Inside Writing RESPONSES TO LITERATURE

... a self-contained student writing unit, complete with instruction, guidelines, activities, and writing space

WRITE SOURCE®
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Consulting Educators

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Planning Notes:
Responses to Literature

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Unit Overview:

Responses to Literature

As with all *Inside Writing* units, this response to literature unit is ready to put in the hands of your students. Everything students need to complete their work is included in this booklet.

In this unit, students are asked to respond to a piece of literature by writing about the theme of a favorite novel or short story. In their responses, students should focus on how the feelings, thoughts, words, or actions of the main character illustrate the theme. The unit includes a sample essay that discusses the theme of Laurie Halse Anderson's novel *Speak*.

**Rationale**

- In the “Universe of Discourse,” responding to literature is one of the more challenging forms of writing for students to develop. Identifying and writing about the theme of a novel or short story requires students to formulate a statement about an idea or a concept and support the statement using evidence from the text.
- Writing about the theme requires students to identify details and patterns that show how the author expressed the theme. Reading a literary text closely helps students better understand and appreciate the books and short stories they read.
- Students can learn to shape effective literature-based essays with clearly developed beginnings, middles, and endings.
- Responding to literature is included on some district and state assessment tests.

**Major Concepts**

- Responses to literature can focus on the identification and explanation of the theme of a literary work.
- A response to literature must go through a series of steps—prewriting, writing, revising, and editing and proofreading—before it is ready to be published.
- Assessment is an important part of the writing process.

**Strategies and Skills That Students Will Practice**

- Listing to choose an appropriate work of literature
- Completing writing prompts to develop a statement of theme
- Using a chart and answering questions to identify details that support a theme
- Writing the beginning, middle, and ending parts of a response to literature
- Evaluating closing paragraphs
- Peer responding
- Using specific verbs
- Punctuating titles of literary works
- Evaluating responses to literature using an assessment rubric

**Performance Standards**

Students are expected to . . .

- use prewriting strategies to generate and organize ideas.
- develop a response that exhibits a careful reading and understanding of a piece of literature.
- revise and edit their writing, striving for completeness, personal voice, specific word choice, smooth-reading sentences, and correctness.

**Reinforcing Skills**

- Students can use either the *Writers INC* or the *Write Ahead* handbook for additional instruction related to writing responses to literature. (See page 16T for handbook correlations.)
- Editing and proofreading skills can be reinforced and expanded by implementing exercises from *Inside Writing Skills* available for each level. (See page 7TE for suggestions.)
## Weekly Planning Chart

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**Daily Lesson Plans: Week One**

**DAY 1**

**Understanding the Unit**

**Reviewing the Unit Basics**
- Discuss "About the Unit" (inside front cover). Note that the intended audience is the students' classmates. Students will be expected to share their finished writing in class.
- Review the table of contents (page 1) and the assignment checklist (page 2). Students can use the checklist to keep track of their assignments. (Consider establishing a due date for each assignment.)
- Before having students read page 3, lead a class discussion about things that involve themes, such as amusement parks (also known as theme parks) and theme songs. If necessary, review the dictionary definition of the word theme, and discuss its different contexts. Students should understand that a theme is an idea that shapes a piece of literature or other creative work.
- If time allows, read aloud the quotation at the top of page 3, and discuss with students how exploring themes in literature can help them recognize good writing. It can also help them become better readers and writers.

**Completing a Responding Warm-Up Activity**
- Implement "What's the Big Idea?" (page 4). In this activity, students are asked to think about some "big ideas" or concepts used in various movies or television shows. The purpose is to introduce students to the concept of theme.

**DAY 2**

**Working with a Sample**

**Reading a Sample Response to Literature**

*Optional:* Implement "Prereading Activity" (page 9TE).

- Have students read the sample response to literature on pages 5-6. Ask them to pay attention to the side notes. These notes identify the traits of a response to literature that focuses on the theme of a literary work.

*Before* ESL students read the sample response to literature (pages 5-6), implement the "Prereading Activity" (page 9TE), discuss "Important Stylistic Features" (page 9TE), and outline "Reacting to the Reading" (page 7).

**Reacting to the Response to Literature**

- Have students complete "Reacting to the Reading" (page 7). You may ask students to respond on their own, in small groups, or as a class. Discuss their responses as a class. After students complete the second question, have them reread the theme statement in the sample response. Remind students that the theme is an idea or a concept.

*Optional:* Using "Important Stylistic Features" (page 9TE) as a guide, discuss the use of literary present tense and making a position statement in the model response to literature.
• As a class, use the rubric on page 8 to assess the sample. To get started, analyze the sample for content (stimulating ideas) by determining whether the essay writer identifies the theme of the work in a clear statement. Then go on to organization, voice, and so on. As an alternative, you may analyze the sample for just one or two of the traits in the rubric. Inform students that their own responses to literature will be assessed with the rubric.

Optional: Implement “Additional Reading and Responding to Literature” (page 44). Students can work on this activity throughout the unit, whenever they have free time.

**DAY 3**

**Prewriting**

**Choosing a Topic**

• Implement “Choosing a Work of Literature and Identifying Its Theme” (page 10). In this activity, students list novels and stories they have recently read, choose one to write about, and identify its theme. You may wish to simplify the process by asking students to choose from a list of titles that you provide.

**Gathering Details**

• Implement “Gathering Details That Support Your Theme” and “Support Your Theme” (pages 11-13). Before students begin, remind them that authors often express a theme through the actions and thoughts of characters. Point out how the essay writer gathered details on page 11. Advanced students may benefit from exploring the thoughts and words of the narrator, especially if the narrator is not one of the characters. Finally, you may wish to review students’ statements of theme before they begin the writing process. Make sure that the statement can be supported by details in the text.

**Learning About the Structure of Responses to Literature**

• Discuss “Learning About the Structure of Responses to Literature” (page 14). Remind students that their responses to literature should include at least three main details from the text. The details should focus on the characters’ actions, thoughts, feelings, or words that reveal the theme.

Using “Transition Words and Phrases” (page 14) as a guide, make a linking words chart for your classroom. Visuals provide strong, continual reinforcement for ESL students.

**DAY 4**

**Writing**

**Writing the Beginning**

• Implement “Starting Your Response to Literature” (pages 16-17). Before students begin, discuss with them the beginning paragraph of the sample response to literature on page 5 and the sample beginning paragraph on page 16. Upon completion of their work, ask students to share their beginnings for a class discussion.
Developing the Middle Part
- Implement “Developing the Middle Part” (pages 18-19). Before students begin, discuss the sample middle paragraph on page 18 and the middle paragraphs of the model response on pages 5-6. Talk to students about the order in which the essay writer presents the details in the model response.

**ESL TIP** Encourage ESL students to find at least one direct quotation from the chosen novel or story to express or illustrate the theme.

**DAY 5**

Writing
Writing the Ending
- Implement “Ending Your Response to Literature” (pages 20-21). Have students review the sample ending paragraph on page 20 and on page 6. Students will have another opportunity to evaluate closing paragraphs on pages 24-25.

Forming a Complete First Draft
- Copies of completed first drafts should be due for the next class period. Review the tips on page 22 before students complete their first drafts.

