MODULE 2: WORKSHOP 6

DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS IN RESPONSE TO NON-FICTION LITERACY MATERIALS, I.E., HOW TO IDENTIFY MAIN IDEAS AND KEY THEMES FOR INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS, INCLUDING CITING CLAIMS AND EVIDENCE IN A PERSUASIVE ESSAY FORMAT
Instructional Objectives / Goals

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY RL.6.1 - Participants will cite evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY RL.6.8 Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence that are not.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY W.6.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas concepts, and information through selection organization, and analysis of a relevant content.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY W.6.2d Establish a formal style of writing such as an expository essay citing claims from the text they read, showing evidence that will persuade the reader/audience.
Goals

• Participants will collect details that support the author’s point of view to design analysis of the text.
• Develop a thesis statement based on evidence from a text to construct a persuasive essay.
• Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims while reading a text and taking a position and writing a response.
• Examine how a persuasive essay is formatted and critique the writing multiple choice questions on the TASC exam.
Warm-Up / Review

- Explain how the TASC exam requires the applicant to respond in formal writing to two documents they will need to read, analyze, and formulate an opinion on.
- Gather relevant information to be included in a persuasive essay.
- The applicant is only given 50 minutes for this entire task on the TASC exam.
- What strategies may be used to support students to comprehend, analyze, and extract information from nonfiction documents in order to construct an effective response in writing to meet TASC requirements?
Lesson Topic 1

Lesson Content/Focus – Examine details of nonfiction prose that support the author’s point of view.

Participants/students will study passages similar to those found on the TASC exam and decipher vocabulary embedded in the text to promote comprehension and analysis of the documents in order to discern the different points of view presented. A questionnaire organizer will be administered to provide focus to outline the author’s point of view. The chart delineates authors’ point of view assisting participants/students to shape their own opinions and create a thesis statement, a skill necessary to complete an essay on the TASC exam.
Activity 1

- A preliminary discussion will be led by the facilitator regarding the requirements of the essay portion of the TASC exam. He/she explains that a student receives 50 minutes to read through two documents for which each has a different point of view. They must analyze the text and take a position to write a persuasive essay using information they have extracted in order to present their own point of view responding to a prompt.
- Participants/students will receive and individually read each of the following passages: We Need Better Alternatives to College Education and The Value of a College Education. They will be asked to consider the essay prompt while reading: Is a college education necessary for success in today’s world?
- Vocabulary Activity: Participants/students will divide into groups of 4. A related vocabulary handout will be distributed. They will be asked to highlight 3 – 5 words that appear on the sheet in each of the texts they have read. Think, Pair, Share: Individually write what each word means in context then Share with a partner and compare selections, word choice and meanings; Facilitator will ask for volunteers to share with the class.
- Questionnaire Organizer Activity: Each member of the group will be given a graphic organizer to be completed with a question to assist them in collecting and writing key details from the excerpts assisting in outlining the different points of view presented in each text.
- The group will discuss and share their organized information. Each of the groups will identify a “reporter” to share with the class their findings.
- Take a Position Activity: The facilitator will ask each of the participants/students to write down one- three sentences agreeing with one side or the other. He/she will have the correct answers provided to him/her to compare them with the groups’ outcomes.
- Facilitator will select random volunteers to share their statements. He/she will emphasize the participants/students opinion in each statement and explain how they have just created a “thesis” statement or a “main idea” for the introduction of a persuasive essay similar to what is given on the TASC exam.
Questions to Answer

Participants and Students

• What is a thesis statement and how does this relate to point of view? (A thesis statement includes a writer’s opinion about a particular topic, revealing the position the writer has taken.)

• The prompt in today’s lesson asks, “Is a college education necessary for success in today’s world?” How important is it to address this question when writing your thesis statement? (The prompt must be addressed in order to receive a passing score on the essay portion of the TASC exam. It also assists in anchoring the writer’s opinion.)

• How important is it to discover context clues when reading words you are unfamiliar with? (A sentence in a text enables the reader to define meaning as a whole rather than focusing on one unfamiliar word.)

