Writers Workshop Unit of Study
7th Grade – Informational Essay
A Moment in History from a Unique Perspective

ELA
Common Core Standards

7th Grade
Informational Essay:
A Moment in History from a Unique Perspective
Unit # in sequence
Writers Workshop Unit of Study
7th Grade – Informational Essay
A Moment in History from a Unique Perspective

Table of Contents

Background Section

Philosophy and Notes About This Unit
Unit Description, Pre-Unit Performance Assessment, and Summative Assessment Descriptions
Standards Addressed

Sample Unit Section

Teaching Points
Informational Essay Rubric
Informational Essay: Cause and Effect Key Terms
Sample Unit Sessions

Resource Materials Section

What is Informational/Explanatory Writing?: Foundational Thinking
Resources
Mentor Texts
Writers Workshop Unit of Study
7th Grade – Informational Essay
A Moment in History from a Unique Perspective

Philosophy and Notes About This Unit

This unit should follow a non-fiction unit in which the texts act as mentor texts for the writing unit. Historically focused informational texts that are written in a lively manner would be ideal mentor texts, especially if they address events from a single person or group’s perspective.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unit Description (overview):
In this writing unit, students will engage in informational/explanatory writing by examining an historical event from a unique perspective and conveying ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content. First, they will brainstorm historical events of significant interest to them about which they may have some prior knowledge. After selecting a topic and learning about the concept of writing from a unique perspective, students will develop an inquiry question to drive their research and determine which perspective they wish to write from. After pre-writing to record prior knowledge, students will determine the information gaps they need to research, which may include determining a unique perspective. After researching, they will develop a controlling idea, which will help them select and group relevant details, quotations, examples, and other information into categories. Students will write a first draft in which they organize information by sub-topic and importance, analyze information to explain the relationship between the unique perspective and the controlling idea, and transition between sentences and paragraphs. They will conclude with a paragraph that summarizes their findings and explains to the reader why this is important information. The first draft will be taken through peer critique and multiple revisions to strengthen the clarity of ideas, organization of the essay, and completeness of analysis. At two points during the writing process, students will reflect on their choices to help them become more autonomous as writers.

Pre-Unit Performance Task
To assess students’ skills as writers of informational texts that examine an historical event from a unique perspective, students will write such an essay. Students should write on a topic that they have prior knowledge of and that interests them significantly. Teachers will assess the results of the pre-unit performance task using the Informational Essay Unique Perspective Rubric, focusing on students’ understanding of the chosen perspective and their ability to organize and analyze the information they provide. This performance task will help determine skill strengths and deficits of the class as a whole and of individual students and will help the teacher determine how much depth to go into regarding perspective, controlling idea, analysis, and essay organization.

Mid-Unit Formative Assessment Task
Summative Assessment Task

Is there a historic event you are interested in and would like to know more about? Now is your chance to show what you know and deepen your understanding of a moment in history. For this informational essay, you will write about an historical event from a particular perspective—looking through a single person or group’s lens. For example, rather than writing about the Battle of Gettysburg during the Civil War, you would write about the battle from the perspective of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. Or you could write about the Montgomery Bus Boycotts from the perspective of the African American citizens who were protesting the segregation of the buses in Alabama. This specificity of perspective will help you select details, focus your analysis, and better organize your essay.

After deciding on a topic, you will determine the unique perspective you wish to write from. Or if you’re not sure, you’ll move forward and devise an inquiry question to focus your writing and research. First, you’ll record all your prior knowledge to answer this question. Then, you’ll determine what else you need to know to answer your question and set to work researching. In the course of researching, the unique perspective you wish to write from may shift. At this point, you may need to perform more research to learn more about the unique perspective. Or you may be ready to determine your controlling idea—the informational lens through which you’ll deliver this unique perspective. A strong controlling idea will help you select and organize the most relevant details, quotations, examples, and other information about your topic. You will then analyze your information to explain the relationship between the unique perspective and the controlling idea. In your concluding paragraph, be sure to summarize your findings and tell the reader why this is important information to have. After writing a first draft, you will engage in peer critique and revise to strengthen the clarity of your ideas, organization of your essay, and completeness of your analysis.

Standards

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

Grade Level Standards Addressed by this Unit

Grade 7: Reading/Informational Texts – RI.7.2, RI.7.3, RI.7.5, RI.7.6, RI.7.10


Grade 7: Speaking and Listening – SL.7.1, SL.7.2, SL.7.6

Grade 7: Language – L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3, L.7.6

Number | CCR Anchor Standards for Reading

| Number | CCR Anchor Standards for Writing Narrative

This document is the property of the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CCR Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CCR Anchor Standards for Language Conventions of Standard English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teaching Points

PRE-UNIT PERFORMANCE TASK

1 & 2. To figure out which skills you need to focus on and further develop for a particular kind of writing task, it’s helpful to attempt that writing task, review the results, and assess where you need the most improvement.

GENERATING AND SELECTING A TOPIC

3 & 4. Historical Events and Unique Perspectives
   a. We read and write about historical events because past events help us better understand present events and future choices.
   b. Examining a unique perspective on an historical event reveals how interpretations of history depend on the lens through which they are conveyed. The information a reader receives depends on the point of view from which it is provided.

5. Topic Brainstorming – Finding a Passion
   Great writing is generated when writers commit to topics they care about. Passion-inspired writing results in interesting pieces that readers care about. To figure out what they most passionately want to write about, writers brainstorm in their Writer’s Notebook using a variety of techniques. Brainstorming, or the process of generating ideas, can open up topic possibilities that don’t come to mind when first presented with a writing task.

6. Directed Exploration and Establishing Prior Knowledge
   Writers of informational texts carefully select a topic by making sure that
   a. they are truly passionate about the subject,
   b. they have some prior knowledge about the topic,
   c. the topic fulfills the technique or text type of the assignment (in this case—unique perspective on an historical event), and
   d. they can find plenty of information on the subject.

7. Mini-Conferences and Selecting a Perspective
   a. For writing conferences to be effective, the writer must come with questions and use the teacher as a resource.
   b. The perspective a writer selects determines the details that will be included in the essay. In order to perform more focused research, a writer of this kind of informational text must select a perspective.

GATHERING INFORMATION – RESEARCHING A MOMENT IN HISTORY

8. Devising an Inquiry Question
   a. Questions are the foundation of all learning. In order to learn, we must be curious.

   Inquiry questions help writers focus their investigation of a topic for an informational text. An inquiry question is an overarching question that steers the research and writing of an essay. These questions should:
   • Not be easily answered.
• Be analytical in nature.
• Be open-ended.
• Require research and thinking to craft an adequate response.

b. Information or knowledge questions are fact-based questions at the lowest level of question asking. The answers to these questions help answer the overarching inquiry question.

9. Researching and Refining Your Inquiry Questions

Writers perform research to answer their overarching inquiry question. They continue to research throughout the drafting process as needed. They also refine their inquiry questions as necessary, depending on the information and ideas they uncover.

DRAFTING THE INFORMATIONAL ESSAY

10. Identifying the Controlling Idea

a. The controlling idea is overarching idea behind an informational essay that determines what information the reader will receive.

b. In an informational essay about a moment in history, the controlling idea

• is influenced by the unique perspective of the individual or party being discussed.
• concerns the issues and difficulties of the party being written about, including what they’re fighting for.

11. Sorting and Selecting Information

a. Writers of informational texts about a moment in history sort through their prior knowledge and research information, selecting information that pertains to the unique perspective they are writing about.

b. Next, they organize this information facts, details, quotations, and examples into categories and sub-categories.

c. Finally, writers select key facts, details, quotations and examples to support their essay’s controlling idea, and the controlling idea of each paragraph.

12. Analyzing Information

a. Analysis in an informational text helps the reader understand how to interpret the facts and details they are given and make connections between different pieces of information.

b. In this kind of informational text, writers analyze

 œ how the facts and details support the controlling idea.
 œ how the chosen unique perspective affects our understanding of the historical moment.

13. Using Visuals to Support Facts, Details, and Analysis

a. The use of pictures, graphs, charts, and headings and sub-headings helps the reader visually understand the content and organization of a writer’s text.

b. Well-placed and captioned pictures, graphs, and charts can highlight particular facts, details, and
14. Finding a Structure and Transitioning Between Paragraphs

a. Information must be carefully organized to allow readers to deepen their knowledge, understanding, and comprehension of a topic.

b. Writers of informational essays about a moment in history structure their writing either chronologically or by issue/problem.

15. Introductory paragraphs

The introductory paragraph is crucial to the success of a piece. It must grab the reader’s attention and make clear what the informational text is about. Some writers craft the introductory paragraph after writing the body paragraphs when they’re clearer about the focus on their essay.

16. Concluding Paragraphs

Concluding paragraphs about moments in history should discuss:
- why the event was important to a society or culture.
- the impact the moment in history has had on future events.

17. Drafting and Conferences

a. Drafting involves revision. While drafting, writers give themselves the freedom to
   - Research as needed to fully explain and support the controlling idea.
   - Re-think their analysis.
   - Re-consider and/or expand their controlling idea.
   - Try a different organizational strategy if their chosen one is not working.

b. Writing conferences help writers see their drafts more objectively so they can make adjustments in focus, content, and organization. For writing conferences to be effective, the writer must come with questions and use the teacher as a resource.

18. Peer Critique

Writers ask for constructive criticism from other writers to figure out how to best revise their pieces. This feedback can come from peers who carefully and respectfully critique another student’s writing, including how the author’s passion for his subject translates to the reader. The writing task rubric is a useful tool in guiding peer and self-critique. All this feedback is used to revise the piece to improve focus, content, and organization.

19. Final Revision

a. Writers revise throughout the drafting process. When they have completed a draft of their essay, they can use a reverse outline to determine the effectiveness of their piece. By re-reading the essay and recording the order of the topics and sub-topics, writers can evaluate whether:
   - all paragraphs stay on topic.
• information or analysis is missing that supports the controlling idea.
• paragraphs need to be moved around.

b. Writers then develop a revision plan and make changes based on their reverse outline and the feedback received in peer critique.

20. Editing and Reflection

a. Writers carefully edit their pieces to make sure there are no grammatical errors, misspellings, or sentences that don’t make sense so that the reader has a smooth and enjoyable reading experience.

b. Writers reflect on their writing process in order to
   • decide what steps to take next.
   • clarify why they made certain decisions during the writing process.
   • identify strategies that work best for them and can be used in future writing tasks.

