



Oakland Unified School District
Writing Proficiency Project

Process Writing Assessment
(PWA)

Fourth Grade

Spring

Response to Literature:
“Mississippi Lesson”

Teacher Instructions

4th Grade Winter Prompt Response to Literature

This Process Writing Assessment consists of five lessons that prepare students to write an essay in response to a piece of literature. Ideally it should take place on consecutive days during your regular writing period. Due to scheduling constraints, you may have to “chunk” lessons into more/fewer days. If this occurs please do the lessons in order. Many activities are designed to be done with a partner. Look for the partner icon and plan accordingly.



Note that shaded boxes are from the student booklet.

- 1) Review all instructions in this manual and prepare materials.
- 2) Use these lessons over the course of one week during your regular Writer’s Workshop or Language Arts time. Adapt lessons to meet the needs of your students. *However, the final writing prompt is to be presented without modifications.*
- 3) Collect student writing and score them in teams, using the rubric and anchor papers.
- 4) OPTIONAL - Continue the writing process with the students, helping them take their writing through revision to publication.

Overview of week:

Approx. time:

Day One	<i>Project introduction:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduce Packet ▪ Analyze a Response to Literature 	30 - 45 minutes
Day Two	<i>Listen, Visualize and Read</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prior Knowledge ▪ Visualize & Sketch ▪ Read “Mississippi Lesson” 	40 - 50 minutes
Day Three	<i>Thinking and Planning</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Summarize ▪ Main Idea ▪ Significance 	40 - 50 minutes
Day Four	<i>Graphic Organizer</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planning an essay 	40 - 50 minutes
Day Five	<i>Writing:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review packet ▪ Write essay 	50 - 60 minutes



DAY ONE: PROJECT INTRODUCTION

 **Goal:** To generate interest, build background, and analyze an example of a student-written response to literature essay.

Generate interest

 **Tell students :** *“You are going to spend the week doing what students in college do all the time; read stories, think about them, discuss your ideas with classmates and then write what you think is important about the story. When you write down your thoughts about a story in an organized way it means that other people will be able to read and understand your thinking (which is usually invisible). Teachers in Oakland want to know what important ideas students learn from reading stories. The best way for them to find out is for students to read a story, think about it, talk about it and then to write down their thinking in an organized way (a response to literature essay.)”*

Activate and Build Background Knowledge

 **Ask students:** *“Have you ever been in a class where there was a student who thought that they knew the answers to all the teacher’s questions? Try to imagine what they would think and feel when they end up with the wrong answer? Tomorrow you’ll be reading and writing about a student who finds herself in just that situation.”*

Introduce Student Packets

 **Hand out the Student Booklets and tell students:**

- *These activities will help them think and write an organized way about a story*
- *Write their name at the top of the first page*
- *Silently skim through the booklet*



Listen, Read, Think

 **Tell students:** *“Close your booklets and listen to this story about a girl and a puppy. You won’t be writing about this story but you do need to listen carefully in order to do today’s work.”*

 **Read aloud** the story “First Choice” while students listen silently (without a copy to follow.)

First Choice

by Cheryl Mays Halton

“Hi, Mom,” Franny said as she ran into the kitchen. “Sorry I’m late, but I stopped by to see the puppies at Mrs. Morton’s. They’re the most beautiful little Irish setters I’ve ever seen.”

“How old are they now?” Mother asked.

“Four weeks old today. In just two more weeks I’ll be able to bring one home,” Franny said, smiling.

“You’ll have to work awfully hard to earn enough money in just two more weeks,” said Mother.

“Yes,” Franny agreed, “but Mrs. Johnson said I could cut her grass Saturday, and Dad promised to have some extra chores for me, too.”

Franny had been saving her money for a long time—ever since last summer when her parents had said she could have a dog if she saved enough money to help pay for it. ...

The next day Franny stopped in to see the puppies just as she did every day. Mrs. Morton unlatched the gate to the pen so Franny could play with puppies. “Which one do you want?” she asked. “I have six puppies and eight people wanting them. I’ve told everyone that you get first choice.”

“I haven’t made up my mind yet,” Franny answered. “But I’ll decide tonight, for certain.”