**Daily Lesson Plans: Week Two**

**DAY 1**

Revising
Skills Activity
- As a class, review the purpose of each section of a response to literature. Then implement “Evaluating Closing Paragraphs” (pages 24-25). Remind students that the beginning introduces the work of literature and states the theme, the middle provides details that reveal the theme, and the ending restates the theme and makes a connection between the literature and real life. Then, discuss this activity as a class.

Sharing Assessed Models
Optional: Share the “excellent” and “fair” assessed student essays (pages 10TE-13TE) to help students evaluate the effectiveness of their writing. (Make copies of the essays or display them on an overhead projector.) Students should ask themselves whether their writing measures up to the “excellent” response to literature, and, if not, what improvements they should make.

**ESL TIP** Review comments that are suitable in assessment situations and list sample responses for students to use as they review one another’s writing.
DAY 2

Revising

Peer Responding
- Have students work as partners using “Peer Responding” (page 26) as a guide.

Using a Checklist
- Review “Revising in Action” (bottom, page 27) to make sure that students understand the revising process. Then have students revise their first drafts, following “Using a Checklist” (top, page 27). Emphasize that revising is the process of improving the ideas and organization of details in writing. (Checking for spelling, punctuation, and grammar should wait.)

ESL TIP
Have students highlight the topic sentence in each of their middle paragraphs and then underline the key word or phrase that is the focus. This process will help students identify the ideas and organization of their work. (In the response on pages 5-6, the first middle paragraph focuses on the changes Melinda undergoes.)

Writing a Complete Revised Draft
- Provide time for students to complete their revising. Have students write a complete revised draft, following the tips on page 28.

DAY 3

Editing and Proofreading

Skills Activity: Editing for Style
- Implement “Using Specific Verbs” (pages 30-31). Tell students that they can make their writing clearer and more interesting by removing vague verbs such as was, were, and are and changing the adjectives or participles that follow them into main verbs. Point out that strong verbs need to fit the writing. To say “The boy wolfed down his sandwich” uses a strong verb. However, if the boy is just nibbling on a sandwich while he waits for a bus, “wolfed” may not fit.

ESL TIP
Review the hints on page 30. Have students work in pairs or with English speakers to replace the helping verbs in their writing with forms of the main verb.

Skills Activity: Editing for Correctness
- Implement “Punctuating Titles of Literary Works” (page 32). Explain that students working on computers should use italics instead of underlining.
DAY 4

Editing and Proofreading

Reviewing Editing in Action
- Discuss the edited paragraph (page 33) to review the editing process.

Skills Activity: Checking for Correctness
- Discuss the sample proofread paragraph at the top of page 34. Then implement “Making Editing and Proofreading Changes” (pages 34-35). This activity could be done by individuals, with partners, or as a class, depending on students' abilities. Note that students may solve editing issues in different ways.

Using a Checklist to Edit and Proofread
- Have students edit their revised writing, following “Using a Checklist” (page 36). In addition, have partners check one another's writing for errors.

Writing the Final Copy
- Review the tips on page 37. Then provide time for students to write and proofread their final copies (pages 38-40), which are due the following day.

DAY 5

Publishing

Sharing Final Copies
- Arrange students into small groups, and have them share their final drafts. Provide copies of the rubric (page 8) for students to use to evaluate their classmates’ essays. Each student responder should write his or her name (Evaluator:) and the name of the writer (Writer:) at the top of the rubric. After students evaluate each essay for the six traits of effective responses to literature, have them write at least one positive comment at the bottom of the rubric. (Each writer should have an opportunity to review the ratings.)

Assessment Note: We use a 5-point scale to evaluate the writing samples on pages 107e-147e, but the rubric can be used with any point scale.

Understanding the Publishing Process
- Discuss the variety of ways writing can be published (page 42).

Daily Lesson Plans: Week Three (Optional)

Extension Activities

Reflecting on Your Writing
- Have students complete “Reflecting on Your Writing” (page 45). This activity will help them think about their writing experiences in this unit.

Preparing for a Writing Test
- Also consider implementing “Preparing for a Writing Test” (page 46). Students should review this sheet before they take a district or state assessment test.
About the Sample Response

The sample response to literature focuses on the theme of the novel *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson. The writer identifies engagement rather than withdrawal as a way to deal with life’s difficulties. She then provides a summary of the information that is slowly revealed to the reader by the narrator and main character, Melinda. Anderson’s technique, not being the typical chronological narrative, follows the girl’s thoughts as they gradually focus on the cause of her distress. Her observations about her surroundings show that she is an intelligent and perceptive person rather than the isolated loser that others see. The theme expands to a call for understanding of outcasts like Melinda.

Prereading Activity

Before students read the sample response on pages 5-6, introduce the novel or review it with the class. If students have not read the book recently, you may offer the following summary:

Melinda Sordino is entering ninth grade with “seven new notebooks, a skirt I hate, and a stomachache.” Melinda’s anxiety is not the average case of new-school jitters. She is extremely withdrawn, preferring solitude to socializing with her peers. Being the outsider, and an intelligent one at that, she entertains readers with her witty observations on high school life. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that something happened to cause Melinda’s distress. There are scattered references to an underage drinking party that Melinda had broken up by calling the police. Late in the story, it is revealed that she called 911 because a senior boy, whom Melinda has referred to as IT, had assaulted her during the party. She has never told anyone about this, but when he starts dating another freshman girl, Melinda feels obligated to go public with what happened. There is a happy resolution for Melinda, and her schoolmates realize that she is not a weirdo, but a victim who courageously risks her own reputation to put a stop to future abuse.

After students read the sample response, point out the difference between interpretation and summary. (Students may tend to write summaries rather than interpretations.) Tell students that an interpretation (or analysis) selects events from the novel and discusses their meaning. Point out how the sample identifies key elements in the novel that support the theme. A summary merely reports key events but does not assign any meaning to them.

Vocabulary

*wickedly* Mischievously

*revelation* A discovery of hidden truth

Important Stylistic Features

USE OF LITERARY PRESENT TENSE: Point out that the sample response is written in the present tense. This is customary when writing about literature. It lets the reader see the literature through the eyes of the person writing about it. Other tenses may appear in a response to literature when a character or the narrator is quoted or when events preceding the narrative are being recounted. Have students use literary present tense in their prewriting activities and initial drafts.

MAKING A POSITION STATEMENT: Point out that the statement of theme, or thesis statement, in a response to literature is similar to the opinion statement in a persuasive essay. Because the theme of a work of literature is suggested by the author rather than stated directly, different readers may interpret the theme differently. Explain that different interpretations are acceptable, provided that the writer has defended and supported his or her ideas with evidence and details from the text.

The writer of the sample response believes that the theme of *Speak* is that life’s difficulties can best be faced by acting on them rather than by withdrawing from them. Another writer might focus on the circumstances that caused the main character’s distress. In this case, the theme might be the damage that people do to others through abusive behavior. Students could benefit from listing more than one possible theme for the work they choose. Then they could decide which one could be most convincingly supported in a response to literature essay.
Assessed Writing Samples

Pages 10TE-14TE include three sample responses to literature assessed according to the rubric on page 8 in the unit. Use these samples to help students with their writing and revising. (See Week Two, DAY 1 in “Daily Lesson Plans,” page 6TE.) You may also use these samples to guide your own evaluation of students’ responses. A 5-point scale is used to evaluate these samples, but the rubric will work with any point scale.

