

In Common: Effective Writing for All Students Collection of All Student Work Samples, K-12

By The Vermont Writing Collaborative, with Student Achievement Partners and CCSSO

9–12 Annotated for Argument, Informative, and Narration Work Samples

On-Demand Samples

These pieces were written in response to a uniform text-based prompt.

The text changes at different grades, but the task and prompt remains essentially the same.

Grades 9-12, Prompt for Argument Writing Common Core Standard W.CCR.1

A group of parents and teachers in your school have made a proposal to the school board. In their proposal, they are suggesting that the school join in a national movement called “Shut Down Your Screen Week.” The parents and teachers in the group believe that not using any electronic media for an entire week would be good for students for many reasons.

They have taken the proposal to a teachers’ meeting, so that teachers can discuss the issue of whether or not to ask their students to participate in the “Shut Down Your Screen Week.” The teachers have decided they would like to hear from the students before they decide.

This is not a simple issue, so you need to think very carefully about it. You have three texts to read relating to the issue: “Social Media as Community,” “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” and “Attached to Technology and Paying a Price.” As you read and re-read these texts, think about what they show you about the issue. Think about what position you will take and what evidence you will use to support your thinking.

Finally, write an essay, in the form of a letter to the teachers, explaining your thinking.

For the essay, your Focusing Question is:

Should your school participate in the national “Shut Down Your Screen Week?” Be sure to use evidence from the texts, as well as your own knowledge, to support and develop your thinking.

Remember, a strong and effective piece of argument writing:

- *Takes the audience into account*
- *Has a clear introduction*
- *States a focus/position statement clearly, precisely, and thoughtfully*
- *Uses specific evidence from the text(s) to support and develop the position, and explains that evidence logically*
- *Takes into account what people who disagree with you might think and tries to respond to that*
- *Concludes effectively*
- *Uses precise language*
- *Shows control over conventions*

You will have three class periods to complete this reading/thinking/writing task. The essay will have a single draft, and you may want to take some time to plan your writing before you begin work. When you have finished, be sure to proofread.

File Name: A9-10P High School Should Not Participate**Opinion/Argument****Grade 9-10****On-Demand Writing- Uniform Prompt****High School Should Not Participate**

To whom it may concern:

L High School should not participate in the national "Shut Down Your Screen Week." Technology can be beneficial, especially to students. A vast majority of students finds it helpful to have access to technology. Technology makes quicker, more efficient work. Without the advancements of technology, we are no farther along than school children in the 1960's.

The internet and social media, such as Facebook, improve the social lives of those who use it. In the article Information, Communication and Society, a survey found that whether the participants were married or single, people who used social media had more close friends. An average American who uses social media is half as likely to be socially isolated. They also know more diverse people. Also, users of social media never lose ties because of relocating, because you can always keep your friends on social media.

Internet search engines allow us better access to information. In my experience, information is far more accessible and quick than searching through books. That allows for time to complete other class assignments. According to Peter Norvig, director of research for Google, Inc., in an article for the New York Times, "The internet contains the world's best writing, images, and ideas; Google lets us find the relevant pieces instantly." Some argue that ads and irrelevant sites may be distracting, but more find that the

Introduces a precise claim: The introduction states a claim and then gives context about the subject of technology, acknowledging it as a **substantive topic**

Creates an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim, counterclaims, reasons, and evidence

Develops the claim fairly, supplying evidence for it, but does not develop the counterclaims or acknowledge significant limitations of the claim

Distinguishes the claim from an opposing claim

benefits are worth it. Eighty-one percent of experts polled by the Pew Internet Research Project support this opinion.

The internet also makes a good learning tool. In an article by Matt Richtel for the New York Times, he proves that it helps our brains.

“Imaging studies show the brains of Internet users become more efficient at finding information.” Basically, the more we use online resources to learn, the better our brains become at learning. Also, in the same article, it says, “Internet users showed greater brain activity than non-users...” The internet even develops our brain to think more! Technology is improving our brains.

I have heard it argued that children “rot” their brains with video game systems. In the previously mentioned article by Matt Richtel, he says, “At the University of Rochester, researchers found that players of some fast-paced video games can track the movement of a third more objects on a screen than nonplayers...games can improve reaction time and the ability to pick out details amid clutter.” It seems that the more people play fast-paced video games, the more efficient they become at finding important details. These games may not be so “brain rotting “ after all. They could even be argued as beneficial.