Franny walked home slowly along the creek. She needed time to decide which puppy she wanted. Franny was thinking of the puppies when, suddenly, she heard a soft, high-pitched noise coming from a pile of small branches by the side of the creek. There it was again. A whimper. It seemed to come from under the pile of brush. Franny lifted a branch carefully and then another and another. Still she didn’t see anything. But now the whimpering was louder and more excited. Franny lifted another branch. There was a hole, and at the bottom of the hole was a little black-and-white dog. It was not much larger than a puppy, and it was thin, dirty, and full of burrs. “I’d better take you home and get you some food and water. You look awfully hungry. Franny walked toward home, carrying the little dog. As she reached her yard, she saw her mother standing on the porch.

“I thought you wanted an Irish setter,” Mother said, “and here you come with a little black-and-white dog.”

“I still want an Irish setter, Mom,” Franny said, “but I found this dog in the woods, and he looks hungry. I’ll feed him, and then he’ll probably find his way back home.”

“He certainly looks happy that you found him,” Mother said. “He hasn’t quit licking you for a minute...”

But after dinner Franny looked out the window, and there was the little dog sitting on the porch, just waiting for her to come out again.

Franny opened the door and bent down to pet the little dog. Up he hopped, his tail wagging furiously, and his tongue reaching for Franny’s cheek. ...

The next morning at breakfast Franny peeked out the kitchen window, and there sat the little dog, waiting patiently for her to come outside. Franny opened the door and stepped out on the porch. The dog barked happily and ran around and around

her, jumping delightedly as Franny tried to pet him. The little dog was having such fun that soon Franny was laughing and coaxing him to greater excitement. She didn't even notice her mother standing in the kitchen door until she said, "Well, Francine, have you decided which puppy you want to buy?"

"I'm not going to buy a puppy, Mom," Franny said.

"But I thought you had your heart set on an Irish setter," Mother said.

"I did—but so do lots of other people. And this puppy has his heart set on me."

☞ **Tell students:** "Open your booklet to page "2" and follow along while I read the directions and an essay that a student wrote after reading the story, "First Choice."

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.

- ☞ **After reading the essay, ask students:** “What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of this student’s essay? Share your thinking with your neighbor.” Call on students to share with class.
- ☞ **Tell them:** “Now, write what you think are the strengths and weaknesses of this essay. You can use words or phrases.” Walk around the room to check that students are writing their ideas on the chart on page 3.

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

- ☞ **Tell students:** “Now we are going to read what teachers thought when they read this essay. Turn the page and let’s look at this together. This is important information to know because when I read your essays I will have to look at these same five features: Ideas and Content, Organization, Evidence, Language and Conventions.”
- ☞ **Read aloud** each feature with the teacher comments. Emphasize: Identification of Main Idea, Summary, Evidence and Significance. Ask if anyone can find more evidence in the student essay (positive or negative) for a feature.

4. Here is why teachers think that this is a well written essay	
FEATURES	TEACHER COMMENTS:
Ideas and Content	Shows clear understanding of purpose of the story. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “...she changes her mind... ● Franny could have first choice of the one she wanted... ● ...now someone else could have first choice.”
Organization	Clear organizational structure. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introduction sets the stage and identifies the main idea of the story. ● Middle paragraph supports main idea with evidence from

	<p>the story.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Middle and concluding paragraphs give a summary of important events. ● Concluding paragraph states why the main idea might be significant (important) to others.
Evidence	<p>Student uses text to support main idea.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “...<i>because Mrs. Morton...</i>” ● “...<i>so Franny decided to keep...</i>” ● “<i>That’s why I think...</i>” ● Student paraphrased main idea “...<i>Franny decided to keep the small, lonely dog. Now, someone else...could have first choice.</i>”
Language	<p>Sentences are varied and detailed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● For example, the middle paragraph has a long complex opening sentence followed by a short sentence with a compound verb.
Conventions	<p>These are first draft errors and don’t interfere with meaning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student used unnecessary commas and underlined the story’s title instead of using quotation marks.



