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WHY AND HOW TO INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF WRITING IN UTAH'S SCHOOLS

By

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Why and How to Increase the Amount of Writing in Utah’s Schools

“Today’s most pressing domestic challenge is that of improving public schools. In dealing with this challenge, one of the greatest potential rewards lies in better writing—and improved thinking” (Magrath 18).

—National Commission on Writing

The writing culture in elementary schools and secondary schools needs to change if students are going to be equipped for their future academic and career goals. An ideal writing culture promotes advanced writing by encouraging more writing, sharing, and a sense that everyone in the classroom is a developing writer. The writing students produce shows that this type of writing culture is not being nurtured in many secondary schools. It is apparent that the ideal writing culture in secondary schools is not being achieved because of the writing students produce. Arthur Applebee and Judith Langer, in connection with the National Writing Project, the College Board, and the Center on English Learning & Achievement, analyzed the writing production in secondary language arts classrooms across the nation. They found that in 1998 “40% of 12th grade students reported never or hardly ever writing papers of 3 pages or more for their English language arts classes, and 14 percent were not writing papers of even 1 to 2 pages” (Writing Instruction in America’s Schools 11). This statistic includes personal narratives, reflections, responses to literature, and any formal writing that students can recall. In 2009, these authors published similar findings that papers longer than three pages are rare while also suggesting that “Data over time also suggest that there has been some increase
in emphasis on writing and the teaching of writing, both in English language arts classrooms and across the curriculum, although this may have begun to decline from its high” (“What Is Happening in the Teaching of Writing?” 26). The increase in emphasis produced the following statistic:

In 2007, between 80% and 90% of middle school and high school students had achieved what NAEP identifies as ‘basic’ writing skills appropriate to their grade level, but only 31% at Grade 8 and 23% at Grade 12 were rated as ‘proficient.’ (Applebee, “What Is Happening in the Teaching of Writing?” 19)

Basic writing level is not adequate for college level writing, and proficient may not be either. Applebee and Langer conclude claiming, “even with some increases over time, many students are not writing a great deal for any of their academic subjects, including English, and most are not writing at any length” (“What Is Happening in the Teaching of Writing?” 26). While writing instruction has increased it has not produced the necessary results for students to be college-and career-ready.

The result is that seniors virtually tremble at the prospect of writing a five-page research paper. I frequently hear complaints from my high school seniors claiming that they have never written more than three double-spaced typed pages. Kyle Cusick, a senior in my regular English class, commented on a four- to five-page research paper assignment saying “I’ve never written more than two pages. How am I supposed to write four?” His retort was not in jest, but rather manifested genuine fear because he was expected to double his comfortable writing output. I am concerned for my students’ educational future, knowing that they are moving on to college where seven- to nine-page papers, or longer, are not unusual. Length is not necessarily an accurate indicator of a difficult assignment but Applebee and Langer have noted:
Although short, focused writing is also important, such more extended writing is necessary to explore ideas or develop arguments in depth. Further, there are strong patterns of differential instruction based on teachers’ notions of what higher- and lower-performing students can be expected to do. (Writing Instruction in America’s Schools 28)

Formulating detailed ideas and arguments takes a considerable amount of research and evidence-based writing; a two- to three-page double-spaced paper does not promote the depth needed to formulate a complex idea supported by evidence.

High school language arts classes are not the only group neglecting writing; elementary schools are too. Educators from Utah Valley University and Brigham Young University recognize the lack of writing in elementary schools in their publication “Instruction and Physical Environments That Support Process Writing In Elementary Classrooms.” This research study was limited to elementary schools along the Wasatch Front in Utah. The results are alarming. Classes spent an average of one hour a day engaged in the writing process. Half of the writing instruction, or approximately 30 minutes, was dedicated to conventional aspects which included spelling, Daily Oral Language prompts, word walls, and handwriting. The remaining time was allocated for mini-lessons. The time students spent producing writing added up to an astonishing 13.2 minutes a day (Billen 107). The lack of writing in elementary schools influences the writing performance of high school students, but the purpose of analyzing this study is not to claim that the challenges, which secondary language arts teachers are facing, are merely a result of poor primary schooling. Instead, the study illustrates the remarkable reality that very little writing is occurring on any level prior to higher education.

Kathleen Manzo highlighted the fact that students do not write enough in elementary and high school in her 2006 article in Education Week. She “reported that
high school students who aspire to attend college will likely be unprepared to tackle the complex reading and writing tasks they will encounter” (Applebee, Writing Instruction in America’s Schools 29). During that same year the Chronicle of Higher Education conducted a survey of college teachers and “reported that 91 percent thought their students were not very well-prepared in writing, 89 percent said they were not very well-prepared in reading, and 91 percent said they were not very well-prepared with research skills” (Fitzhugh 413). The college teachers opinions reflect that the reading and writing skills expected from students are not evident. These statistics become more startling when juxtaposed next to the perception of high school English teachers. High school English teachers were given this same survey and reported that “36 percent of their students were ready for college writing, 25 percent were ready for college reading, and 26 percent were ready for college research” (Fitzhugh 413). This research study illustrates clear differences between the expected standards in college and high schools. The perception of college level educators concerning poor student performance can be indicative of poor writing instruction by secondary school teachers.

The National Commission on Writing published their widely cited article “The Neglected ‘R’: The Need for A Writing Revolution” to address the lack of writing in secondary schools. They claim that schools should aim to double the amount of time most students spend writing, require a writing plan in every school district, insist that writing be taught in all subjects and at all grade levels, and require successful completion of a course in writing theory and practice as a condition of teacher licensing. (3)

The National Commission on Writing is claiming that students need to double the amount of time dedicated to writing. To ask students to increase their production by one hundred percent is a large demand, yet it is vital considering the contemporary writing
culture in language arts classes. This learning gap is often identified when students go to college and are underprepared.

In 1999, nine years before obtaining university status, UVSC published an article about students needing to take remedial classes. UVSC found that “student’s high school preparation was predictive of their need for remedial education in college… Over a third of the students successfully completing 12th grade English needed remedial English in college” (Hoyt 1). Having a third of students need remedial English classes indicates that students are not getting basic literacy skills in high school.