21. Publication and Celebration

To complete the writing process, writers must share their pieces with an audience—either in print or on the web—and then celebrate the accomplishment of completing a significant writing task.
### Informational Essay Rubric – A Moment in History from a Unique Perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
<th>On-Target</th>
<th>Novice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Content** | The writer:  
• Artfully presents the hook, unique perspective, thumbnail sketch of the event, and controlling idea in the introductory paragraph.  
• Has crafted a controlling idea that concerns multiple issues, problems, and the plight of an individual or group.  
• Thoughtfully presents an abundance of supporting details highly relevant to the controlling idea in the form of facts, quotations, examples, and statistics.  
• Always carefully analyzes supporting details to explain their importance in the historical moment and to the unique perspective and controlling idea.  
• Consistently makes clear and explains the relationship between the historical moment and the group/individual of the chosen unique perspective.  
• Uses the concluding paragraph to examine the historical moment’s effect on the individual, group, society/culture, and future events. Draws larger conclusions about the significance of this event in history. | The writer:  
• Presents the unique perspective, thumbnail sketch of the event, and controlling idea in the introductory paragraph.  
• Has crafted a controlling idea that concerns an issue, problem, and/or the plight of an individual or group.  
• Presents supporting details highly relevant to the supporting idea in the form of facts, quotations, examples, and statistics.  
• Analyzes most supporting details to explain their importance in the historical moment and to the unique perspective and controlling idea.  
• Often makes clear and explains the relationship between the historical moment and the group/individual of the chosen unique perspective.  
• Uses the concluding paragraph to examine the importance of this historical moment and its effect on the individual, group, society/culture, and future events. | The writer:  
• Presents the unique perspective, thumbnail sketch of the event, or the controlling idea in the introductory paragraph, but not all these crucial elements.  
• Has crafted a controlling idea that does not concern relevant issues, problems, and/or the plight of an individual or group.  
• Presents some supporting details relevant to the controlling idea in the form of facts, quotations, examples, and statistics.  
• Occasionally or never analyzes supporting details to explain their importance in the historical moment and to the unique perspective and controlling idea. The essay is fact-heavy.  
• Rarely makes clear and explains the relationship between the historical moment and the group/individual of the chosen unique perspective.  
• Uses the concluding paragraph to summarize what has already been explored in the essay. |
| **Organization** | • The chosen structure is the most effective means of conveying/supporting the controlling idea about this historical moment.  
• Headings and sub-headings, if used, always have effective titles and assist the reader in understanding how information is organized.  
• The use of signal words and phrases create a logical flow between sentences and paragraphs.  
• Each paragraph has a clear controlling idea that is presented in the topic sentence. | • The chosen structure is an effective means of conveying/supporting the controlling idea about this historical moment.  
• Headings and sub-headings, if used, usually have effective titles and often assist the reader in understanding how information is organized.  
• The use of signal words and phrases usually create a logical flow between sentences and paragraphs.  
• Most paragraphs have a clear controlling idea that is presented in the topic sentence. | • The chosen structure is not the most effective means of conveying/supporting the controlling idea about this historical moment; or there is no clear structure to the essay.  
• Headings and sub-headings, if used, create confusion for the reader about how information is organized.  
• Signal words and phrases are rarely or never used to create a logical flow between sentences and paragraphs.  
• Few paragraphs have a clear controlling idea that is presented in the topic sentence. |
<p>| <strong>Style &amp; Mechanics</strong> | • Writing voice is engaging and consistently appropriate for the intended audience. | • Writing voice is engaging and usually appropriate for the intended audience. | • Writing voice is not engaging or is not appropriate for the intended audience. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Checklist</th>
<th>The writer:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Brainstormed to discover multiple topics and selected one suited to the writing task.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Researched to explore and refine his/her topic choice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Drafted to organize and analyze information.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Revised his/her draft to achieve greater coherency and clarity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Edited for clarity and an error-free essay.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| | • The word choice is specific to the chosen topic. |
| | • Sentence structures are varied and complex. |
| | • The essay contains no errors in spelling or punctuation. |
| | • The word choice is somewhat specific to the chosen topic. |
| | • Sentence structures are often varied and sometimes complex. |
| | • The essay contains minimal spelling and punctuation errors. |
| | • The word choice is not specific to the chosen topic. |
| | • Sentence structures are not varied or complex. |
| | • The essay contains multiple spelling or punctuation errors. |
Informational Essay – A Moment in History from a Unique Perspective

Key Terms

Informational/Explanatory Writing - Informational/explanatory writing conveys information accurately and is organized around a controlling idea with a coherent focus, answering a question that addresses WHAT, HOW or WHY?

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

Historical Event - an event whose outcome affects future events for a culture, a significant number of people and/or the direction of a culture, government, or community.

Unique Perspective - a particular attitude towards or way of regarding something; a point of view.

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

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

Inquiry Question – An overarching question that steers the research and writing of an essay. These questions should:

- Not be easily answered
- Analytical in nature
- Open-ended
- Require research and thinking to craft an adequate response

Information/Knowledge Question – According to Bloom’s Taxonomy, these fact-based questions are the lowest level of question asking. The answers to these questions contribute to addressing the overarching inquiry question.

Controlling Idea – The overarching idea behind an informational essay. The term controlling idea can also be used in reference to a paragraph, where the controlling idea should sit in the topic sentence.

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

Analysis – The explanation of how supporting details support the controlling idea and the relationship between the unique perspective and the controlling idea.

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

Introductory Paragraph – The first paragraph of an informational text that introduces the unique perspective and a thumbnail sketch of the moment in history, then makes clear the essay’s controlling idea.

Concluding Paragraph – A paragraph or two that sums up the major ideas presented in the essay. For an essay that focuses on an historical event, writers need to assert why this event was so important and how it affected future events in the society, culture, or community.
### Session 3 & 4

### Concept
Generating and Selecting a Topic: Historical Events and Unique Perspectives

**NOTE:** If this writing unit was preceded by a non-fiction reading unit in which you focused on identifying unique perspectives in informational texts, you can skip this lesson.

### Teaching Point

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Point</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. We read and write about historical events because past events help us better understand present events and future choices.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Examining an historical event from a unique perspective reveals how interpretations of history depend on the lens through which they are conveyed. The information a reader receives depends on the point of view from which it is provided.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Suggested Materials

- Websites and video clips about Hurricane Katrina
  - Citizens of New Orleans
    - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbL_rXpdu8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbL_rXpdu8)
  - President Bush: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QrR0U6xl6g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QrR0U6xl6g)
  - Spike Lee, filmmaker, When the Levees Broke [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dkDF58XzpU&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dkDF58XzpU&feature=related)

- **Unique Perspectives on a Moment in History** handout
• Read the thumbnail sketch about Hurricane Katrina from Wikipedia and watch the interviews clips provided and think through the questions on the Unique Perspectives on a Moment in History handout.
• If you’d prefer not to study Hurricane Katrina, identify a past event you feel your students will be interested in. This may be an event that students have studied in their social studies class.
• Locate documentary clips, YouTube videos, and documents that represent different perspectives on the same event. Consider the different information and details such perspectives reveal about the event.

History should be studied because it is essential to individuals and to society, and because it harbors beauty… In the first place, history offers a storehouse of information about how people and societies behave… The second reason history is inescapable as a subject of serious study follows closely on the first. The past causes the present, and so the future.

- Peter Stearns, The American Historical Association

| Teaching Point | 1. We read and write about historical events because past events help us better understand present events and future choices.

The unit begins here to provide students with some context for their writing task. Writers need to grasp the importance of their work in order to convey this importance to their readers. |
1. Historical Events and Unique Perspectives – The Concept
   • Full Class Discussion
     o Share the teaching point.
     o Brainstorm: together develop a list of historical events students are familiar with. Ask them to name any major historical occurrences they can think of. They should record these in their Writer’s Notebooks for possible later use.
     o Ask students to think about the events they named and to write down in their Writer’s Notebook what we can learn about/from the event as individuals and as a society.
     o Have some students share their responses with the class.
     o Ask your students: Why do we study the past?
     o Record all answers on the board.
     o Ask: How do we decide which events are important?
     o Record all answers on the board.
     o Together: Define the term historical event using the ideas on the board. Something like: an event whose outcome affects future events for a culture, a significant number of people and/or the direction of a culture, government, or community.
     o Select two to three of the events from the list, the ones students seem most familiar with, and have them identify the different players involved in making or witnessing the event and its aftermath. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assassination of MLK</th>
<th>9/11</th>
<th>Man on the Moon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James Earl Ray - shooter</td>
<td>Workers in the Twin Towers</td>
<td>The astronauts – Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralph Abernathy – King’s friend who was the first to reach him after he was shot</td>
<td>Citizens in NYC</td>
<td>The NASA scientists on the ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President Lyndon Johnson</td>
<td>Firefighters and police involved in rescue</td>
<td>American citizens watching on their tvs at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American citizens involved in the Civil Rights Movement</td>
<td>al-Qaeda – the terrorist organization</td>
<td>President Nixon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American citizens invested in keeping the US racially segregated</td>
<td>President Bush</td>
<td>Other world leaders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   o Define the term perspective: a particular attitude towards or way of regarding something; a point of view.
   o Explain that all the players in these events have a different perspective or point of view on what happened because of their difference in experience, access to information about the event, and even beliefs and political affiliation.

2. Examining an historical event from a unique perspective reveals how interpretations of history depend on the lens through which they are conveyed. The information a reader receives depends on the point of view from which it is provided.

   This activity is designed help students see the difference in information and opinions they get from each person or constituency who discusses Hurricane Katrina. This exercise is one you can refer back to as students work to select their own topics, determine the different perspectives on the event, and select one perspective to write about.
2. **Unique Perspectives on a Moment in History – Hurricane Katrina**

   - **Full Class – Thumbnail Sketch of an Event**
     - Share information with students about Hurricane Katrina or the historical event of your choice from Wikipedia or some other objective source.
     - Share the photographs of the devastation.
     - Make the point that this information is **objective**: not influenced by personal feelings or opinions in considering and representing facts.

   - **Full Class – Clips of Different Perspectives**
     - Ask your students to identify as many different perspectives on Hurricane Katrina as possible based on the information they have. Who were the players in this historical event? Put these responses on the board.
     - Share the clips below (or other clips of your choice) and have students work on the **Unique Perspectives on a Moment in History** handout during and between each clip.
     - After each clip, discuss the students’ findings.
     - Citizens of New Orleans
       - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IblL_rXpdu8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IblL_rXpdu8)
     - President Bush:
       - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QrR0U6xl6g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QrR0U6xl6g)
     - Reporter and Politician: Anderson Cooper interviewing Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu
       - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVPlcY4YA-O&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVPlcY4YA-O&feature=related)
     - Spike Lee, filmmaker, When the Levees Broke
       - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dkDF5B8zpU&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dkDF5B8zpU&feature=related)

   - **Solo or Small Group**
     - Have students work together on the analysis and conclusion sections of the **Unique Perspectives on a Moment in History**.

