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Using Sense of Place and Community to Ground Argument
Washington Township High School
509 Hurffville-Cross Keys Rd., Sewell, NJ 08080
Grade 11 AP Language and Composition
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Unit Overview

This unit is designed for an 11th grade AP Language and Composition course. Washington Township High School follows a “Township PRIDE” schedule that consists of 4 days per cycle in which each class meets 3 times (see wtps.org). While following the CED from the College Board for AP Language and Composition, this unit will begin in the second week of Unit 1 Rhetorical Analysis and culminate at the end of Unit 2 Argument ([see college board course and exam page for AP Language and Composition](#)). This will occur in the months of September and October in our district. The rationale for this timing is to help students develop a sense of place and community that will help ground them while constructing arguments. During this unit, students will explore their identity as it is related to our school and community. Since we refer to ourselves as “Township,” this unit will help students understand what it means to be a part of our physical space and our school community. This sense of identity will then be the foundation on which students build arguments for this course. Students will spend this unit understanding and articulating their ethos, thus helping them to move beyond mere persuasion and into academic argumentation. We will repeat (and expand) the argument unit multiple times over the course of the year, and students will return to their work in these weeks to ground themselves for establishing their voices in their arguments. For reference, the lessons are written for a classroom using team-based learning. The activities can be adjusted for use in a traditional classroom, though it is recommended that students work with the same groups for team activities. The activities are meant to foster collaboration and Team identity in the beginning of the school year.

Lesson 1- This series of Quick Writes should be used in the cycles leading up to the next lessons (with standard rotation of 3 lessons per cycle).

Teacher’s Note. Students will be given 7 minutes to read the prompt and write a response in their writing journal (students should begin as soon as they take their seats). They will then share in their team for 5 minutes, followed by a class discussion of the prompt for an additional 5 minutes. Students will be given an additional 2 minutes to add to their response before the class moves on to another activity for the remainder of the class session.

Quick Write 1- “We are Township.” This phrase greets you as you enter the building in the morning. It is a part of our morning announcements. It is on various signs, t-shirts and posters throughout the district. In fact, you have probably been hearing this phrase since you were in

elementary school. At the high school, it becomes something more. You are beginning your junior year here at Township. What does this phrase mean to you? Your response can include positive or negative associations. Be Honest! (and don't stop writing until you hear my bell 😊). ***If you are new to Township, what do you think of the phrase? Is it weird that we call ourselves "Township" even though there are many others in the area? Or does it help you understand something about the new school you are joining? How is this similar or different from your previous school?

Quick Write 2- Describe the steps you took to make it to class today. Minimally, start with the moment you arrived at school (you may also write about your trip to the building). What path did you take? What do you typically notice as you travel from class to class? Who do you talk to? Was there anything different today? **Reminder- Don't stop writing until you hear my bell 😊!

Quick Write 3- What is your favorite spot at Washington Township High School? Or, where is the place on campus where you feel most comfortable? Is it a classroom, a special spot for lunch, the library, the sports fields, the theater, a music room, or ROTC? Describe this place using as much detail as you can remember. **Reminder- Don't stop writing until you hear my bell 😊!

Homework: Visit this place before our next class. Take a few moments to pay attention to the details. Add to your quick write from today. Write for at least 5 minutes!

Lesson 2

Teacher's note. This lesson will be the first that will last for a full class session. We will draw on ideas that were discussed in the previous Quick Writes as we proceed to the end of this unit.

Quick Write- Who are you? If you were to introduce yourself to a complete stranger, what would be the first thing you would tell him or her about you? Imagine this person asks follow-up questions. What would those questions be (think about what you want to know about new people you meet)? Then, how would you answer those questions? **Reminder- Don't stop writing until you hear my bell 😊! ***Special instructions*** After this entry only, leave at least one full, blank page so that you can add to this entry over the next several class sessions. Make a note at the top of the page so you can start tomorrow's Quick Write in the correct spot!

Teacher's Note- As with previous Quick Writes, students will discuss with their teams. We will not have a full class discussion on this Quick Write. This question is what the students will be ultimately trying to answer by the end of the unit.

Mini-lesson. Remind students of SOAPSTone (or other mnemonic for the rhetorical situation). Also, introduce our guiding question for rhetorical analysis- What is the speaker trying to **do to** the audience?