• Has today’s lesson simplified how to take a position before responding in writing to a text you have read?
Wrap Up

• Teacher: The answers provided on the graphic organizer will help students develop an opinion about the excerpts and decide which side of the argument they are on.
• Teacher: The graphic organizer answers will provide the supporting details needed to write a reader’s response portraying the position taken and a well scripted thesis statement to begin a persuasive essay for the TASC exam.
• Students: Compose an introductory paragraph which includes your thesis statement using the prompt given in today’s lesson.
Lesson Topic 2

Lesson Content/Focus
Examine a nonfiction reading excerpt to establish a thesis statement identifying position to be used in preparation for writing a constructed response and/or a persuasive essay similar to what is required on the TASC exam. Participants/students will receive and review related vocabulary to the text. Graphic organizers will be utilized to map and organize information from the text for comprehension, analysis, and formulating an opinion/thesis statement that may be used in a written response to the text.
Activity 2

• Participants/students will receive and read an excerpt The Changing Face of America with a prompt that reads: Is there a common value and belief system in the United States, or has the concept of American unity simply always been a myth?
• Participants/students will receive a related vocabulary handout to be reviewed and discussed.
• “What is the Excerpt About?” Activity: Facilitator will lead a short discussion in order to display some details from the excerpt read. The answers will be “T” charted by the facilitator.
• Participants/students will receive a graphic organizer to support them in creating a thesis statement. A cluster diagram with the center bubble reading “Key word or thesis” will be distributed. They will write a key word that relates to the text in the center bubble and details from the text in the connected bubbles. The activity engages the student with the text to generate key concepts using words and details.
• Facilitator will select volunteers to share out and brainstorm various ideas presented in the text.
• Facilitator discusses: If this question was on the actual exam students would be asked to use examples from their personal life and knowledge of American history and society to support their written response. (10-15 minutes on the actual exam would be given to plan and answer the question).
• Participants/students will receive a graphic organizer to answer the prompt on the reading excerpt. The focus tree permits the student to jot down his/her answer/thesis to the prompt in the box marked “thesis.” He/she will complete the graphic by filling in information provided in the text so as to map out whether they are in agreement that there is “a common value and belief system in the United States” or “has American unity simply always been a myth?” By doing this the student has a visual of the argument and becomes clear about his/her position, creates a thesis and uses the graph to write a constructed response. In the focus tree graphic they may include some of their own experiences and information they know about society to help formulate a personally connected thesis.
• Participants/students will be asked to illustrate a thesis statement by writing 1 – 3 sentences extrapolating information from their graphic organizers.
Questions to Answer

Questions to answer: For Participants

• How important is it to understand word meanings and context clues for comprehension of the excerpt.
• What kind of background knowledge is needed to write a response to the prompt?
• How did utilizing the graphic organizers help to generate a thesis statement?
• How does having a solid thesis statement drive one’s writing?

Questions to answer: For Students

• In what way is your opinion related to a thesis statement? (A thesis statement takes a topic offered in a text and makes it your own by adding your opinion to it. Doing this introduces what “YOUR” piece of writing will be about.)
• How is your opinion similar to “point of view?” (Point of view reveals the author’s purpose for writing the text and clearly encapsulates his/her opinion.)
• How may a writer captivate his/her audience when writing a thesis statement in an introductory paragraph? (By writing a general statement about the topic the reader “is hooked” immediately. Additionally, the prompt has been addressed. The following sentence will include your personal opinion creating a fresh new outlook for the reader with a clear thesis statement to begin an essay.)
Wrap Up

- Share out and discuss the process of reading a text first for comprehension, then analysis, and having to gather information to write a response with a well-developed thesis statement.
- Ask volunteers to share a thesis statement that was drawn from the information organized in the “focus tree” graphic.
- Discuss: Difficulties that might arise for students when being asked to comprehend a text, formulate ideas, and write a response in a short period of time and how we can provide them strategies to make the task easier.
- For Students:
  - Write down an opinion you have about something you feel strongly about. Now pair up with a partner and try to convince him/her to be persuaded to agree with at least three points you have made about your topic.
  - Now ask your partner to write down “your” point of view. Then he/she will write: agree or disagree and why?
  - The partners will switch roles and complete the process.
  - Have each of the students write a thesis statement about each other’s topic and volunteers will take turns sharing out with the class.
  - Based on today’s lesson students should be able to form strong opinions and back them up with details and examples. By completing this task they will have the opportunity to be in charge of the process by selecting a topic they are passionate about while trying to persuade their partners to see things their way, culminating in writing a thesis such as the one discussed in today’s lesson.
Lesson Topic 3

Lesson Content/Focus –

Read and evaluate nonfiction prose to trace and analyze an argument in order to take a position to write a persuasive essay. Facilitator will review/scaffold what participants/students have learned about analyzing nonfiction texts, developing a thesis statement and taking a position upon reading two opposing nonfiction texts. Facilitator will address reading and writing TASC exam requirements and discuss timing. Participants/students will compare two nonfiction excerpts guided by a prompt, extract information using an outline or graphic organizers they are familiar with to compose a thesis statement that will be used in an introductory paragraph of a persuasive essay.
Activity 3

Participants/students have learned about nonfiction, and have read excerpts similar to what might be seen on a TASC exam. They have been engaged in extracting information via graphic organizers, such as cluster diagrams and “the focus tree” a bubble map to formulate their own opinions/thesis in response to reading a text. They have had some experience with writing a thesis statement, a review of which operates as scaffolding for the following activity.