3. **How Perspectives Determine Information for a Reader/Viewer**

   - **Full Class – Discussion**
     - Ask students to share their ideas from the analysis section. Be sure to have them be specific and detailed in their responses and support their ideas with specifics from the film clips.
     - Reinforce teaching point B.
     - On the board or butcher paper, in two columns, have students record a.) what they learned from reading and hearing about Katrina and b.) what we can learn as a nation.
     - Advanced question: Why is it helpful and important to get multiple perspectives on a single historical event?
     - Reinforce teaching point A.
     - Close by reminding students that they will be writing an informational essay in which they select an important event and present it from a unique perspective.
Unique Perspectives on a Moment in History
Hurricane Katrina

Hurricane Katrina – information from Wikipedia
Hurricane Katrina was the deadliest and most destructive Atlantic hurricane of the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season. It is the costliest natural disaster, as well as one of the five deadliest hurricanes, in the history of the United States.[3] Among recorded Atlantic hurricanes, it was the sixth strongest overall. At least 1,836 people died in the actual hurricane and in the subsequent floods, making it the deadliest U.S. hurricane since the 1928 Okeechobee hurricane; total property damage was estimated at $81 billion (2005 USD),[3] nearly triple the damage wrought by Hurricane Andrew in 1992.[4]

Hurricane Katrina formed over the Bahamas on August 23, 2005 and crossed southern Florida as a moderate Category 1 hurricane, causing some deaths and flooding there before strengthening rapidly in the Gulf of Mexico. The storm weakened before making its second landfall as a Category 3 storm on the morning of Monday, August 29 in southeast Louisiana. It caused severe destruction along the Gulf coast from central Florida to Texas, much of it due to the storm surge. The most significant number of deaths occurred in New Orleans, Louisiana, which flooded as the levee system catastrophically failed, in many cases hours after the storm had moved inland.[5] Eventually 80% of the city and large tracts of neighboring parishes became flooded, and the floodwaters lingered for weeks.[5] However, the worst property damage occurred in coastal areas, such as all Mississippi beachfront towns, which were flooded over 90% in hours, as boats and casino barges rammed buildings, pushing cars and houses inland, with waters reaching 6–12 miles (10–19 km) from the beach.

The hurricane surge protection failures in New Orleans are considered the worst civil engineering disaster in U.S history[6] and prompted a lawsuit against the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), the designers and builders of the levee system as mandated by the Flood Control Act of 1965. Responsibility for the failures and flooding was laid squarely on the Army Corps in January 2008 by Judge Stanwood Duval, US District Court,[7] but the federal agency could not be held financially liable due to sovereign immunity in the Flood Control Act of 1928. There was also an investigation of the responses from federal, state and local governments, resulting in the resignation of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) director Michael D. Brown, and of New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) Superintendent Eddie Compass.

Unique Perspectives
For each perspective below, record the important details you hear and see in the video clip, then summarize the perspective on the hurricane.

Perspective: New Orleans Residents
Important details and quotations

How did the citizens of New Orleans feel about the experience of Katrina and the work done to help them during the disaster?
How did the President believe the government would deal with the disaster?

How did Anderson Cooper feel about the government’s response to the disaster? Why is he upset with the Senator?

Why does the Senator respond to the reporter’s anger in the way she does? What is her motivation?
**Perspective: Filmmaker Spike Lee, *When the Levees Broke***

Important details and quotations

What messages is Spike Lee trying to send in his documentary film about Katrina?

What group’s perspective is Lee trying to convey in this film?

**Analysis**

Which perspectives are most different? How?

Why do you think these perspectives are so different? What is the cause of these differences in perspective?

**Conclusions**

Why was Hurricane Katrina an important historical event?

- Who was affected?

- How do we still see the effects from the 2005 storm?

- What can we learn from this event?
### Session 5

**Concept**  
Generating and Selecting a Topic: Topic Brainstorming – Finding a Passion

**Quotation**  
“Motivation is at the heart of writing...Go where your interest lies or your affection or your passion.”  
– William Zinsser from *On Writing Well*

**Teaching Point**  
Great writing is generated when writers commit to topics they care about. Passion-inspired writing results in interesting pieces that readers care about. To figure out what they most passionately want to write about, writers brainstorm in their Writer’s Notebook using a variety of techniques. Brainstorming, or the process of generating ideas, can open up topic possibilities that don’t come to mind when first presented with a writing task.

### Suggested Materials

Examples of student or professional writers’ Writing Notebooks

Copies, transparencies or scans to be projected of your (the teacher’s) Writer’s Notebook that you will share with your students that includes:

- The two lists:
  - What historical events do you know about?
  - What historical events do you want to know about?

Websites to research for possible topics

- [http://www.history-timelines.org.uk/events-timelines/14-american-history-timeline.htm](http://www.history-timelines.org.uk/events-timelines/14-american-history-timeline.htm)

### Preparation

Complete the Writer’s Notebook activities as outlined above and in this lesson.

Review the Sample Topics Brainstorm List and the Historical Events Categories Anchor Chart

**Teaching Point**  
Great writing is generated when writers commit to topics they care about. Passion-inspired writing results in interesting pieces that readers care about. To figure out what they most passionately want to write about, writers brainstorm in their Writer’s Notebook using a variety of techniques. Brainstorming, or the process of generating ideas, can open up topic possibilities that don’t come to mind when first presented with a writing task.
1. Using the Writer’s Notebook

- Full Class: What’s a Writer’s Notebook?
  - You may have already introduced the Writer’s Notebook to students earlier in the year as part of their writing practice. If so, that’s great. You’ll have less groundwork to lay in this lesson. But here you’re also going to show your students your Writer’s Notebook. Why?
    - Because as teachers we must model for our students what learning and curiosity look like. Students need examples of how to actually engage in research and writing, and what better example than you? If you share the topics you are passionate about, share your inquiry into them, and the information you collect on them, students will see how cool and fun research and writing can be.
  - Things for your students to know about the Writer’s Notebook:
    - Great writers must be keen observers of the world who pay careful attention and record their observations in a notebook.
    - The notebook should contain any and all questions, ideas, and content students have for this writing project and future writing projects.
    - Writer’s Notebooks aren’t graded.
  - Share sample Writer’s Notebooks with students or show them notebooks online like these: http://www.randomhouse.com/knopf/authors/orringer/

2. Brainstorming Topics for the Informational Essay

- Full Class: How to Brainstorm
  - Share the definition of brainstorming to reinforce the idea that at this stage of the writing process, students should be open to all possibilities.
    - Brainstorming: a first stage process where the writer produces a list of ideas, topics, or arguments without crossing any possibilities off the list. The goal is to create a “storm” of creative energy to open up thinking about the writing task and access ideas the writer might not have realized she had.
  - Explain that students are going to be generating two lists today that answer these questions:
    - WHAT HISTORICAL EVENTS DO YOU KNOW ABOUT?
    - WHAT HISTORICAL EVENTS DO YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT?
  - Share your lists from your Writer’s Notebook that answer these questions. This will give students a sense of the variety they can include in their own lists. It will also help them build connection with you.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Solo: Generating Topics and Analyzing Lists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Have students generate their two lists, each on a different page. Ask them to have at least <strong>five items</strong> on each list as a goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Remind them that they can refer back to the list they generated in Lesson 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Remind them that they can include topics they know about from outside of school and from their classes. All history-focused topics are possibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Also, remind students that they can include events from the recent past—like the election of the first black president.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o For help with the list <strong>WHAT HISTORICAL EVENTS DO YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Share the <strong>Historical Events Categories Anchor Chart</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Have students surf the websites below to expand their brainstorming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o <a href="http://www.history-timelines.org.uk/events-timelines/14-american-history-timeline.htm">http://www.history-timelines.org.uk/events-timelines/14-american-history-timeline.htm</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Consider stopping here for the day and sending students home to add to their lists for homework. Being in their home environment and having more time to think about the lists will prompt more ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o When they are finished, have your students read back through their lists. Students should:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Put a star next to any topic they feel especially interested in or passionate about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Highlight topics are repeated from one list to another.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sample Topic Brainstorm List – Historical Events in U.S. History

Civil Rights
- Montgomery Bus Boycott
- Lunch counter sit-ins
- Detroit Race Riots of 1965
- Selma to Montgomery March for Voting Rights

Triumphs
- Man on the moon
- Invention of the television
- Invention of radio
- Invention of the electric light
- The production of the Model T

War
- Pearl Harbor
- Invasion of Baghdad during war with Iraq
- Dropping the atomic bomb

Political Events
- Watergate
- The Cuban Missile Crisis
- End of Slavery

Assassinations
- JFK
- Martin Luther King
- Malcolm X
- Robert Kennedy
- John Lennon

Disasters
- Sinking of the Titanic
- The Challenger Explosion
- Sinking of the Titanic
- The Trail of Tears
- Hurricane Katrina
- The bombing of the Twin Towers on 9/11
- Oklahoma City Bombing
- Stock Market Crash of 1929
- Chicago Fire
U.S. Historical Events Categories
Anchor Chart

Major Battles or Attacks During Wars

Political Events

Assassinations

Disasters

Triumphs

Civil Rights
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>Generating and Selecting a Topic: Directed Exploration and Establishing Prior Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotation</td>
<td>&quot;Write what you like. There’s no other rule.&quot; –O. Henry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Kids need time to explore topics before we ask them to formulate definitive research questions. Often they don’t know which questions to ask early in the research process, because they don’t know enough. They can investigate topics, build background knowledge, and learn as they research, becoming more knowledgeable and more curious, gathering important questions along the way. I have seen kids go to great lengths to find answers to questions that compel them.” –Carol Newman, a school librarian in Boulder, Colorado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Point</td>
<td>Writers of informational texts carefully select a topic by making sure that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. they are truly passionate about the subject,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. the topic fulfills the technique or text type of the assignment (in this case—unique perspective on an historical event),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. they can find plenty of information on the subject, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. they have some prior knowledge about the topic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggested Materials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Topic Selection for Informational Texts Anchor Chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Using a Search Engine handout (if needed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Directed Exploration/Prior Knowledge Anchor Chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mini-Conference Preparation Questions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copies, transparencies or scans to be projected of your (the teacher’s) Writer’s Notebook that you will share with your students of your prior knowledge/research on your 3 topics of greatest interest. Think about what you want to share with your students regarding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Why you’re most interested in these topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What you already knew about the topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What you needed to research.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Teaching Point | Writers of informational texts carefully select a topic by making sure that |
|----------------| a. they are truly passionate about the subject,  |
|                | b. the topic fulfills the technique or text type of the assignment (in this case—unique perspective on an historical event),  |
|                | c. they can find plenty of information on the subject, and  |
|                | d. they have some prior knowledge about the topic.  |

| This lesson gives students some time to explore a few historical events they believe they might be interested in. At this age, they might know a nugget of information about an event, but little more. Give students a class period to do some directed exploration of possible topics.  |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Modeling Topic Narrowing and Recording Prior Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Review the teaching point using the Topic Selection for Informational Texts Anchor Chart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Share your choices and Writer’s Notebook entries with your students so they have a sense of where they are headed in this topic exploration and selection process. Give students a chance to ask questions about your research process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Review the Directed Exploration/Prior Knowledge Anchor Chart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Be sure to spend some time discussing how you determine what constitutes reliable information.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Independent Practice

### 2. Directed Exploration and Recording Prior Knowledge
- In their Writer’s Notebooks, have students record prior knowledge and/or research on their 3 selected topics to answer these questions from the Directed Exploration/Prior Knowledge Anchor Chart:
  - What happened? Give a brief summary of the event.
  - When and where did it happen?
  - Who were the players and parties involved in this event? (What are the unique perspectives?)
  - How much reliable information is there about this topic on the Web?
    - .gov, .edu, .net
    - search more narrowly for info from particular perspectives
    - Is there a variety of info or is it the same on each site?

