



West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District  
Integrated Reading Language Arts (IRLA)

## Overview

**Content Area: Language Arts**

**Course & Grade Level: IRLA, Grade 8**

## Summary & Rationale

Integrated Reading and Language Arts challenges students to master skills in reading and writing across various genres. Throughout the year, students will analyze non-fiction, fiction, and narrative texts, in order to develop theories about themselves, others, and society as a whole. In 8th grade, students will master these reading and writing skills within the context of social justice issues that are addressed throughout our human rights curriculum. Discussions surrounding these complex topics will be captured within literary analysis, personal writing, investigative study, and will state their observations of their immediate microsystem in middle school, the mesosystem of our nation, and the macrosystem of our global society. By focusing the 8th grade curriculum within the context of human rights, we can teach the whole child to analyze the challenges presented within our society, so that we can collaborate to create a better world through advocacy, acceptance, agency, and empathy. To ensure that students master the art of critical reading and writing it is necessary to spiral in key objectives, which are listed below. These objectives are frequently measured both implicitly and explicitly and are assessed in a variety of ways.

## Assessments

- Conferring
- Whole Class discussion
- Book Club meetings
- Turn and Talks
- Writing on Demand
- Exit tickets
- Self-Assess with rubrics

## Recurring Objectives

### **Students will be able to:**

- Set reading and writing goals based on rubrics.
- Examine mentor writing to identify structure and thematic lenses.
- Revise with focus (i.e., intro and conclusion, audience).
- Determine themes/central ideas & how they are developed throughout a text.
- Determine how the writer uses characterization, setting and plot to convey meaning.
- Craft and evaluate sophisticated claims by using strong, relevant textual evidence and sound reasoning.

- Recognize weak and/or irrelevant evidence.
- Analyze traditional themes/motifs, techniques & archetypes to strengthen understanding by examining details across texts.
- Synthesize understanding of texts by tracing multiple lenses/themes/symbols in order to draw a connection and develop a deeper interpretation.
- Pose and respond to provocative text-based questions by using evidence to guide thinking.
- Collaborate with others to extend/grow thinking about complex texts and topics.

## Unit One: Memoir: Writing to Reflect on Experience and Suggest Thematic Connections (Writing)

**Content Area: Language Arts**

**Course & Grade Level: IRLA, Grade 8**

### Summary & Rationale

This unit aims to dramatically alter the quality of students' writing, while tapping into their motivation to write about topics that are especially personal. Start by clarifying the difference between personal narrative writing and memoir. In the former, writers write true stories and revise them as they bring out the story shape that is nascent to them, and as they think "What's this story really about?" they then bring that idea forward in the story. When working on memoir, writers are more apt to start with some big, important ideas that they want to explore and to communicate--something that says to the world, "this is who I am." The idea comes first, and then writers collect small moments around the idea, bringing out themes through a variety of narrative and expository techniques. The memoir unit will be based in independence in which student will not be told, "This is how your memoir should be structured." Instead, they will be given the freedom to draw on all they know about forwarding meaning through storytelling and exposition and to weave these two together to craft a text that is utterly *them*. For this reason, the memoir should be approached not as only the narrative genre or the opinion/argument genre, but a hybrid of the two.

This unit brings together the art of narrative and expository writing and supports both the first and third NJSL standards in writing. Students will read memoirs by Joan Didion and David Sedaris and see the blending of ideas and vignettes that lead the writer and reader on a compelling journey of introspection and insight. Memoir demands much in the way of structure, expecting writers to skillfully move between conveying events and experience and explication. This means that students will be asked to draw upon and extend their prior narrative skills to engage the reader, sequence events, and convey meaning through storytelling, and to draw on their expository work to skillfully unpack and couch these stories in idea-based writing. To do this, students must learn to analyze their life experiences to determine what it is they most want to convey about themselves and their lives and make purposeful craft and structure choices to do so.

This genre lays the groundwork for future high-stakes writing that students will be asked to do for application essays, job applications, and in writing prompts on exams such as the PARCC and the SAT. Beyond test scores, data, and standards, though, adolescents need opportunities to write to make sense of their lives. Eighth grade is a time of emotional roller coasters and shifting perspectives. This kind of writing is not just an expectation within national standards, it is a tool that changes lives.

|  |
|--|
| <b>Recommended Pacing</b>  |
| <b>3 weeks</b>   |
| <b>New Jersey Student Learning State Standards</b>   |
| RL 8.2, RL 8.4, RL 8.5, RL 8.6, W. 3a-e, L. 5, W. 1a-e   |
| <b>Sample Assessments</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Graded drafts (rough and final)</li> <li>● Participation in writing process</li> <li>● Ted Talks/ This I Believe</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Instructional Focus</b>   |
| <b>Unit Enduring Understandings</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Meaningful memoirs reveal something important about my character or my experience.</li> <li>● Narrative structures bring out important meaning through linked stories and written reflection.</li> <li>● Powerful topics can be explored by moving between small details and big ideas.</li> <li>● Big ideas can be conveyed through memoirs by studying mentor texts.</li> <li>● Powerful messages can be conveyed through memoirs by adjusting narrative structures.</li> <li>● Meaning can be created in memoirs by drawing on a repertoire of old and new narrative strategies.</li> <li>● Experimenting with narrative structure and written craft allows for greater independence in my writing throughout the writing process--drafting, revising, and editing.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Unit Essential Questions</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>How can I craft a meaningful memoir that reveals something important about my character and experience, using what I know of narrative structure to bring out an important meaning through linked stories and written reflection?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How can I (use my writer’s notebook to) explore powerful topics, moving between writing small details and writing about big ideas?</li> <li>○ How can I convey a big idea through my memoir by studying mentor texts, adjusting structure, and drawing on a repertoire of old and new strategies for highlighting meaning?</li> <li>○ How do I draft, revise and edit with even greater independence while also bringing out my bigger meaning in even more powerful ways by experimenting with structure and elaboration?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