The need for students to take remedial English is not isolated to just UVSC, but is a national issue. “In 1995, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) found that 29 percent of all freshmen required remedial education at four-year colleges and universities. At community colleges ‘the figure was 41 percent’” (Hoyt 2). The trend of students taking remedial classes, usually for English and math, is problematic because the state has to subsidize the remedial classes. This is frustrating because many of the students have received high school credit for the remedial classes they are taking yet they do not know the material. The colleges and universities are placed in the difficult position of needing to provide the necessary remedial courses and essentially ignore the evaluation given by high school teachers. Consequently, the university needs to make teachers available to teach those remedial courses; taking these courses often causes students to delay graduation. Students nationwide are also inconvenienced by remedial courses because they are forced to pay for 900 level courses to be eligible to take 1000 level courses—yet students do not receive credit for remedial classes. The demand for remedial classes in colleges and universities is illustrative of the teaching systems in high
schools. UVSC’s article sheds light on some of the reasons these problems exist in high schools:

There may be a fundamental problem with the current educational environment in our secondary schools. There appears to be a lack of individual accountability for learning in some cases, and such a heightened concern to help every student succeed that the integrity of the system may be compromised. (Hoyt 25)

UVSC makes a valid argument claiming that the assessment of high school students is being compromised, because of either a lack of individual accountability or heightened concern to help every student succeed at the expense of high academic standards. The assessment of high school students is dramatically impacting colleges and universities, yet the real concern should be why students are not learning the content in high school and how to change this.

Ralph Slow, in *The Journal of Educational Research*, concludes that students are placed in remedial freshman English composition classes because they “wrote fewer class themes in high school then did students enrolled in regular English” (526). The students who needed to take remedial English in college were not required to write as much in high school, regardless of the subject, as those in regular college English classes. While assessments may need to change for evaluating students’ knowledge to better inform colleges and universities of student preparedness, writing more in high school can help prevent the need for remedial college composition classes. Local and national associations of higher education have valid concerns about student writing, and they agree that writing instruction in secondary schools needs to improve.

It is important to recognize the poor writing culture across all levels of education to understand why The National Commission on Writing requests that students double the amount of time dedicated to writing. Ultimately, it begs the question of why writing is
not a central focus in high school language arts classes and how to make writing a more essential part of the classroom experience. Writing instruction needs to be a central focus in high school language arts classes and while a variety of writing styles will help improve the writing culture, it is particularly important that argumentative writing is given added emphasis. Argumentative writing is an essential writing style in college and a necessary skill for improving critical thinking.

The lack of writing instruction can be attributed to four major factors: literary tradition, writing background, time demands on language arts teachers, and high-stakes testing. It is important to critically analyze each of these issues to identify possible solutions that may help increase student writing.

**Literary Tradition**

“Can you believe that we’re teaching a book a term this year? I have never taught so many books—it’s going to be a lot of work.” This quote is from the English teacher that teaches down the hall from me. Ten weeks later she told me that she was just completing her unit on *Julius Caesar*. Her unit was completed with a short, textual analysis. I was not in her classroom day in and day out, and I understand that I do not know exactly what she was teaching or what went on in her classroom. I do know that this style of teaching one text for an extended period of time with one writing assignment at the end is common in Utah public high schools.

I created a brief informal survey of twenty-five high school English teachers throughout the state of Utah and I found that many of them taught from one book for weeks on end. I was not surprised at this result because I am a product of the Utah Public
Education system. I attended elementary school, middle school, and high school in the Provo School District. After high school graduation, I enrolled at Brigham Young University where I received my degree in English Education and observed many secondary classrooms in Utah. I also completed my student teaching in Alpine School District, one of the largest school districts in the state. During that time I found that many instructors employed the same traditional curriculum style as the teacher down the hall from me: they would read one book a term. Once they finished reading the book they would analyze it in class and require the students to write a final paper on it, generally two- to three-pages double-spaced. Part of this trend can be attributed to the type of person who goes into the English teaching profession.

English teachers frequently enter the teaching profession because they love literature and they have a passion for it. In fact, 93.1 percent of teachers are passionate about the content that they are teaching which influences their decision to become teachers (Carbonneau 983). This passion is critical in order for teachers to be effective, but it can create a culture where individual instructors overemphasize their content interest while neglecting other essential portions of the curriculum. Critical writing is one of the often-neglected elements. Teachers expect students to respond to literature instead of teaching them a myriad of writing styles, especially critical writing styles like workplace writing, real-world writing, or research-oriented writing. Scherff and Piazza respond to this result saying it is “unfortunate, given that one of the aims of effective instruction is to assist students in writing for many purposes” (292). Teachers need to be aware of their own love for literature and make sure that they are also teaching all the necessary elements of language arts.
Denice Turner, a high school English teacher who taught for many years in Nevada and Utah, gives insight to why teachers spend so much time on a novel:

I think it is important to introduce students to the rigors (and rewards!) of longer texts: the building of suspense, character development, and evolution of story that are more complex with longer works. Some students come to my class having never read a whole novel; most have not read or seen a live drama. So, I think I do students a disservice if I do not show them how to successfully read—and hopefully enjoy—these genres.

The elements she commends for the study of a novel are critical for helping students become more advanced thinkers, readers, and, ultimately, writers. These are noble goals but the current practical application of teaching novels is concerning. In an effort to include all of the important rigors of reading longer texts, teachers often neglect having students write critically, extensively, and frequently.

During my junior year of college I took a semester long class dedicated exclusively to Joseph Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness*. Teaching a book for a semester could be advantageous because it allows for intense analysis. If a teacher were very familiar with the text it would also limit the time spent on lesson prep while providing students with vast information about text. It is not inherently negative to study a text over a long period of time, but it can be problematic if the writing expectation is merely one paper at the end of the book. Many teachers will have short writing assignments spread throughout reading the novel, which include reader-responses or reflections on the reading; in terms of textual analysis writing, or extended writing in general, many teachers leave this until the end of the novel. If we consider the extreme example of teaching one play or book a term, with one textual analysis accompanying it, the result is only four formal papers a year. This is not enough higher-level writing.
The novel-centric system of teaching and student writing is apparent throughout the nation. An extensive research study titled “The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same: A Survey of High School Students’ Writing Experiences” was published by the National Council of Teachers of English in 2005. This research study was performed in Florida because the culture of public education in Florida is unique. Florida has had an extensive 30-year system of high-stakes testing which provides far-reaching numerical data recording the amount of writing being done in language arts classrooms at the secondary level. The study reported the following:

Only one genre—responses to literature—occurred ‘almost every week.’ Three other genres—expository, persuasive, and summaries—occurred ‘once or twice a month.’ Two types of writing—narrative and comparison/contrast essays—were reported as ‘once or twice a quarter.’ And one category (research-based papers) was represented as ‘once or twice a year.’ Five types of writing—dramatic, poetry, personal, responses to art or music, and business letters—were ‘never or hardly ever’ done at all. (Scherff 283)

Students are predominantly writing in response to literature in short answer or essay form. A more recent study conducted in 2002 for The Concord Review found that “62 percent [of teachers] never assign a paper of moderate length (three thousand to five thousand words) and 81 percent never assign a paper of more than five thousand words” (Fitzhugh 415). My own observations align with both of these studies. In many cases students write while they are reading novels but the writing is often simple plot summaries and reader-response writing in journals. They are not producing writing of considerable length. Writing in response to literature helps to make important text-to-self and text-to-world connections. However, it is done at the hazard of less exposure to persuasive writing, expository writing, and research-based writing—essential styles of successful writing at the college level.
The reading and writing culture in high school language arts classes needs to adapt to meet The National Commission on Writing’s request that students double the amount of time dedicated to writing. Literature provides many opportunities to help students improve their writing, but it can become problematic if writing is merely left until the piece of literature is finished. Teachers need to be incorporating advanced writing expectations while students are reading the assigned work of literature as well as when they finish. Having students write more while reading assigned literature can be achieved by assigning students short critical argumentative essays throughout the unit. I found it very helpful to have my students write a critical analysis of the book, with a clear claim or argument half-way through the novel. We would brainstorm possible paper ideas as a class but each individual student was expected to identify a strong theme within the novel and write a critical analysis of that theme with information from the first half of the book. This type of writing was repeated again at the end of the book. Teaching students to use quotes from literature as evidence promotes critical thinking. This process was not left until the end of the novel but, instead, was a consistent presence throughout assigned reading.

Writing critical and analytical pieces while reading literature builds on George Hillocks’ claim that “argument is at the heart of critical thinking and academic discourse; it is the kind of writing students need to know for success in college and in life—the kind of writing that the Common Core State Standards puts first (xvii).” Hillocks promotes writing and expects that writing is evident in every lesson. He uses Toulmin’s elements of argumentation and incorporates argumentative writing in many different ways while utilizing many different texts. Hillocks teaches argumentative writing with activities like
solving mysteries, evaluating mascots and characters, analyzing real world circumstances, supporting claims and judgments, and making literary judgments. Teachers need to be aware of writing expectations in their classrooms in conjunction with literature. Writing instruction needs to be constant and writing assignments need to be frequent, not merely when the reading of a novel is finished.

Writing Background

To promote writing in language arts classes, teachers need to be writers. Chris Street analyzed how a teacher’s relationship to writing influences teaching. His findings were predictable. The “two teachers in this study who saw themselves as writers offered a great deal to students that the other three participants did not” (“Pre-service Teachers’ Attitudes” 46). One of the individuals studied was Monica. Monica had a positive attitude about writing and often modeled writing assignments for her students. In her writing she presented writing techniques that worked and those that did not; this style of teaching helped to promote writing in her classroom. It is essential that writing instructors write and consider themselves writers to help students learn to be writers. This may seem like a simple idea but, in practice, it is challenging. Writing is a difficult task. Getting work published can seem daunting, and drafting and redrafting takes countless hours. Moreover, writing is rarely a lucrative job and many teachers view writing as an additional item on the never-ending list of the things to do and so they decide not to write.

While these may be valid reasons, a more disturbing reality is that most teachers do not have adequate training in teaching writing. The results from the study Teaching
Writing to High School Students: A National Survey concur with the findings from the National Commission on Writing, which claim “high school teachers are poorly prepared to teach writing” (Kiuara 136). In fact, “one out of every two high school teachers indicated that they had little to no preparation in how to teach writing” (Graham, “Writing”). With so few writing teachers trained to teach writing, it is logical that this lack of education would contribute to teachers’ feeling inadequate to teach writing and in turn influence how teachers teach writing.

I completed a three credit undergraduate course designed to teach writing. It was combined with learning to teach literature and was titled “Teaching Literature and Writing.” The content expected to be covered in that class was enormous. It makes sense to teach both important teaching concepts in tandem but it is unrealistic and ineffective to teach both in a three- or four-month course. Nevertheless, this process is common. The National Commission on Writing addressed this concern stating:

Higher education should address the special roles it has to play in improving writing. All prospective teachers, no matter their discipline, should be provided with courses in how to teach writing. Meanwhile, writing instruction in colleges and universities should be improved for all students. (Magrath 3)

Writing needs to be promoted in teaching pedagogy classes so that the amount and quality of writing in the secondary and primary schools improve. That includes an exclusive course on how to teach writing. Utah now requires all English teacher-training programs to include a course devoted to teaching writing. This is a great step to help qualify language arts teachers to teach writing and should be modeled throughout the nation.

Teaching writing can be uncomfortable regardless of how much training a teacher has received. It is uncomfortable because as a teacher you are presenting yourself as an
expert and there are very few writing experts. I often feel afraid of having my writing critiqued. My student Taetum put my fears into words when she said “I hate it when you grade my writing; it’s like you’re grading my soul.” Most writers will agree that having their writing critiqued is uncomfortable; it is a type of unwanted exposure. I have my students critique my writing as a class. They know during the activity my face will go red, I will invariably say, “It’s just a draft,” and I will ultimately acknowledge that I am a developing writer. Why would a teacher go through this uncomfortable experience six times in one day, multiple times throughout the year? To help students become better writers by recognizing that the writing process applies to everyone, including teachers.

Pedagogy classes generally teach writing practices, though there could certainly be additional training. To teach the craft of writing you need to know it; this includes having a basic understanding of grammatical elements as well as organization, ideas, and generally what makes for good writing. Reading books on how to become a better writer can help teachers achieve this knowledge—though it might not make them the greatest writers in the world. It will give teachers a foundation of basic writing skills to work on with their students, and in turn, improve their confidence in their own writing. This places them in a better position as a teacher who critiques writing.

