure to include information from the passages you read.**

**3. Read the Evaluation Information**

**Say:** Find STEP 3 and read along as I tell you how your essay will be evaluated. It says:

**Revise and edit your narrative.**

The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:

- Narrative Focus – how well you maintain your focus and establish a setting, narrator and/or characters, and point of view
- Organization – how well the events logically flow from beginning to end using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Narrative – how well you elaborate with details, dialogue, and description to advance the story or illustrate the experience
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express experiences or events using sensory, concrete, and figurative language that is appropriate for your purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.

**4. Answer Any Questions**

**Say:** I can read the directions as often as needed, but I cannot translate, edit your work, explain, or give examples on what or how to write. Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Do:** Answer questions by rereading the directions.

**5. Begin Planning and Drafting**

**Say:** Now, go back to STEP 1 of the student directions sheet. You have 45 minutes to read these passages, take notes, and start planning and drafting your essay. You should think about the information you have read, which should help you write your essay.

**Do:** Write the ending time on the board to let students know when the first session will end.

**Say:** *Now, read your assignment and begin your work. Manage your time carefully so that you have time to plan and draft your essay. I'll announce when you have 10 minutes left. You may begin.*

**Do:** Start timing now. Monitor the class to ensure students are working productively, not using any other programs on the computer, and not using the Internet.

If students finish early, encourage them to reread their work or silently read a book.

## **6. Announce 10 Minutes Remaining**

**Say:** *You have 10 minutes left.*

## **7. End Session 1**

**Say:** *Please stop writing. Save your work on the computer. Write your name on the top of your directions paper and the scratch paper. You will finish writing your essay during the next session.*

**Do:** If your next session will start on the next day, collect all materials. If your next session will continue on the same day, provide a 15 minute break before beginning the second session.

## **Session 2 (45 minutes)**

### **1. Distribute the Materials (if necessary)**

**Do:** Hand out the things students will need:

- \_\_\_ Student Directions Narrative Writing Task B
- \_\_\_ Grade 6 Student Guide to Narrative Writing (optional)
- \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
- \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
- \_\_\_ Pencils
- \_\_\_ Highlighters, colored pencils or pens (optional)

### **2. Review the Directions**

**Say:** *During the first session, you read some information about the Mary Celeste, took notes on these sources, and started planning and drafting a narrative. Now, you will have 45 minutes to review, revise, and edit your essay. You may reread the passages and use the notes you wrote on your scratch paper. You will write your essay using the word processor on the computer. You may use spell check and grammar check. However, you may **not** use any other programs on the computer, and you may **not** use the Internet.*

*Let's review how your essay will be evaluated and then you can reread your essay and begin revising and editing. Find STEP 3 and read along as I tell you how your essay will be evaluated. It says: evaluated. It says:*

***Revise and edit your narrative.***

*The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:*

- Narrative Focus – how well you maintain your focus and establish a setting, narrator and/or characters, and point of view
- Organization – how well the events logically flow from beginning to end using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Narrative – how well you elaborate with details, dialogue, and description to advance the story or illustrate the experience
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express experiences or events using sensory, concrete, and figurative language that is appropriate for your purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

*Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.*

### 3. Reread, Revise, and Edit

**Say:** *Now, continue working on your essay. Manage your time carefully so that you can reread the essay you started during the last session, finish any drafting, and revise and edit for your final draft.*

**Do:** Write the ending time on the board to let students know when the second session will end.

**Say:** *I'll announce when you have 10 minutes left. You may continue writing your essay now.*

**Do:** Start timing now. Monitor the class to ensure students are working productively, not using any other programs on the computer, and not using the Internet.

If students finish early, encourage them to reread their work or silently read a book.

### 4. Announce 10 Minutes Remaining

**Say:** *You have 10 minutes left. Please work quickly to finish your final draft. Remember, teachers reading your essay will only evaluate the final draft.*

### 5. End Session 2

**Say:** *Please stop writing. Save your work on the computer. I will collect your pencils and scratch paper.*

**Do:** Collect student writing by asking students to print their essays, or email them to you, or drop them in your virtual inbox.



## Student Directions

### Grade 6 Narrative Writing Task C

**YOUR****ASSIGNMENT:**

You will read a folk tale about a magistrate (a judge) in China who tries to catch a thief. Take notes as you read. You will later write your own narrative that is based on this folk tale.

---

**STEP 1****Read the passages and take notes on these sources.**

Read the following folk tale. Take notes to use later while writing your narrative. You can look back at the passage and your notes as often as you like.

- “The Thief Who Kept His Hands Clean”

As you read, think about the descriptive details, the setting, and the characters you may wish to include in your narrative utilizing the same theme.