## Objectives

### Students will be able to:

- Collect entries from freewriting and relive small moments in their lives.
- Write numerous anecdotes that capture tension in their lives.
- Write to show pivotal points and life themes.
- Investigate patterns and themes in anecdotes.
- Write narrative that develops real experiences using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
- Refocus memoir on person, not just events.
- Use metaphor and comparison to capture complicated ideas and feelings.
- Experiment with structure to evoke meaning.
- Create a blend of dialogue, thinking and action.
- Publish and celebrate their work.

## Resources

*“Quietly Struggling,”* by Kelly Boland Hohne  
*Marshfield Dreams,* by Ralph Fletcher  
*Little by Little,* by Jean Little  
*When I Was Your Age: Original Stories about Growing Up,* edited by Amy Elrich  
*Knots in my Yo-Yo String,* by Jerry Spinelli  
*Going Where I’m Coming From,* edited by Anne Mazer  
*Persepolis,* by Marjane Satrapi (graphic novel)  
*Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun,* by Geoffrey Canada  
*Long Way Gone,* by Ishmael Beah  
*“Eleven,”* by Sandra Cisneros  
*“Not Enough Emilys,”* by Jean Little  
*“My Grandmother’s Hair,”* by Cynthia Rylant  
TCRWP Units of Study Books

## Unit Two: Close Reading for Theoretical Lenses (Reading)

**Content Area: Language Arts**

**Course & Grade Level: IRLA, Grade 8**

### Summary & Rationale

In this unit, students will have opportunities to select and read books according to their interests, to track what and how much they are reading, to react and respond to their reading using a variety of strategies for specific reading skills, to reflect on their reading lives, and to set personal reading goals. Students will read with stamina and engagement, monitor for comprehension. Specifically, students will practice and apply the close reading strategies of tracking character progression and author's craft to enhance the skills of effective reading. As a result, students will read more, be accountable for their reading goals, and increase their ability to comprehend and think deeply as they read. Alfred Tatum describes the beauty of textual lineages – the literature and nonfiction that has deeply influenced us, either by filling us with new ideas, or with visions of possibility, or with comfort or escape. In this unit of study, we will encourage students to find, name, and describe the books that have influenced them. This unit also aims to inspire students to take charge of their independent reading life so that they follow the authors and literary traditions they love, in trajectories they can stay on as adult readers. In this unit, we want to instill the reading habits that have less to do with skill and more to do with loving reading. We do this in the firm belief that it matters that kids love to read. The reading they do for school will be just a small percentage, then, of their total reading life. Reading is, after all, a combination of skill and will.

#### **LGBTQ:**

This unit aims to introduce LGBTQ-themed texts into the 8th grade curriculum, specifically as a part of a unit on close reading and reading through literary lenses. The intention is to help students develop a critical understanding of heteronormativity and the way it impacts perception, language, and behavior.

The integration of LGBTQ texts into the curriculum also aligns with the emphasis in 8th grade on social justice, identity, community, engagement, and acceptance. The presence of LGBTQ literature--and a theory-based analysis of these text--will not only provide students with language, arguments, and ideas that they can use in order to process various identities and orientations, but will also provide a voice to LGBTQ students and a means to represent them within the curriculum.

### Recommended Pacing

**5 weeks**

## New Jersey Student Learning State Standards

RL.8.2, RL.8.4, RL.8.5, RL.8.6, RL.8.8, RI.8.5, RI.8.8

### Sample Assessments

- Writing on Demand - Using claim, evidence, reasoning
  - Journal writing, informal responses to reading
- Whole group/small group discussions
- Literary analysis screencast
- Literary analysis essay

### Instructional Focus

#### Unit Enduring Understandings

- The goal of reading is to make meaning from text.
- Fiction can entertain while revealing truths.
- Literature can reflect, clarify, and criticize the times it portrays.
- Effective readers use specific strategies to help them develop the skills needed to comprehend texts and think deeply about them (to make meaning from what they are reading).
- Words have multiple meanings.
- Authors sometimes convey meaning indirectly.
- Readers are entitled to an opinion about what a text means, but some opinions are more supported by text evidence than others.
- Effective readers bring various stances to make meaning from text.
- Genre influences organization, technique, and style.
- Different texts have different structures.
- Close reading focuses student reading, analysis, and argument of text.

#### Unit Essential Questions

- How can I read to notice and analyze how authors write to convey themes, including author's use of archetypal characters and allusions to other texts?

#### LGBTQ Unit:

- What are the common themes or theories that exist within LGBTQ literature?
- Do these common themes work to perpetuate or deconstruct the narrative of LGBTQ characters, and their experiences in the world?
- How can I read to notice and analyze how authors write to convey themes, including author's use of archetypal characters and allusions to other texts?