### 3. Mini-Conference Preparation
- In their Writer’s Notebook, students should record responses to these questions:
  - What’s your #1 topic choice?
  - What do you find interesting about it?
  - What unique perspective would you write about?
  - What are your concerns about writing about this event? What problems might you run into?

## Assessment

### 4. Pass Out of Class
- Have students write their name and their 3 potential topics on a notecard. Ask them to put a star next to the one they are most interested in. This will help you prepare for mini-conferences.
Writers of informational texts carefully select a topic by making sure that

a. they are truly passionate about the subject.

b. they have some prior knowledge about the topic.

c. the topic fulfills the technique or text type of the assignment (in this case—unique perspective on a moment in history).

d. they can find plenty of information on the subject.
Directed Exploration/Prior Knowledge Anchor Chart

- What happened? Give a brief summary of the event.
- When and where did it happen?
- Who were the players and parties involved in this event? (What are the unique perspectives?)
- How much reliable information is there about this topic on the Web?
  - .gov, .edu, .net
  - search more narrowly for info from particular perspectives
  - Is there a variety of info or is it the same on each site?
Mini-Conference Preparation Questions

In your Writer’s Notebook, record responses to these questions:

- What’s your #1 topic choice?
- What do you find interesting about it?
- What unique perspective would you write about?
- What are your concerns about writing about this event?
- What problems might you run into?
### Sessions 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Generating and Selecting a Topic: Mini-Conferences and Selecting a Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Teaching Point | a. For writing conferences to be effective, the writer must come with questions and use the teacher as a resource.  
|                | b. The perspective a writer selects determines the details that will be included in the essay. In order to perform more focused research, a writer of this kind of informational text must select a perspective. |

| Suggested Materials | • Questions for mini-conferences  
|                    | • Selecting a Perspective handout |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparation</th>
<th>Mini-Conference Prep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

  (must be an NCTE member or previous customer to use this link - see PDF attached to this unit for the text of the article named above.)  
- Sort through students’ topic choices by class. If there are students considering the same or similar topics, meet with them together to save time and so they can hear the ideas of the other student(s).  
- Generate a short list of questions you’ll ask students to help nudge them toward appropriate/effective topics. Because you’ll be checking in with students when they are at various stages of the topic selection process, think carefully about your students and who will probably need what kind of help when. You know best who will need help generating, narrowing, and further exploring topics. Your conference preparation will ensure that conferences move quickly and accomplish much in a short time. Your questions, depending on the stage students are at might include:  
  o How can you further narrow that topic? (i.e. shift from WWII to Pearl Harbor)  
  o How can you broaden this topic?  
  o What’s the unique perspective you plan to explore?  
  o What else do you need to learn about to move forward with this topic?  
  o What are your greatest concerns about this topic—what kind of trouble do you think you might run into with it?  

| Teaching Point | a. For writing conferences to be effective, the writer must come with questions and use the teacher as a resource. |

| Active Engagement | 1. **Mini-Conferences** (run concurrently with students performing their directed exploration and completing the Selecting a Perspective handout)  
|                  | • Before you begin, let students know that they should:  
|                  |   o Bring the conference preparation they completed.  
|                  |   o Come with at least one question they have about something they need help with regarding topic selection.  
|                  | • Use the rubric below to assess where students are in their topic selection and thinking process after the conference. |
### Mini-Conference Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
<th>On-Target</th>
<th>Novice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moments in History</strong></td>
<td>- Identified &amp; is excited about several</td>
<td>- Identified 3 &amp; is excited about one</td>
<td>- None defined, or they are too broad or narrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Possible Perspectives</strong></td>
<td>- Has already identified most players in/ perspectives on this event</td>
<td>- Has considered at least two of the possible perspectives</td>
<td>- Unclear what the possible perspectives are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>?’s for the Teacher</strong></td>
<td>- Multiple and will push the project forward</td>
<td>- Will help clarify a pressing issue</td>
<td>- No questions; unprepared</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Teaching Point

b. The perspective a writer selects determines the details that will be included in the essay. In order to perform more focused research, a writer of this kind of informational text must select a perspective.

### Independent Practice

2. **Selecting a Perspective**
   - Ask students to complete the **Selecting a Perspective** handout when they have selected their particular moment in history.
   - Note that completing Selecting a Perspective will require conducting more research.
Selecting a Perspective on a Moment in History

Answer the questions on this handout in your Writer’s Notebook where you will have plenty of space to record your answers.

THE PLAYERS

1. What well-known individuals were involved in this event?

2. What groups were involved in this event?

THE PLAYERS Example – Hurricane Katrina

People
- The Mayor of New Orleans, Ray Nagin
- The Governor of Louisiana, Kathleen Blanco
- President George Bush

Groups
- Law enforcement in New Orleans
- FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency)
- Residents of the Lower 9th Ward (worst hit neighborhood – homes destroyed)
- Citizens of New Orleans who were able to evacuate and did not lose homes

THE ISSUES & THE FIGHT
(To answer these questions, you will need to perform more research.)

3. What issues, difficulties, and sacrifices did each person/group have to deal with during the event?

4. What was each individual or group fighting for?

THE ISSUES & THE FIGHT Example – Hurricane Katrina

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual/ Group</th>
<th>Issues, difficulties, sacrifices</th>
<th>Fighting for…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Residents of the Lower 9th Ward | - Loss of shelter, food source, work  
- No place to go or $ to relocate                                                      | - immediate aid from the government for food and shelter  
- long-term rebuilding of their city for affordable housing, jobs etc. |
| Mayor Ray Nagin                                      | - safety of citizens  
|                                                 | - poor communication with the federal government and emergency relief efforts  
|                                                 | - federal government’s slow response to the disaster  
|                                                 | - help from the federal government with shelter for citizens, food, gaining control of and safety for the city  
|                                                 | - $ to reinforce the levees so this won’t happen again  
|                                                 | - federal support to rebuild the city  
| Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)       | - poorly organized for a disaster of this scale  
|                                                 | - unclear directives from the President  
|                                                 | - to maintain the appearance of being capable  
|                                                 | - to get supplies to New Orleans  

**Narrowing Down Your Choices**

In your Writer’s Notebook:
- Put a star next to the perspectives that interest you the most.
- Put smiley faces next to the specific perspectives you are able to find the most information about. Be sure to perform Internet searches to determine this.
- Notice which perspectives have both a star and a smiley face. That’s probably the one to go with!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concept</strong></td>
<td><strong>Gathering Information – Researching a Moment in History: Devising an Inquiry Question</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Quotation** | “All students should learn how to formulate their own questions. All teachers can easily teach this skill as part of their regular practice...The skill of being able to generate a wide range of questions and strategies about how to use them effectively is rarely, if ever, deliberately taught. In fact, it has too often been limited to students who have access to an elite education. Our goal is to democratize the teaching of an essential thinking and learning skill that is also an essential democratic skill.”  
- from *Make Just One Change* by Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana |
| **Teaching Point** | Questions are the foundation of all learning. In order to learn, we must be curious. |
| **Inquiry questions** help writers focus their investigation of a topic for an informational text. An inquiry question is an overarching question that steers the research and writing of an essay. These questions should: |
| • Not be easily answered |
| • Analytical in nature |
| • Open-ended |
| • Require research and thinking to craft an adequate response |

**Information or knowledge questions** are fact-based questions at the lowest level of question asking. The answers to these questions help answer the overarching inquiry question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggested Materials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copies of <em>Devising and Using Inquiry Questions</em> handout</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Preparation</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Gather or devise sample inquiry questions about a moment in history from a unique perspective that your students will find interesting. These could concern the topics that you shared from your Writer’s Notebook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For each inquiry question, devise a list of information/knowledge questions for your own informational essay topic that will help answer the inquiry question.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| <strong>Teaching Point</strong> | Questions are the foundation of all learning. In order to learn, we must be curious. |
| <strong>Inquiry questions</strong> help writers focus their investigation of a topic for an informational text. An inquiry question is an overarching question that steers the research and writing of an essay. These questions should: |
| • Not be easily answered |
| • Analytical in nature |
| • Open-ended |
| • Require research and thinking to craft an adequate response |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active Engagement</th>
<th>1. Inquiry Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Whole Class &amp; Solo: Creating Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Share the first teaching point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Review the sample inquiry questions on the <em>Devising and Using Inquiry Questions</em> handout and/or share some you have generated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Using the unique perspective students have selected for essay, have students create an inquiry question that will drive their research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Have students share their inquiry questions with the class and/or record them on notecards that will go on the Information Classifieds bulletin board (see note at the end of this lesson for more information).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Teaching Point | Information or knowledge questions are fact-based questions at the lowest level of question asking. The answers to these questions help answer the overarching inquiry question. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active and Engagement</th>
<th>• Generating Information Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Whole Class &amp; Solo: Knowing What You Don’t Know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Share the teaching point on information questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Have students attempt to generate information questions using the sample inquiry questions about Hurricane Katrina.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Compare their information questions to the ones listed on the <em>Devising and Using Inquiry Questions</em> handout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Have students record their information questions in their Writer’s Notebooks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Have students share their questions with a partner to generate even more questions before they begin further research.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sharing to Build Community</th>
<th>Information/ Resource Classifieds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Create a bulletin board in your classroom with two columns: seeking information/resources and offering information/resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students post their inquiry questions in the “seeking information” column and can post a list of their areas of informational expertise or resources they’ve run across in their research in the “offering information” column.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• This bulletin board can help students act as resources for one another both within and across classes. It also allows students to share what they’re up to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Digital Option: Put these classified on a class wiki that students can easily access and edit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Independent Practice – Formative Assessment Mini-Task

At this point in the research and writing process, have students turn in a notecard to you with the following information. Let them know this is a formative assessment.