Some also argue that because of new technologies, people limit how much they associate together, even in the same area. Social media disproves this argument. Not only can people associate easily with friends, they can also chat with relatives. They can also show relatives photos, even if they are states away. People who use social media are more likely to know more diverse people, according to the article by Keith Hampton. People still associate with people just as much as before, if not more. They are merely doing it in a different manner than before social media was in use.

Cyber bullying has now become an issue. I would like to bring to attention that all bullying is a big issue. I do not think that technology has caused bullying. It has just allowed for a new way to bully someone. I

Develops the claim fairly, supplying evidence for it, but does not develop the counterclaims or acknowledge significant limitations of the claim

Distinguishes the claim from an opposing claim

Establishes and maintains a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline

Uses words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships between claim and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim and counterclaims

Acknowledges counterclaim, pointing out its limitation, anticipates audience's (other students, parents, teachers, school board) concern.

have never been cyber-bullied. I personally was bullied in a face-to-face manner. A bully will take any chance to bully a target. Social media has not caused bullying.

Like most tools, technology is useful if used correctly. Work quality on a computer can be better, because people have more time to check over their work and improve it. Unfortunately, some people are lazy, and use that extra time they could use for editing for other things. That is not a problem with the tools, it is a problem with the people. People who use such technology correctly and efficiently should still have access. If our screens are shut down, there is no access. We should not participate in "Shut Down Your Screen Week."

Sincerely,

Acknowledges counterclaim, pointing out its limitation, anticipates audience's (other students, parents, teachers, school board) concern.

NOTE: "people are lazy" is an *ad hominem* approach, and should not be used

Provides a concluding statement that follows from but does not add support to the argument presented

In this on-demand assignment, students were asked to take a position on whether their school should participate in the national “Shut Down Your Screen Week.” This writer begins by asserting the claim that, in his view, the school should not participate and then discusses technology in a broad and substantive sense to provide context concerning the issue.

The writer develops his claim with several reasons, which he supports with sufficient, relevant, credible evidence, demonstrating his understanding of the topic and the texts he has read. The evidence in this piece comes from those texts and from the writer’s experience. The writer organizes his ideas clearly and supports his claim with logical reasoning. In addition, he acknowledges multiple counterclaims, distinguishes them from his own claim, and refutes them with support for his own position, which again includes evidence from the texts. In some cases, the writer introduces counterclaims specifically to anticipate the concerns of the likely audience (other students, parents, teachers, school board members). However, the writer does not develop the counterclaims or acknowledge their strengths, and he resorts to *ad hominem* (“people are lazy”) in the closing paragraph—approaches inconsistent with the Standards at this grade level. Throughout the essay, the writer uses words, phrases, and clauses as transitions to clarify the relationships among claim, counterclaims, reasons, and evidence and to create cohesion.

The writer maintains a formal style and objective tone throughout the piece. The conclusion follows from the argument but does not significantly support it.

File Name: A11-12P Proposal to Shut Down Screen**Opinion/Argument****Grade 11-12****On-Demand Writing- Uniform Prompt****Proposal to Shut Down Screen**

To whom it may concern:

A group of parents, and some teachers, have made a proposal to the school board. They would like the school to participate in the national “Shut Down Your Screen Week.” A week without any electronics is what parents believe the school needs. Technology is a big contradiction. It is useful with all the tools it has, yet it can be a distraction, or addicting.

Our school should participate in the national “Shut Down Your Screen Week” because of the following issues with technology.

“Based on a representative survey of 2,500 Americans...those who used social media had more close confidants,” says Keith Hampton. Facebook, Twitter, and other social media allow people to connect with each other and have social interactions, but through the web. The web, or a phone, that allows people to be more social is a major issue today. Kids, especially high school students, feel no need to talk to a friend in person. They can just text them. The problem with Facebook, or texting, is that people interact differently than they would in person. Cyberbullying is one of the biggest issues with the web today. People say things on the web that they wouldn’t say to the person’s face. Bullies feel safe when hidden behind a screen. Whether or not the survey of 2,500 people was accurate, it still did not account for the differences in interactions for media and in person. Having no electronics for a week would allow students to see that difference.

