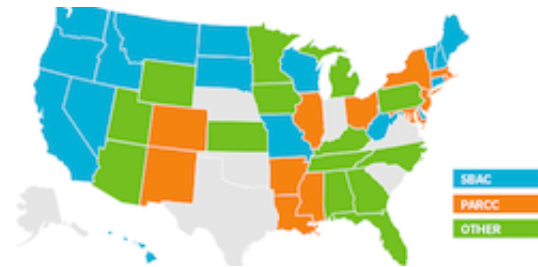


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PARCC Prep: The Literary Analysis Writing Task

BY MIDDLEWEB · 12/16/2014

This post on how to approach the PARCC Literary Analysis Writing Task offers new



material developed by Sarah Tantillo, the author of *Literacy and the Common Core: Recipes for Action* (Jossey-Bass, 2014) and *The Literacy Cookbook* (Jossey-Bass, 2012). For more information, check out her website, *The Literacy Cookbook*, and her *TL C Blog*, where she is posting other articles about prepping for Common Core-based ELA examinations.



by Sarah Tantillo

As we all strive to help our students meet and exceed the **Common Core Standards**, one reality we also have to prepare them for is the

standardized assessments they will face.

Depending on what state you live in, your students might take the PARCC, the SBAC, or **something else**. In my home state of New Jersey, we're gearing up for the PARCC, so I've been developing materials to support teachers in that arena. Even if your students are taking a different assessment, I think you'll find the writing instructional process described here of use.

In addition to reading comprehension questions (some traditional multiple-choice, some using newfangled drag-and-drop or other tech-enabled formats), the PARCC includes three writing tasks:



- (1) **Narrative Writing** based on a literary text, typically along the lines of “continue this story”: for more information, [click here](#).
- (2) **Research Writing** based on two pieces of nonfiction and a video, often involving either historical or scientific content: for more information, [click here](#).
- (3) **Literary Analysis Writing**, which typically requires students to compare and contrast two pieces of literature that deal with a common theme. This post explains how to prepare students for

Literary Analysis Writing.

Here are the materials you will need for this lesson series:

Generic Template for the literary analysis writing task for your grade level: Refer to the [PARCC online practice tests](#), and see the 6th grade model below.



Sample Writing Prompt #1: You create this based on content your students are familiar with.

Sample Exemplary Response #1: You create this based on 2 texts and a question you design, using the Generic Template.

Note: You do not have to show students these texts during the rollout described below, but you will obviously need them to write the exemplar. Also, depending on timing, you might want to model with these texts first, then use the #2 materials more for the “We Do” work.

Sample Writing Prompt #2: You create this based on current/forthcoming content.

Sample Exemplary Response #2: You can write this (a) in advance for reference, (b) on the spot with the students, or (c) not at all: just have students write it. See below to decide.

First Text for Prompt #2: You select this based on current/forthcoming content.

Second Text for Prompt #2: ditto

PARCC Literary Analysis Writing Task Rubrics:

For grade 3: <http://www.parcconline.org/samples/english-language-artsliteracy/grade-3-generic-rubrics>

For grades 4-5: <http://www.parcconline.org/samples/english-language-artsliteracy/grades-4-5-generic-rubrics>

For grades 6-11: <http://www.parcconline.org/samples/english-language-artsliteracy/grades-6-11-generic-rubrics>

Day 1: Focus on Unpacking the Prompt

1. Show students Sample Writing Prompt #1 and note that it appears in two parts (preliminary language and a later elaboration).
2. Show Sample Exemplary Response #1 so that students can see what the final product should look

like.

3. Show students the Generic Template for the literary analysis writing task for your grade level, noting that the language is predictable, so once they've seen a few of these, they will become more comfortable with the task.

Here is a generic template for grade 6 PARCC literary analysis writing task (pulled from the practice test found at: <http://parcc.pearson.com/practice-tests/english/>):

TODAY, you will read and think about the passages from _____ and _____. As you read these texts, you will gather information and answer questions about comparing themes and topics so you can write an essay.