DAY TWO: Visualize, Sketch and Write Captions

👉 **Goal:** To build background by looking at a map of the Mississippi River, listen to the story “Mississippi Lesson” and identify the beginning, middle end, and important details of the story.

Activate and Build Background Knowledge

👉 **Tell students:**

“*Sometimes families tell traditional stories that are not really true. Sometimes young children in the family believe that the story is true. (You can share a personal anecdote if you wish).*”

We are going to read a story today about a student who believes just such a story and she is one of those classmates who think they know the answer to all the teacher’s questions.”

☞ Tell students:

“Open your booklets to page “4” and look at the map of the United States.”

☞ Read aloud the directions in the student booklet.

☞ 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.

Listen and Visualize

☞ Tell students to: “Turn the page to page ‘5.’ Today you will be listening to and reading the story, “Mississippi Lesson.” This is the story you will be writing about later in the week. When people listen to stories they create mental pictures of the setting, the characters and events. Visualizing helps people remember the flow of the story and important details. While you listen to this story you will be making quick sketches of the images that pop up in your mind. Remember that a sketch is just a quick drawing and not an art project or an illustration.

☞ *The page is divided into three boxes labeled “Beginning,” “Middle,” and “End.” As you listen to the story you will make a quick sketch of the beginning, the middle and the end of the story. I will tell you when each section begins and ends. Don’t worry about finishing your sketch while I am reading. You will have time to do that and add a caption when the story is over.*

☞ **Read aloud the story, “Mississippi Lesson” Be sure to say aloud where each section begins and ends so that students know when to change their sketch box.**

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 class. I was the smallest and the quietest kid in the class. I was pretty smart, and the teacher liked 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.

☞ After you finish reading, tell students: *“Take a few minutes to add to your sketches and then write a caption below each sketch.”*

Mississippi Lesson” Sketches

Beginning:

“

”

Middle:

“

”

End

“

”



Tell students to: *“Share your sketch and caption with a partner. Be sure to tell them what you drew and why you drew it, along with the caption you wrote. Listen to your partner.”*



DAY THREE: Summary, Main Idea & Significance

Goal: Students read the realistic fiction story “Mississippi Lesson”, summarize the story, and identify the main idea and its significance.

Pre-view and Review

Tell students: *“Today you are going to summarize the story that you read yesterday, “Mississippi Lesson.” Then you are going to do some thinking about what the main idea of the story might be and share your thinking with a partner. Last, you are going to think why the main idea might be important (significant) to other people and write your thoughts.”*

Tell students: *“Open your booklets to page 6 to review the story “Mississippi Lesson.” As you look over the story, your sketches and your work from yesterday remember that good readers and writers are always curious and asking questions as they read and write. As skim your booklet I want you to think of any questions you might have about the story or your work so far. We’ll take questions after everyone has had a few minutes to quietly review.” Take questions.*

A Student Summary

Tell students: *“When you go to a movie or read a book and a friend asks you ‘What was it about?’ you give them a quick summary. You don’t retell the whole story; the friend would probably tell you to stop if you tried. A summary just has the important events and details from the beginning, middle and end. Look at your sketches and then think of how you are going to start your summary.” Wait a few seconds - you might model your thinking as you look at your sketches to get students started on the process.*

Summary

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.



“Now, work with your partner and decide who is going to listen and who is going to summarize the story first. Remember you will switch roles in one minute. Begin.”
Time students for a minute (you can judge how long this should be) and then tell them to switch.

Students Decide on a Main Idea

☞ Determining the main idea of a story is a challenge because it requires the reader to infer and interpret information. *Different readers can correctly identify different main ideas.* The important part is using evidence from the text to support your interpretation (understanding) of a main idea. **You can do this segment as a whole class, as a Think, Pair Share or as independent work.**

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) _____.*

Tell students: *Now complete the sentence that begins, “I think that the main idea...” When you get to the word “because” you need to use evidence from the story to support your interpretation (understanding) of the main idea.*



Tell students: Now, with your partner read and listen to each main idea(s). Remember it may be different but correct if there is evidence from the story that supports it.