View as a class- “We Need to Talk About An Injustice”- Bryan Stevenson.

https://www.ted.com/talks/bryan_stevenson_we_need_to_talk_about_an_injustice?utm_campaign=tedsread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare

After viewing, in Teams: Students will fill out a SOAPStone form for the Ted Talk. Then, students will discuss the guiding question, What is the speaker trying to do to the audience? The teacher will ask various teams for their input on different aspects of the discussion (subject, occasion, audience, purpose, speaker, and tone). Then, students will complete an exit ticket answering the question, What does Brian Stevenson want us to think about identity?

Lesson 3

Quick Write- Add to yesterday’s Quick Write. You should reflect on both your team discussion and the Bryan Stevenson Ted Talk in today’s entry. (If you were absent yesterday, complete that prompt today, then view the Ted Talk for Homework). **Reminder- Don’t stop writing until you hear my bell 😊! (5 minutes)

Class Activity.

In Teams: (10 minutes for reading, 5 minutes for writing notes on chart paper).

Teacher’s note. Provide a copy of the text for the entire talk, but highlight the section assigned to each team. I suggest the following breakdown for 4 teams. The story about the janitor at the end could be added to adjust for 5 teams.

Team 1 00:12, 00:49, 12:36, 13:25 (Ted’s Identity)

Team 2 1:18-4:56 (The Mama Story)

Team 3 8:50-11:13 (History of Slavery in America)

Team 4 13:55- 15:07 (Rosa Parks)

*See attached file***

1. Complete a close read of select passages from Bryan Stevenson’s Ted Talk. Start by summarizing what Stevenson is saying in the excerpt you are assigned. Then, discuss as a team:

1. What is Stevenson trying to DO to the audience?
2. How is he trying to get the audience to think, feel or act differently after listening to his speech?
3. Recall the way that Stevenson delivered the talk from our viewing yesterday and discuss both the indented and actual impact on the audience.

2. Add notes reflecting your discussion to the chart paper at your table. The notes should cover your summary and all 3 prompts.

3. Gallery Walk- View the notes of other teams. Add a comment to each team’s notes based on your understanding of that part of the talk.

Full class discussion- How does this orientation to identity impact Stevenson’s argument at the end of his talk? (Read 17:06-20:28 aloud to begin discussion)

Teacher's note: This is the final lesson in a cycle for our high school. The intention is to give the students some time to process what they read and discussed before moving to the next lesson. I would take a break and work on something from the textbook for a class session before moving to the next lesson.

Lesson 4

Quick Write: Review your Quick Writes about our building (*provide dates assigned*). What is your identity at Township? (7 minutes) **Reminder- Don't stop writing until you hear my bell 😊!

Class activity- [Read Zora Neal Hurston's "How it Feels to be Colored Me."](#)

*Teacher's note. Begin by modeling the reading of the first few paragraphs of the essay. Then, have the students finish reading the essay with their teams. Provide comprehension questions to guide their reading. **see attached file*

Full Class discussion- How was Hurston addressing her identity in this essay?

Homework- In your writing journal, write about a space where you feel at home (this time not here in Township). Spend at least 10 minutes writing. Describe the space physically. Describe how you feel when you are there. Describe how you feel when you cannot be there.

Lesson 5

Quick Write: What do you think of when you hear the word "solitude"? Does this word have positive, negative or neutral connotations for you? (5 minutes) **Reminder- Don't stop writing until you hear my bell 😊!

Teacher's Note. This Quick Write serves 2 purposes for my class. Students should have studied the Transcendentalists the previous year. They could have read excerpts from Emerson or Thoreau. I want to know if they remember this reading AND I want the students to think about how they feel about being alone. This will prepare them for reading the chapter on Solitude from Walden (pages 303-311 in The Portable Thoreau).

Teams- Read the selection from "Solitude." 30 minutes

As you read, consider the following question:

What is Thoreau's view of solitude?

Also, are there any lines from this reading that you find particularly interesting? Record these lines on the chart paper provided. You will not be asked to explain what they mean but to simply explain why they drew your attention.

For the final 10 minutes of class, we will share lines that students chose as they read.

Lesson 6

Quick Write- Go back to your entry on identity and add to it based on yesterday's reading and discussion. **Reminder- Don't stop writing until you hear my bell 😊!

Class Activity. Individual writing. Choose one paragraph from "Solitude." Read it closely, then re-read your journal entry on a place where you feel at home. Rewrite this entry while trying to reflect Thoreau's style. Compare both entries, then, on your exit ticket, explain which entry you prefer and why.