**Final Topic Selection and Reflection**

The moment in history I plan to write about is:

I am going to write about it from the perspective of ________________________________.

The reason I selected this perspective is:

The step in the topic selection process that helped me figure this out was:

The inquiry question(s) I devised is/are:

The information questions I’ll need to answer during my next stage of research are:

What I’m most excited to research and learn more about for this topic is:

---

**Mini-Task Rubric**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept/Skill</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
<th>On-target</th>
<th>Novice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passion for subject</td>
<td>- Response indicates true passion and wonder.</td>
<td>- Response points to great excitement.</td>
<td>- Response suggests boredom or lack of curiosity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected Perspective</td>
<td>- Perspective is clearly identified, compelling.</td>
<td>- Perspective is clearly identified, makes sense.</td>
<td>- Perspective too general/vague or not chosen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry Question(s)</td>
<td>- Analytical and open-ended.</td>
<td>- Analytical and open-ended.</td>
<td>- Devised an information question rather than an inquiry question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Multiple questions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Questions</td>
<td>- Multiple ?’s that get at the heart of the inquiry question.</td>
<td>- Many good questions, will need to devise more as research unfolds.</td>
<td>- Few questions, don’t fully address the inquiry question.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Devising and Using Inquiry Questions

What is an inquiry question?

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

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

Sample inquiry questions – Perspectives on Hurricane Katrina

Perspective: President George Bush
Why was the federal government’s response to the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina so slow, especially in the week following the storm?

Perspective: New Orleans residents in the Lower Ninth Ward
Why didn’t these residents evacuate prior to the storm hitting, especially since the neighborhood had been devastated during Hurricane Betsy in 1965?

Perspective: Mayor Ray Nagin
Why was the Mayor so frustrated with the federal government’s response in the week after Hurricane Katrina hit?

**Notice that these questions are quite specific in terms of time period. A “moment” in history can actually be quite a large event to write about, so narrowing it down is important.

TO DO:
Based on your chosen unique perspective and the initial research you’ve done, devise an inquiry question. You may decide you need more than one to fully explore this moment in history and the unique perspective. Write your inquiry question(s) in your Writer’s Notebook.
**What is an information question?**
Information questions are fact-based questions at the lowest level of question asking. The answers to these questions help answer the overarching inquiry question.

**Types of information questions about moments in history**

- **Where?**
  - At what specific location or locations did this occur?
  - Are there multiple locations involved?
- **When?**
  - What was the timeline of events?
  - When did this “moment” begin and end?
- **Who?**
  - Who are all the players involved in this historical event?
- **What?**
  - What are the step-by-step events that compose this moment in history?
  - What exactly happened?
- **How?**
  - What were all the circumstances surrounding the event that allowed for it to occur?
  - What role did particular people play that allowed it to unfold?

**Sample information questions – about Hurricane Katrina**

**Perspective:** President George Bush

**Inquiry Question:** Why was the federal government’s response to the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina so slow, especially in the week following the storm?

**Information Questions:**
- What was President Bush’s initial response to Hurricane Katrina? What did he say?
- What is the timeline of his decisions in the week after Katrina hit?
- When did he get FEMA involved?
- When did Bush visit New Orleans?
- Did his visit change the response to the disaster?
- What reasons did Bush give for the slow response after being criticized by the media?

**Perspective:** Citizens of the Lower 9th Ward

**Inquiry Question:** Why didn’t these residents evacuate prior to the storm hitting, especially since the neighborhood had been devastated during Hurricane Betsy in 1965?

**Information Questions:**
- What destruction occurred in the Lower 9th Ward as a result Hurricane Betsy?
- Who were the residents of the Lower 9th Ward? What are the demographics?
- What was the economic situation of residents of the 9th Ward pre-Katrina?
- What warnings did Lower 9th Ward residents receive about the hurricane?
- What were the different attitudes about evacuating?
- What were the reasons people gave for not evacuating?
TO DO:
Read over all your prior knowledge and information gathered in your initial research. Next, write down all questions you think you need to answer (information questions) in order to write a strong essay that fully responds to your inquiry question(s). Information questions should be quite specific, like the questions about Hurricane Katrina above.

TO DO:
Share your inquiry question and information questions with a partner. Ask for their help in generating further relevant information questions.

NEXT STEP:
Perform more research to get your questions answered!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>Gathering Information – Researching a Moment in History: Researching and Refining the Inquiry Question(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Point</td>
<td>Writers perform research to answer their overarching inquiry question. They continue to research throughout the drafting process as needed. They also refine their inquiry question(s) as necessary, depending on the information and ideas they uncover.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Notes: | - This session may extend over several days depending on how much time your students need to complete their initial research. This is another good point at which to hold mini-conferences.  
- If you have not previously addressed citing sources with your students, you should do so prior to the formal research they are about to perform. |
| Session | 10 |
| Concept | Drafting: Identifying the Controlling Idea |
| Teaching Point | a. The controlling idea is an overarching idea in an informational essay that determines what information the reader will receive.  
b. In an informational essay about a moment in history, the controlling idea  
   o is influenced by the unique perspective of the individual or party being discussed.  
   o concerns the issues and difficulties of the party being written about, including what they’re fighting for. |
| Suggested Materials | • The Effects of Hurricane Katrina: Unique Perspectives and Controlling Ideas handout |
| Preparation | • Review the lesson and The Effects of Hurricane Katrina: Unique Perspectives and Controlling Ideas handout.  
| Teaching Point | The controlling idea is overarching idea behind an informational essay that determines what information the reader will receive. *****  
In the first part of this lesson, the focus is a.) on helping students understand the concept of a controlling idea when it comes to information and b.) how a controlling idea is affected when information is being given through the lens of a unique perspective. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. What is a Controlling Idea?</th>
<th>In an informational essay about a moment in history, the controlling idea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Full Class/Pairs</td>
<td>• is influenced by the unique perspective of the individual or party being discussed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Present the teaching point.</td>
<td>• concerns the issues and difficulties of the party being written about, including what they’re fighting for.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Introduce the New York Times article included in The Effects of Hurricane Katrina: Unique Perspectives and Controlling Ideas handout.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Make the point that the article, because it is a newspaper piece, is meant to be objective. It is not told from a unique perspective.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o In pairs, have students underline the controlling idea and generate a list of information questions the article might address.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Come back together as a class and share your responses.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Point</th>
<th>Active Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Identifying the Unique Perspective and Controlling Idea</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Full Class – Solo/Small group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o The goal of this exercise is to have students identify the controlling idea and unique perspective in a text.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Using The Effects of Hurricane Katrina: Unique Perspectives and Controlling Ideas handout, Read Barack Obama’s speech together as a class.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Have students perform the close reading and annotation as the handout requests.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Review your answers together.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Extend the discussion of unique perspective and controlling idea by asking:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How might the controlling idea of this speech be different if it were being made the President? Or the Mayor of New Orleans? Or by a senator who hadn’t gone done to New Orleans for a visit just after the hurricane?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Developing a Controlling Idea

- Solo: Review Your Information
  - Ask students to review the following in their Writer’s Notebook:
    - Prior knowledge on the topic
    - Inquiry question
    - Information questions
    - All research notes
  - Have them complete the freewriting prompt on the handout with the goal of completing this notecard that is their pass out of class.

**STUDENT NAME**

**Historical moment:**

**My inquiry question is:**

**The unique perspective I chose is:**

**My controlling idea is:**

Complete this sentence.

*This controlling idea is unique to this perspective because it means I must explain to my reader...*

---

**Mini-Task Rubric**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
<th>On-Target</th>
<th>Novice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Controlling idea</td>
<td>- Addresses all aspects of the issues, problems and cause being fought for by the chosen group or individual</td>
<td>- Addresses some aspects of the issues, problems and cause being fought for by the chosen group or individual</td>
<td>- Does not address the issues, problems and cause being fought for by the chosen group or individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling idea unique to this perspective</td>
<td>- Clearly explains this connection by providing multiple examples and reasons</td>
<td>- Somewhat clearly conveys this connection by providing one example and one reason</td>
<td>- Can not explain the connection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Effects of Hurricane Katrina: Unique Perspectives and Controlling Ideas

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

READ – Objective Perspective & Controlling Idea
Read the beginning of the newspaper article below and underline the controlling idea.

New Orleans Shrank After Hurricane Katrina, Census Shows

When Hurricane Katrina hit and the murky waters rushed through levee breaches, even the facts were drowned.

Official documents were destroyed, years of photographs were ruined, and a city’s ability to know itself was lost. Answers to basic questions like how many people lived here, where they lived and who they were could not be easily answered.

Now there finally are some numbers, and they show that the city is 29 percent smaller than a decade ago.

The Census Bureau reported on Thursday that 343,829 people were living in the city of New Orleans on April 1, 2010, four years and seven months after it was virtually emptied by the floodwaters that followed the hurricane.

Write – Information Questions
Make a list of the information questions you believe the rest of this article might answer:

Controlling Idea about a Moment in History:
• is influenced by the unique perspective (the informational lens) from which the text is written.
• concerns the issues and difficulties of the party being written about, including what they’re fighting for.

READ – Unique Perspective & Controlling Idea
As you read:
• Underline or highlight key details that point to the unique perspective—things that are unique to the writer’s experience.
• Put a star next to key points that you think might be the controlling idea.
Speech to Congress by Senator Barack Obama of Illinois on Hurricane Katrina Relief Efforts
September 6, 2005

I just got back from a trip to Houston with former Presidents Clinton and Bush. And as we wandered through the crowd, we heard in very intimate terms the heart-wrenching stories that all of us have witnessed from a distance over the past several days: mothers separated from babies, adults mourning the loss of elderly parents, descriptions of the heat and filth and fear of the Superdome and the Convention Center. There was an overriding sense of relief, for the officials in Houston have done an outstanding job of creating a clean and stable place for these families in the short-term. But a conversation I had with one woman captured the realities that are settling into these families as they face the future. She told me "We had nothing before the hurricane. Now we got less than nothing."