Although technology allows students to do research, that research isn’t helping students to do strategic and logical thinking. “What really

Introduces a knowledgeable claim and establishes its significance: The introduction gives context about the subject of technology, acknowledging it as a **substantive topic**, and then states a claim, albeit not very precisely

Develops the claim and a counterclaim fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the concerns, values, and possible biases of the audience (other students, parents, teachers, school board members)

Addresses significance of claim and topic

Points out limitation on claim

Uses words, phrases, and varied syntax to create cohesion, clarify the relationships among claims and reasons

makes us intelligent isn't our ability to find lots of information quickly. It's our ability to think deeply about that information," says Nicholas Carr, author of the book *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*. Brain scientists have researched and found out that deep thinking only happens with a calm mind. "The greater our concentration, the richer our thoughts," Nicholas Carr says. The internet is a useful search engine, but does not allow students to go deeply into thought. Google allows people to find anything by the click of a button. This isn't the way students should learn. Nicholas Carr says, "If you're really interested in developing your mind, you should turn off your computer and your cellphone – and start thinking. Really thinking."

Technology can be distracting, but most of all it is addictive. Scientists say that using email, texting, or searching the web can change how someone thinks or behaves. "The stimulation [of technology use] provokes excitement – a dopamine squirt – that researchers say can be addictive. In its absence, people feel bored," says Matt Richtel of the New York Times. Addiction to technology may not compare to the addiction of certain drugs, but being a student who is addicted to something that creates different social interactions, and doesn't allow deep thought, could be very bad. "In 2008, people consumed three times as much [technology] each day as they did in 1960," Matt says. This rate has already increased, and a break from it wouldn't be a bad thing. Researchers worry that constant digital stimulation like this creates attention problems for children with brains that are still developing, who already struggle to set priorities and resist impulses," Matt says. Students in high school, or even in college, have brains that are still developing. A week off from the technology would allow these students to develop skills, with their growing brains, that could be used instead of electronics.

Our school should start participating in the national "Shut Down Your Screen Week." It would allow students to see the difference in social interactions of electronics and in person. The week would allow students

Acknowledges counterclaims, then distinguishes from claim with reasons and relevant, credible evidence from text, using valid reasoning

Creates an organization that logically sequences claim, counterclaims, reasons, and evidence throughout

Develops the claim fairly and thoroughly, supplying evidence for it in a manner that anticipates the concerns, values, and possible biases of the audience (other students, parents, teachers, school board members).

Uses depth of evidence

Establishes and maintains a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline

Provides a conclusion that follows from and supports the argument presented

to go into deep thought and understand subjects and ideas that Google cannot. Lastly, technology is addictive and a break is what students need to understand the consequences of it being addictive. By our school doing this national movement, we could change the way school is taught to better help each and every student.

Recognizes and appeals to the **audience's concerns**, values, and **possible biases**, coming back to further **establishing the significance of the claim**

In this on-demand assignment, students were asked to take a position on whether or not his school should participate in the national "Shut Down Your Screen Week." This student gives an introduction about technology in a broad and substantive sense as context on the issue and makes a claim that in his view the school should not participate.

The writer reminds the reader of the significance of his claim by pointing out one of the reasons to support that claim ("*Cyber bullying is one of the biggest issues with the web today*"), then develops the overall claim with several reasons, which he supports with sufficient relevant, credible evidence, demonstrating his understanding of the topic and the texts he has read. The evidence in this piece comes from those texts and from the writer's experience. The writer organizes his ideas clearly and supports his claim with logical reasoning. In addition, he acknowledges and treats fairly multiple counterclaims, distinguishes them from his own claim, and refutes them with support for his own position, which again includes evidence from the texts. The writer introduces counterclaims specifically to anticipate the concerns, values, and possible biases of the likely audience (other students, parents, teachers, school board members). Throughout the essay, the writer uses words, phrases, and clauses as well as varied syntax to clarify the relationships among claim, counterclaims, reasons, and evidence and to create cohesion.

The writer maintains a formal style and objective tone throughout the piece. The conclusion follows from and supports the argument presented, reminding the reader of the significance of the topic and claim to this particular audience (other students, teachers, parents, school board members).

Grades 9-12, Prompt for Informative / Explanatory Writing Common Core Standard W.CCR.2

Great historical events often have deep effects upon the people who live through them. Depending on the person and the situation, those effects can be very different – or not.

The Great Depression of the 1930s, in the United States, was one of these events. Lasting for nearly ten years, the Great Depression closed thousands of banks, put millions of people out of work, and seared itself into the memory of those who lived through it.

The President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, responded by creating new government programs to help Americans, known as the New Deal.

