



Oakland Unified School District  Process Writing Assessment  
Response to Literature - Spring

STUDENT NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

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Dear Students,

This week you are going to write an essay in response to a story about a student who thinks that the Mississippi River starts in her backyard. Your teacher will read your essay to find out your ideas about the story and characters. This kind of writing is called a response to literature and it is the writing that most high school and college students do all the time. It is important writing because it is the best way for students to show what they really know and understand about what they read. Writers do their best writing when they have time to read, think, and plan.

During the next few days, you will do the following activities:

1. Read an example of a well written response to literature.
2. Listen to “Mississippi Lesson” and visualize the setting, the characters and the events in the story.
3. Read “Mississippi Lesson” yourself to identify what the story is really about. Then support your ideas with evidence from the text.
4. Identify the significance of the story.
5. Plan and write your essay.



DAY ONE: Listen, Read and Think

1. Your teacher has read aloud the story, “First Choice” by Cheryl Mays Halton.

2. Now read this student’s essay. It is an example of a response to literature essay. The student was asked to write an essay answering the question:

**“Why do you think ‘First Choice’ is a good title for the story? Use details from the story to support your answer.”**

First Choice is the story of Franny, who wants a puppy and has been saving up to buy one from Mrs. Morton for a very long time. But, when she finds a lost dog in the woods, she changes her mind about buying an Irish setter from Mrs. Morton!

I think First Choice is a good title for this story because Mrs. Morton, the lady Franny wanted to buy an Irish setter puppy from, said that, even though eight other people wanted one of the six Irish setters, Franny could have first choice of the one she wanted. That all changed when one day, Franny heard a whimper and found a skinny, black and white dog, hidden in a mound of brush. Franny gave it food and water and expected it to then go home, but even after dinner, the dog was sitting there on Franny’s front porch.

The next morning, the small dog was still there, so Franny decided to keep the small, lonely dog. Now, someone else who wanted an Irish setter could have first choice. Franny discovered that getting first choice doesn’t always mean that you get what you want. That’s why I think First Choice is a good title for this story.

3. What are the strengths and weaknesses in this student essay?

| Strengths in essay | Weaknesses in essay |
|--------------------|---------------------|
|                    |                     |
|                    |                     |
|                    |                     |

4. Here is why teachers think that this is a well-written student essay:

| FEATURES          | TEACHER COMMENTS:  |
|-------------------|--|
| Ideas and Content | <p><b>Shows clear understanding of purpose of the story.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“...she changes her mind...”</i></li> <li>● <i>Franny could have first choice of the one she wanted...</i></li> <li>● <i>...now someone else could have first choice.”</i></li> </ul>   |
| Organization      | <p><b>Clear organizational structure.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Introduction sets the stage and identifies the main idea of the story.</li> <li>● Middle paragraph supports main idea with evidence from the story.</li> <li>● Middle and concluding paragraphs give a summary of important events.</li> <li>● Concluding paragraph states why the main idea might be significant (important) to others.</li> </ul> |
| Evidence          | <p><b>Student uses text to support main idea.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>“...because Mrs. Morton...”</i></li> <li>● <i>“...so Franny decided to keep...”</i></li> <li>● <i>“That’s why I think...”</i></li> <li>● Student <b>paraphrased</b> main idea <i>“...Franny decided to keep the small, lonely dog. Now, someone else...could have first choice.”</i></li> </ul>  |
| Language          | <p><b>Sentences are varied and detailed.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● For example, the middle paragraph has a long complex opening sentence followed by a short sentence with a compound verb.</li> </ul>  |
| Conventions       | <p><b>These are first draft errors and don’t interfere with meaning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Student used unnecessary commas and underlined the story’s title instead of using quotation marks.</li> </ul>   |



## DAY TWO: Visualize, Sketch and Write a Caption

☛ Where is the Mississippi River?



This map shows the major rivers in the United States including the Mississippi River. In the story you are about to hear there is a student who thinks that the Mississippi River starts in her back yard. Look at the river that begins next to Lake Superior and trace it down to the Gulf of Mexico. This is the Mississippi River.

As you listen to the realistic fiction story, “**Mississippi Lesson**” sketch images that “pop up” in your mind from the beginning, middle and end of the story. When you are finished, write a caption below each sketch.

## “Mississippi Lesson” Sketches

**Beginning:**

“

”

**Middle:**

“

”

**End**

“

”

## Mississippi Lesson

My dad had said it more than once. “The creek behind our barn flows into the Little Rib River. The Little Rib River flows into the Big Rib River. The Big Rib River flows into the Wisconsin River. Then the Wisconsin River flows into the Mississippi.” Everyone in my family knew this. Of course, everyone knew the Mississippi River was very important.