• Facilitator will lead a preliminary discussion to review strategies to determine how a thesis statement is written after reading a nonfiction excerpt (similar to what would be given on a TASC exam). Writing a thesis statement is required for both writing components on the TASC exam. A thesis statement must be included in the “constructed reader’s response,” as well as writing a persuasive essay for the Language Arts Writing portion of the exam.
• Facilitator discusses the amount of time that should be allotted to successfully complete the essay, a 50 minute task. (10 minutes to read and plan response; 25-30 minutes to draft the essay; 10-15 minutes to revise and edit).
• Participants/students will receive a list of vocabulary related to the selected nonfiction texts. Spend approximately 5 minutes reviewing and reading over the vocabulary.
• Participants/students will receive two nonfiction excerpts: – The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn Can Help Students Understand The Past and – We should Eliminate The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and the Essay Prompt. They will read the selections (10 minutes) and on scrap paper jot down key words and make notes about major points.
• Participants/students will create a cluster diagram to build a focus and a thesis statement with a position. Students will be reminded of the focus tree they created in a previous lesson and will be encouraged to make a “focus tree” which will include the point of view of one text to compare with the POV from the second text, with their own opinion in the center of the two, including personal experiences to compile a thesis statement.
• Participants/students will be asked to write an introduction that includes a thesis statement that clearly shows the position he/she has taken. The information should be drawn from their cluster diagram and/or focus tree.
• Participants/students will be asked to share their readings within small groups identifying their thesis statement. Followed by a volunteer from each group to read and share their introductory paragraph with the class.
Questions to Answer

For Participants and Students

• Why is it important to read the essay prompt before reading the nonfiction excerpts? (This guides the reader to support him/her to create a thesis and answer the prompt.)

• When you begin writing, if you are not sure of a focus how can you proceed? (Make lists of key ideas; create a cluster, create a focus tree, etc.)

• Should the thesis statement clearly respond to the prompt? (Your thesis statement clearly defines how you feel about what the prompt asks. A general statement about the prompt may be included before your thesis, but be focused to include your opinion about the topic/prompt.)

• In regards to the prompt, have you depicted a clear position by agreeing with one side or the other? (Facilitators should strongly emphasize the need to take one clear position when reading and writing a response two texts that oppose one another.)
Wrap Up

• What frustrates and confuses you about the text? Why?
• Name three things you found out during this lesson? Two interesting and one question you still have.
• Outline the organization of an introductory paragraph in a persuasive essay. (For example, Answering the prompt and taking a position (thesis statement); Key ideas (using a cluster diagram) to present the argument, etc.

• Facilitators/Teachers will be able to evaluate and assess what participants/students have digested about today’s lesson. If a student says, the vocabulary was difficult I did not understand (xyz?) support could be offered to increase vocabulary knowledge. If a student had a hard time creating a focus tree or a diagram that would aid him/her to gather pertinent information from the text, perhaps suggestions related to completing graphic organizers could be offered. Students need practice to build skill, therefore it is vital that instructors are aware of the strengths and weaknesses as to how they understand nonfiction and writing about it. Practice or further lessons could be implemented for reading nonfiction texts; comparing two points of view; taking a position; writing an introduction that includes a thesis statement regarding the prompt.
Lesson Content/Focus –

• Examine persuasive essay formatting and rubrics for grading. Analyze Language Arts Writing multiple choice questions. Participants/students will receive guidelines for writing/formatting a persuasive essay. They will become engaged with the scoring process of the essay portion of the TASC exam by exploring a rubric, reading and grading student sample essays, and reading/listening to a student essay receiving a score of 4. Participants/students will delve into sample writing questions that may be encountered on a Language Arts Writing (LAW) portion of the TASC exam.
Activity 4