- How can we read through various lenses in order to identify evidence and develop arguments that illustrate the analysis of themes addressed by Marcel Foucault (i.e. heteronormativity, identity, and discourse)?
- What is heteronormativity and how it is harmful?

## Objectives

### Students will be able to:

- Determine themes/central ideas & their development throughout a text.
- Notice patterns and complications to patterns in texts.
- Determine how the writer uses characterization, setting and plot to convey meaning.
- Notice and understand complicated messages.
- Identify figurative language & connotative meanings.
- Analyze word choice and its effect on mood & tone.
- Noticing literary elements and how they work together to convey meaning.
- Analyze text structures & their contributions to meaning & style.
- Use graphic organizers to compare texts.
- Identify allusions to themes, patterns of events and characters from myths, traditional stories, etc.
- Self-assess reading about writing & use of best textual evidence.
- Develop and refine key concepts.
- Evaluate arguments by assessing reasoning and evidence.
- Recognize irrelevant evidence.

## Resources

### LGBTQ Unit:

*Lily and Dunkin* by Donna Gephart

*Star-Crossed* by Barbara Dee

*Gracefully Grayson* by Ami Polonsky

*Felix Yz*, by Lisa Bunker

*Drama* by Raina Telgemeier

*So Hard to Say* by Alex Sanchez

*The Misfits* by James Howe

“Secret Samantha”, by Tim Federle

“Why Heteronormativity Is Harmful”, by Chris Tompkins, *Teaching Tolerance*

“Why Heteronormativity Is a Bad Thing”

## Unit Three: Literary Essay (Writing)

**Content Area: Language Arts**

**Course & Grade Level: IRLA, Grade 8**

### Summary & Rationale

The unit begins in what is most likely comfortable territory--teaching students to write about and reflect upon the themes they see in the texts they have chosen to write about. Urging students to use their prior learning, they will be pushed to collect a few possible themes and expand on them in their writing, using writing partners for support. Then, students will be taught to read their texts a little more closely, paying attention to the small details and critical themes they originally named. In an effort to push the sophistication and nuance of both their thinking and their reading of their texts, students will be taught to focus on theme by paying attention to the author's craft of the text, using that craft to unlock more of the author's purpose.

In the first portion of this unit, students will be coached to use all that they know to draft their first essay on a short story of their choosing (from a teacher-provided selection). In particular, students will be offered a mentor essay to study for ways to get started and then to keep going as they draft. This work encourages independence, assuming that most of the class has written many essays before.

After their drafts are written, students will be taught a few high-leverage, sophisticated strategies to help lift the level of their essays. First, students will be encouraged to be critical of their own writing, and to look for places where their essays are not making sense. Students will be taught to use logical reasoning to clarify the relationship between their evidence and the ideas in their essays. Students will search for any alternative arguments that could be made about the texts they are analyzing, and to speak back to those alternatives in their own essays. Finally, students will be asked to edit their essays to the best of their abilities. By pulling aside small groups and conferences, students will be provided with ways to make their writing all the more powerful, correct, and readable.

Another section of this unit will rally them to focus on not only the themes that tend to emerge in a text, but also on the craft than author tends to use as he or she writes. This focus on the patterns of craft that we see as we read pushes students to think about the text as something that the author has created purposefully, and that the choices he or she tends to make around word choice, syntax or literary devices matter. Students will be taught the ways that writers refine their introductions and conclusions so that these provide the context that readers will need in order to enter the world of the essayist and so that the essay topic will feel relevant to the readers' worlds and to their own lives. In addition, students will analyze ways that writers

adopt the tone of an essayist, paying close attention to the language they use and making sure that it matches their intent.

Finally, students will be asked to use all that they have learned both this year and in years past to conceive of and draft an essay in which they compare and contrast the themes of two texts. One of these texts will be the one they have chosen to write about across this unit. The other will be a different text of their choosing. This work asks students to apply what they know to a slightly different task: to decide how a compare-and-contrast essay might be the same and different from the work they have done.

### **Recommended Pacing**

**2 Weeks**

### **New Jersey Student Learning State Standards**

W.8.1.a-e, W.8.2.d, W.8.3.b, W.8.3.d, W.8.4, W.8.5, W.8.6, W.8.7, W.8.9.a; W.8.10 RL.8.1, RL.8.2, RL.8.3, RL.8.4, RL.8.5, RL.8.10, SL.8.1, SL.8.2, SL.8.3, SL.8.4, SL.8.6, L.8.1, L.8.2, L.8.3, L.8.4, L.8.5, L.8.6

### **Sample Assessments**

- Peer Editing
- Final Paper

### **Instructional Focus**

#### **Unit Enduring Understandings**

- By reading closely and powerfully, literary analysis essays can be well developed and centered around themes.
- Close reading allows for the creation of analytical arguments that can analyze authorial craft across various texts.
- Reading closely across various texts allows for a synthesized argument to be developed and well-supported using strong evidence from multiple literary sources.

#### **Unit Essential Questions**

- How can I transfer all that I know about reading powerfully and about writing literary essays to the challenge of writing well-developed essays about the themes and craft of different texts?