Responses to Literature Assessment

**EXCELLENT**

**Scout Takes Another Look**

You might judge the book *To Kill a Mockingbird* from its title. You might read the title and think that the author, Harper Lee, will tell a depressing story. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is anything but depressing, although the story takes place in the South during the Great Depression. It tells the story of a young girl named Scout. Over a period of two years, she discovers that her brother, her dad, and her neighbors are not who she thought they were. One theme of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is that deep down every person has something to offer the world and sometimes people don’t realize it until they see the world from another person’s viewpoint. Often it takes a crisis before people can see the good in another person.

Scout, who is only six when the book begins, is quick to judge. She lives in a small community where people are known by what their families are like. For example, as Scout explains to her new teacher, the Cunninghams do not like to owe people. Her explanation is supposed to explain why the boy sitting behind her will not accept lunch money from the teacher. Members of Walter’s family have always been poor, but they refuse handouts. Walter is just following his family’s way of life. Other families are different. The Ewells are mean and ignorant. The Radleys keep to themselves. The Finches seem a little strange, but they are always fair. Scout has learned to judge what a person is like based on what family he or she comes from, but something happens to change that idea.

Although Scout is devoted to her father, she does not think that he is talented or has much to offer the world. Atticus Finch is older than most of her friends’ parents. He is a lawyer, and he prefers to sit and read rather than play football. Scout does not see what her father can do until a rabid dog appears in the middle of town. In a suspenseful moment, Finch drops his glasses in the street and shoots the rabid dog with one shot. Amazed, Scout learns that her father was once known as “One-shot Finch.” He gave up guns because he thought they were dangerous. Scout is impressed and sees her father in a whole new light.
Throughout the book, Scout and her brother, Jem, tell tales about the mysterious Arthur Radley. He is a neighbor they nicknamed Boo because he has not been outside his house in many years. The two children think that Boo Radley must be crazy, and they listen to rumors that Boo is also dangerous and mean. They spend a whole summer trying to think of ways to get Boo to come out of the house. Scout does not meet Boo Radley until the end of the novel when he saves her and her brother's lives. When she finally meets him, she discovers that he is extremely shy. He is childlike in his appearance, and he hides in the shadows. Despite the fact that Boo saved Scout's life, he is afraid to walk across the street by himself, so Scout walks him home. She stands on his porch and imagines what his life has been like. She feels she understands this stranger who is now a friend.

Atticus Finch's earliest lesson to Scout is simple: "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." Throughout the novel, Scout is learning to see the good in people, even in people she is afraid of or dislikes, by seeing the world from their points of view. She learns that the Cunninghams are not only poor but nice. She realizes her father is not only smart but brave. She discovers that Boo Radley is not crazy but shy. The theme of walking in another person's footsteps sounds simple. However, it's often challenging because it forces people to really think about how they judge others. The world today is still a place filled with conflict, and people could all benefit from thinking about other people's viewpoints before making judgments.

**Assessment Rubric**

**4. Stimulating Ideas**
- The response...
  - focuses on the thoughts, feelings, words, or actions of a specific character in a story or a novel.
  - shows how the character reveals the theme.

**4. Logical Organization**
- begins by identifying the work of literature, its author, and its theme.
- presents details in an easy-to-follow manner.

**5. Engaging Voice**
- uses the present tense except for quotations or recounted actions.
- shows an understanding of the story or novel.

**5. Original Word Choice**
- includes specific verbs and nouns.

**5. Effective Sentence Style**
- flows smoothly from one idea to the next.

**5. Correct, Accurate Copy**
- observes the basic rules of grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
- follows the format suggested by the teacher.

**Comments:**

Your introduction is good. It grabs the reader's attention and states the theme. Your examples support your theme, although it is not clear in the third paragraph exactly how Scout saw the world through her father's eyes. Your conclusion is effective. It restates the theme and draws connections between the literature and real life.

Your sentences are interesting, and your details are accurate. You have no spelling or grammatical errors. Good job overall.
A Wrinkle in Time

Madeleine L’Engle wrote the book *A Wrinkle in Time* about a tesseract, which is a wrinkle in time. The story is about a girl named Margaret Murry, who is called Meg, and her brother Charles Wallace, and a guy named Calvin, who is kind of Meg’s boyfriend and kind of not. On the back of the book, the Saturday Review says that the “theme is love.” I agree with that.

First of all, Meg loves her family, even though she thinks they are weird and they don’t really fit in. She loves her mom, who is beautiful, and her dad, who is a scientist, and her twin brothers, Sandy and Dennys, and even her baby brother, Charles Wallace, even though everybody thinks he’s dumb. Seriously, they think he can’t talk—not his family, but other people. The Murrays all love each other even though they are oddballs, and that’s important.

Second of all, Meg falls in love with Calvin O’Keefe, even though Charles Wallace at first thinks he’s a “big bug.” He is tall and skinny, with orange hair and pants that are too short, so I guess Charles Wallace was right about the big part and maybe the bug part to. At first, Meg and Calvin and Charles—none of them like each other very much, but then they run into these three witches named Mrs. Which, Mrs Who and Mrs Whatsit. It’s off to another planet! That’s where the wrinkle in time comes in, and when they keep going to different planets, they fall in love. That’s because they were all oddballs on earth but they fit in out in space, so I guess part of the theme is that if you spend enough time with someone, you may fall in love.

Third of all, Meg loves this big mushy brain called IT. Seriously, that’s the way they spell it—I T! IT controls this one world where everybody has to be the same, and it’s the one world where Meg’s dad is held a prisoner, so she and Calvin and Charles Wallace have to go fight IT. At first, they can’t, but then Meg loves IT. I don’t mean she loves IT like she loves her family, or even
like she loves Calvin, but like you love something that you wouldn’t normally. Like if you had a dog that smelled bad and had only three legs, the way you’d love that dog. Anyway, Meg loves IT, and that’s how she beats IT and saves her dad.

So in conclusion, *A Wrinkle in Time* is a book about the theme of love—the kind of love you have for your family, the kind you have for a basketball-player boyfriend, and the kind you have for a three-legged dog. That’s three kinds of love, and there are all sorts of other kinds of love in the world. People should read this book so that they learn how to love. All you need is love. That’s the theme, and it relates to life because everybody needs somebody to love.

**Assessment Rubric**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Stimulating Ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The response...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• focuses on the thoughts, feelings, words, or actions of a specific character in a story or a novel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• shows how the character reveals the theme.</td>
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<th>4. Logical Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<th>2. Effective Sentence Style</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• flows smoothly from one idea to the next.</td>
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<td>• observes the basic rules of grammar, spelling, and punctuation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• follows the format suggested by the teacher.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments:**

It seems you enjoyed this book, but your statement of theme should have come from your own ideas, not a review. You clearly explain the theme and provide lots of detail, but your organization is a little clunky. Instead of quoting song lyrics, it would be more effective to use your own words to tie the theme to real life.

In the future, avoid such a casual tone, watch for pronoun usage, and be careful about repetitive sentence structure.
Being True to Your Self: The Call of the Wild

The Call of the Wild was a good book. It was about a dog who had to fight for survival in Alaska a long time ago. Buck was the dog. He was strong and smart. He figured out that he could not be true to himself if he lived with men so he left them and went into the wild. The book was about how wildness is good.