Teachers who perceive themselves as writers bring two key elements to the classroom: knowledge of writing techniques and confidence. According to Street, the teachers who had the most success in their classroom were writers who saw themselves as “developing” (“Pre-service Teachers’ Attitudes” 46). This was because developing writers could “provide students with a passion for writing that the other participants were unable or unwilling to do” (Street, “Pre-service Teachers’ Attitudes” 46). Teachers are
dealing with adolescents who often do not want to write or read. Students can be stubborn and if they decide they do not care about a subject or do not want to engage in the class, they will likely keep an unwritten contract that you cannot force them to do anything. I have found that enthusiasm and confidence are more effective than threats and calls home—which only slightly penetrate the walls of stubbornness. Confidence and enthusiasm are contagious. During my research paper unit I told my students a secret: I am in love with actor James Franco. This confession, paired with a research paper centered on James Franco, became a class joke. The students loved it and their newfound enthusiasm about James Franco was easily funneled to analyzing the James Franco research paper that we used to search for effective and ineffective elements of writing. I recognize that I am not a perfect writer and nothing is more frustrating than knowing what good writing is and realizing that my writing is far from it. Yet I choose to not allow frustration and fear to inhibit my teaching of writing because I want students to recognize that these reactions are normal and should not prevent writing.

To help the writing culture in high schools, universities need to promote writing education by increasing the quality and quantity of writing pedagogy courses future teachers are required to take. Hopefully teachers will be confident in using their writing skills to teach writing and not merely avoid it.

**Time Demands on Language Arts Teachers**

Grading papers demands a lot of time. Language arts teachers are teaching 200 plus students and grading writing becomes overwhelming, if not impossible. In a perfect world the high ratio of students to teacher would be addressed by decreasing class sizes
but this is not happening any time soon. “Over the past two years, California, Georgia, Nevada, Ohio, Utah and Wisconsin have loosened legal restrictions on class size” (Dillon). Utah is one of the few states that collect class size data yearly, and the “median class size has increased by several students in many grade levels since 2008. It now ranges from 22 students in kindergarten to 31 students in high school chemistry classes” (Dillon). Judy Park, associate superintendent of the State Office of Education in Utah, attributes the rise in students to state budget cuts. A significant portion of the state budget is allocated to schools and in a recession schools are forced to adjust (Dillon). Class sizes are continuing to increase with talks of having more than forty students in each English classroom.

All teachers have heavy workloads but there are goliath expectations for English teachers. Financial concerns in states across the nation have created an educational culture that is burdened with fewer teachers and larger class sizes. This is frustrating in every area of study, but for some it is more manageable. Every teacher with large class sizes has typical classroom management issues and, unfortunately, teachers cannot always give the necessary one-on-one instructions to students. Luckily, classes that assess student work based on multiple-choice assessments limit the amount of outside grading demands on teachers. This is where language arts classes differ. Language arts classes assess writing improvement and see writing as a process. They do not have the option of running a Scantron through a machine and entering a grade or having a TA correct objective short answer tests. Rather, language arts teachers are expected to grade and respond to each piece of student writing.

Chris Street and Kristin Stang recognize the enormous expectations, challenges,
and rewards of teaching writing in their article “Improving the Teaching of Writing Across the Curriculum: A Model for Teaching In-Service Secondary Teachers to Write.” They acknowledge that the challenges of teaching writing include three basic elements: limited time available to teach writing, professional development, and “the burden of responding to students’ written work” (Street, “Improving the Teaching of Writing” 40).

I teach six sections of English with thirty-five students in each class. Grading over two hundred papers on a consistent basis is unrealistic, yet English teachers cannot stop assigning writing because they fear the enormous workload. Instead, it is important for teachers to develop systems that make it so students are writing consistently and the grading burden on teachers is manageable. These systems should be addressed in pedagogy classes in colleges or professional development seminars through their respective state or school district. Many of the essential systems in teaching writing are well documented but are not taught to future teachers.

There are many practical ways to encourage students to write while maintaining realistic expectations for a teacher. The intent of this section is not to create a list of possible ideas, but instead to survey a few well-established systems that promote writing without overwhelming the teacher.

Peer-review is a tool that teachers often employ to help students become better writers. I have found that peer review is only successful if students have been trained on how to give useful feedback. This training takes a considerable amount of time but it helps students to evaluate their peers’ writing and their own writing, and to be exposed to many examples of essays similar to the one they are writing. Mary Healy, a high school
English teacher, recognizes how response groups are effective when teaching writing. She records her experience:

After a year’s work with response groups in the classroom, students generally request time for group work when they are between drafts...as their perceptions of the differences between their first and second drafts grows, their involvement in the revision process deepens. (290)

Revision is an essential step in writing, and when teachers promote in-class revision the editing responsibility is gradually transitioned from the teacher to students. Peer-review allows the teacher to concentrate on one draft and the final paper, or even just the final paper, while still providing students feedback on the early stages of their writing.

Another important way to maintain sanity as a teacher when dealing with large writing loads is to be aware of the amount of time it takes to grade papers and the load of papers that will be submitted. Jon Ostenson, a teacher at Brigham Young University and a former high school teacher, establishes a time limit for every paper he grades. He sets a timer for five minutes per student paper. This may seem like a callous way of teaching but it is an effective way to prevent burnout. Teachers often become consumed by a paper or set of papers and if they allow the grading process to continue unchecked it can take teachers hours or weeks to finish papers. Setting a time limit for papers encourages the teacher to look for more global problems, like organization and ideas. If teachers budget their time, they can limit the excess time spent on grading. Another successful way of managing time is staggering due dates for papers. Gordon Clanton plans “courses so that papers are due in different weeks for different courses” (23). This calculated way of staggering paper submissions helps to avoid grading a rush of papers and makes grading throughout the year more manageable.
It is impossible for a teacher to review each student paper looking for every problem because the time demand would be overwhelming and it doesn’t directly influence student writing because students often throw feedback away or do not transfer the writing instruction to other writing scenarios. Instead, teachers need to be content with grading certain elements of papers. A teacher who demonstrates this principal is Katie Stewart. She assigned a paper to all of her students and was looking at the stack of over two hundred papers in despair. It was right before spring break and she did not want to grade them over the break because she was going on vacation. If she had graded over the break the students would have received their papers three weeks after submission. Her unit in writing was centered on improving introductions and conclusions; so that is what she graded. It would have been helpful for the students to have feedback on their entire work but that was not an option for Katie. She had to decide what specific element she was evaluating and use her time effectively to help her students and their writing.