There were other things everyone knew, too - things at school in Mrs. Hoff’s class. I was the smallest and the quietest kid in the class. I was pretty smart, and the teacher like me best. Everyone knew these things.

In November, Mrs. Hoff pulled down a big map of the United States and asked the class, “Who can tell me where the Mississippi River starts? Does anyone know?”

“Oh,” I thought, “I wonder if they all know.” I didn’t raise my hand, though. I didn’t want the other kids to think I was being a show-off because I knew the answer. Anyway, Mrs. Hoff knew I always knew the answer, even though I didn’t raise my hand very often. After a couple of other kids answered wrong, I thought Mrs. Hoff would look at me and say, in her calm voice, “Maria, do you know?”

Scott and Donny, the two smartest boys in the class, were waving their arms back and forth like they usually did. “Well,” I thought, “maybe they know. But maybe they don’t.” I tried not to smile. I knew the answer. Pretty soon, everyone would look over at me and admire me because the Mississippi River started behind my barn.

Mrs. Hoff picked Scott. He knew answers most of the time. “In Minnesota,” he said, out of breath. He said it in the same way that I would have said “behind my barn.”

“Minnesota?” I thought to myself. “HE GOT IT WRONG! HE DOESN’T KNOW! Oh, this is great.” I felt warm all over. Any second now, Mrs. Hoff would look my way. I wondered how she would let Scott down. Would she just call on me, or would she smile at him nicely and tell him he was wrong?

“You’re right, Scott.”

My stomach flipped. If I had been warm before, I was roasting now. There she stood, actually pointing to a spot in Minnesota. I would have looked like such a fool if Mrs. Hoff had called on me. I had been so sure of myself. I learned more than one thing in school that day.



### DAY THREE: Summary, Main Idea & Significance

#### 1. What is a summary of the story?

Briefly summarize “Mississippi Lesson” for a partner. Make sure that you include the beginning, middle and end. Remember that a summary is not a retelling. It only includes the important or essential details. When you are done, listen to your partner’s summary.

#### 2. Writing about the Main Idea

The main idea is what the story is *really* about. What do you think is the main idea of “Mississippi Lesson”?

Here are some questions to help you think about the main idea:

- How does the author show that Maria is a student who thinks she knows all the answers?
- What does Maria think when Scott first answers, “Minnesota?”
- What is Maria thinking after Mrs. Hoff says, “You’re right, Scott?”
- How has Maria changed from the beginning of the story?

*I think that the main idea of the story is \_\_\_\_\_*  
*\_\_\_\_\_ because (use evidence*  
*from the text)\_\_\_\_\_*



Share your interpretation (understanding) of the main idea with a classmate. Listen to her/his interpretation. It may be different from yours.

### Significance

Why could the main idea of the story be **significant (important)** to other people)?

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*☞ Helpful hint: Think about what people could learn from this story.*



### DAY FOUR: Planning an Essay

This is a graphic organizer to help you plan your essay. You will be answering the question, “***What is the main idea in the story, “Mississippi Lesson” and why is it significant (important)?***” Use words or phrases to make notes. You can use this booklet to help you plan your essay.

Title of the story: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes for an introduction: \_\_\_\_\_

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Notes for a brief summary:

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Main Idea: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes for evidence from the text: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes for statement: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes about significance: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



### Day Five: WRITING!

#### **Response to “Mississippi Lesson”**

Teachers want to know what students think are the important ideas in stories. Write an essay that explains what you think is the main idea in the story “Mississippi Lesson” and why you think this idea is significant (important) to others? As you explain your thinking, be sure to include evidence from the story that supports your idea. You can also include connections to your own life or to other stories that support your thinking. You may use the work you did in this packet to help you.

### *Writing Reminders:*

Keep the following points in mind since you won't have time to rewrite:

- Begin in an interesting way that includes the title of the story and the main idea.
- Briefly summarize the story using only important events and significant details.
- Organize your ideas in paragraphs so that they are easy to follow.
- Show that you really understand your topic by using clear and lively words and phrases.
- Use the text and personal experiences to support your ideas.
- *Do your best!*

### After you write:

- Check your punctuation. Use capital letters, commas, periods, quotation marks correctly.
- Check your spelling for accuracy.
- Give your essay a title. (Choose a title that states what your essay is about).