We had nothing before the hurricane. Now we got less than nothing.

In the coming weeks, as the images of the immediate crisis fade and this chamber (Congress) becomes consumed with other matters, we will be hearing a lot about lessons learned and steps to be taken. I will be among those voices calling for action.

In the most immediate term, we will have to assure that the efforts at evacuating families from the affected states proceed - that these Americans are fed, clothed, housed, and provided with the immediate care and medicine that they need. We’re going to have to make sure that we cut through red tape. I can say from personal experience how frustrating, how unconscionable it is, that it has been so difficult to get medical supplies to those in need quickly enough. We should make certain that any impediments that may continue to exist in preventing relief efforts from moving rapidly are eliminated.

Once we stabilize the situation, this country will face an enormous challenge in providing stability for displaced families over the months and years that it will take to rebuild. Already, the state of Illinois has committed to accepting 10,000 families that are displaced. There are stories in Illinois as there are everywhere of churches, mosques, synagogues and individual families welcoming people with open arms and no strings attached. Indeed, if there's any bright light that has come out of this disaster, it's the degree to which ordinary Americans have responded with speed and determination even as their government has responded with unconscionable ineptitude.

Which brings me to the next point. Once the situation is stable, once families are settled - at least for the short term - once children are reunited with their parents and enrolled in schools and the wounds have healed, we’re gonna have to do some hard thinking about how we could have failed our fellow citizens so badly, and how we will prevent such a failure from ever occurring again.

It is not politics to insist that we have an independent commission to examine these issues. Indeed, one of the heartening things about this crisis has been the degree to which the outrage has come from across the political spectrum; across races; across incomes. The degree to which the American people sense that we can and must do better, and a recognition that if we cannot cope with a crisis that has been predicted for decades - a crisis in which we’re given four or five days notice - how can we ever hope to respond to a serious terrorist attack in a major American city in which there is no notice, and in which the death toll and panic and disruptions may be far greater?

Which brings me to my final point. There's been much attention in the press about the fact that those who were left behind in New Orleans were disproportionately poor and African American. I’ve said publicly that I do not subscribe to the notion that the painfully slow response of FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security was racially-based. The ineptitude was colorblind.

But what must be said is that whoever was in charge of planning and preparing for the worst case scenario appeared to assume that every American has the capacity to load up their family in an SUV, fill it up with $100 worth of gasoline, stick some bottled water in the trunk, and use a credit card to check in to a hotel on safe ground. I see no evidence of active malice, but I see a continuation of passive indifference on the part of our government towards the least of these. And so I hope that out of this crisis we all begin to reflect - Democrat and Republican - on not only our individual responsibilities to ourselves and our families, but to our mutual responsibilities to our fellow Americans. I hope we realize that the people of New Orleans weren't just abandoned during the Hurricane. They were abandoned long ago - to murder and mayhem in their streets; to substandard schools; to dilapidated housing; to inadequate health care; to a pervasive sense of hopelessness.

That is the deeper shame of this past week - that it has taken a crisis like this one to awaken us to the great divide that continues to fester in our midst. That's what all Americans are truly ashamed about, and the fact that we're ashamed about it is a good sign. The fact that all of us - black, white, rich, poor, Republican, Democrat - don't like to see such a reflection of this country we love, tells me that the American people have better instincts and a broader heart than our
current politics would indicate.  
We had nothing before the Hurricane. Now we have even less.

I hope that we all take the time to ponder the truth of that message.

**CLOSER READING**

**Unique Perspective**

1.) Consider the details Senator Obama gives in his speech that point to his unique perspective on Hurricane Katrina.

   a. What trip has he just returned from and what has he seen?

   b. What is his position in the government and what does it provide him the power to do?

2.) Senator Obama makes 3 key points in this speech. The first 2 points concern helping the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Underline those 2 points in the text and paraphrase them here:

   a. 

   b.

3.) His third point concerns a divide in America.

   a. What divide is Obama talking about?

   b. What is he calling on his fellow politicians and American citizens to do about it?

4.) Identify the controlling idea. This speech is all about what Senator Obama wants his fellow politicians to do. Where in the early part of the speech does he tell us what the speech is going to be about? Underline the controlling idea in the text.
WRITE

Now it’s time for you to determine your controlling idea.

1. Review your
   • Prior knowledge
   • Inquiry question
   • Information questions
   • All research notes

2. In your Writer’s Notebook, freewrite about this question:

   What issues and problems did the group or individual you’re writing struggle with during this moment in history? What are they fighting for?

3. Draft a 1-2 sentence controlling idea.

4. Share it with your teacher by completing the pass out of class notecard.
### Session 11

**Concept**  Drafting: Sorting and Selecting Information

**Teaching Point**  

- a. Writers of informational texts about a moment in history sort through their prior knowledge and research information, selecting information that pertains to the unique perspective they are writing about.
- b. Next, they organize this information facts, details, quotations, and examples into categories and sub-categories.
- c. Finally, writers select key facts, details, quotations and examples to support their essay’s controlling ide, and the controlling idea of each paragraph.

### Session 12

**Concept**  Drafting: Analyzing Information

**Teaching Point**  

- a. Analysis in an informational text helps the reader understand how to interpret the facts and details they are given and make connections between different pieces of information.
- b. In this kind of informational text, writers analyze  
  - how the facts and details support the controlling idea.
  - how the chosen unique perspective affects our understanding of the historical moment.

### Suggested Materials

- **Analyzing Information about a Moment in History** handout

### Preparation

- Review the lesson materials.
- Come up with different facts and details for your students to analyze for activity #1 – Analyze This! as needed.
- Consider where your students will have the most difficulty with producing analysis. This is one of the most difficult steps in the writing process for students, and you may need to spend extra time on it, providing more models and more practice until students begin to generate analysis about the facts, details, and quotations they have collected about their moment in history.

### Teaching Point

Analysis in an informational text helps the reader understand how to interpret the facts and details they are given and make connections between different pieces of information.

****

The beginning of this lesson is meant to illustrate for students how to connect the dots between facts by providing explanation and analysis. This is something they do in their daily lives, they just don’t refer to it as “analysis.”
Active Engagement

1. Analyze This!
   • Full Class/Small Groups
     o Explain to students: analysis is a form of explanation that often uses the word “because.” It tells the reader “why” and “how.”
       ▪ Why a fact or detail is important.
       ▪ How one piece of information connects to another piece of information.
       ▪ Why a fact or detail is relevant to the subject of the essay.
       ▪ What to think about those facts and details.
     o Share an example like this one:
       Facts
       ▪ I have braces.
       ▪ I don’t smile.
       ▪ I really like popcorn.
       ▪ I only eat popcorn at the movies.
       Facts with Analysis (highlighted)
       I have braces, and I hate them. Because my braces make me feel ugly, I don’t smile. Having braces restricts other things I can do. For example, I really like popcorn. But I only eat popcorn at the movies because it’s dark and no one will be able to see the kernels that get stuck in my teeth. Having braces is a difficult experience no teenager should be subjected too because we’re self-conscious enough as it is.
     o Put the following facts on the board (or use others that your students will find interesting).
       ▪ The basketball team has won five games.
       ▪ They have lost three games.
       ▪ They lost two players to injury during the season.
       ▪ They have a new coach.
     o In small groups, have students write a brief paragraph on butcher paper that includes analysis connecting these facts and binds them together. They should underline their analysis.
     o Share all the paragraphs and have the class assess whether groups actually provided analysis of the facts.

Teaching Point
In this kind of informational text, writers analyze
   o how the facts and details support the controlling idea.
   o how the chosen unique perspective affects our understanding of the historical moment.

Active Engagement

2. Analysis Hunting
   • Pairs/Solo
     o Pass out the Analyzing Information about an Historical Moment handout.
     o Review the teaching points.
     o Have the students complete the annotation exercise.
   • Full Class
     o Review the annotation as a class.
     o Review the controlling idea of the essay.
     o Next, have students identify the key nouns and adjectives in the analysis sections/sentences. (Key words area highlighted in the teacher version of the excerpt.)
     o Discuss what the analysis explains, connects, and support in the controlling idea by examining these key words. (Explanations are given in the teacher version of the excerpt.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Practice</th>
<th>3. Drafting Body Paragraphs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Have students draft a body paragraph about one of their information categories using key details, facts, and quotations and weaving them together with analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Further directions are given on the Analyzing Information about an Historical Moment handout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Remind students about strong topic sentences – reteach this concept as needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Have students continue to craft body paragraphs using the information they are selected and organized and incorporating analysis. This is a good time to check in, circulate, and mini-conference.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analyzing Information about a Moment in History

Analysis tells the reader:
- how the facts and details support the controlling idea.
- how the chosen unique perspective affects our understanding of the historical moment.

READ and ANNOTATE
In the excerpt of the article below
- Put check marks next to the supporting details (facts, statistics, quotations).
- Underline the analysis.

excerpt from “It Didn’t Begin with Katrina” by Mary Gail Snyder, National Housing Institute website, Shelter Force Online, Issue #143, Sept/Oct 2005
http://www.nhi.org/online/issues/143/beforekatrina.html

Controlling Idea of the Article: Because of Katrina, the nation and the world had a shocking reminder of the vulnerability of the poor.

New Orleans had a poverty rate of 28 percent in 2000. About 70,000 people, 14 percent of the city, lived in households with incomes below 50 percent of the poverty line. Two-thirds black, New Orleans was deeply segregated and marked by racial division in its economy and politics. With its economy chronically stagnant and its population shrinking, it was a city short on adequate housing and health care and well-paying jobs. Its education system was so poor that it is estimated that 40 percent of the adult population was functionally illiterate. Before the hurricane, it was already a large-scale humanitarian crisis.

In the end poverty means a lack of resources, and that means vulnerability. The poor, near-poor, and sometimes-poor of New Orleans were vulnerable every day. Living on low-lying ground was not the only environmental hazard they faced. Industrial pollutants, high lead levels and toxic waste sites were all concentrated in their neighborhoods. And before they were left behind in the path of the hurricane, they were left behind in educational and economic opportunities. A small everyday disaster, like a medical emergency, can take out a family as surely as a hurricane.

YOU TRY! – DRAFTING BODY PARAGRAPHS

1. Pick one of your information categories that seems like it should sit at the beginning of the essay.
2. Put the details and facts in an order that makes sense.
3. Weave them together with analysis that explains why and how these facts are connected and important.
4. Craft a topic sentence for the paragraph that supports the essay’s controlling idea and makes clear what the controlling idea of the paragraph is.
Analysis Annotation
(teacher version)

excerpt from “It Didn't Begin with Katrina” by Mary Gail Snyder, National Housing Institute website, Shelter Force Online, Issue #143, Sept/Oct 2005 http://www.nhi.org/online/issues/143/beforekatrina.html

Controlling Idea of the Article: Because of Katrina, the nation and the world had a shocking reminder of the vulnerability of the poor.