At first Buck was the king of the farm where he grew up. He was in charge of everything. The writer calls him the king, too. When Buck got kidnapped he was not the king anymor. He was the lowly one. He had to fight his way up until he was the leder of his sled team. The fight where he kills Spitz was painful to read if you like dogs which I do. But Buck was smart so he knew exactly what to do and everybody was happy until the team got sold to some people who were not very smart. They overfed and then starved the dogs and made them run to much. Buck hung in there the whole time because he knew that he would survive.

When Buck got saved by John Thompson his whole life changed. Now he was king again and he had a great friend. He followed Thompson everwhere and saved his life. He thought that Thompson was great accept when he slept by the fire and saw cave men and thought about wild times from long ago as if he was there. That’s when Buck thought he should go check out the wild.

When Buck checked out the wild, he met a wolf and they became brothers. They ran far together. Then Buck hunted a giant moose and killed it. He was real proud but he ran back to John Thompson but he was killed by Indians and so now Buck was really mad and sad too. He gave up on men and lived in the wild with the wolves.

Buck realized that he was meant to live in the wild because he was strong and the wolves respected him. Living where you belong is important. Everybody has got to figure out what is important in life.

Assessment Rubric

2 Stimulating Ideas
The response...
- focuses on the thoughts, feelings, words, or actions of a specific character in a story or a novel.
- shows how the character reveals the theme.

2 Logical Organization
- begins by identifying the work of literature, its author, and its theme.
- presents details in an easy-to-follow manner.

3 Engaging Voice
- uses the present tense except for quotations or recounted actions.
- shows an understanding of the story or novel.

2 Original Word Choice
- includes specific verbs and nouns.

2 Effective Sentence Style
- flows smoothly from one idea to the next.

2 Correct, Accurate Copy
- observes the basic rules of grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
- follows the format suggested by the teacher.

1 Incomplete
2 Poor
3 Fair
4 Good
5 Excellent

Comments:
Your beginning gives some background about the novel, but your theme should be stated more clearly and should be supported with details. Your middle paragraphs just retell the story rather than explain why wildness is good. Try to use the author’s words to back up your point. Your ending needs to share more about the connection to readers and restate the theme.

Next time, ask for help checking for spelling, grammar, and sentence structure.
Optional Activities for Multiple Intelligences

Consider implementing one or more of the following activities during the unit. (The intelligences addressed in each activity are listed in italics.)

* **Introduction** (page 3)
  Hum, sing, or play recorded versions of theme songs from movies or television shows for the class to identify. Explain that theme songs help identify types of movies or shows. Talk about how theme songs tie together the various parts of a movie or show.
  *Musical Intelligence*

* **Identifying a Theme** (page 10)
  In a small group, impersonate the author of the story or novel you selected. Talk about why you wrote the work and why you focused on a particular theme. Tell the group members why the theme is important to you.
  *Verbal-Interpersonal Intelligence*

* **Gathering Details** (pages 11-13)
  As you review your chosen story or novel for details, keep a tally of ideas or concept words that appear regularly in the text. The number of times the words were used may provide clues to the theme.
  *Logical-Mathematical Intelligence*

* **Gathering Details** (pages 11-13)
  Create a piece of art to illustrate the theme of the story or novel you have chosen. You might make a collage of two or three key scenes that reveal the theme.
  *Visual-Spatial Intelligence*

* **Editing** (pages 30-31)
  When you find places in your draft response that have too many vague verbs, try acting out the ideas you are trying to convey. Use your actions to help you think of vivid verbs that will enliven your writing.
  *Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence*

Additional Responding Writing Prompts

For additional writing practice, assign one or more of the following responsive writing prompts.

- Turn your response to literature into a letter to the author. Briefly share what you think about the theme of the work. Ask any questions you may have.
- Write a journal entry as a character from the book. Have the character share what he or she learned over the course of the story or novel.
- Write an analysis of the theme of a favorite poem. Look at the writer’s choice of words, figures of speech, and symbols to help you identify the theme.
- Write a journal entry in which you explore the theme of a piece of nonfiction writing, such as an essay or a chapter in a social studies or science textbook.
- Write an e-mail to a friend discussing the theme of a favorite movie or television show. Ask for his or her response.
- Find a piece of music that expresses the theme of the novel or story you chose for your response. Write a paragraph that explains why the music matches the theme.
# Correlations to Write Source Handbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSES TO LITERATURE</th>
<th>Writers INC ©2001</th>
<th>Write Ahead ©2004</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Introduction</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Responding Warm-Up</td>
<td>140, 228, 231, 241</td>
<td>142, 185, 331-335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Reacting to the Reading</td>
<td>217-219, 223-25, 229-230</td>
<td>182, 186, 331-335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Understanding Traits</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>19-23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PREWRITING: Planning Your Writing**

| 10 Choosing a Work     | 42-45, 222, 228, 231 | 41-46, 183 |
| 11 Gathering Details That Support Your Theme | 46-52, 222, 231 | 49-58, 183 |
| 14 Learning About the Structure of Responses to Literature | 106, 223-24, 230 | 60, 182, 186 |

**WRITING: Connecting Your Ideas**

| 16 Starting Your Response | 55, 222, 232 | 61, 69, 183, 185, 187 |
| 18 Developing the Middle Part | 56-57, 222, 232 | 62-63, 68-69, 183, 187 |
| 20 Ending Your Response   | 58, 222, 232 | 64, 69, 183 |
| 22 Forming a Complete First Draft | 5, 12-13, 222, 232 | 13, 59-64, 183 |

**REVISING: Improving Your Writing**

| 24 Evaluating Closing Paragraphs | 58, 66, 223, 224, 229, 230 | 64, 69, 182, 186, 187 |
| 26 Peer Responding             | 69-74             | 73-76             |
| 27 Using a Checklist           | 25, 68            | 24, 72            |

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| 32 Punctuating Titles of Literary Works | 468, 470 | 392, 396, 401 |
| 33 Reviewing Editing in Action | 16-19, 75-78    | 16-17, 80, 184    |
| 34 Checking for Correctness    | 18-19, 216, 222, 228 | 17, 80, 184 |
| 36 Using a Checklist           | 26, 79, 226       | 24, 81, 189       |
| 37 Writing the Final Copy      | 30-32             | 26-27             |

**PUBLISHING: Sharing the Final Copy**

| 42 Understanding Publishing    | 6, 33-39          | 7, 35-39          |

**Extension Activities**

| 44 Reading Responses           | 217-220, 223-225, 229-231 | 182, 186, 331-335 |
| 45 Reflecting on Your Writing  | 35, 226            | 7, 33-34          |
Inside Writing  RESPONSES TO LITERATURE

Getting Started: Learning About Responses to Literature
  3  Introduction: Responses to Literature
  4  Responding Warm-Up
  5  Reading and Reacting to a Sample Discussion of Theme
  8  Evaluating: Understanding the Traits of an Effective Response to Literature

PREWRITING: Planning Your Writing
  10 Choosing a Work of Literature and Identifying Its Theme
  11 Gathering Details That Support Your Theme
  14 Learning About the Structure of Responses to Literature

WRITING: Connecting Your Ideas
  16 Starting Your Response to Literature
  18 Developing the Middle Part
  20 Ending Your Response to Literature
  22 Forming a Complete First Draft

REVISING: Improving Your Writing
  24 Evaluating Closing Paragraphs
  26 Peer Responding
  27 Using a Checklist
  28 Writing a Complete Revised Draft