## Objectives

**Students will be able to:**

**Write a thematic essay:**

- Look for themes all around us
- Read closely to develop themes
- Fine tune themes by studying author's craft
- Clarify relationships between evidence and ideas
- Craft a counter-argument within the literary essays

**Write a comparative essay** \*addressed in SGO for later in the year\*

- Write across texts
- Write comparative essays on demand
- Publish on the internet
- Write for an authentic audience

## Resources

**LGBTQ Unit:**

*Lily and Dunkin* by Donna Gehart

*Star-Crossed* by Barbara Dee

*Gracefully Grayson* by Ami Polonsky

*Felix Yz*, by Lisa Bunker

*Drama* by Raina Telgemeier

*So Hard to Say* by Alex Sanchez

*The Misfits* by James Howe

"Secret Samantha", by Tim Federle

"Why Heteronormativity Is Harmful", by Chris Tompkins, *Teaching Tolerance*

"Why Heteronormativity Is a Bad Thing"

## Unit Four: Social Issues Book Clubs (Reading)

**Content Area: Language Arts**

**Course & Grade Level: IRLA, Grade 8**

### Summary & Rationale

In this unit, readers will be pushed toward deep comprehension from the get-go through the study of social issue texts in book clubs. Additionally, there will be a new strand of focus on literary terms, analysis and critique.

The best way to deepen our thinking and increase engagement, while also quickly forging relationships in the classroom is to read in the company of others. In this unit, students will be asked to read in clubs. Knowing that book resources vary, we recommend a couple of different book configurations. The first option is clubs with each member reading the same book. These books may be chosen by the group, and group members may be organized by reading level. Another option is to have students reading different texts, but organized around a similar theme or concept.

The work in this unit is split into two sections. First, the students are organized into book clubs that are *all* reading the same text: *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton. The teacher may use this text, since all students will be familiar, for examples of close reading strategies to use in preparation for club meetings, as well as to model strong discussion skills. This section of the unit is a brief and focused way to have all students share the same mentor text, as well as model and set the bar for the skills (reading and discussion) we expect to see students using for the remainder of the unit.

For the second round of clubs, groups of students will choose one of a selection of texts that center around various social issues in today's world; issues such as race, gender, education and rape culture. Students will continue to pull from the close reading skills modeled in previous reading units--as well as those specific to the discourse of social justice literature--to explore the complicated themes and real world connections of this text with their group over the course of the remaining weeks.

### Recommended Pacing

**7 Weeks**

### New Jersey Student Learning State Standards

RL. 8.1, RL 8.2, RL 8.3, RL 8.7, RL 8.9

## Sample Assessments

- Performance Assessment--Reading Response
- Literary Centers
- On Demand Journal Responses
- Socratic/Group Discussions

## Instructional Focus

### Unit Enduring Understandings

- Using strategies from reading across genres allows readers to make sense of complicated words.
- Personal understanding of the world affects underlying ideas that are highlighted in texts--ideas that might offer insights or critiques to concepts that were previously understood.
- Themes can be traces across a text and can be supported by text evidence.
- Reading can be strengthened by compounding prior knowledge of the text, its themes, and its development.
- Understanding literature can be enhanced by noticing traditional literary techniques, themes, and archetypes that exist in the stories.
- Recognizing patterns in life and in world events will yield a richer understanding of social justice literature.

### Unit Essential Questions

- How can I use strategies from reading other genres in order to make sense of complicated worlds?
- In what ways does my understanding of these worlds affect underlying ideas the text is highlighting – ideas that might also offer insights or critiques of my own world?
- What are ways I can look at themes that live in each of the texts that I read? How can I trace not only the themes across the text, but the details that support each theme?
- What are ways I can see how themes travel across texts? How can I be sure that with each subsequent text I read, I strengthen my reading by compounding my understanding with the themes from all the texts that came before it?
- How does noticing some traditional literary techniques, themes and archetypes that I see playing out in the stories I have read help strengthen my understanding of those stories?
- How can seeing those same patterns in my life and in world events help me make sense of them as well?

## Objectives

### Students will be able to:

- Consider their relationship to alternate societies (historical or contemporary).
- Use reading strategies to make sense of complicated worlds.
- Observe textual issues for insights and critiques of our world.
- Use nuances in text and aha! moments to critique their own worlds.
- Cite textual evidence to make an accurate inference and support analysis of what the text says.
- Study the author's use of motifs such as fear, power, privilege, oppression, hatred, sexism, racism, classism, colorism, ageism to build a theme in an original way.
- Consider how a book's theme mirrors their own world.
- Debate how a character both fits and challenges a traditional archetype.

## Resources

- *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton
- *Social Issues Book Club* texts:
  - *I am Malala*
    - (classism/sexism/discrimination)
  - *Monster*, Walter Dean Myers
    - (Race in society)
  - *\*Skin I'm In* (limited number needed)
    - (Race in Society/Bullying/Discrimination)
  - *Sold*
    - (Sexism/classism)
  - *Speak*
    - (Sexism/bullying/Discrimination)
  - *All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds
  - *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio

TCRWP Units of Study Books

## Unit Five: Position Paper (Writing)

**Content Area: Language Arts**

**Course & Grade Level: IRLA, Grade 8**

### Summary & Rationale

This unit directs students to enter the tricky intersection of critical literacy and argument writing; therefore, there will be inevitable discomfort. Critical literacy asks teachers to put themselves in a place of discomfort, not only because of the topics and conversations that will inevitably ensue, but also because they will likely need to think about their own stances and responsibilities as humans. The goal is to teach the student writers to channel their emotional response and to compose arguments that are fair and principled as well as impassioned.