You are going to read four texts about the Great Depression: a memoir called *Digging In* by Robert Hastings, a poem “Debt” by Karen Hesse, a short text about the programs of the New Deal of President Roosevelt, and President Roosevelt’s second inaugural address to the nation in 1937. As you read and re-read these texts, think about what the texts show you about how the Great Depression seems to have affected the individual people who lived through it.

Finally, using these texts, you will write an essay, explaining your thinking.

For the essay, your Focusing Question is:

According to these texts, what effect did the Great Depression have on people who lived through it? Be sure to use evidence from the texts to support and develop your thinking.

Remember, a good informational essay:

- *Has a clear introduction*
- *States a focus/topic clearly, precisely, and thoughtfully*
- *Uses specific evidence from the text(s) to support and develop the topic and explains that evidence*
- *Concludes effectively*
- *Uses precise language*
- *Shows control over conventions*

You will have three class periods to complete this reading/thinking/writing task. The essay will have a single draft, and you may want to take some time to plan your writing before you begin work. When you have finished, be sure to proofread.

File Name: I9-10P Gains of the Great Depression**Informative / Explanatory****Grade 9-10****On-Demand Writing, Uniform Prompt****Gains of the Great Depression**

During the Great Depression, millions of people lost jobs, and families struggled to find financial footholds. It lasted for ten years,

leaving very strong memories of dramatically dark times. Throughout those years, people found new ways to cope with the struggles, and

interestingly enough, new emotions and belief in the ideals of America.

Everybody learned the importance of being resourceful, while also keeping hope for the future and growing more unified and patriotic as a country.

One important effect of the Great Depression was how it made people and families resourceful. That quality is largely a part of the memoir Digging In, where a man who lived during the Depression talked about his family's

frugality, and how they had to "cut back on everything possible" in order to save money. Some of the things they had to cut back on included city

Integrates water, selling their car, and discontinuing purchases of toothpaste, **quotations** toilet paper, and snacks, just to name a few. They also "took care of
effectively
into **analysis**

Introduces the topic:

The writer gives strong context that sets the stage for the essay; includes **topic / focus** of the piece, which previews what is to follow

Uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic

Analyzes ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections

Organizes complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions:

The writer cites several texts but organizes the essay mainly by abstract **concept** (e.g., resourcefulness, patriotism), not text.

Develops the topic with well-chosen, relevant, sufficient, accurate facts and concrete details

Uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the

what [they] had", and listed all the ways they used a cotton cloth, which included using it as a dish cloth, bandage, quilt piece and more. These qualities of being frugal and resourceful weren't bad; they taught people to not be wasteful and to not spend money on things that aren't necessary. Being resourceful became a part of life during the Depression as a way to help families stay financially afloat.

Establishes and maintains a formal style, objective tone while attending to norms and conventions of discipline in which the student is writing

More significantly the Great Depression, in a broad sense, brought a sense of patriotism and more unity as a country. Former President Franklin

D. Roosevelt enriched his second inaugural address with these ideals. He said that the greatest change he had witnessed was the "change in the moral climate of America" and that they were on the road of progress. Another quote of his

Uses appropriate, varied transitions to clarify relationships among ideas and concepts and create cohesion

was "in seeking for economic and political progress as a nation, we all go up, or else we all go down, as one people." What Roosevelt was implying

was if the people wanted their country to go in the right direction, they all had to work together. Working together wouldn't be hard, due to the entire country's new sense of belief in their country, also known as patriotism. The United States' stronger sense of unity that came about during the depression helped citizens work through the hard times.

Analyzes evidence

Most importantly, the Depression oddly enough brought a sense of hope. In

some cases, farmers had to keep hope for the future and that it would bring rain for their crops so they could get money, as a farmer had in a poem called "Debts". In an article about "The New Deal", an explanation was given about how Roosevelt gave the country hope by creating many reforms that were aimed to "relieve poverty, reduce unemployment, and speed economic

Develops topic with well-chosen, relevant, sufficient, accurate facts and concrete details from New Deal text

Uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic

recovery". This hope for the future gave people something worth living for during times when suicide didn't seem like a bad idea. Indeed, this sense of hope was a very important effect that the Great Depression had on the people who lived through it.

Reminds audience of the focus / topic / main point of the essay.