EDITING: Checking for Style and Correctness
  30 Using Specific Verbs
  32 Punctuating Titles of Literary Works
  33 Reviewing Editing in Action
  34 Making Editing and Proofreading Changes
  36 Using a Checklist
  37 Writing the Final Copy

PUBLISHING: Sharing the Final Copy
  42 Understanding the Publishing Process

Extension Activities
  44 Additional Reading and Responding to Literature
  45 Reflecting on Your Writing
  46 Preparing for a Writing Test
Checklist: **Responses to Literature**

This checklist will help you keep track of the assignments in this unit. Check the box next to each assignment as you complete it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Due Date</th>
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- □ Responding Warm-Up: What's the Big Idea? (page 4)
- □ Reacting to the Reading (page 7)

**PREWRITING: Planning Your Writing**

- □ Choosing a Work of Literature and Identifying Its Theme (page 10)
- □ Supporting Your Theme with Details (pages 12-13)

**WRITING: Connecting Your Ideas**

- □ Starting Your Response to Literature (pages 16-17)
- □ Developing the Middle Part (pages 18-19)
- □ Ending Your Response to Literature (pages 20-21)
- □ Forming a Complete First Draft (page 22)

**REVISING: Improving Your Writing**

- □ Evaluating Closing Paragraphs (pages 24-25)
- □ Peer Responding (page 26)
- □ Using a Checklist (page 27)
- □ Writing a Complete Revised Draft (page 28)

**EDITING: Checking for Style and Correctness**

- □ Using Specific Verbs (pages 30-31)
- □ Punctuating Titles of Literary Works (page 32)
- □ Making Editing and Proofreading Changes (pages 34-35)
- □ Using a Checklist (page 36)
- □ Writing the Final Copy (pages 37-40)

**Extension Activities**

- □ Additional Reading and Responding to Literature (page 44)
- □ Reflecting on Your Writing (page 45)
- □ Preparing for a Writing Test (page 46)
"No one can hope to write really well if he [or she] has not learned how to . . . make out a theme in a literary work."

—John Gardner,
author of The Art of Fiction

Responses to Literature

"Love conquers all." "Only the strong survive." "Crime doesn't pay."
These statements are themes you may have found in stories or novels you have read. A theme is a statement that a work of literature makes about life or human nature.

Authors rarely state themes directly. Instead, they use their characters’ thoughts, feelings, words, and actions to reveal the theme. However, it is important to recognize that the theme of a novel is not the same thing as the subject of a novel. The subject is what a story or a novel is about. For example, the subject of the novel Speak, by Laurie Halse Anderson, is Melinda Sordino’s terrible freshman year. The theme, however, expresses the human quality Melinda shows at the end: It is better to do the right thing than it is to hide.

In this unit, you will be asked to write about the theme of a work of literature. You will need to reread a favorite novel or story to find clues that point to the theme. Of course, different readers will identify different themes, even for the same work of literature. Your goal will be to state a theme that you can support with details from the literature.
Responding Warm-Up: What’s the Big Idea?

All forms of creative writing—stories, novels, poems, plays, and scripts for movies or television programs—have an important underlying idea or message. This idea or message is the theme. The theme expresses a truth that readers or viewers can recognize. Below are some examples of themes. (Notice that the themes are stated as complete thoughts.)

*Love conquers all.*
*Good guys always win.*
*Might does not make right.*
*The world needs more heroes.*
*Honesty is the best policy.*
*Everybody loves a winner.*
*Loyalty is more important than success.*

Choose a theme from the list above, or think of one of your own. Then choose a television show or movie that you have seen that explores this theme. Use the space below to begin freewriting about the theme. Use your own paper if you need more room.

1. The title of the show or movie is ____________________________________________

2. I think the theme of _______________________________________________________
   fits the show or movie because ______________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

3. I think the theme is true because in my own experience ________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

**Next Step:** Meet with two classmates and share your answers. If you are familiar with one another’s shows or movies, compare your ideas about what the themes are.
Reading a Sample Discussion of Theme

The sample response to literature discusses the theme in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*. The notes in the left-hand margin identify the key parts of the essay.

Too Quiet

Why does that kid sit by herself in the lunchroom and not talk to anyone? What's in her head? These are the questions people ask themselves about someone who doesn't "belong."

The main character in *Speak*, by Laurie Halse Anderson, refers to herself as "Outcast," but she doesn't seem to know why she doesn't fit in at school. Through Melinda Sordino's thoughts, readers share her *wickedly* funny insights into high school life.

Anderson reveals the theme of *Speak* as Melinda slowly realizes that the way to overcome difficulties in life is to face them and do what is right rather than to withdraw.

Melinda has friends, good grades, and a positive outlook on life. That all changes after "the party." Before school starts in the fall, Melinda goes to an underage drinking party attended by older students. When the party gets out of control, she calls the police.

After this she is unable to look at herself in the mirror, doesn't do her school work, and seeks small, enclosed spaces—even taking over an unused janitor's closet as a hiding place at school.

While she is lonely and

**VOCABULARY**

*wickedly* Mischievously
struggles with her everyday life, she also shares the hilarious observations of a bright girl who is on the outside of high school life looking in. Melinda identifies the "Marthas," a group of perky, perfect girls who "like rules too much." There are also the typical teachers like the ultra-cool rebellious art guy, the sports-hating English lady with big hair, and Mr. Neck, who forces his worldview on his students.

Melinda has an awful freshman year as she struggles to make sense of her inability to relate to others or understand herself. She feels that she has to find a way to work through her isolation and that she needs "to speak." In a surprising revelation, readers find out why she calls the police. She courageously faces the reason publicly. By helping others to see a disturbing truth, she begins to heal herself. Melinda is not trying to be different; she has been shattered by something horrible. The book certainly shows that people need to face their own problems, but more importantly, this story gives insight into why some people suffer silently. People who are not troubled or lonely must seek to understand those who are.

**VOCABULARY**

**revelation** A discovery of hidden truth
Reacting to the Reading
Answer the following questions about the sample response to literature.

Responses will vary.

- What author, book, and character are discussed in the response to literature?
The response discusses Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* and focuses on the character of Melinda Sordino.

- What theme does the writer identify in the first paragraph?
Life's difficulties are overcome by facing them and doing what is right rather than by withdrawing from them.

- What information about the theme does the writer provide in the middle paragraphs?
The middle paragraphs show how and when Melinda suddenly changes from being happy and well-adjusted to being an outcast. The middle paragraphs also provide examples of her sense of humor, which shed light on life around her even though she is isolated from it.

- Based on the details from the novel that the writer provides in the middle paragraphs, do you agree with the writer's choice of theme?

- Do you agree with the writer's conclusion that *Speak* has a lesson for today's readers? Why or why not?

Next Step: Team up with a classmate to compare your reactions. How are your responses to the last two questions similar or different?
Evaluating: **Understanding the Traits of an Effective Response to Literature**

This rubric will help you understand the traits found in an effective response to literature. Use the rubric to help you write your own response and as a final checklist for your completed writing. You can also use this rubric to evaluate your classmates' finished responses. (Your teacher will give you a point scale to use for final evaluations.)

### Assessment Rubric

**STIMULATING IDEAS**

*The response...*
- focuses on the thoughts, feelings, words, or actions of a specific character in a story or a novel.
- shows how the character reveals the theme.