Significance

Determining the significance of a story is probably the most challenging aspect of a fully realized response to literature essay. Not only does it require inference but also empathy and the ability to generalize. Use the word “important” interchangeably with significance. **Read aloud the directions for determining significance and then brainstorm and record possible lessons people could learn from the story.** Tell students to write what they think the significance could be.

Significance

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

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



DAY FOUR: Planning

Goal: To plan their response essay using a graphic organizer.

Generate Interest

There are many different graphic organizers that you can use with your students to plan their essays. You can use the one in their booklets or select another one that you think will better meet the needs of your students. The important thing is that the class has time to plan out their essay. *We suggest making an overhead transparency of the graphic organizer that you will use and model the central elements of the lesson with the whole class.*

Tell students dramatically: *All week we have been reading, rereading, thinking about and talking about “Mississippi Lesson.” You know a lot about a very short story. Now you are going to get a chance to plan out your essay using all the information you have gathered already. Writers plan essays in all kinds of ways. Some use post-it notes. Others make outlines on big posters and put them up on their walls. Some writers make files on their computer for the different sections of their essays. Others use one page*

organizers like the one we are going to use today. The important thing is that you have a plan **BEFORE** you sit down to write tomorrow.”

Using a Graphic Organizer

- You can guide the whole class through this process while modeling at the overhead
- You can guide the whole class orally without modeling
- Students can work with you in small groups
- Students can work with a partner
- Students can work independently

Tell students: “When you plan today you are really organizing your thinking before you start writing. It’s like when President Obama uses his Blackberry to jot down a few notes before he gives a speech. He wants to remember the points he will make and the order he wants to give them. Because you are just planning you don’t need to write whole sentences in your organizer. It works best to just use words and phrases. You will use the work you have already done in your booklet to complete the graphic organizer.”

Students have a hard time not writing complete sentences in their organizers. The organizer in the student booklet uses the word “Notes” to support the idea of using words and phrases. Circulate through the room as students work to complete their organizers.

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: _____

Notes for a brief summary:

Main Idea: _____

Notes for evidence from the text:

<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Notes for a concluding statement:
Notes about significance:



DAY FIVE: Writing

Goal: To write a first draft of a response to the realistic fiction story “Mississippi Lesson.”

Generate Interest

Tell students: “At last you are going to get a whole period to just write! No interruptions! You have become an expert on the story “Mississippi Lesson” and today is the day you finally get to write that essay proving all of your ideas. As you write you can use all the information in your booklet or any charts that are in the room. You will be working by yourself so it is important to do your work quietly while classmates are writing.”

Read the Prompt

Tell students: “Turn to the back page of your booklet and we’ll read the prompt together.”

Prompt: 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 and be sure you include supporting evidence from the story.

Ask, “Are there are any questions about the prompt?”

Review Student Packet

Tell students: *Take a few minutes to review the work that you have done in your booklets. Read through your booklets silently. You can use your booklet to help you write your essay.*

Time Check

The next two activities must be completed on the same day. If there is not enough remaining time for most students to write a complete first draft essay then students should not begin to write. The writing portion of the assessment must take place in one session.

Read aloud the “Checklist AS you write” from the student packet.

Checklist AS you write:

 *You won't have time to rewrite today so remember to:*

- Begin in an interesting way that states the title of the story, provides a brief summary and your interpretation of the main idea.
- Organize your ideas and evidence so that they are easy to follow.
- Show that you really know your topic by using precise and lively vocabulary.
- End with a conclusion that tells the reader why you think the story is significant (important).

After setting expectations for the activity (time, noise level, materials getting help), distribute the writing paper and let the students begin work. Students work independently and silently on their essays. As students write, circulate through the classroom to assist and encourage. Do not correct student's errors or prompt them as they work. Do not provide spelling but encourage children to sound out unknown words or use available spelling resources.

As individual students begin to signal that they are finished, read aloud the “After You Write” suggestions from the student packet. Collect papers as students finish.

Checklist AFTER you write:

- Check your punctuation. Use capital letters, commas, periods, quotation marks and spelling correctly.
- Give your Response to Literature essay a title. (Write a title that will help your reader to know what your essay will be about).
- Go back and check that you have done everything on the checklist.