Even though the Depression devastatingly affected tens of millions of people, the way it changed people's outlooks was inspiring. Instead of tossing a cotton bag in the garbage, people learned to be resourceful and used them as towels and dish cloths. A stronger sense of pride in their country helped them work through the hardships together, with patriotism and unity. Above all else, without hope for the future, people would've given up on trying to fix their severely wounded economy. These enhanced senses of resourcefulness, unity, along with patriotism and hope were all ways that the Great

Makes an important distinction, demonstrating understanding of the complexity of the topic

Provides a conclusion that follows from and supports the information presented by articulating implications and the significance of the topic

In this on-demand assignment, students were asked to explain the effects of the Great Depression on people who lived through it. This writer provides some context about the severity of the Great Depression in the introduction and then states his main points (the Great Depression taught people to be resourceful as well as inspired unity), which serves to preview what follows.

The writer organizes ideas, concepts, and information clearly by concept, using textual evidence to support the main points. While he uses the texts extensively, they are not the organizing principle; rather, the concepts of resourcefulness and unity are. The writer uses appropriate, varied, and strong transitions to clarify relationships and create cohesion (for example, "*Indeed, this sense of hope...*"). Within each chunk of the essay, the writer uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to name and explain the effects, which he has identified from the texts he has read. The writer analyzes evidence thoughtfully throughout so that the reader grasps the complexity of the topic.

While the essay is compelling and even dramatic, it has an appropriately formal style. The conclusion follows from and supports the information presented, and in it the writer analyzes the implications and significance of the topic.

Even though the Depression devastatingly affected tens of millions of people, the way it changed people's outlooks was inspiring. Instead of tossing a cotton bag in the garbage, people learned to be resourceful and used them as towels and dish cloths. A stronger sense of pride in their country helped them work through the hardships together, with patriotism and unity. Above all else, without hope for the future, people would've given up on trying to fix their severely wounded economy. These enhanced senses of resourcefulness, unity, along with patriotism and hope were all ways that the Great Depression affected Americans.

File Name: I 11-12P Hope During the Great Depression

Informative / Explanatory

Grades 11-12

On-Demand Writing, Uniform Prompt

Hope During The Great Depression

Life is difficult. Sometimes, it is devastatingly so. Yet the human race can be defined by the dual characteristics of perseverance and hope. We, the human race, are the infamous turtle of Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, we take each obstacle in stride and keep on going on. The Great Depression is one of the best examples of humankind's tendency towards both perseverance and hope. The fact that so many people managed to live through the terrible poverty of the Great Depression is a testament to the tenacity of hope and optimism in humans, and Americans in particular.

Introduces the topic: The writer provides context, acknowledging the **complexity** of the **concept** of life's difficulty.

Uses the domain-specific technique of metaphor (the turtle in *Grapes of Wrath*) **to manage the complexity of the topic**

Develops topic with appropriate, accurate, facts and concrete details; uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary in well-chosen evidence from the text (here, the Second Inaugural)

The texts provided for this analysis all discuss the Great Depression and its effects on the people who lived through it. On the whole, the theme translated from

States
focus

the texts is that the people who survived the Great Depression developed, as a direct result of the Depression, a curiously strong sense of optimism. President

Franklin D. Roosevelt, in his Second Inaugural Address, attributes this

sense of optimism to democracy, and its "...innate capacity to protect its

people against disasters once considered inevitable, to solve problems

once considered unsolvable." Roosevelt is, of course, making a blunt

reference to his popular and effective programs under the New Deal. It is

Integrates
quotations
effectively
into
analysis

true that the New Deal had come at just the right moment, and that millions of

people were helped through the New Deal, particularly the WPA, or Works

Progress Administration, which was, as put in the fourth source from PBS, a

"major work relief program...[employing] more than 8.5 million people to build

bridges, roads, public buildings, parks and airports." 8.5 million people is a lot

of people to employ, and based upon these facts alone it would seem that the

New Deal was indeed reason to hope.

Yet the other sources, and indeed even later on in Roosevelt's speech,
indicate that such hope was perhaps misplaced, at least in the extent that the

hope was placed upon Roosevelt. In "Digging

second source written by Robert J. Hastings,

Uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary and techniques to manage the complexity of the topic

In", the

Establishes and maintains a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which the writer is working

Develops the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant, relevant, accurate facts and concrete details from the text

Organizes complex ideas, concepts, and information: Beginning with a discussion of Roosevelt's optimism in his Second Inaugural, the writer **creates a unified whole** in which **each new element builds on that which precedes it**

Analyzes Roosevelt's speech in terms of author's craft (anaphora); connects the use of this rhetorical device to the essay's topic of perseverance and hope, to **manage the complexity of the topic**