Focusing on a few specific elements in a paper allows students to identify particular areas that they need to work on instead of being overwhelmed with a long list of writing errors. This system gives students more manageable feedback in a timely way. It also promotes continuous writing because the teacher isn’t belabored with unrealistic grading expectations.

**High-Stakes Testing**

Teachers may not want to grade papers because of time demands but it could also be because they feel the need to spend time helping students prepare for the end of year
state assessment. This time spent on test preparation has dire consequences for any writing culture.

High-stakes testing is a common trend throughout the nation. A high-stakes test is intended to accurately assess a student’s knowledge, and the test is used to track the learning progress in schools. These tests come with important consequences because they are intended to hold students, teachers, and schools to “stronger accountability” (“Stronger Accountability”). The obsession with high-stakes testing may contribute to a public school system where writing is being replaced by multiple-choice evaluations.

Tracking student performance requires a system that determines the effectiveness of teachers, schools, and materials; high-stakes testing allows for quantifiable data supporting, or exposing, issues within the delicate ecosystem of education. The concern with this type of system is that “commendable goals (e.g., local control of schools, parental involvement, and teaching methods that work) may be lost under a scrim of standardized forms of accountability” (Whithaus 104). Goals are not the only thing sacrificed with high-stakes testing. The hidden cost of this practice is that the teacher’s instruction is focused on an imperfect test.

High-stakes tests for language arts have traditionally been multiple-choice. The multiple-choice system emphasizes comprehension. Teachers dutifully prepare students by having mock tests and units created with the intent to improve comprehension so students will excel on tests. Multiple-choice tests are problematic because they neglect the “cognitive and reflective processes involved in actually producing a text” (Murphey 51). When teachers ignore extensive writing, whether in test form or otherwise, the
important skills critical to the students’ success in college and beyond are consequently neglected. America’s obsession with high-stakes multiple-choice testing is clear:

Extended writing plays a marginal role at best in postsecondary admissions decisions in the U.S. To be sure, tests are used as gatekeepers to postsecondary education, but not ones that aim to measure what has been learned through extended writing. Instead, as Foster and Russell (2002) point out, ‘Multiple-choice tests are the primary bases for access decisions in the United States: the SAT, ACT, GRE, MedCAT, LSAT, GMAT—all the familiar exam acronyms for U.S. students—require little or no writing. (Murphy 48)

These tests reflect the need for convenience: assessing multiple-choice tests is quicker than grading writing. Evaluating writing is time consuming and can be subjective. It seems logical to create assessments that are objective, multiple-choice tests, which influence teachers to teach to the test, not the curriculum (Murphy 58). Dr. George Hillocks, in an interview for the New York Times, commented that “Teachers tell me in district after district that when they teach to the test, they get better results….These tests have a strong impact on what happens in the classroom” (Nausbaum). If the tests are crafted in a way to improve student understanding then high-stakes testing can be a fundamental part of education. Unfortunately, high-stakes tests do not effectively promote writing:

Students’ writing cannot be calibrated by the exams themselves. Because teachers have taught toward these tests after they were implemented, the test scores will go up. A real comparison of students’ knowledge and writing abilities before and after the implementation of a state-mandated test would require readings of students writing sample not related to the test from before the test began to shape the curriculum and after the test. (Whithaus 107)

Evaluating writing improvement is incredibly complicated and it requires before and after writing samples. The mere manpower that this system needs makes it seem unrealistic because of cost and time restraints. Hillocks recognizes the limitations of high-stakes testing on writing saying:
Forty-eight states are now giving writing assessments, as compared to 37 states in 1995. Teachers are hammering the kids on the tested stuff. There's a hysteria about it. There's a belief that having the tests promotes better writing in school. It does not. (Nausbaum)

Students need to improve their writing skills; either high-stakes testing in language arts needs to be abandoned or the tests need to be changed dramatically. There are reasons for the creation of high-stakes testing but the consequences to student writing are egregious and need to be corrected. The following section addresses how testing can be correctly applied when meeting expectations of the Common Core.

45 states have recently adopted The Common Core Curriculum. The shift away from individual state core curriculums to the Common Core creates an atmosphere of change, which, if properly focused, could prompt change in the amount and quality of writing secondary students are producing. It will also influence the way writing is being taught. The Common Core promotes writing and the following section is designed to show writing expectations within the Common Core. This change is a great opportunity for language arts teachers to alter their curriculum to align with the Common Core learning objectives and assessments to promote more writing.

What Do the Common Core State Standards Mean for Writing Instruction?

The new Common Core State Standards emphasize helping students to be prepared for college and careers. The transition to the CCSS creates a window of opportunity for each state to reflect on the writing culture in their classrooms and improve writing production and writing expectations. To help understand how this
transition can promote writing it is essential to look at the creation of the CCSS and the changes that will occur.

The transition away from individual state standards to a more unified national set of standards has raised many questions about the practicality of the transition as well as the differences between the different standards. A diverse and experienced committee created the guidelines of the CCSS. The group is composed of the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers:

[These groups] worked with representatives from participating states, a wide range of educators, content experts, researchers, national organization, and community groups…[to] reflect the invaluable feedback from the general public, teachers, parents, business leaders, states, and content experts and are informed by the standards of other high performing nations. (“Common Core State Standard Initiative”)

The CCSS were created with the help of many different groups so that the standards could help prepare students for the various challenges they will face.

According to Andrew Porter’s article, “Common Core Standards: The New U.S. Intended Curriculum” published in Educational Researcher, “The Common Core standards represent considerable change from what states currently call for in their standards and in what they assess” (114). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation compared each individual state set of standards to the CCSS and assigned each state and the CCSS a letter grade. The Common Core State Standards Initiative earned a solid B-plus (Institute Thomas B. Fordham 313). California, District of Columbia, and Indiana were the only states ranked as “clearly superior” to the Common Core. The remaining states were either too close to call or were ranked as inferior (Institute Thomas B. Fordham 14). A common critique of the different states standards was that the standards were too vague (Institute Thomas B. Fordham 312). Many states switched to the CCSS
because CCSS have more direct expectations. This includes writing standards. The CCSS encourage a change in the writing culture in schools. In fact,

the development of the Common Core Standards (CCSS, 2010) has made writing a central part of the school reform movement (Graham, in press). The Standards provide benchmarks for a variety of writing skills and applications that students are expected to master and apply at each grade level in kindergarten through grade 12. (Graham “Writing: Importance, Development, and Instruction” 1)

These benchmarks are established to promote writing and give clear directions to teachers about what they should be teaching in each academic year.