The first segment of the unit begins with an argument that leads students to question the taking for granted. At this time, students are introduced immediately to the debate about whether games with fictional violence are diverting or harmful. Teachers will anchor this work by beginning with a shared text (*New Yorker* article on teens playing the role-playing game *Killer*), inviting students to use their knowledge of argument writing to cull implicit as well as explicit support from this initial text to support their position. Students are reminded that it is important to weigh and evaluate evidence from both sides of the issue quickly, develop a position supported by reasons and evidence, and compose a position paper that takes a clear position while acknowledging other points of view. In this context, the term position paper is used to describe a research-based argument essay, one that attempts to be principled and fair to alternative points of view. There should be a return to flash-draft writing (writing an entire argument quickly, including referencing text evidence) as a way to get a whole draft going. Students will then take that draft through more sweeping research and revision work that focuses on elaboration, explanation, and language choices.

The next section of the unit moves to more troubling, real world issues. Columbia provides text sets on the troubling issue of child soldiers that teachers may or may not choose to use to focus their work in this section. Alternately, teachers may invite students to compile more intensive research on the issue of genocide in a particular region, such as they were exposed to during genocide book clubs (previous reading unit). Students can use their research to argue if a nation is at risk for genocide and warrants assistance from global allies, such as the UN. Finally, teachers may take a more creative approach and offer their students a real world topic of their choice that would allow students to have choice in their writing focus and research. All topic options, whichever a teacher may choose, should promote students to tackle an even more complex issue, perhaps one with aspects of injustice, tragedy, and violence as well as courage, hope, and regeneration. It should be an issue that forces students to rethink again and again. Students will learn that some of the



thorniest questions are unanswerable--questions of national security, of holding people responsible, or of shared moral responsibility. The goal should not be for students to feel like they are “right,” or that they have “won” this argument, but have come to new understandings, deeper realizations, and a newfound confidence that they can write about complicated issues in a way that does not simplify that complexity. Regardless of the topic a teacher may choose, the research and writing piece will culminate in student use of the same writing skills.

Because the topic is one that has real-world seriousness, students are given the opportunity to engage in freewriting and discussion as a way to frame the topic. They’ll flash-draft, using their knowledge and skills of argument writing to get their first draft going. In this section, there will be more expectation that writers will rethink these positions as they research. Much of the revision process, therefore, will only be about learning to work with counterargument to be principled and fair--to contextualize the issue and to be fair to multiple points of view. As students work to write longer, denser, more complex arguments, the essay’s predictable structure will become an issue.

Because the issue at hand is so nuanced, students will need to contextualize the issue more in their position papers. They’ll need to highlight the complexity of this issue, develop its history, and define the scope of their particular argument in their papers, which means they’ll need to expand parts of their writing and consider how to structure their writing to allow for complexity. Teaching students a few structural choices--and how to use them to strengthen their argument and guide their reader--will be crucial.

### **Recommended Pacing**

**2 Weeks**

### **New Jersey Student Learning State Standards**

RL. 8.1, RL 8.2, RL 8.3, RL 8.7, RL 8.9

### **Sample Assessments**

- Final Position Paper
- Formal in-class Debate

### **Instructional Focus**

#### **Unit Enduring Understandings**

- In order to complete objective research, readers, analysts, and researchers need to suspend judgment on an issue while weighing and evaluating ideas across texts.

- Through objectivity, researchers can revise preliminary positions on subjects, develop research questions, and become an expert on a particular topic.
- Selecting strong, thorough evidence requires a study of topics that are fully substantiated by authors, recognizing which topics require additional research, and how personal insights are validated--or discredited--by research.
- Reading critically allows analysts to understand that multiple layers to an argument exist.
- The study of authorial craft reveals how an author manipulates their readers' thinking about a topic, based on the way in which the author presents the evidence of their thinking about the topic.
- Arguments will always have two sides, which can be debated through the use of strong evidence.
- Counterarguments strengthen position papers by revealing the opposing viewpoint to the writer's, and then using stronger evidence against the opposition to support the position of the author.

### **Unit Essential Questions**

- How can we suspend judgment on an issue as we research, weigh and evaluate ideas and information presented across texts, and carefully consider the strength of arguments?
- How can I approach reading with an open mind, form and revise preliminary positions on subjects, develop research questions, and read to become more expert?
- How can I learn to weigh and evaluate evidence, noticing which points authors fully substantiate, which merit further research, and which of my own arguments are validated by research?
- How can I read and reread critically to understand the multiple layers to an argument, as well as how the author presents and crafts their argument to get readers to follow his thinking?
- Are simulated games of violence perilous or diverting for teens?
- Should child soldiers be given amnesty?