**LOGICAL ORGANIZATION**

- begins by identifying the work of literature, its author, and its theme.
- presents details in an easy-to-follow manner.

**ENGAGING VOICE**

- uses the present tense except for quotations or recounted actions.
- shows an understanding of the story or novel.

**ORIGINAL WORD CHOICE**

- includes specific verbs and nouns.

**EFFECTIVE SENTENCE STYLE**

- flows smoothly from one idea to the next.

**CORRECT, ACCURATE COPY**

- observes the basic rules of grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
- follows the format suggested by the teacher.

*Comments:*
Prewriting
Planning Your Writing
Prewriting: Choosing a Work of Literature and Identifying Its Theme

Every work of literature has a theme (a statement about life or human nature). Choosing a novel or story that you have read and enjoyed recently will help you write an effective response.

On the lines below, list the books and stories that you have read recently.


Add other ideas or concepts to the list above. Then choose one idea that relates to a novel or story you listed at the top of the page. Form a theme statement for that book or story by completing the following sentences:

- The novel/story ___________________________ deals with the idea of ___________________________.

- One possible theme of the novel/story ___________________________ is that ___________________________.

  in order to get beyond difficulties in life, one must face them ___________________________ and do what is right rather than withdraw.

Next Step: Keep in mind that your statement of theme may change as you gather details from your novel or story.
Prewriting Gathering Details That Support Your Theme

Now that you have written a statement of theme, you need to find details that support the theme. Look for clues to the theme in a specific character’s thoughts, feelings, words, and actions.

Review the notes and comments below made by the writer of the sample response on pages 5-6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character at the beginning of the novel/story</th>
<th>Character in the middle of the novel/story</th>
<th>Character at the end of the novel/story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melinda is an outcast in her high school. She feels different from others, but she doesn’t know why.</td>
<td>Melinda hides in a janitor’s closet and doesn’t speak. Her funny observations about others don’t help her understand what’s wrong.</td>
<td>Melinda takes a risk in helping others avoid what has nearly ruined her life. She is praised for her courage and no longer hides.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. What does the character learn from his or her experiences?

   Melinda learns that there is nothing wrong with her. Her feelings of isolation are caused by what has happened to her.

2. How does the character change over the course of the novel or story?

   Melinda changes from a self-doubting girl to a happy high school student.

3. What does the character do, say, or think that fits the theme?

   She makes other students aware of a danger in their midst.
Write the theme of your novel or story. (See page 10.) Then review your novel or story for details that support the theme. Complete the chart below, noting the main character's actions, words, thoughts, or feelings. Then answer the questions that follow.

The theme is

| Character at the beginning of the novel/story | Character in the middle of the novel/story | Character at the end of the novel/story |
1. What does the character learn from his or her experiences?

2. How does the character change over the course of the novel or story?

3. What does the character do, say, or think that fits the theme?

Next Step: With a classmate, review your notes on pages 12-13. Do your notes support your theme? If not, work with your partner to revise your statement of theme. Then write it below.

The theme of the novel/story ......................................................... is that
Exploring the theme of a work of literature is like writing a persuasive essay. Your statement of theme is similar to an opinion based on your reading. Your goal is to provide details from the literature that support the theme. The graphic below shows the basic parts of a response to literature (an analysis of theme).

The **beginning** introduces the work of literature, names the author, and gives background about the story. It describes an important character and then states the theme. (See page 16.)

The **middle** presents details from the story that support the theme statement. Each paragraph focuses on a different part of the theme. Ideas are presented in the order of their importance. (See page 18.)

The **ending** restates the theme and connects it to real life. (See page 20.)

**Transition Words and Phrases**

Here are some words that you can use to link reasons and supporting details in responses to literature.

- again
- along with
- also
- another
- finally
- for instance
- for this reason
- in addition
- in conclusion
- in fact
- in the same way
- lastly
- likewise
- most importantly
- next
- similarly
Writing
Connecting Your Ideas
Writing Starting Your Response to Literature

The beginning of your response to literature should name the work of literature, its author, and its main character. It should also include a statement of the theme. (See the underlined sentence in the sample.) Try to get your reader’s attention by making the beginning interesting. Start with a quotation or with an interesting detail or comment.

Sample Beginning Paragraph

The simplest but greatest truths often appear in stories based on real life. Francisco Jiménez’s autobiographical novel Breaking Through proves that point. The novel is the sequel to the award-winning The Circuit, and Breaking Through continues the story of young Francisco. He is now a teenager in California in the late 1950s. Years before, he and his family entered the United States illegally to work in the fields. Frankie lives in two worlds that threaten to tear him apart. He is constantly pulled between his Mexican heritage and his desire to be American, between his love for his family and his hope for an education, and between his respect for his parents and his respect for himself; Francisco needs balance, and his struggle to get that balance establishes the primary theme of the book: balance is the key to making it through adolescence.

Use the space below to write the beginning of your response to literature. If you don’t like the way your first beginning turns out, try one or two more versions on the next page.


**Next Step:** Meet with a classmate and review each other's beginnings. If you wrote more than one beginning, put a star next to the one you like best.
Developing the Middle Part

The middle part of your response to literature should provide details that support your theme. Each paragraph should focus on one element of the theme and the details that support it.

Sample Middle Paragraph

Francisco feels great pride in both his Mexican heritage and the American culture he lives in. He works hard to balance the two. He loves his mother’s traditional Mexican cooking, but he asks her to make bologna sandwiches so that other kids won’t tease him at lunch. He enjoys singing traditional Mexican folk songs but is thrilled by American rock and roll. When he imitates Elvis Presley for his class, he is teased and cheered at the same time. He feels deeply angry when he learns that the Anglo parents of his classmates won’t let their daughters go out with him and his brother. Rather than turn away from his heritage, however, Francisco sees the benefits of both worlds. Being a Mexican has taught him to work hard and to have faith. Being an American has taught him to dream big. By embracing both parts of his world, Francisco succeeds in graduating from high school and starting college.

Write your middle paragraphs below and on the page that follows. Remember to focus each paragraph on a different part of the theme. Present these paragraphs in the order of their importance. Begin with the most important, or end with it.
Writing Ending Your Response to Literature

The ending of your response to literature should restate the theme and make a connection between the story and real life. Remember, one of the reasons people read stories and novels is to make connections between their own experiences and a writer's ideas. Be sure to include that connection in your conclusion.

Sample Ending Paragraph

At the end of the novel, Francisco leaves for college. For years, he has juggled his two cultures, his family and his friends, his respect for his father, and his need to leave home. Francisco finally reaches adulthood. Although the story is set in a specific time and place, the story of Frankie's teenage years shows the importance of balance in one's life. He shows that you can work and play hard, can value both family and friends, can make some mistakes, and can still succeed. These are lessons we all can benefit from learning.

Use the space below and on the following page to write the ending of your response to literature. If you don't like your first ending, try another version.
Next Step: Meet with a classmate to discuss your endings. Choose the one that best restates the theme and makes a connection with real life.
Forming a Complete First Draft

After you finish pages 16-21, write a complete copy of your first draft. Do your writing on your own paper and store your work in the back pocket of this booklet. Keep the following tips in mind as you complete this copy.