Teacher's Note- Review the exit tickets, then discuss the overall findings with the class the next day. Hopefully this will lead to a discussion about voice .

Moving Forward

The goal of these lessons is to help students to embrace their identity. I envision these types of discussions spanning the school year. Students can use their connections to place (Washington Township High School, home, etc.) to help to feel grounded in their identity. One of the biggest struggles that students face when writing arguments is feeling like they do not have the authority to talk about complex topics. By using these first few readings to focus on understanding that each of us has a unique and valid identity, I hope to help students feel confident in their ethos. With that being said, I want to wrap up the unit with the first graded argumentative essay. Since it is early in the year, the focus of the rubric will be stating a clear purpose (thesis statement) and providing evidence and commentary to support that purpose. The topic will be assigned after the above lessons, but students will work on this in stages over the course of a couple of weeks (Once a cycle while we are working on other things). Since the unit that follows this argument unit is a synthesis unit, students will also be asked to refer to texts from class and any other texts that help to establish their identity in their essay.

Final Essay- As a final assignment, the students will write an essay "arguing" their identity. While there will be elements of personal narrative in this type of writing, it will need to be supported in evidence from observation and reading. On the next page is the assignment and rubric as it would be given to students at the conclusion of lesson 6. I would add due dates for each part of the assignment that align with the school and cycle calendar.

Grading for other assignments. Journal entries, homework, and exit tickets will be treated as supportive grades. Students will receive feedback but no grades for these assignments.

How it Feels to Be Me- Exploring your identity.

We have been talking about argument for the last few weeks. At this point you have practiced writing a thesis statement for various types of argument. For this essay, you will be writing an argument that defines you as an individual. This means your thesis statement might look a little different than what we practiced. However, it still needs to be arguable! Your goal is to write an essay that argues that you are something. This is the tricky part. You want to define who you are, not necessarily who others see you as. To do this, you will need to draw on your observations, your feelings and your reactions to texts. (Don't be scared- I'm not going to ask you to research who you are ;). The final product will be modeled on Bryan Stevenson's Ted Talk, ["We Need to Talk about an Injustice."](#) Remember that in this talk, Stevenson uses his identity to support his overall critique of the American criminal justice system. You do not need to argue on this topic (or anything this serious), but you should focus on something you believe as your thesis. See the directions below, and it will hopefully start to make a little more sense.

Step one- Read through your journal responses. Pull ideas from these that you think you could say more about.

Step two- Read through your notes on the texts we have read so far this year. Any text we read (even the summer assignments) can be used. Choose 2 direct quotes that speak to you.

Step three- Think about texts that have been important to you. These can be books, movies, shows, etc. Why are they important? List quotes from these in your writing journal.

Step four- Draft a thesis. We will stop here and have a conference. Be prepared to share notes on steps 1-3 and a working thesis statement.

After the conference, draft your essay. There is no length requirement, but you need to write a full essay. There should be an intro (set up the purpose for your essay), multiple body paragraphs (claims to support your thesis- anecdotes from your life, quotes or references to the readings, connections to texts that you find meaningful), and a conclusion (refine your definition of your identity and your fundamental belief that informs your thesis).

First draft will be shared with your team. I will stop into each team's discussion and check for completion of the first draft.

The final draft will be due 1 week after the first draft. I will be available during lunch and after school to review your draft before you submit.

Rubric:

1. First Draft completion and participation in Team discussion. (5 points)
2. Thesis statement (I will approve this at our conference. If you change it, you should come and see me before you submit the final draft) (15 points).
3. Use of evidence
Includes observations and reflections on your school and/or home environment.
Includes at least 2 direct quotes from class texts.
Includes at least 2 direct quotes from other texts.
(5 points each, 15 points total)
4. Commentary
Commentary connects your evidence to your thesis (10 points)
5. Conventions
Draft shows evidence of proofreading and editing (5 points)

Total _____/50 points

Teacher's Note. This rubric is lighter on the commentary than it would be later in the year. At this point, the students will have had very little instruction in effective commentary.

References

Hurston, Z. N. (2015). *How it feels to be colored me* (pp. 152-155). Carlisle, Mass.: Applewood Books.

Stevenson, B. (2012.). *We need to talk about an injustice* [Video]. TED Talks.

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Thoreau, H. D. (2012). *The Portable Thoreau*. Penguin.