Uses appropriate, varied transitions and syntax to clarify relationships among complex ideas and concepts and create cohesion. This section of the essay **builds from the section which precedes it and connects to the next** ("Digging In") to **create a unified whole**

the narrator reflects on her father's efforts to get money: "it was a day's work here and a day's work there...a few days on the WPA..." Thus, it seems that although the WPA may have employed 8.5 million people, it was not by any means a source of income, if people were only able to work for a few days at a time. However, the focus of "Digging In" is not to evaluate federal programs, but to evaluate the effectiveness of one's own efforts to help oneself. More than anything, the lengths to which the narrator's family went in order to save money exemplifies, once again, an incredible amount of perseverance. From the selling of the car, to the renouncement of milk and ice, the family maintains their perseverance and their hope. Towards the end of the passage, the narrator's mother speaks of this imperative hope: "I've learned that whatever happens, your Daddy always has a little dab of money put back somewhere..." Whether or not this was true, it certainly seems to be a sentiment that enabled the family to maintain their sanity

In Roosevelt's speech, there is a section in which he employs anaphora to give emphasis to the negative effects of the Depression by repeating, for several lines, "I see..." followed by a sad image, thought, or idea. He finishes the anaphora with "I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished." While this rhetorical emphasis is used mainly to lead into his positive images to follow, in order to be more convincing towards his audience, the negative scenes which he describes were not only rhetorical, but quite real. People were homeless and clotheless and foodless during the Great Depression, millions of them. That is why it is so incredible that the primary effect of such a tragedy was to create a generation of hopeful people. Such hope is characterized in the first source, a poem by Karen Hesse entitled "Debts". In

**Uses the most
significant and relevant
evidence to develop
topic**

this poem, the narrator describes that "Daddy is thinking/ of taking a loan from Mr. Roosevelt and his men..." This connection to the New Deal emphasizes that the government, through President Roosevelt, helped instigate the massive flood of hope in the American people. The dad in the poem wants to buy wheat even though such an idea is completely impractical; the dad is a naively hopeful character.

As the "Ma" says in the last phrase of the poem, "well, it rains enough...to keep a person hoping./But even if it didn't/your daddy would have to believe." This quote

defines succinctly the mind-set amongst Americans living in the Depression that hope will lead to greatness. Perhaps this was because Americans could do nothing else but hope, and work, and trust in the leaders of their country. It is human nature, after all, to do everything one

can to keep oneself going. Thus, the Depression imprinted a sense of hope on the people that lived through it. It is a sense of hope that has not been witnessed to the

same extent in our time, yet hope continues to persevere in humans.

Provides a concluding section that follows from and supports the information presented and reflects on the significance of topic

In this on-demand assignment, students were asked to explain the effects of the Great Depression on people who lived through it. This writer provides context about the deep difficulty of living during the Depression in the introduction. She analyzes the metaphor of Steinbeck's turtle to help manage the complexity of the topic. In the second paragraph, she offers her main point/focus: the Great Depression created a "*curiously strong sense of optimism*" in people.

The writer organizes complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly to support the main point using textual evidence, doing so in such a way that each section builds on the one that precedes it. While she draws on texts extensively, they are not the organizing principle; rather, the concepts of hope, optimism, and perseverance are. The writer uses appropriate, varied, and strong transitions to connect concepts and create coherence. (For example, "*However, the focus of "Digging In" is not to evaluate federal programs, but to evaluate the effectiveness of one's own efforts to help oneself.*") Within each chunk of the essay, the writer uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary and techniques to name and explain the effects, which she has identified from the texts she has read. The writer analyzes evidence thoughtfully throughout so that the reader grasps the complexity of the topic.

Grades 9-12, Prompt for Narrative

Writing Common Core Standard W.CCR.3

Great historical events often have deep effects upon the people who live through them. Depending on the person and the situation, those effects can be very different.

You are going to read a short article about the Dust Bowl days in American history titled “Black Blizzard.” You will also look at some photographs taken during that time period. As you read and study the photographs, think about how this experience may have affected the individual people who lived through it.

Finally, you will write a narrative, showing how a particular small moment during this experience affected one person.