---

**STEP 2****Plan and write your narrative.**

Now, review your notes and source, then plan and draft your essay on the following topic:

**Write a modern-day folk tale with the same theme and narrative techniques as “The Thief Who Kept His Hands Clean.”**

---

**STEP 3****Revise and edit your narrative.**

The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:

- Narrative Focus – how well you maintain your focus and establish a setting, narrator and/or characters, and point of view
- Organization – how well the events logically flow from beginning to end using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Narrative – how well you elaborate with details, dialogue, and description to advance the story or illustrate the experience
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express experiences or events using sensory, concrete, and figurative language that is appropriate for your purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.

GO ON

# The Thief Who Kept His Hands Clean

by Carol Kendall and Yao-wen Li

1 Long years ago in south China there lived a magistrate called Chen whose wisdom equalled his love of justice. He was admired and revered by all the honest people under his rule.

One night there was a great robbery in the district. The constable, eager to win the admiration of Magistrate Chen, quickly swept up every possible suspect in the neighbourhood and crammed the lot of them into the courtroom. He then set himself to questioning each in turn, asking the whereabouts and the wherefores and the whens and whats, until he had amassed so many twists of fact that he was quite entangled in them. At last he had to admit defeat and, as on many another occasion, he turned the hopeless jumble over to the magistrate.

At the preliminary hearing, Magistrate Chen heard the charges, but instead of questioning the suspects, he announced, "Upon the eastern hill in the Temple of the Great Buddha there is an old bronze bell which will tell us who the robber is."

Thereupon he sent the constable's men to transport the bell from the temple to the court, and gave orders for a blue cotton canopy to be spread on poles above it. The night before the trial he himself set firepots in the four quarters round the bell and lit them. When the fires finally died away, he slowly lowered the blue canopy until the bell was completely hidden in its folds.

5 Because Magistrate Chen's judgments were famous, people thronged to the courtroom the next day to attend the trial. There was scarcely room for them and all the suspects too.

Without preamble the magistrate addressed the suspects. "This old bronze bell from the Temple of the Great Buddha has powers of divination beyond those of man or magistrate," he said. "Ten thousand innocent people may rub it and no sound will be heard, but let one thief touch his hand to its side, and a clear peal will sound out his guilt for all the world to hear." He paused and looked intently at the suspects. "In a few moments I shall ask each of you to put his hand under the blue cover and rub the bell."

Solemnly, the magistrate bowed his head and made a prayer in front of the bell. Then, one by one, he led the suspects forward and watched while they put their hands under the cover to rub the bell. As each suspect turned away without the bell's having sounded, the crowd gave a little sigh, but when the last man had passed the test, there was a restless stirring. The bell had failed!

But the magistrate clapped his hand on the shoulder of the last suspect.

"Here is the thief we are looking for," he declared.

10 A stir of outrage spread over the crowd.

The accused spluttered. "Your Honour! When I rubbed the bell, there was no more sound than when all the others did the same thing! How can you so unjustly accuse me!"



“He’s right!” somebody in the crowd shouted.

Indignant cries rang out on all sides.

“Unfair!” “Injustice!”

- 15        The magistrate, unperturbed, gave his beard a tidy stroke. “Remove the cover,” he said to the constable.

The constable did his bidding.

There was a gasp of amazement round the courtroom, and then the crowd fell silent as they began to understand what had passed. The gleaming bell they had seen brought to the court was now black with soot—save round the rim where many innocent hands had rubbed through the grime to the gleaming bronze.

“Truly this old bell has powers of divination,” Magistrate Chen said. “Truly, it uttered no sound when innocent people rubbed it. And it uttered no sound when the thief put his hand under the cover, for only the thief was afraid to rub the bell for fear of its revealing peal. Therefore, only the thief brought his hand out from under the cover free of soot.”

All eyes came to focus on the shamefully clean hands of the thief, and a murmur of admiration swelled from the crowd.

- 20        Truly it was a magic bell. And Magistrate Chen was something of a magician.

“The Thief Who Kept His Hands Clean” by Carol Kendall and Yao-wen Li, from *Sweet and Sour: Tales from China*. Copyright © 1978 by Carol Kendall and Yao-wen Li. Reprinted by permission of Clarion Books, an imprint of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.