1.) New Orleans had a poverty rate of 28 percent in 2000. About 70,000 people, 14 percent of the city, lived in households with incomes below 50 percent of the poverty line. Two-thirds black, New Orleans was deeply segregated and marked by racial division in its economy and politics. With its economy chronically stagnant and its population shrinking, it was a city short on adequate housing and health care and well-paying jobs. Its education system was so poor that it is estimated that 40 percent of the adult population was functionally illiterate. Before the hurricane, it was already a large-scale humanitarian crisis. This is a claim supported by the preceding facts.

2.) In the end poverty means a lack of resources, and that means vulnerability. The poor, near-poor, and sometimes-poor of New Orleans were vulnerable every day. This word explains the implications of being poor and addresses who the writer means by “poor.” Living on low-lying ground was not the only environmental hazard they faced. Industrial pollutants, high lead levels and toxic waste sites were all concentrated in their neighborhoods. And before they were left behind in the path of the hurricane, they were left behind in educational and economic opportunities. Explains how being poor means being left behind not just to ride out the hurricane but also in education and economy. A small everyday disaster, like a medical emergency, can take out a family as surely as a hurricane. Connects every day crises with the major crises that hit New Orleans.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>Drafting: Using Visuals to Support Facts, Details, and Analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Teaching Point | a. The use of pictures, graphs, charts, and headings and sub-headings helps the reader visually understand the content and organization of a writer’s text.  

b. Well-placed and captioned pictures, graphs, and charts can highlight particular facts, details, and analysis in an informational text. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>Drafting: Finding a Structure and Transitioning Between Paragraphs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Teaching Point | a. Information must be carefully organized to allow readers to deepen their knowledge, understanding, and comprehension of a topic.  

b. Writers of informational essays about a moment in history structure their text either chronologically or by issue/problem. |
Session 15

Concept
Drafting: Introductory Paragraphs

Teaching Point
The introductory paragraph is crucial to the success of a piece. It must grab the reader’s attention and make clear what the informational text is about. Some writers craft the introductory paragraph after writing the body paragraphs when they’re clearer about the focus on their essay.

Suggested Materials
Introductory Paragraphs handout

Preparation
Review the teacher version of the handout, which contains annotations.

Teaching Point
The introductory paragraph is crucial to the success of a piece. It must grab the reader’s attention and make clear what the informational text is about. Some writers craft the introductory paragraph after writing the body paragraphs when they’re clearer about the focus on their essay.

Active Engagement
1. What’s in an Introduction?
   • Full Class
     o Introduce the teaching point.
     o Ask your students what they think should be included in the introduction of their essay?
     o Put the responses on the board.
     o Pass out the Introductory Paragraphs handout.
     o Review the names and purpose of each paragraph element.
     o Ask your students what order they would put these elements in – discuss why this order and what happens when the order is shifted around.
   • Pairs/Small Groups → Full Class
     o Have students work together to annotate the mentor text.
     o Review the annotations as a class.
   • Solo
     o Students draft their paragraphs and share with a partner for initial feedback as time allows.

Independent Practice Formative Assessment Mini-task
Mini-Task Rubric: Draft of the Introductory Paragraph

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
<th>On-Target</th>
<th>Novice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hook</td>
<td>-Quote, anecdote or description is a unique choice and grips the reader’s attention.</td>
<td>-Quote, anecdote or description captures the reader’s attention.</td>
<td>-Missing hook or selected quote, anecdote or description does not suit the controlling idea or historical event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thumbnail Sketch</td>
<td>-Addresses the who, what, where, when of the historical moment in a riveting, well-worded fashion.</td>
<td>-Addresses the who, what, where, when of the historical moment.</td>
<td>-Addresses some but not all of the elements concerning who, what, where, when of the historical moment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected Perspective</td>
<td>-Mentioned in title, thumbnail sketch, and controlling idea.</td>
<td>-Mentioned in thumbnail sketch and controlling idea.</td>
<td>-Not mentioned in the intro paragraph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling idea</td>
<td>-Addresses all aspects of the issues, problems and cause being fought for by the chosen group or individual.</td>
<td>-Addresses some aspects of the issues, problems and cause being fought for by the chosen group or individual.</td>
<td>-Does not address the issues, problems and cause being fought for by the chosen group or individual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style &amp; Flow</td>
<td>-Sentences and ideas flow seamlessly.</td>
<td>-Sentences and ideas flow seamlessly with one or two small exceptions.</td>
<td>-Sentences and ideas are disjointed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introductory Paragraphs

Goals of an Introductory Paragraph in an Informational Essay:

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

To achieve the goals above, you must include:

- a hook
- a thumbnail sketch of the moment in history
- the selected perspective
- the controlling idea

Drafting Strategies

HOOK - Grabbing the Reader’s Attention

- very briefly tell a specific story from the point of view of one of the players in the historical moment (anecdote)
- begin with a relevant quotation by one of the players in this historical moment
- describe the scene of the historical event in vivid detail

THUMBNAIL SKETCH – Historical Moment Summary

- 3-4 sentences that tell the reader the major points about this moment in history.
  - Who was involved?
  - What happened?
  - Where did this take place?
  - How did this story end?

SELECTED PERSPECTIVE

- Explain whose point of view you’ll be explaining this historical moment from.

CONTROLLING IDEA

- state the issues, problems,
- Advanced: pose a question and answer it with the statement of your controlling idea.

Let’s Look at a Mentor Text

Annotate:

- Put [brackets] around the hook.
- Put (parentheses) around the thumbnail sketch.
- Highlight the selected perspective - all mentions of the group or individual this essay concerns.
- Underline the controlling idea.

Surviving Hurricane Katrina: Citizens of the Lower Ninth Ward

Imagine this. You’ve been told a major hurricane is going to hit your city. The mayor has ordered everyone to evacuate. But you can’t. You have no car. Who needs one? You live in the city. And you
have no extra money. You can barely pay the rent each month. How can you leave? There are no trains or busses running. Your friends either don’t have cars or their cars are full. You have no way out. On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina and the flooding that followed devastated the city of New Orleans. People knew this category 3 storm was coming. Mayor Ray Nagin announced mandatory evacuations for all neighborhoods. And yet many residents of the Lower Ninth Ward, the lowest part of the city and most vulnerable to the hurricane, remained in their homes. In 1965, Hurricane Betsy swept through New Orleans and devastated the Lower Ninth Ward. Knowing that history, why did residents of the Lower Ninth Ward remain in their homes after the evacuation was announced? They stayed because they didn’t have the resources—the transportation, money, or community support or connections—to leave. They were forced to ride out the storm and the flood that followed.

You Try!

Using the Drafting Strategies, write a rough draft of an introductory paragraph for your essay. Remember, this is your first draft. Experiment with interesting hook ideas and what facts to put in your thumbnail sketch. Okay-start writing!
Introductory Paragraphs
(teacher version)

Goals of an Introductory Paragraph in an Informational Essay:
• to grab the reader’s attention by raising their curiosity
• to make clear the topic you will be writing about

To achieve the goals above, you must include:
• a hook
• a thumbnail sketch of the moment in history
• the selected perspective
• the controlling idea

Drafting Strategies

HOOK - Grabbing the Reader’s Attention
• very briefly tell a specific story from the point of view of one of the players in the historical moment (anecdote)
• begin with a relevant quotation by one of the players in this historical moment
• describe the scene of the historical event in vivid detail

THUMBNAIL SKETCH – Historical Moment Summary
• 3-4 sentences that tell the reader the major points about this moment in history.
  o Who was involved?
  o What happened?
  o Where did this take place?
  o How did this story end?

SELECTED PERSPECTIVE
• Explain whose point of view you’ll be explaining this historical moment from.

CONTROLLING IDEA
• state the issues, problems,
  Advanced: pose a question and answer it with the statement of your controlling idea.

Let’s Look at a Mentor Text

Annotate:
• Put [brackets] around the hook.
• Put (parentheses) around the thumbnail sketch.
• Highlight the selected perspective - all mentions of the group or individual this essay concerns.
• Underline the controlling idea.
Surviving Hurricane Katrina: Citizens of the Lower Ninth Ward

[Imagine this. You’ve been told a major hurricane is going to hit your city. The mayor has ordered everyone to evacuate. But you can’t. You have no car. Who needs one? You live in the city. And you have no extra money. You can barely pay the rent each month. How can you leave? There are no trains or busses running. Your friends either don’t have cars or their cars are full. You have no way out.] (On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina and the flooding that followed devastated the city of New Orleans. People knew this category 3 storm was coming. Mayor Ray Nagin announced mandatory evacuations for all neighborhoods. And yet many residents of the Lower Ninth Ward, the lowest part of the city and most vulnerable to the hurricane, remained in their homes. In 1965, Hurricane Betsy swept through New Orleans and devastated the Lower Ninth Ward.) Knowing that history, why did residents of the Lower Ninth Ward remain in their homes after the evacuation was announced? They stayed because they didn’t have the resources—the transportation, money, or community support or connections—to leave. They were forced to ride out the storm and the flood that followed.

You Try!

Using the Drafting Strategies, write a rough draft of an introductory paragraph for your essay. Remember, this is your first draft. Experiment with interesting hook ideas and what facts to put in your thumbnail sketch. Okay-start writing!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concept</strong></td>
<td>Drafting: Concluding Paragraphs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Teaching Point** | Concluding paragraphs about moments in history should discuss:  
  • why the event was important to a society or culture.  
  • the impact the moment in history has had on future events. |
| **Suggested Materials** | **Concluding Paragraphs** handout (see below) |
Concluding Paragraphs

Concluding paragraphs about moments in history should discuss:
- why the event was important to a society or culture.
- the impact the moment in history has had on future events.

To generate strong material for your concluding paragraph, freewrite about the following questions. Write down everything you know about the answers to these questions. Don’t leave anything out! If you feel you can’t answer any of these questions, you may need to do some more research.

- Why was your chosen moment in history so important?
- Why are we still talking and writing about this historical event today?
- What other things happened as a result of this moment in history? (These could be positive or negative developments.)
- What people or groups of people did this historical event affect long-term?
- How did this moment in history affect the economy, arts, jobs, technological advancements, politics, etc. of the area/people involved?