Drafting Tips

1. Write on every other line and on only one side of your paper. Having plenty of space will make revising much easier. (If you use a computer, be sure to double-space.)

2. Keep your writing as neat as possible, but don’t stop to recopy just to make your draft look better. Concentrate on ideas, not neatness.

3. Keep your purpose and audience in mind. You’re trying to clearly state and support the theme of a novel or short story for your classmates.

4. Feel free to add new ideas that come to mind as you write your draft. After all, writing is a process of discovery.

5. Notice any parts you may want to change. You can make these changes later when you revise.

6. Remember: A first draft is your first look at a piece of writing. You may rewrite parts of your draft three or four times before they sound just right.
Revising
Improving
Your Writing
The closing paragraph in a response to literature should restate the theme of the novel or story and make a clear connection between the literature and real life. These two parts of your conclusion tie your response together and give the reader something to think about.

Review each of the following closing paragraphs. Put a check (√) next to the paragraphs that both restate the theme and make a connection for readers. For paragraphs that you think are not effective, explain your reasons on the lines provided. The first one has been done for you.

1. By the end of the play *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare shows that young love can be a powerful yet dangerous force. The love between the two teens first tears their families apart but in the end brings them together again. Love also makes the young lovers’ lives both thrilling and miserable. Hundreds of years later, the play still fascinates readers young and old. Experiencing first love through Shakespeare’s words and imagination is something that never goes out of style.

   ✅ The conclusion does not identify the theme.

2. Harper Lee’s novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, is a great American novel. It tells the story of a young girl who grows up in the South in the 1930s. What it has to say about prejudice is still worth considering today.

   The conclusion does not make a connection between the theme and real life.

3. Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein* shows the theme that too much ambition can be dangerous and even deadly. Dr. Frankenstein nearly destroys his whole family because he wants to use science to create life. I recommend this book to people who enjoy scary stories.

   ✅ The conclusion does not make a connection between the theme and real life.
4. The theme of Theodore Taylor's novel *The Cay* is that underneath their skin, people are the same. Even though the two characters in his novel—a young, blind white boy and an older black man—are very different, they help each other during a crisis. *The Cay* offers readers a valuable lesson about why people need to overcome prejudices about others' backgrounds and ages.

5. Paul Zindel's funny novel *The Pigman* is about two kids and an older man whose wife has died. The novel follows their friendship until Mr. Pignati dies. The novel could have been written today. It shows teenagers as they really are.

*The conclusion does not identify a theme or make a connection to real life.*

**Next Step:** Carefully review the closing paragraph in your own response to literature. Does it restate the theme and make a connection between the literature and real life? Have a classmate review your closing. If you are not satisfied with it, use the workspace below to write a new ending.
Peer Responding

Your teacher may want you and a classmate to react to each other’s writing by completing the response sheet below.

Response Sheet

Writer’s name: ..................................  Responder’s name: ..................................

Title: ..........................................................................................................................

I like . . . ..................................................................................................................
  • the way you introduced the character.
  • the _____ paragraph. Your details from the literature support your theme.
  • the ending. I like your connection between the book and real life.

I would change . . . ..................................................................................................
  • the beginning because it doesn’t mention the author of the novel.
  • the part about _____ because it just tells what happened and doesn’t tell about the theme.
  • the sentence about _____ because it is confusing.

Strong words, phrases, and ideas in the writing: ..................................................

.................................................................................................................................
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Revising Using a Checklist

Use the following checklist or the assessment rubric (page 8) to help you review and revise your first draft. Make as many changes as needed so that your response to literature contains the best ideas and details.

Revising Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does my beginning identify the author and the work of literature, give background information, and then state the theme?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does each middle paragraph cover some part of the theme?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does each middle paragraph include details that support the theme?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does my conclusion restate the theme and make a connection between the literature and real life?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Revising in Action

When you revise, you improve the ideas and organization in your first draft. You can make improvements by adding new ideas, crossing out unnecessary ideas, rewriting unclear ideas, and reordering out-of-place ideas. See the example changes below.

An unnecessary idea is dropped.

Information is moved.

An idea is made clearer.

*The Cay* describes how a young American boy and an older Caribbean man survive being shipwrecked and stranded on a deserted island. The book was written in 1969. It is a novel by Theodore Taylor. More than an adventure, *The Cay* is a story about people who learn to care about others who are different from themselves. The theme of the novel is stated by one of the characters: "I true think which means that people are human beings, whatever their skin color beneath diskin is all disame." The novel shows that it often takes a while for people to understand this.
Revising Writing a Complete Revised Draft

After you finish pages 24-27, write a complete copy of your revised first draft. Do your writing on your own paper and store your work in the back pocket of this booklet. Keep the following tips in mind as you complete the revised copy.

Revising Tips

1. Write on every other line and on only one side of your paper. This will make editing much easier. (If you use a computer, make sure to double-space.)

2. Keep your writing as neat as possible, but don’t stop to rewrite just to make your draft look better. Concentrate on ideas, not neatness.

3. Focus on ideas that need to be changed. Add, cut, reorder, and rewrite different parts as needed.

4. Take your time. You can’t make the best changes all at once.

5. Pay special attention to peer responses. Your peers may notice ideas that need to be clearer—especially if your peers are not as familiar with the book as you are.

6. Save your first draft so that you have a record of the changes you have made.

Adding a Title

At some point in the process, you need to write a title for your response to literature. The title should hook your reader and introduce your opinion. Here are three guidelines to follow:

- **Use strong, colorful words.**
  Master the Balance Beam of Life, *not* Teens Need Balance

- **Give the words rhythm.**
  What Scout Finds Out, *not* Scout Learns About Life

- **Be imaginative.**
  Too Quiet, *not* Melinda Makes a Change
Editing
Checking for Style and Correctness
Using Specific Verbs

Specific, direct verbs tell readers exactly what action is happening. When writing about literature, it is easy to use forms of be, get, and have. However, these verbs are often vague, and they may make sentences sound boring if used too often. Your writing will be more interesting if you use specific verbs. They act like little hooks that catch the reader’s attention. Read the two examples below.

Nonspecific verbs:
The *Call of the Wild* is the story of a dog named Buck. He *is* a survivor in terrible circumstances. As a result, he *is changed* into a strong leader and *gets* the respect of the pack.

Specific verbs:
The *Call of the Wild* *tells* the story of a dog named Buck. He *survives* in terrible circumstances. As a result, he *changes* into a strong leader and *earns* the respect of the pack.

HINTS:

- Sometimes a noun or an adjective following the verb will give you a clue about the verb to use. (*Note: If you want to use a completely different word for your verb, a thesaurus can help you find words with similar meanings.*)

  “Buck *gets* into fights” becomes “Buck *fights.*”

- Look for adjectives or participles that follow the verb be. You can change them into main verbs.

  “Buck is *afraid* of men with clubs” becomes “Buck *fears* men with clubs.”
  “He is *changed*” becomes “He *changes.*”

Underline the nonspecific verbs in the sentences below. Then rewrite the sentences using specific verbs. The first sentence has been done for you.

1. Harper Lee’s novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, is about the Finch family.

   **Harper Lee’s novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, tells about the Finch family.**

2. The author has the story set in a small town in Alabama during the Great Depression.

   **The author sets the story in a small town in Alabama during the Great Depression.**
3. The book is focused on Atticus Finch's young daughter, Scout.

