



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2019 Volume I: Reading for Writing: Modeling the Modern Essay

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## **The Death of the Five Paragraph Essay: Reading and Writing the Modern Essay in Middle School**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 19.01.01, published September 2019  
by Brandon Barr

In this unit, students will be introduced to the genre of profile and personal experience essays. Students will read four pieces: “Learning to Read,” by Frederick Douglass, “From An American Childhood,” by Annie Dillard, “On Dumpster Diving,” by Lars Eigher, and “Under the Influence,” by Scott Russel Sanders. For each piece of literary nonfiction, key passages are explored, and supplemental web resources are provided to help frame the analysis. By the end of the unit, students select whether to write either a profile or a personal experience essay using class readings as models.

This unit is designed for sixth grade students to build knowledge of writing craft by exploring literary nonfiction. The conversations that revolve around each passage scaffold the type of writing that is expected of students as they write independently. The unit could be used in middle school or high school art, humanities, or English classes. It assumes little-to-no background knowledge in literary nonfiction.

(Developed for Language Arts, grade 6; recommended for English, grades 6-12)

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