Mentor Text – Concluding Paragraph

Surviving Hurricane Katrina: Citizens of the Lower Ninth Ward

The devastating 2005 hurricane scarred the New Orleans’ Lower Ninth Ward. Seven years after the storm, only a fraction of its residents have returned. Dilapidated and gutted houses are interspersed with empty lots where homes have been razed. But some folks are returning and rebuilding the Lower Ninth Ward. A few local businesses have re-opened. Several non-profits have sprung up that are rebuilding homes and assisting former neighborhood residents, including Make It Right, sponsored by Brad Pitt, Build Now, and lowernine.org. And the current mayor, Mitch Landrieu, is determined to rebuild the city. The blight that he, his administration, and the citizens of New Orleans are fighting these many years later have revealed how hard it is to rebuild a city, especially one that was suffering economically before Katrina.

But we also have to wonder if the Lower Ninth Ward’s status as one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city is a major reason why it still has not been rebuilt? Most of the residents were forced to leave post-Katrina and now don’t have the money, resources, or power to return. They have settled elsewhere, found jobs, and started new lives. To return to the Lower Ninth Ward would mean having the funds to rebuild their homes and the energy to start over yet again. And in a neighborhood where there are few businesses and no jobs, that is a difficult prospect to consider.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>Drafting:Drafting and Conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Point</td>
<td>a. Drafting involves revision. While drafting, writers give themselves the freedom to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Research as needed to fully explain and support the controlling idea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Re-think their analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Re-consider and/or expand their controlling idea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Try a different organizational strategy if their chosen one is not working.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Writing conferences help writers see their drafts more objectively so they can make</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>adjustments in focus, content, and organization. For writing conferences to be effective, the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>writer must come with questions and use the teacher as a resource.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>“Conferring in the Writing Workshop” by Salch and Marino, article published by NCTE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Journals/ST/ST0062January01.pdf">http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Journals/ST/ST0062January01.pdf</a> (Must be an NCTE member or previous customer to use this link. See PDF attached to this unit for the text of the article named above.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>Final Stages of the Writing Process: Peer Critique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Point</td>
<td>Writers ask for constructive criticism from other writers to figure out how to best revise their pieces. This feedback can come from peers who carefully and respectfully critique another student’s writing, including how the author’s passion for his subject translates to the reader. The writing task rubric is a useful tool in guiding peer and self-critique. All this feedback is used to revise the piece to improve focus, content, and organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggested Materials</td>
<td>Peer Critique handout (see below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This handout is a comprehensive critique. Edit and expand it to suit your class and the elements of the essay you focused on most or feel your students need the most work on. Alternately, you can photocopy it in full and have writers indicate what elements of their essay they need the most feedback on from their partner.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Peer Critique

Critiquer’s Name__________________________________________

The Writer’s Name________________________________Essay Title____________________________________

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

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

**General Praise**

What did you find most interesting about this essay? How come?

**Introduction**

Hook to draw in the reader? yes no
Thumbnail sketch of the historical moment? yes no
Selected perspective made clear? yes no
Controlling idea stated? yes no

Provide **praise** for specific elements of the introduction that are working well.

Provide **suggestions** for how the writer can improve any of the elements of the introduction that are missing or are confusing.

**Body Paragraphs**

Provide **praise** for the body paragraphs. Which paragraph is the strongest? How come?

Do all the topic sentences make clear what the follow paragraph is about? If not, underline topic sentences on the draft that need attention. Make a note in the margin about why they need attention.

Put □ check marks □ next to supporting details that are especially interesting and best support the controlling idea.

Put *stars* next to analysis that is especially strong in explaining the relationship between the controlling idea, the supporting details, and the unique perspective.

Which body paragraph needs the most attention? How come? Explain below.
### Overall Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How is the essay organized?</th>
<th>chronologically</th>
<th>by issue/problem</th>
<th>not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does the essay flow logically from one paragraph to the next?</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explain your answer below.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Put your suggestions for moving paragraphs around here:

### Concluding Paragraph

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does the paragraph explain how the event was important to society or culture?</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>no</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Provide **praise** for specific elements of the concluding paragraph that are working well.

Provide **suggestions** for how the writer can improve any of the elements of the concluding paragraph that are missing or are confusing. Question can be helpful here—what else did you want to know?

### Title

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does it point to the controlling idea?</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>no</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Give the writer 1-2 suggestions for a creative title.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>Final Stages of the Writing Process: Final Revision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Teaching Point | a. Writers revise throughout the drafting process. When they have completed a draft of their essay, they can use a reverse outline to determine the effectiveness of their piece. By re-reading the essay and recording the order of the topics and sub-topics, writers can evaluate whether:  
  • all paragraphs stay on topic.  
  • information or analysis is missing that supports the controlling idea.  
  • paragraphs need to be moved around.  
  
  b. Writers then develop a revision plan and make changes based on their reverse outline and the feedback received in peer critique. |
| Suggested Materials | Reverse Outline and Revision Plan handout (see below) |
Reverse Outline and Revision Plan

Reverse Outline

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

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

1. Read each paragraph carefully and thoroughly.
2. As you read, make a note next to each paragraph that summarizes what it’s about (3 or 4 words)
3. Then, underline the topic sentence for that paragraph and decide if it reflects what you wrote in the margin. If your summary and the topic sentence don’t match up, put an arrow next to your topic sentence to note that it needs attention.
4. When you’ve finished reading and summarizing, go back and read through all your margin summaries. Ask yourself:
   a. Do the ideas and information flow here?
   b. What would happen if I put the paragraphs in a different order? Would my controlling idea be clearer?
   c. What seems to be missing?
   d. Is there anything I have spent too much time explaining?

Revision Plan

Take stock of what you’ll do next by:
1. Re-reading the peer critique feedback.
2. Making a list below or in your Writer’s Notebook of all the changes you will make to your essay. What should you do first?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>Final Stages of the Writing Process: Editing and Reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Teaching Point | a. Writers carefully edit their pieces to make sure there are no grammatical errors, misspellings, or sentences that don’t make sense so that the reader has a smooth and enjoyable reading experience.  
b. Writers reflect on their writing process in order to  
  • decide what steps to take next.  
  • clarify why they made certain decisions during the writing process.  
  • identify strategies that work best for them and can be used in future writing tasks. |
| Suggested Materials | Post Revision Reflection Anchor Chart (see below) |
Post Revision Reflection
Anchor Chart

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

- What was the most exciting part of writing your informational essay? How come?
- What was the most difficult part of writing your informational essay? How come?
- If you still had more time to revise your piece, what would you work on/change?
- What did you learn about yourself as a writer?
- What will you do differently next time you write an essay?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concept</strong></td>
<td>Final Stages of the Writing Process: Publication and Celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching Point</strong></td>
<td>To complete the writing process, writers must share their pieces with an audience—either in print or on the web—and then celebrate the accomplishment of completing a significant writing task.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Publication Possibilities** | Free Online Platforms  
http://www.wikispaces.com/  
http://issuu.com/  
http://www.livebinders.com/  
Publications  
http://www.teenink.com/submit |
What is Informational/Explanatory Writing?

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

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

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

As Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards explains:

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

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

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

**The CCSS that Inform the Middle School Informational Writing Units**

*Reading*

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

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

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

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

*Writing*

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

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

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

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

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

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

**How Do Students Approach the Informational Writing Process?**

*Topics*

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

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

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

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

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

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

The graphics below highlights key steps in the informational writing process.
Resources

Teaching the Informational Text – Pedagogical and Theoretical Resources

Common Core State Standards Appendix A
http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards

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

Nonfiction Matters: Reading, Writing, and Research in Grades 3-8 by Stephanie Harvey
http://www.amazon.com/Nonfiction-Matters-Reading-Writing-Research/dp/1571100725/ref=lh_ni_t

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

“Conferring in the Writing Workshop” by Salch and Marino, article published by NCTE
(Must be an NCTE member or previous customer to use this link - see PDF attached to this unit for the text of the article named above.)

Mentor Texts: Political Memoirs, Speeches, Newspaper and Magazine Articles

On Hurricane Katrina

“The Evacuation of Older People: The Case of Hurricane Katrina” by Bill Bytheway
http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Bytheway/index.html

Senator Barack Obama’s Speech to Congress about Relief Efforts

On Civil Rights

“Letters from a Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King, Jr.
http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html

JFK’s Civil Rights Address
http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkcivilrights.htm
excerpt from Ch. 1 of *Warriors Don’t Cry* by Melba Patillo Beals
http://books.simonandschuster.com/Warriors-Don’t-Cry/Melba-Patillo-Beals/9781416948827/excerpt_with_id/12653

Integrating the University of Mississippi: three perspectives – James Meredith (student), Gov. Ross Barnett, Robert F. Kennedy, U.S. Attorney General
http://microsites.jfklibrary.org/olemiss/controversy/

**On Space Travel**
“Remembering Apollo 8, Man’s First Trip to the Moon” *Time Magazine* article looking back on this event from the perspective of the astronauts
http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1868461,00.html

JFK’s Speech on Space Travel at Rice University

**On Pearl Harbor**
Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Speech to Congress – Declaration of War
(Includes text and video footage)
http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrpearlharbor.htm

**Resources for Finding Mentor Texts**

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

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

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

*Cobblestone* – American History for kids (ages 9-14)
http://www.cobblestonepub.com/resources_cob_tgs.html
Muse— past and present, history, science and the arts (ages 9-14)

National Geographic- cultural, scientific, geographic, anthropological, and historical investigations of past and present events.
http://www.nationalgeographic.com/

National Geographic Explorer for Kids (Pathfinder edition for grades 4-6)
http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngexplorer/

Smithsonian Magazine
http://www.smithsonianmag.com/

Teen Ink - essays written by kids for kids
http://www.teenink.com/nonfiction/academic/top/

Time for Kids
http://www.timeforkids.com/

PBS Video- Watch award-winning documentaries, including current episodes from Nova and Nature, as well as archived videos
http://video.pbs.org/

History.com- Video clips and full length shows on history topics from Ancient China to the Vikings to Watergate.
http://www.history.com

Magnum Photos – a website with powerful photo/audio essays about a variety of world events
http://www.magnumphotos.com/

Excellent Non-fiction Book Lists

The American Library Association’s List for Teens
http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/teenreading/trw/trw2005/nonfiction.cfm

Young Adult Library Services Association – Best Books for Teens 2010 (scroll down for non-fiction)
http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklistsawards/booklists/bestbooksya/bbya2010

Young Adult Library Services Association – Best Books for Teens 2009 (scroll down for non-fiction)
http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklistsawards/booklists/bestbooksya/09bbya