### **Objectives**

#### **Students will be able to:**

- Compose evidence-based arguments.
- Compare and contrast ideas, take different stances on topics.
- Use precise and purposeful vocabulary.
- Develop a position on a complex argument.
- Debate positions to develop a complex argument.
- Flash-draft arguments while -working on specific writing goals.
- Angle evidence to support specific points.
- Use connotative language to paint a tone.
- Write powerful conclusions.
- Revise preliminary positions & develop research questions.
- Determine an author's POV and purpose in a text and compare it to others.
- Raise the level of text-based argument by analytical research.
- Weigh and evaluate evidence.
- Validate and substantiate arguments of authors as well as their own.

- Employ close, critical, interpretive reading to notice how authors craft their arguments.
- Grapple with issues of intensity and developing initial understanding.
- Debate to draft more balanced arguments.
- Attend to alternative arguments and points of view.
- Use the organizational structure of your piece to build argument.
- Attend to audience.

### Resources

- “High Jinks: Shootout,” by Guy Martin, The New Yorker
- “Shooting in the Dark” by Benedict Carey, The New York Times
- “This is America” by Childish Gambino
- Other current News articles exposing social injustice in America

TCRWP Units of Study Books

## Unit Six: Genocide Book Club (Reading)

**Content Area: Language Arts**

**Course & Grade Level: IRLA, Grade 8**

### Summary & Rationale

The goal of this unit is to teach eighth graders that when researchers begin to research, they need to suspend judgment and remain open to different sides of an issue – a skill they need to carry through to adulthood. Another goal is to inspire the belief that one needs to read more than once on a subject in order to build an informed opinion. This unit is planned in the hope that, by its end, students will no longer believe that nonfiction is “true,” but will perceive that it is someone’s perspective on the truth. While some research is necessary in this unit, the true focus of the work will be on how to read more critically, so that students do better work with the texts they have than just accumulating as many texts as they can locate.

In this unit, readers will be pushed toward deep comprehension from the get-go through the study of world genocides in book clubs. Additionally, there will be a new strand of focus on literary terms, analysis and critique.

The best way to deepen our thinking and increase engagement, while also quickly forging relationships in the classroom is to read in the company of others. In this unit, students will be asked to read in clubs. Knowing that book resources vary, we recommend a couple of different book configurations. The first option is clubs with each member reading the same book. These books may be chosen by the group, and group members may be organized by reading level. Another option is to have students reading different texts, but organized around a similar theme or concept.

Groups of students will be assigned one of a selection of texts that center on various world genocides. As the 8th grade curriculum exists as a study of social justice and genocide represents the extreme oppression of people, students will work to understand how tyrannical leaders and governments create genocides. As an exercise in abandoning the pattern of Eurocentric instruction typically taught in American schools, students will be asked to study genocides that have existed around the world, and will apply their knowledge and understanding of genocide in order to develop a well-supported argument about current nations under genocide watch. Students will continue to pull from the close reading skills modeled in previous reading units--as well as those specific to the discourse of social justice, genocide, political corruption, and tyranny.

### Recommended Pacing

**5 Weeks**

## New Jersey Student Learning State Standards

RL. 8.1, RL 8.2, RL 8.3, RL 8.7, RL 8.9

### Sample Assessments

- Presentation on Genocide
- On demand Journal Responses
- Socratic Discussions
- Book club discussions

### Instructional Focus

#### Unit Enduring Understandings

- Genre determines the structure of texts.
- Pictures, graphics, and illustrations can enhance texts.
- There is no such thing as a "neutral" text" because readers bring their personal experiences, perspectives, and philosophies to text.
- Nonfiction texts teach students something new about a subject.
- Narrative nonfiction tells a story that teaches both information and ideas.

#### Unit Essential Questions

- How can I use strategies from reading other genres in order to make sense of complicated worlds?
- In what ways does my understanding of these worlds affect underlying ideas the text is highlighting – ideas that might also offer insights or critiques of my own world?
- What are ways I can look at themes that live in each of the texts that I read? How can I trace not only the themes across the text, but the details that support each theme?
- What are ways I can see how themes travel across texts? How can I be sure that with each subsequent text I read, I strengthen my reading by compounding my understanding with the themes from all the texts that came before it?
- How does noticing some traditional literary techniques, themes and archetypes that I see playing out in the stories I have read help strengthen my understanding of those stories?
- How can seeing those same patterns in my life and in world events help me make sense of them as well?
- Why is nonfiction significant to the reader?
- How does nonfiction reflect culture and/or shape it?

## Objectives

### Students will be able to:

- Use reading strategies to make sense of complicated worlds.
- Observe textual issues for insights and critiques of our world.
- Consider the importance of the historical context.
- Study the author's use of specific motifs such as tyranny, 10 stage of genocide, oppression, empathy and other character archetypes.
- Debate how a character both fits and challenges a traditional archetype.
- To explore multiple nonfiction texts about one subject.
- Use prior knowledge to help them understand what they are reading.
- Determine what the author wants the reader to think and/or feel about the subject.
- Teach others what they have learned about their topic.