THEN: You have read the passage from _____ and _____. Both texts develop the theme of freedom. Write an essay that compares and contrasts the approaches each text uses to develop the theme of freedom.

4. Cross-reference the template with Sample Writing Prompt #1 so they can see where the generic language is. (Later, you might want to give them practice in writing their own prompts, using texts you've selected.)

5. Make this pitch to students: It's important to unpack the prompt and turn it into a clear QUESTION so that we can annotate the text as we

go and save time because then we won't have to re-read each of the texts 4 times. Here is the question I derived from the 6th grade prompt above:

“How do these two texts develop the theme of freedom? In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different?” (Note: For more information on why and how to turn writing prompts into questions, see my blog post [here](#).)

6. Then model how to turn Sample Writing Prompt #2 into a question. If time permits, dive into annotating the First Text for Prompt #2.

Day 2: Focus on How to Annotate Texts

Remind students that we annotated the prompt so that we can annotate the text as we go and save time because then we won't have to re-read each of the texts 4 times. Then model how to annotate the First Text for Prompt #2. I recommend two steps, which can be done either at the same time or first one then the other:

Step #1: Electronically highlight the arguments/main ideas/topic sentences and relevant evidence. The online PARCC assessment includes a highlighting tool with four color choices. I

recommend blue/green for arguments (“Go forward with your argument; go green.”) and yellow for relevant evidence (because it’s bright and easy to see when skimming). Make the pitch that highlighting will enable students to skim quickly and find information they need to review when writing, so they won’t have to read every word of every text multiple times.

Step #2: The Literary Analysis Writing Tasks typically require students to compare and contrast two different texts. The secret truth about Venn diagrams is that they were designed for mathematicians who wanted to discuss set theory, not for essay writers who wanted to organize ideas. So I’ve created an organizer (below) that is more user-friendly for writers.

After students have taken notes on both texts (in the “Key points” boxes), they should go over their notes and put checkmarks next to any items that both texts have in common. Then they can identify key differences and jot a few notes in those bottom boxes. On a blank piece of paper, they should create this chart:

	Text 1	Text 2
Key points		
Key differences		

Day 3: More Annotation Practice

Invite students to help you annotate the Second Text for Response #2 and take notes on the 2-column chart. Day 2 was about modeling (“I Do”). Now you can move into the “We Do” phase.

Day 4: Finish the Notes

Go through the notes and invite students to put checkmarks next to items that both texts have in common. Then model how to add notes about important differences. Give students some guidance on how to determine “what’s important.” Depending on how much time you have, you may be able to move into “Day 5” work.

Days 5-6: Move from Notes to Writing

1. As you begin modeling how to write based on the notes, revisit Sample Exemplary Writing Response #1 and explain how the parts of that essay work:



- Intro: 1-2 sentences (Address the prompt by restating it and give a thesis.)
- Body 1: Contrast
- Body 2: Contrast
- Body 3: Compare
- Conclusion: Punchy ending: Ultimately, what conclusion or conclusions do they come to about the theme?

Invite students to help you explain how each part of the essay functions and let them critique the piece in relation to the PARCC Writing Rubric: What score would they give it, and why?

2. Then you have several options: (1) Hand out your pre-created Sample Exemplary Response #2 and

invite students to explain how it accomplishes the task and meets the criteria for the PARCC Writing Rubric. (2) Conduct the writing process as a “write-aloud,” inviting students to help you compose. (3) Let students try to write their own.

Subsequent Days

What you do next will depend on your last decision. One thing is for certain: a major next step is to give students a fresh prompt and texts and let them work through the entire process on their own.

***Sarah Tantillo** writes frequently [for MiddleWeb](#) about literacy and the Common Core. She's the author of [Literacy and the Common Core: Recipes for Action](#) and [The Literacy Cookbook: A Practical Guide to Effective Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening Instruction](#). Sarah consults with schools on literacy instruction, curriculum development, data-driven instruction, and school culture-building. Sarah has taught high school English and Humanities in both suburban and urban public schools, including the high-performing North Star Academy Charter School of Newark. [Visit her website](#).*