# **Directions for Administering the Grade 6 Narrative Writing Task C**

## **Session 1 (45 minutes)**

### **1. Distribute the Materials**

**Do:** Hand out the materials students will need to complete the formative writing task:

- \_\_\_ Student Directions Narrative Writing Task C
- \_\_\_ Grade 6 Student Guide to Narrative Writing (optional)
- \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
- \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
- \_\_\_ Pencils
- \_\_\_ Highlighters, colored pencils or pens (optional)

### **2. Read the Directions Aloud to the Students**

**Say:** *Over two sessions, you will write a modern-day folk tale based on “The Thief Who Kept His Hands Clean.” During the first session, you will have 45 minutes to read the directions, read some information the folk tale, read how the teachers will evaluate your essay, and begin planning and drafting your essay. During the second 45 minute session, you will finish drafting your essay and then revise and edit your final draft.*

*You have a pencil and blank paper to use for taking notes and planning your essay. You may write, highlight, and underline on the student directions and passage. You will write your essay using the word processor on the computer. You may use spell check and grammar check. However, you may **not** use any other programs on the computer, and you may **not** use the Internet.*

*Find the YOUR ASSIGNMENT section at the top of page 1 of the student directions. Read along while I read aloud. It says:*

*You will read a folk tale about a magistrate (a judge) in China who tries to catch a thief. Take notes as you read. You will later write your own narrative that is based on this folk tale.*

*Next, find STEP 1. It says:*

***Read the passages and take notes on these sources.***

*Read the following folk tale. Take notes to use later while writing your narrative. You can look back at the passage and your notes as often as you like.*

- *“The Thief Who Kept His Hands Clean”*

*As you read, think about the descriptive details, the setting, and the characters you may wish to include in your narrative utilizing the same theme.*

*You will read this on your own; I will not read this to you.*

Now, find STEP 2. It says:

**Plan and write your narrative.**

Now, review your notes and source, then plan and draft your essay on the following topic:

**Write a modern-day folk tale with the same theme and narrative techniques as “The Thief Who Kept His Hands Clean.”**

**3. Read the Evaluation Information**

**Say:** Find STEP 3 and read along as I tell you how your essay will be evaluated. It says:

**Revise and edit your narrative.**

The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:

- Narrative Focus – how well you maintain your focus and establish a setting, narrator and/or characters, and point of view
- Organization – how well the events logically flow from beginning to end using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
- Elaboration of Narrative – how well you elaborate with details, dialogue, and description to advance the story or illustrate the experience
- Language and Vocabulary – how well you effectively express experiences or events using sensory, concrete, and figurative language that is appropriate for your purpose
- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.

**4. Answer Any Questions**

**Say:** I can read the directions as often as needed, but I cannot translate, edit your work, explain, or give examples on what or how to write. Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Do:** Answer questions by rereading the directions.

**5. Begin Planning and Drafting**

**Say:** Now, go back to STEP 1 of the student directions sheet. You have 45 minutes to read this passage, take notes, and start planning and drafting your essay. You should think about the information you have read, which should help you write your essay.

**Do:** Write the ending time on the board to let students know when the first session will end.

**Say:** *Now, read your assignment and begin your work. Manage your time carefully so that you have time to plan and draft your essay. I'll announce when you have 10 minutes left. You may begin.*

**Do:** Start timing now. Monitor the class to ensure students are working productively, not using any other programs on the computer, and not using the Internet.

If students finish early, encourage them to reread their work or silently read a book.

## **6. Announce 10 Minutes Remaining**

**Say:** *You have 10 minutes left.*

## **7. End Session 1**

**Say:** *Please stop writing. Save your work on the computer. Write your name on the top of your directions paper and the scratch paper. You will finish writing your essay during the next session.*

**Do:** If your next session will start on the next day, collect all materials. If your next session will continue on the same day, provide a 15 minute break before beginning the second session.

## **Session 2 (45 minutes)**

### **1. Distribute the Materials (if necessary)**

**Do:** Hand out the things students will need:

- \_\_\_ Student Directions Narrative Writing Task C
- \_\_\_ Grade 6 Student Guide to Narrative Writing (optional)
- \_\_\_ Standard English dictionaries (optional)
- \_\_\_ Blank scratch paper (lined or unlined)
- \_\_\_ Pencils
- \_\_\_ Highlighters, colored pencils or pens (optional)

### **2. Review the Directions**

**Say:** *During the first session, you read a folk tale, took notes on this source, and started planning and drafting a narrative. Now, you will have 45 minutes to review, revise, and edit your essay. You may reread the passage and use the notes you wrote on your scratch paper. You will write your essay using the word processor on the computer. You may use spell check and grammar check. However, you may **not** use any other programs on the computer, and you may **not** use the Internet.*

*Let's review how your essay will be evaluated and then you can reread your essay and begin revising and editing. Find STEP 3 and read along as I tell you how your essay will be evaluated. It says: evaluated. It says:*

***Revise and edit your narrative.***

*The teachers evaluating your essay will be assigning levels for:*

- Narrative Focus – how well you maintain your focus and establish a setting, narrator and/or characters, and point of view
- Organization – how well the events logically flow from beginning to end using effective transitions and how well you stay on topic throughout the essay
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- Conventions – how well you follow the rules of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

*Teachers reading your essay will evaluate only your final draft.*

### 3. Reread, Revise, and Edit

**Say:** *Now, continue working on your essay. Manage your time carefully so that you can reread the essay you started during the last session, finish any drafting, and revise and edit for your final draft.*

**Do:** Write the ending time on the board to let students know when the second session will end.

**Say:** *I'll announce when you have 10 minutes left. You may continue writing your essay now.*

**Do:** Start timing now. Monitor the class to ensure students are working productively, not using any other programs on the computer, and not using the Internet.