Remember, a good narrative:

- *Establishes a clear point of view*
- *Focuses closely on one character or characters*
- *Uses strong sensory details to make the character(s) and event come alive*
- *Uses precise language*
May use dialogue and description to capture the character(s) and event
- *Concludes effectively*

Here are your choices for your narrative:

- A young child watching the “black blizzard” rolling in over the plains
- A young child, watching a tractor knock down his family home in Oklahoma, several years into the Dust Bowl drought
- A mother sitting on her front steps in a migrant camp in California
- An unemployed father, arriving at a squatter camp in California from Oklahoma

You will have three class periods to complete this reading/thinking/writing task. The narrative will have a single draft, and you may want to take some time to plan your writing before you begin work. When you have finished, be sure to proofread.

File Name: N9-10P The Day The Tractor Came**Narrative****Grade 10****On-Demand Writing - Uniform Prompt****The Day The Tractor Came**

I was four years old when our house was destroyed. I didn't

Uses

sensory

details to

convey vivid

picture of

experience

understand why but I could remember when the big red tractor came

belching its smoke, gleaming in the hot midday sunshine, and rolling

over the landscape plowing long furrows in perfect unison. Years later

they told me it was the bank - the monster that lived and breathed profits

from the land. We lived on that land and worked it until it was exhausted. I

was still in the womb when the drought came with its monstrous black

clouds of dust that enveloped the landscape. Pa said that the storms caused

the land to be barren of profit. When the profit ceased, the bank found other

means to satisfy its never-ending appetite for the financial food known to

farmers as profit.

I'll never forget the day the bank took our house. Pa told me that the

bank was cultivating the land because we could no longer sustain the profit

ourselves. I did not know nor cared what it meant. I was just a kid playing

Indians and Cowboys with my two brothers and sister the day the tractor

came. The shiny monster had been plowing the land all day long when it

finally got to our small cabin. My father put up a stand, but to no avail. The

tractor driver delivered his monotonous address to Pa about the bank's

Engages and orients the reader by setting out a problem as the focus for narrative to follow, establishing a point of view, and introducing a narrator and characters: A child's anguish over the destruction of his home by a tractor is the central focus of the narrative, which is told from the perspective of a first person narrator.

Uses a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole

Uses precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory and figurative language to convey a vivid picture of the events, setting, and characters

Creates a smooth progression of events

Uses the narrative technique of personification (portraying the tractor as the enemy) to develop events and characters

situation and needs. Legally it was fair, but it did not seem fair. Finally, Pa stepped away from the tractor squatted down and buried his head in his hands. Without hesitation, the driver fired up the incredible machine and let its engines roar. Looking back, the tractor driver seemed to have an ultimate connection with his machine because he was an obstinate man controlling an unstoppable force. Slowly, the machine approached the house as if it were not even there. At immediate contact, the wall and roof caved in as if it were a flimsy cardboard box against a freight train. The tractor then proceeded as if there never was a house, without a care in the world, unaware and unconcerned of the devastation left in the dust.

Back then, I was merely a child watching and wondering what his father would do next. Pa had always been a strong man, a man that our family could depend on. However, in five minutes, the tractor was able to reduce Pa to nothing. Never before had I seen my father break down with hopelessness. Seeing him there without a plan made me feel as though we were alone in a desert with nowhere to turn. But the tractor, the arrogant tractor, took my small life, shattered it into million pieces, and left it on the ground in front of me. What few memories still had in that house flashed before me as I watch them knocked to the ground. That was my home, the house where I was born, the house where I learned to walk, and the house my father had built with his own craftsmanship so quickly destroyed returning to the dust from which it came. But what do I care; I was merely a child in a large, dusty, lonely, world.

Uses precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory and figurative language to convey a vivid picture of the events, setting, and characters:

Precise, vivid language captures the force of the tractor as it destroys the

Uses precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory and figurative language to convey a vivid picture of the events, setting, and characters:

Precise, telling details contrast the misery of the family with the lack of

Uses a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole

Uses the narrative technique of reflection to develop events, as well as the character of the narrator

Provides a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is resolved over the course of the narrative

In this on-demand narrative, the writer tells the story of a child watching his home being razed by a tractor during the days of the Dust Bowl. He focuses it around the narrator's experience of losing the home his father had built. The narrator and main character is the child.

The writer uses a clear sequence of events to develop the story, using some skillfully executed flashbacks to illuminate the present experience with the tractor. The writer uses no dialogue; most of the detail is provided through the narrator's reflection and through vivid descriptions of events. The narrator's state of mind—bewildered and shocked—is captured through this reflective detail. The narrative concludes with the narrator reflecting on his powerlessness and aloneness. The lack of tidy resolution is appropriate to this narrative and suggests the maturity of the writer.

