



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

How High-School Students Can Echo Professional Writers in Their Own Personal Essays

Guide for Curriculum Unit 19.01.10, published September 2019
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Reading should not be about skimming to the end of a text. Yet, in today's digital world, our reading experiences become shorter and more superficial. Almost always, the conversation about or the reaction to a text focuses on *what* was said. Rarely do we converse about *how* it was said. Because of this focus on information and minimizing of structure, reading mistakenly equals zooming over the screen or page for keywords. With the prominence of high-stakes multiple-choice tests, students, too, train themselves--or educators erroneously train them--to search for information that can be pulled out to answer a question.

This toolkit of sorts for high-school writing teachers helps engage students with complex texts beyond the literal level. Guided mostly by William Zinsser's *On Writing Well*, teachers will find approaches to helping students include "echoes" in their writing to produce eloquent, sophisticated essays that go far beyond the rudimentary five-paragraph essay.

Mentor texts examined include an essay on race by Ta-Nehisi Coates, as well as other essays by other writers about alcoholism and consumerism.

The ideologies and practices compiled here will help students identify the structure of a text at the paragraph and sentence level, practice it, and mirror it in their own original writing. Furthermore, my hope is that this toolkit encourages teachers to select socially conscious, thought-provoking essays to challenge high-school students to engage in conversations about contemporary issues that teachers sometimes refrain from because of professional insecurity or administrative skepticism.

All of this is guided by a belief in the idea that students must be socially conscious, highly skilled writers addressing meaningful issues in order to amplify their voices and challenge social systems that limit young people's opportunities.

(Developed for AP English, grade 11; recommended for any High-School level English class teaching personal essays, grades 9-12)

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