- Participant/students will Think, Pair, Share using guidelines and format for writing in a formal/persuasive style. Read the guidelines and write one or two comments about the format. Share and discuss with a partner. Volunteers will share out with the group comments and concerns about the guidelines for this type of writing.
- Distribute a TASC scoring guide/rubric and sample student essays. First read through the rubric then various essays will be given to each group of 4 and they will score each essay 1-4 in accordance with the rubric. Participants will have time to read the rubric and the sample essay.
- Participants/students will receive a graded essay that scored a 4. A volunteer will read the essay aloud and the facilitator will ask participants/students to look at the rubric (4) to determine if the grade matches with the criteria. The class will agree that it meets the criteria.
- Participants/students will share out the scores they gave to the sample essays and compare the various results amongst each other. They will recognize the subjectivity of grading writing even though a clear rubric is provided.
- Facilitator will lead a discussion: Grading writing and subjectivity. Although a rubric is the actual scoring guide for the TASC essay, there are many gray areas that might cause a scorer to either grade higher or grade lower. A student needs at least a score of one (1) for it to be considered passing.
- Participants/students will receive a handout with two LAW questions to gain an understanding of the types of multiple choice writing questions that are asked on the TASC exam. Each group will answer the questions. The facilitator will select volunteers to share. (Answers will be provided to the questions).
- Facilitator will lead a discussion about the Language Arts Writing (LAW) on the TASC test such as, the expectations, time restraints, the types of questions being asked, appropriate answers, and the essay portion of the test and how the essay grade is added onto the points received for correct answers for the multiple choice questions for a final score on the exam.
- Facilitator will recommend viewing more questions and the entire LAW portion of the TASC exam. The sample Writing TASC practice test may be found online www.CTB.com.
Questions to Answer

• What information should be included in an effective persuasive essay? How is it formatted? (Refer back to guidelines received at the beginning of the lesson).

• How does using a rubric guide the writing process? (Students will recognize that even a few short sentences referring to the prompt may equal a passing grade of a 1 but to achieve a 3 or a 4 the essay must be well-developed and they will recognize the criteria needed to be met to receive a high grade).

• To avoid subjective scoring what can you do to receive a fair grade on the essay? (Stay as focused as possible to the guidelines presented in score point 4 of the rubric when writing your essay. Memorize what you need to do by creating a checklist).

• How may you become more successful at answering the types of writing questions that will be found in the Language Arts Writing portion of the TASC exam? (Practice answering these types of questions. Websites such as www.CTB.com offer questions and they review why the correct answers were the appropriate responses.)
Wrap up

• Identify the main idea of the lesson. Why is it important? What goes into an effective persuasive essay written for the TASC exam and how is the essay evaluated/graded? The teacher wants students to recognize the format of the essay and for students to be exposed to work that would be considered failing, mediocre, or outstanding. By providing the materials in today’s lesson students become aware of what they need to do to be successful persuasive essay writers.

• Quick write: Without stopping write what most confuses you about today’s lesson. Teachers will be able to evaluate what in this lesson needs clarity. For example, a student may not understand how many paragraphs to write to receive a passing grade. The teacher could reiterate the criteria in the rubric or create lessons whereby students are grading each other’s work to get a better understanding of grading. The teacher will emphasize that a student will get the highest grade if he/she develops the essay by creating five paragraphs as suggested in all of the essay guidelines reviewed in today’s lesson.

• Review what the components of an effective persuasive essay are. (Distribute Parts of the Persuasive Essay). This handout will reinforce how many parts are in an effective essay so that students may receive the highest grade possible on the TASC exam.
Overall Wrap Up

Note: this part will be done in a discussion format

• Identify how the lessons in this workshop relate to the NYS common core standards. For teachers.
• What five words would you use to describe writing for the TASC exam? For teachers and students.
• Write a letter to someone in your group explaining what you have learned in today’s workshop. For teachers and students.
Project Homework

- Review each of the lessons in this workshop and organize an outline of a lesson for each that may be used in the classroom.
- Explore the following websites for additional ideas, materials, and activities: Teachers may go to the following
  - Websites to gain ideas to write lesson plans, for nonfiction articles and for classroom activities. Other Websites provide a great deal of information on writing the persuasive essay and offer study guides, strategies for writing and information on test preparation.
  - www.nytimes.com – go to Learning Network for extensive articles and lesson plans.
  - www.scholastic.com – many activities and free reproducibles available.
  - www.wikihow.com – how to write a persuasive essay
  - www.Time4Writing.com – how to write a persuasive essay
  - www.hamilton.edu – Writing Resources – persuasive essays, the basics – Hamilton College
  - www.2.waterforduhs.k12.wi.us/-Writing a persuasive/argument essay
  - www.studygs.net – Study guides and strategies for writing, reading, and test preparation
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