If students finish early, encourage them to reread their work or silently read a book.

### 4. Announce 10 Minutes Remaining

**Say:** *You have 10 minutes left. Please work quickly to finish your final draft. Remember, teachers reading your essay will only evaluate the final draft.*

### 5. End Session 2

**Say:** *Please stop writing. Save your work on the computer. I will collect your pencils and scratch paper.*

**Do:** Collect student writing by asking students to print their essays, or email them to you, or drop them in your virtual inbox.

## Teaching Tips

### **Citing/Using Evidence**

Students need ample practice in using evidence to support their opinions/arguments with reasons and details. It is never acceptable to simply copy verbatim from a text as their reasons or details. While students are not expected to use formal citations (i.e. APA or MLA) on the Formative Tasks, it is important that they acknowledge the source of their evidence because citing sources gives credibility to their opinion and makes for proficient writing. Appropriate phrases might include: "According to the table..." or "Scientists found..." Students may also use parenthetical citations, such as, (Pros column). Students may reference their experiences as an elaborative technique, such as, "On a trip to the beach I discovered..."

### **Highlighters to the Rescue!**

Teach students to use highlighters, colored pencils, or colored pens to emphasize important information as they read. At first it may be tempting for them to highlight everything, since it all seems important. But be patient and model the process a few times.

1. Look briefly over the entire book, article, or assignment to get a feel for its structure and how it is organized.
2. Pay particular attention to introductory and concluding paragraphs. These often contain summaries of important points.
3. Look for certain words and phrases that can tip you off that something important is coming up, such as "In sum," "The point is," "Most importantly," and so on.
4. Consider reading the conclusion first. It's like doing a maze backwards: If you know where you're trying to end up, you can find and understand the path better.
5. Look back over the book, article, or assignment the next day/class/session, reading only the highlighted material.



### **Elaborating Information in Tables**

Tables and charts can provide a lot of information. Unfortunately, when students are writing opinions, arguments, or informative/explanatory essays using information from tables and charts, they do not elaborate. Simply repeating something from a chart is not very interesting. Teach students elaborative techniques such as adding sensory details, adding anecdotes, providing examples, and giving reasons. Students can become better writers by employing elaborative techniques that take their writing from mundane to interesting and even exciting!

### **To Title or Not to Title**

Students often ask, "Does my essay need a title?" Confront this issue while you are teaching and before you administer the formative tasks. Although the rubric does not specifically reference a title, teach students how to write effective and engaging titles.



## **On-Demand Writing**

Remind students that authors write for different purposes. During instruction, there are definitely times when it is important for writers to take a piece through the entire writing process. However, the formative assessments are designed as “on-demand” writing, to see how well students can write to an assigned task in a finite amount of time. This is an important skill as on-demand writing will often be required of them in the college and career world. In on-demand writing, students need to be able to go from their pre-writing/brainstorming to drafting on computer, rather than a paper/pencil created draft. Be sure to incorporate opportunities for on-demand writing in regular instruction so it is not a surprise to students when they take the Formative Tasks.



## **Word Processing**

Be sure students have ample practice and feel confident with the word processing program they will be using for the formative assessments. It is important students are familiar with how to save their documents and use the spell check and grammar check features. Ample practice drafting, re-reading, revising, and editing on-screen will also be beneficial for students so these become comfortable and expected parts of the writing process.



Word processing programs come with many bells and whistles that can enhance the publishing process. However, it is important during the Formative Tasks that students are focused on their writing and not wasting valuable time playing with features such as font and colors. While there are no specific guidelines in these areas for the assessment, it is important students understand the focus of the task is their actual writing. Teachers may want to establish their own parameters for font size/type. Only spell check and grammar check features are permitted.

## **Collecting the Finished Tasks**

Consider setting up a shared drive where students can save their word-processed final drafts. Create folders for each of your classes on this drive. When students save their essays, have them name their file with their last name and first initial (i.e., Jamie Martinez = martinezj). The names will appear alphabetically in the file and make it easy for both you and the student to locate.

## **Meet with Your Colleagues**

Plan to meet with colleagues after scoring all of the papers for your grade. Start a discussion about writing trends. What are some things that are working well? What are some areas that need to be addressed? Create a plan that maintains what is working well and addresses areas that need improving.

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