As a general rule the Standards are simply set out and the local teachers and districts are left to create unit plans to achieve the necessary standards and make their students college and career ready (“Common Core State Standards Initiative”). This allows “schools, districts, and states flexibility in high school course design” (“Common Core State Standards Initiative” 4). The flexibility created by the Standards is found in the claim that the CCSS are focusing on the result and not the ways in which schools (and states) achieve the result. The CCSS make this philosophy explicit, writing that “By emphasizing required achievements, the Standards leave room for teachers, curriculum developers, and states to determine how those goals should be reached and what additional topics should be addressed” (“Common Core State Standards Initiative” 4).

One of the main “achievements” expected is improved writing—specifically argumentative writing.

**Argumentative Writing**

The CCSS framers were particularly concerned about reading and writing of “complex” informational texts (“Common Core State Standards Initiative,” Beach 179).
The creators of the CCSS saw the need for an increase in informational text and chose to include “standards on argumentative writing not found in many ELAR state standards, which focus primarily on expository writing” (Beach 179). The general focus of expository writing is to inform, describe or explain a topic whereas argumentative writing involves essential elements of persuasion and argument. Individual state cores often focused on expository writing and many teachers were assigning expository writing and ignoring argumentative techniques to help prepare students for the assessments—which were focused on expository writing (Kiuhara 136). Expository writing is an important skill to know but argumentative writing is more typical of college level writing (Hillocks 37). Additionally, teaching argument benefits students because they will be able to “identify the underlying argument, and its claims, warrants, and evidence, in reading” and be able to “compose a high-quality argument, and its claims, warrants, and evidence, in writing… critical skills for academic success” (Newell 273). Learning the basic elements of argumentative writing will help students be able to better understand arguments that they read while also helping them create their own cohesive arguments. The focus of the CCSS is to help students be college-and career-ready and this has caused writing expectations to shift. The Standards were developed to bridge the writing gap between secondary and postsecondary writing instruction and to do this they are focused on authentic argumentation based on the Toulmin theory of argumentation.

To increase the quality of argumentative writing produced by students the CCSS framework blends research and media skills “rather than [be] treated in a separate section” to give additional emphasis to synthesizing complex texts (“Common Core State Standards” 4). Synthesizing complex texts and developing a claim using research skills
and media are challenging and essential parts of language arts; this framework is important because it directly influences the writing culture in the classrooms. The writing culture is influenced because of the assessments and the types of writing expected in classroom. The Standards incorporate research and media skills into the entire framework of the core so that students will be “ready for college, workforce training, and life in a technological society” (“Common Core State Standards” 4). Students will:

[Have] the ability to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas, to conduct original research in order to answer questions or solve problems, and to analyze and create a high volume and extensive range of print and nonprint texts in media forms old and new. (“Common Core State Standards” 4)

This use of research and media skills is intended to span the curriculum to help students learn how to digest the ever-changing informational landscape and be able to write about what they have learned. This is a shift in the writing culture found in typical classrooms. The CCSS are shifting away from traditional responses to literature and instead incorporating various research elements which include the vast and expansive texts available online.

The anchor standards for writing for grades 6-12 emphasize the writing process and application. The anchor standards are listed with the reasoning that “for students, writing is a key means of asserting and defending claims, showing what they know about a subject, and conveying what they have experienced, imagined, thought, and felt” (“Common Core State Standards”, 6-12 English Language Arts, Writing 41). The first anchor is Text Types and Purposes, followed by the sub-point that students need to “write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence” (“Common Core State Standards”, 6-12
English Language Arts, Writing 41). Argumentative writing becomes a primary focus of the language arts because it is the first anchor standard. This focus is clear within the language arts because each grade, or grade bands (the CCSS combine ninth and tenth grade and eleventh and twelfth grade), focuses on argumentative writing. The definitions of the three types of texts included within the language arts are led by argument. Argument is then followed by definitions of informational/explanatory writing, and narrative writing (“Common Core State Standards” Appendix A 23). The CCSS recognize the emphasis on argumentative writing in “The Special Place of Argument in the Standards”:

   English and education professor Gerald Graff writes that ‘argument literacy’ is fundamental to being educated. The university is largely an ‘argument culture’…He claims that because argument is not standard in most school curricula, only 20 percent of those who enter college are prepared in this respect. (“Common Core State Standards” Appendix A 24)

This disappointingly low percentage of students ready for college writing is reflected in the results from the 2009 ACT national curriculum survey which claimed:

   Postsecondary instructors of composition, freshman English, and survey of American literature courses found the ‘write to argue or persuade readers’ was virtually tied with ‘write to convey information’ as the most important type of writing needed by incoming college students. (“Common Core State Standards” Appendix A 24)

This survey shows the need for students to be able to argue as well as convey information in writing before they enter college or careers.

Because the CCSS emphasize argumentative writing, school districts across the nation are being given a great opportunity to assess the essential nature of student writing (or lack thereof) and design units to create better student writing focused on
argumentation. The quality of argumentative writing will be judged by assessments, making assessments a critical element in the transition to the Common Core.

**Assessment**

Writing assessments under the CCSS will influence the writing culture in high schools and how writing is taught because of the increased amount of writing expected. It is critical to analyze the CCSS writing assessments because the assessments will largely determine practical expectations of argumentative writing. Teaching is primarily based on a three-prong system: instruction, curriculum units, and assessments. Using these three systems together as a process is called learning by design based on the principle of backward design, and is known as backwards planning. Backwards planning anticipates that a teacher will first identify the learning objectives for a class and then design the assessment that will include all of the learning objectives. After the assessment has been created the teacher will create the curriculum units and the individual lectures to ensure each learning objective is individually met (Wiggins).

This is a logical system for any course development, yet interestingly enough the creators of the CCSS have yet to release an official copy of the 2014 language arts assessment. The official reason for the failure to launch is that the assessments are still being developed. It is disconcerting that the creators are still working on the assessment because educators generally understand and continue to rely upon the concept of learning by design. To ignore such an essential element of the traditional learning model makes it difficult to envision the effects of the assessment. Regardless of how incomplete the
assumptions about the assessments may be it is necessary to try to understand the assessments to help students who will be tested during the transitional period.