## Resources

- *The Book Thief*, by Markus Zusak
- *Forgotten Fire*, by Adam Bagdasarian
- *Between Shades of Grey*, by Ruta Sepetys
- *Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, by John Boyne
- *Over A Thousand Hills I Walk with You*, by Hanna Jansen
- *Children of the River*, by Linda Crew
- *Summer of My German Soldier*, by Bette Greene
- *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank
- *Zlata's Diary*, by Zlata Filipović
- *Milkweed*, by Jerry Spinelli
- *Alive in the Killing Fields*, by Nawuth Keat

TCRWP Units of Study Books

## Unit Seven: Approaching the Classics Through Close Reading, Discussion, and Performance (Reading)

**Content Area: Language Arts**

**Course & Grade Level: IRLA, Grade 8**

### Summary & Rationale

Students expand upon the independent skills and strategies previously mastered in the context of social interactions of book clubs. Book clubs push students to read closely, note and develop significant ideas about the text, and engage in meaningful conversations about the text. Through the study of literature and drama, students will be able to begin formulating understandings of conflicts in the world. Students will also engage in a more sophisticated, nuanced analysis of themes in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* in order to reveal not only its celebrated strengths but also possibly its pitfalls; possible pitfalls could include missing perspectives and unintentional perpetuation of racism.

### Recommended Pacing

**6 Weeks**

### New Jersey Student Learning State Standards

RL 8.1, RL 8.2, RL 8.3, RL 8.4, RL 8.5, RL 8.6, RL 8.7, RL 8.8, RL 8.9, RL 8.10, RI 8.1, RI 8.2, RI 8.3, RI 8.4, RI 8.5, RI 8.6, RI 8.7, RI 8.8, RI 8.9, RI 8.10, SL 8.1, SL 8.2, SL 8.3, SL 8.4, SL 8.5, SL 8.6

### Sample Common Assessments

- Final Paper (in next unit)
- Reading Checks
- Writing on Demand
- Socratic Discussion
- Whole-class discussions
- Presentation on selected motifs
- Characterization charts

## Instructional Focus

### Unit Enduring Understandings

- Literature can reflect, clarify, and criticize the times it portrays.
- Fiction can entertain while revealing truths.
- Great stories/books address universal themes of human existence and conflict.
- Great stories raise questions (and sometimes provide answers).
- Nonfiction provides connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, and events.
- Genres influence organization, technique, and style.

### Unit Essential Questions

- Why is this literature significant to the reader?
- How can fiction reveal truth?
- What influences in the text change characters?
- Does literature reflect culture or shape it?
- Where have readers seen this idea before?
- How do writers of various genres hook and hold their readers?
- How can I harness a toolkit of strategies to read challenging texts deeply, comparing and contrasting these texts to others, leading literary conversations, and becoming an expert on authors and literary traditions?

## Objectives

### Students will be able to:

- Research historical and cultural questions that arise in the process of reading a text.
- Recognize historical context and how it contributes to the story.
- Read across classic texts to analyze differences and perspective.
- Investigate narrative theme, craft and structure.
- Manage interpreting difficult texts with peers.
- Compare summaries or interpretations.
- Turn to literary critics to help illuminate meaning in the text.
- Read across texts for allusions, context and criticism.
- Take up literary or critical theories to investigate the effect of the text.
- Examine pressures put on characters and their effects on character identity.

### Write an essay analyzing authorial craft:

- Notice how an author tends to write.
- Identify, argue, and analyze symbolism.
- Plan the author's craft essay.
- Frame essays with relevance and context: introductions and conclusions.
- Adopt an essayist's tone.



## Resources

**Mentor text:** *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee

- “The Other Side”, Jacqueline Woodson
- “Strange Fruit”, Billie Holiday
- “The Scottsboro Trials”
- “Caged Bird”, Maya Angelou
- “Dream Deferred”, Langston Hughes

**Classic Short Stories:**

- “Tell Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe
- “Lamb to the Slaughter” by Roald Dahl
- “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson
- “Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut
- “Most Dangerous Game” by Richard Connell
- “A Modest Proposal” by Jonathan Swift
- “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin
- *Friendly Fire* by Alaa Al Aswany (anthology of short stories banned in Egypt that tell the stories of ordinary men and women who are struggling with their places in society, their religious beliefs, the government, and social hierarchy).
- *Love Letters from a Fat Man* by Naomi Benaron
- (anthology of short stories that focuses on the idea of bearing witness to some of the previous centuries most horrendous tragedies).
- *Tale of Two Americas: Stories of Inequality in a Divided Nation* by John Freeman
  
- *Other suggestions:*
  - <https://americanliterature.com/twenty-great-american-short-stories>
  - <https://bookriot.com/2018/03/27/classic-short-stories/>
- TCRWP Units of Study Books

|  |
|--|
| <b>Unit Eight: Poetry (Reading/Writing)</b>  |
| <b>Content Area: Language Arts</b>   |
| <b>Course &amp; Grade Level: IRLA, Grade 8</b>   |
| <b>Summary &amp; Rationale</b>   |
| <p>Students will understand and appreciate the beauty, art, and discipline of poetry through close reading. Students will begin by reading and listening to poetry in order to identify the differences between and similarities of poetry and prose. Students will then determine the literal meaning of the poem before beginning to analyze the poem— deconstructing it to look for something different with each read through (poetic devices, elements of structure, sound techniques, clues to the poet’s motivation, etc.) Students will learn to annotate the poem, making their analysis work visible on the page. Students will synthesize the individual elements of the poem that they analyzed in order to construct their own interpretation (or the poem’s deeper meaning).</p> |
| <b>Recommended Pacing</b>  |
| <b>2 weeks</b>   |
| <b>New Jersey Student Learning State Standards</b>   |
| W 8.4, W 8.5, W 8.6, W 8.9, W 8.10, RL.8.1, RL.8.2, RL.8.4, RL.8.5, RL.8.6, SL.8.1, SL.8.3, SL.8.4, L 8.1, L 8.2, L 8.3, L 8.4, L 8.5, L 8.6   |
| <b>Sample Assessments</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Writing on Demand - Analyzing a poem</li> <li>● Reciting a poem</li> <li>● Writing free verse poetry</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Instructional Focus</b>   |
| <b>Unit Enduring Understandings</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Effective readers use specific strategies (including rereading) to help them better understand and deepen their comprehension.</li> <li>● Effective readers bring various experiences and prior knowledge to make meaning from a text.</li> <li>● Poets often convey ideas indirectly.</li> </ul>   |