File Name: N11-12P (Better Than the Sunset.)**Narrative****Grade 12****On-Demand Writing - Uniform Prompt****(Better Than the Sunset.)**

Adam sat on the porch and watched the clear blue sky. Today was his sixth birthday and all he wanted was to watch the sunset. It was only noon and he had hours to go. Inside the house his mother was cooking and his father was out in the fields. He didn't mind being alone on his birthday. He liked the quiet.

He sensed it before he saw it. Something felt wrong. Everything was too quiet, much the same as the minutes before a hurricane. Those moments were magical. The world seemed to stand still; the air charged with electricity.

Waiting to explode into chaos.

Today was no different. A cloud that had not been present only seconds before covered the sun. Adam looked up and squinted into the still bright sky. The cloud covering the sun was alone. It would not be a thunderstorm.

Suddenly a huge shadow loomed before him. It sped forward from the tree line and deftly made its way towards him.

Time slowed down and he watched as animals exploded from their hiding places. The wide yard was chaos as a hundred tiny bodies ran for cover. His breath caught in his throat and while he *was* afraid he could not

Engages and orients the reader by setting out a situation and its significance, establishing a point of view, and introducing a character:

The writer delays the introduction of the problem of the dust storm, instead focusing on a setting. The narrative is told from the perspective of a third person limited narrator.

Establishes the **problem** (coming of the dust storm) and **its significance**, using narrative technique of **suspense**

Uses precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the events, setting, and character

Uses a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome, the coming of the storm

tear his eyes away. There was something beautiful about the way the cloud of black dust crept towards him, swallowing everything in its path. To him it looked like a monster. Big and ugly and destructive and yet somehow extraordinary at the same time.

Uses description and reflection to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome, how the child will experience the storm

He vaguely registered that his name was being called, but there was nothing urgent enough to tear him away from the havoc unfolding before his eyes. He ignored the voices and watched as his mother's flowerbed was swallowed in seconds. Next were the tractor and then the shed. His big blue eyes grew wide as the cloud of angry, swirling black dust drew ever closer. His heart pounded now not from fear, but from something else. Adrenaline sang through his veins. It was exhilarating to watch his own death approach. He had no intention of dying today, but he couldn't bear to run inside and lose sight of this beautiful destruction.

Reflection builds towards the outcome of how child will experience this storm

The voices grew more and more frantic and the swirling mass of dust threatened closer and closer. And still Adam sat, watching and waiting for what was to be swallowed next. The shadow of this beast loomed over the house and he craned his head back to watch the hurricane of dust descend upon him. If possible time slowed even more. The door behind him burst open, the wood creaking and groaning in protest at the force shoved against it. The span of seconds in which his father ran towards him, shouting his name, stretched and seemed to become years. His footsteps pounded against the rotting planks of the porch, the noise exploding in Adam's ears. He looked between his father and the black monster, which had now reached the bottom step.

Creates a smooth progression of events

Uses precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the events, setting, and characters: Here, the writer conveys the danger of the moment

His father's strong arm reached towards him and closed around his body like a metal vice. His small bones jarred from the impact. He watched over his father's shoulder as the storm wailed closer.

I'll catch you, it seemed to be mocking.

As suddenly as time had slowed, it began again. The dust exploded around them just as his father slammed the door, shutting out the world.

Black dust curled under the door and shifted forward in fury. His mother shoved a wet towel in the crack and pressed another to Adam's face.

Together, the three of them huddled in the middle of the room, gasping and hacking and choking for air. But Adam didn't mind. He had only one thought as the black dust wormed its way into his lungs and stole his breath.

That was better than the sunset.

Creates a smooth progression of events

Provides a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is resolved over the course of the narrative: The writer contrasts the danger of the storm with the child's experience of it to establish an ironic ending.

In this on-demand narrative, the writer tells the story of a child experiencing a dust storm during the days of the Dust Bowl. He focuses it around the irony of such a dreadful thing being such a magical experience for the child. The main character is the child, and the narrative is told from a third-person limited point of view.

The writer uses a clear sequence of events to develop the story, beginning with the main character watching the sunset and using the notion of the sunset to create a cohesive whole by the end of the narrative. The writer uses no dialogue; most of the detail is provided through reflection on the part of the child and through vivid description of events. The child's state of mind—shocked but also thrilled—is captured through this reflective detail. The narrative concludes with the child thinking, *"That was better than the sunset,"* an ironic resolution that is appropriate to this narrative and that suggests the maturity of the writer.