Appendix A is a copy of the most recent example of what the CCSS framers are presently creating for the writing assessment. Debra Drummond, the Provo School District literacy coordinator, provided this example at a recent presentation focused on CCSS assessments. The CCSS writing assessment may look like this example or it may go through considerable alterations. However, this is the only direction that English teachers currently have. The CCSS writing assessment requires student writing. The writing produced by students will be based on their analysis of multiple texts. The texts themselves increase in complexity, with multiple-choice questions in each section followed by a synthesis essay question at the end. The writing prompts promote diversity in analysis and writing:

With a partner, explain your reasons for selecting the claim you chose that captures the similarities in the three viewpoints. Use specific evidence from all three texts that explain your selection… You are speaking to a group of high school students who have just survived a natural disaster, in which many lost possessions, homes, and loved ones. Write a speech in which your central idea is the same as the claim you selected above. Use specific evidence/examples from all three texts within the body of your speech… Write a brief but specific narrative from your own experience OR from examples taken from current events that reflect the claim chosen above. (Drummond 4)

These writing prompts expect high levels of analysis and critical thinking and direct the students to produce findings in a well-organized essay. The writing required in the CCSS assessment will be beneficial to students because teachers will likely try to increase the quality and quantity of writing they expect from students.

According to a survey of postsecondary educators, an essential aspect of language arts is the ability to “Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive
topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence” (Conley 26). The assessment is attempting to promote what teachers see as the most important: argument and analysis.

The CCSS framers hope to include a section where students research a specific topic and then analyze different sources to create an argumentative piece of writing (Drummond 4). Vicki Phillips and Carina Wong outline the literacy module intended to meet the language arts criteria:

[The module] uses social studies content for a persuasive essay (argumentation is one of the most frequently assigned modes in college-ready writing). The ladder of assignments (from pretest to final draft), scoring rubrics (for advanced, proficient, and ‘not yet’ levels), and summative assessment can apply to a persuasive essay for English/language arts and written assignments in science. (41)

Using social studies material helps enforce that literacy skills “cross subject area boundaries” (Phillips 40). Teachers across the curriculum will be more inclined to see literacy as an important aspect of their teaching if an assessment crosses subject boundaries. This assessment will directly impact student writing in language arts and social studies. If teachers are willing to teach to the CCSS assessment this style of assessment will increase writing production while promoting quality writing.

The practical application of this new assessment approach has not been formally released but it appears that the CCSS will include a website that the students may browse and analyze. The material present on the website, along with students’ prior knowledge on the predetermined subject, will influence what the students write about. Steve Graham, Michael Hebert, and Karen Harris co-authored the article “Throw ’em Out or Make ’em Better? State and District High-Stakes Writing Assessments” which analyzes writing assessments similar to the ones proposed by the CCSS. They found that “writing
assessments that are part of typical classroom practices improve the overall quality of students' writing” (11). Writing assessments are important because teachers use them as tools to gauge the improvement of students, and hopefully create higher quality student performance. Writing assessments are only effective when they are part of typical classroom practice. Implementing assessments that model what the core has devised, as a part of typical classroom practices, will be a significant change in writing in language arts classrooms.

Teachers use various writing assessments to evaluate a variety of forms ranging from a simple paragraph to an in-class essay. But, traditional and useful writing assessments are different than what the Standards are proposing. The CCSS assessments fall under the category of what is called “high-stakes” writing assessments. These are their findings:

Studies have provided some limited support for the positive effects of high-stakes writing assessments, including improving students' writing (based on correlative data where students' writing scores improved after such assessments were implemented), making writing instruction more central to the mission of schools, and changing teachers' writing practices in positive ways. (Graham, “Throw “Em Out Or Make ‘Em Better?” 2)

High-stakes testing can be problematic because teachers often teach to the test, limiting the range and important true-to-life writing that helps students develop writing skills. But, a high-stakes test that promotes writing is better than a multiple-choice test that does not require writing. Data show only limited support for high-stakes writing assessments, so it is important for teachers to employ other typical writing assessments in their classrooms. Teachers will need to create a hybrid of writing assignments in their classrooms which incorporate writing assessments that improve writing skills and also prepare students for the high-stakes testing which will be administered. The practical
application may include more in-class argumentative essays or outlines. These types of writing exercises would promote viewing essays as evidence based arguments and not merely regurgitating information, which was prevalent in expository writing.

Teachers will have a better idea of what to expect with the CCSS when examples of the finalized language arts assessments are released and testing begins. From the limited evidence available there will be an extensive element of argumentative writing embedded in the Standards. Language arts teachers will need to increase the argumentative writing done in their classrooms to prepare for the change. It is important to mention that though the CCSS have been adopted by most states, a few are considering dropping the Standards in favor of state standards. One example is the state of Utah. Utah’s State Office of Education is committed to the CCSS, but various independent groups have been meeting with legislators to discuss how the Standards are “are too specific…they’re not the best standards possible; and because Core standards are not truly independent” (Schencker). Educational standards are frequently changing, and if Utah and other states decide to drop the Standards, it is in each state’s best interest to promote a writing culture similar to what the CCSS propose.

Research shows student writing performance in elementary schools and secondary schools is subpar. Writing is an essential skill and it is a concern that elementary schools and secondary schools are not promoting writing with the needed rigor to help students prepare for college and careers. There are various reasons why writing is not a focus in language arts classrooms including literary tradition, writing background, time demands on language arts teachers, and high-stakes testing. Regardless of the reasons, multiple organizations and states saw the need to reform the writing culture in schools and created
the Common Core State Standards. The CCSS emphasize argumentative writing, and increased writing in general, through learning outcomes and assessments. The transition from state cores to the CCSS is a great opportunity for teachers to reflect on their writing pedagogy and how that is shaping the writing culture in their classrooms. Teachers need to actively promote a writing culture that encourages students to produce advanced writing; expecting more writing, in a classroom environment that aids developing writers, can help achieve this necessary goal.
1.0 College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards: Grades 9-10 Performance Tasks

RI.9-10.1 READING: Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

W.9-10.1 WRITING: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

SL.9-10.1 SPEAKING AND LISTENING: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

2.0 TEXT ONE: Excerpt found on the following website: www.americanrhetoric.com


I decline to accept the end of man. It is easy enough to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure: that when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking. I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure; he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.