## Unit Essential Questions

- How can I read and reread a poem until I know how it works - why it looks the way it does on the page, how each part makes sense with the whole poem, and how specific words and phrases in the poem mean more than they would in another context?
  - How can I read and re-read a poem to understand not just the literal words on the page, but what is symbolized or hinted at that points to more complex themes?
  - How can I use what I know about poets' techniques and goals to analyze the many ways that a poem works to get across complex ideas and emotions?
  - How can I read closely to analyze the voice of the speaker, thinking about how this affects the messages of the poem?
- How do poets use different structures, sound techniques, and figurative language to communicate an idea?
- How does the individual's schema influence the reader's interpretation of the poem?
- How does the style and point of view of the poet affect the reader's understanding of the text?

## Objectives

### Students will be able to:

- Reread to make connections and determine the deeper meaning of the poem.
- Write multiple poetic forms.
- Identify symbolism.
- Analyze authorial craft.
- Argue connections between poetry and political, social, and cultural movements.
- Perform poetry.

## Resources

- "For Some Slight I Can't Quite Recall," by Ross Gay  
(<http://poets.org/poetsorg/poem/some-slight-i-cant-quite-recall>)
- "Bringing My Son to the Police Station to Be Fingerprinted," by Shoshauna Shy  
(<http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/068.html>)
- "Spring is like a perhaps hand," by ee cummings  
(<http://www.pemhunter.com/poem/spring-is-like-a-perhaps-hand/>)
- "We Real Cool: The Pool Players. Seven at the Golden Shovel" by Gwendolyn Brooks  
(<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/we-real-cool>)
- "Nikki-Rosa," by Nikki Giovanni  
(<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/177827>)
- "Knock, Knock" by Daniel Beatty
- "If I Should Have a Daughter" by Sarah Kay
- "Hands" by Sarah Kay
- "What Teachers Make" by Taylor Mali

TCRWP Units of Study Books

## Combined Unit: On Demand Reading and Writing

**Content Area: Language Arts**

**Course & Grade Level: IRLA, Grade 8**

### Summary & Rationale

On demand writing and reading are regular and expected parts of school life. Timed settings present a specific genre of reading and writing that must be discussed/practiced if students are to understand the demands of immediacy and performance.

### Recommended Pacing

**20 days, approximately**

### New Jersey Student Learning State Standards

RL 8.1, RL 8.2, RL 8.3, RL 8.4, RL 8.5, RL 8.6, RL 8.7, RL 8.8, RL 8.9, RL 8.10, RI 8.1, RI 8.2, RI 8.3, RI 8.4, RI 8.5, RI 8.6, RI 8.7, RI 8.8, RI 8.9, RI 8.10, W 8.1 a-e, W 8.2 a-f, W 8.3 a-e, W 8.4, W 8.7, W 8.8, W 8.9 a-b, L 8.1, L 8.2, L 8.4, L 8.5, L 8.6

### Sample Assessments

- On demand writing
- On demand reading for comprehension and analysis

### Instructional Focus

#### Unit Enduring Understandings

- On demand performance settings for reading and writing are used by local, state, and national agencies to assess student growth, school success, and school districts' delivery and interpretation of curriculum.
- On demand performance settings for reading and writing represent a particular genre of reading and writing, significantly different from the daily reading and writing practiced in workshop.
- Participation in daily reading and writing workshop is the most important predictor of success in real world, on demand settings.
- Standardized test question formats differ significantly from classroom question formats, for those students that participate.

## Unit Essential Questions

- What role do on demand performance settings play in assessing student/teacher performance?
- How can successful student performance in on demand settings be facilitated?

## Suggested Objectives

### Students will be able to:

- Identify the need for and occurrence of on demand reading and writing tasks.
- Compare and contrast on-demand environments versus school/classroom formats and use the appropriate skills to be successful in each.
- Identify the qualities of good writing expressed classroom writing workshops, on-demand setting and real life scenarios.
- Respond to sample prompts, recognizing that the format, content, and specifics of their writing must “match” the task set before them by the assessment itself.
- Use various writing rubrics (teacher-made, PARCC, TCRWP) to evaluate and score their own writing and the writing of others.
- Make a plan for their timed writing, e.g., think and plan for five minutes, write for 30 minutes, read and revise for five minutes.
- Use reading skills modeled and practiced all year to successfully answer open-ended questions on the reading portion of PARCC or other on-demand scenarios.

## Resources

- Scored writing samples from NJDOE website

TCRWP Units of Study Books