3.0 Learning Task: Analysis DOK 3

3.1 After doing a close reading of the excerpt from Faulkner’s speech, decide what claim Faulkner is making.

3.2 Highlight/Underline the specific textual evidence that supports your conclusion.

3.3 Talk with the person next to you and be ready to cite the explicit textual evidence from the speech that supports your conclusion, AND why you selected this particular evidence. Listen carefully to your partner’s selection of evidence and the rationale for selection.
4.0 TEXT THREE: Found on the following website: www.americanrhetoric.com


Watch it at www.americanrhetoric.com and follow the script:

Ladies and Gentlemen, I'd planned to speak to you tonight to report on the state of the Union, but the events of earlier today have led me to change those plans. Today is a day for mourning and remembering. Nancy and I are pained to the core by the tragedy of the shuttle Challenger. We know we share this pain with all of the people of our country. This is truly a national loss.

Nineteen years ago, almost to the day, we lost three astronauts in a terrible accident on the ground. But we've never lost an astronaut in flight. We've never had a tragedy like this.

And perhaps we've forgotten the courage it took for the crew of the shuttle. But they, the Challenger Seven, were aware of the dangers, but overcame them and did their jobs brilliantly. We mourn seven heroes: Michael Smith, Dick Scobee, Judith Resnik, Ronald McNair, Ellison Onizuka, Gregory Jarvis, and Christa McAuliffe.

We mourn their loss as a nation together.

For the families of the seven, we cannot bear, as you do, the full impact of this tragedy. But we feel the loss, and we're thinking about you so very much. Your loved ones were daring and brave, and they had that special grace, that special spirit that says, "Give me a challenge, and I'll meet it with joy." They had a hunger to explore the universe and discover its truths. They wished to serve, and they did. They served all of us.

We've grown used to wonders in this century. It's hard to dazzle us. But for twenty-five years the United States space program has been doing just that. We've grown used to the idea of space, and, perhaps we forget that we've only just begun. We're still pioneers. They, the members of the Challenger crew, were pioneers.

And I want to say something to the schoolchildren of America who were watching the live coverage of the shuttle's take-off. I know it's hard to understand, but sometimes painful things like this happen. It's all part of the process of exploration and discovery. It's all part of taking a chance and expanding man's horizons. The future doesn't belong to the fainthearted; it belongs to the brave. The Challenger crew was pulling us into the future, and we'll continue to follow them.

I've always had great faith in and respect for our space program. And what happened today does nothing to diminish it. We don't hide our space program. We don't keep secrets and cover things up. We do it all up front and in public. That's the way freedom is, and we wouldn't change it for a minute.
We’ll continue our quest in space. There will be more shuttle flights and more shuttle crews and, yes, more volunteers, more civilians, more teachers in space. Nothing ends here; our hopes and our journeys continue.

I want to add that I wish I could talk to every man and woman who works for NASA, or who worked on this mission and tell them: "Your dedication and professionalism have moved and impressed us for decades. And we know of your anguish. We share it."

There’s a coincidence today. On this day three hundred and ninety years ago, the great explorer Sir Francis Drake died aboard ship off the coast of Panama. In his lifetime the great frontiers were the oceans, and a historian later said, "He lived by the sea, died on it, and was buried in it." Well, today, we can say of the Challenger crew: Their dedication was, like Drake’s, complete.

The crew of the space shuttle Challenger honored us by the manner in which they lived their lives. We will never forget them, nor the last time we saw them, this morning, as they prepared for their journey and waved goodbye and "slipped the surly bonds of earth" to "touch the face of God."

Thank you.

5.0 **Learning Task: Analysis (DOK 2 & 3)**

5.1 After doing a close reading of Reagan’s speech, decide what claim Reagan is making.

5.2 Highlight/Underline the specific textual evidence that supports your conclusion.

5.3 Summarize Reagan’s speech, in one or two sentences, answering the following question in the process: What is Reagan’s message to a nation in mourning?

6.0 **TEXT THREE: Found on the following website: [www.poemhunter.com](http://www.poemhunter.com)**

**Invictus**

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.
It matters not how straight the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

William Ernest Henley

7.0 Learning Task: Analysis (DOK 3)

7.1 How is Henley’s theme both LIKE and UNLIKE the claims of Reagan’s and Faulkner’s speeches? Using specific evidence from all three texts, use a three-way Venn Diagram to compare and contrast Faulkner’s and Reagan’s speeches with Henley’s poem.

7.2 Which of the following claims do you feel BEST captures the similarities in Henley’s, Reagan’s and Faulkner’s viewpoints? If none reflects the claim you feel is the best representation, feel free to create your own, as long as it can be supported with specific textual evidence.

7.2.1 The future belongs to the brave.
7.2.2 To be human is to sacrifice.
7.2.3 Our dedication and endurance will make us immortal.
7.2.4 We are the masters of our fate.

7.3 With a partner, explain your reasons for selecting the claim you chose that captures the similarities in the three viewpoints. Use specific evidence from all three texts that explain your selection.

7.3 WRITING PROMPT: You are speaking to a group of high school students who have just survived a natural disaster, in which many lost possessions, homes, and loved ones. Write a speech in which your central idea is the same as the claim you selected above. Use specific evidence/examples from all three texts within the body of your speech. (Rubric included after Learning Task 8)

8.0 Learning Task (DOK 4): Application and Extension:

8.1 WRITING PROMPT: Write a brief but specific narrative from your own experience OR from examples taken from current events that reflect the claim chosen above.
### Writing Scoring Guide – Three Point Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The response provides the essential elements of a complete interpretation of the prompt. It addresses important aspects of the task and provides sufficient relevant evidence to support development. It is focused and organized, addressing the needs of purpose, audience and task. It includes sentences of varied length and structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The response provides some of the elements of an interpretation of the prompt. It addresses some aspects of the task and provides some evidence to support development. It has a focus but lacks strong organization and inconsistently addresses the needs of purpose, audience and task. It includes sentences of somewhat varied length and structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The response provides minimal elements of an interpretation of the prompt. It addresses few aspects of the task and provides little relevant evidence to support development. It lacks focus and organization and generally fails to address the needs of purpose, audience, and task. It includes sentences with little variety and structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>The response does not meet any criteria.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Work Cited


Turner, Denice. Personal Interview. 13 April 2011.