   The book focuses on Atticus Finch’s young daughter, Scout.

4. Scout is the narrator of the novel.

   Scout narrates the novel.

5. She is observant and gets to learn a lot.

   She observes and learns a lot.

6. Her father and older brother guide her through some serious events.

   Her father and older brother guide her through some serious events.

7. For example, they worry about a rabid dog.

   For example, they worry about a rabid dog.

8. Boo Radley is a character who interests Scout and her brother.

   Boo Radley interests Scout and her brother.

9. Boo Radley doesn’t leave his house much.

   Boo Radley doesn’t leave his house much.

10. At the end, some of the townspeople respect Atticus Finch.

    At the end, some of the townspeople respect Atticus Finch.

Next Step: Find sentences in your response that contain vague verbs. Replace them with specific verbs.
Punctuating Titles of Literary Works

Titles of different types of literature are punctuated differently. For example, the titles of longer works, such as novels, plays, and collections of short stories, appear underlined (or in *italics* on a computer). The titles of short stories and poems are enclosed in quotation marks. See the examples in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Literature</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books (novels, collections)</td>
<td>The Call of the Wild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plays</td>
<td>Romeo and Juliet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short stories</td>
<td>&quot;The Cask of Amontillado&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poems</td>
<td>&quot;Harlem&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essays</td>
<td>&quot;The Talk&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speeches</td>
<td>&quot;Ain't I a Woman?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters in books</td>
<td>&quot;Haven't I Made a Difference?&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the sentences below, if a title is punctuated correctly, write "C" on the line. If the title is punctuated incorrectly, cross out the errors and write the correct punctuation. The first one has been done for you.

____ 1. James Hurst's story *The Scarlet Ibis* is set in the South.

C 2. Carl Sandburg's "Fog" is a famous American poem.


____ 4. Nikki Giovanni's poem *The World Is Not a Pleasant Place to Be* uses the voice of an angry young woman.


____ 6. *The Birds,* by Daphne du Maurier, is another story that became a film.

C 7. Have you ever read Gwen Bristow's book *Jubilee Trail?*

**Next Step:** Review your corrections with a classmate. Then check your revised writing to make sure that you correctly punctuated the titles of works of literature.
Your main job when editing is to check your revised writing for word choice, style, and sentence errors. See the following examples.

A fragment is corrected.

Two sentences are combined.

Two verbs are made more specific.

The Cay starts out as a story of opposites. Phillipyoung, American, white, and privileged. Timothy is more than 70 years old. He has lived and worked most of his life in the Caribbean. He has never had any formal education. Even though Timothy has saved Phillip's life during a shipwreck, Phillip is suspicious of the older man. His mother had told him many times that people of color were different from whites and that he should not trust them.

Editing and Proofreading Symbols

Use the following marks to show where and how your writing needs to be changed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>capital letter</td>
<td>= Capitalize a letter.</td>
<td>Lorraine Hansberry wrote <em>A Raisin in the sun.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lowercase letter</td>
<td>/ Lowercase a letter.</td>
<td>Her play tells the story of the Younger Family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>period</td>
<td>o Insert a period.</td>
<td>This play focuses on racial attitudes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or spelling</td>
<td>Correct spelling.</td>
<td>Lena Younger, the family leader, is very religious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>delete or replace</td>
<td>Delete or replace.</td>
<td>Lena she makes a down payment on a nice house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comma</td>
<td>Insert a comma.</td>
<td>Her son, Walter Lee, Jr. wants to buy a business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apostrophe or quotation marks</td>
<td>Insert an apostrophe or quotation marks.</td>
<td>Walter Lee's wife hopes for a larger apartment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>question mark or an exclamation point</td>
<td>Insert a question mark or an exclamation point.</td>
<td>What would Beneatha do with the money?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paragraph</td>
<td>Start a new paragraph.</td>
<td>The play takes a surprising turn when . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>switch words or letters</td>
<td>Switch words or letters.</td>
<td>Walter gets the possible worst news.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Proofreading: Checking for Correctness

When you proofread, you check for errors in punctuation, capitalization, grammar, usage, and spelling. See the examples below.

A comma is added.

At the beginning of the story, Phillip thinks that people of color are different and could never be a part of his life. His experiences with Timothy change everything for Phillip, however. Not only does Timothy, an elderly black man, save Phillips life and teach Phillip how to survive, but Timothy wins Phillip’s respect and gratitude. Timothy changes the way Phillip thinks about human beings and life. Timothy proves that skin color is less important than character and intelligence.

A usage error is corrected.

An apostrophe is added.

A spelling error is marked.

Making Editing and Proofreading Changes

Edit and proofread the following response to literature to improve the style and correctness. (Use the editing and proofreading symbols listed on page 33.) The first correction has been done for you. Check off the errors as you correct them.

☐ spelling errors (2)  ☐ word choice (verb) issue (at least 1)  ☐ run-on sentences (1)
☐ usage errors (3)  ☐ sentence fragments (1)  ☐ punctuation errors (2)

Dance Lessons

1 People often get used to thinking about themselves in a certain way until
2 something challenges them. In the novel “Another Way to Dance” by Martha
3 Southgate, Vicki Harris is an African American girl who loves ballet and
4 thinks about it constantly. However, during a summer of intense ballet
5 instruction, Vicki realizes that what you hope for is not who you are.
Vicki is one of only two black girls in the summer dance program at the School of American Ballet in Manhattan. She works hard to be like the white dancers. Letting her hair grow so that she can pull it back in a bun and eating very little so that she can stay thin. She feels embarrassed on the subway when a few black girls who are wearing baggy clothes and are laughing loudly sit near her. Most of the time her race is not something that Vicki really thinks about; she is totally focused on ballet.

Then things start getting complicated. Vicki is close to Stacey, the other black girl in the dance school. Stacey wears an Afro and has her doubts about whether ballet is best for her. Vicki also befriends an African American boy named Michael. He gets angry at any suggestion that white ways are better than black ways. Finally, two ballet-related incidents upset Vicki: She overhears a white girl wondering if Vicki is in the school because of affirmative action, and she goes to Macy’s Department Store to get her ballet idols’ autograph, but he doesn’t even look at her.

Vicki sees that the world of ballet is not perfect. For the first time, she wonders if she has been shutting herself off from her own people. Talking about ballet, Stacey once said, “I wish there was another way to dance.” That comment gets Vicki thinking. Soon students will learn whether they will be asked back for the fall term. Vicki knows that whether she makes the cut or not isn’t the most important thing in life. Realizing that life offers many ways to “dance” is the secret to being a whole person.

**Next Step:** Carefully read and mark your revised writing for any editing and proofreading changes. (Use the editing and proofreading symbols listed on page 33 to mark your changes.)
Editing and Proofreading: Using a Checklist

Use the checklist that follows as an editing and proofreading guide. Remember that this step in the process becomes important only after you have revised the ideas in your writing.

* It's very easy to miss errors when you edit and proofread, so be sure to ask a teacher, a classmate, or a family member for help.

Sentence Structure

- Did I write clear and complete sentences?
- Did I write smooth-reading sentences?

Punctuation

- Does each sentence close with an end punctuation mark?
- Did I correctly punctuate the titles of literary works? (page 32)

Capitalization

- Did I start all of my sentences with capital letters?
- Did I capitalize the specific names of people and places?

Grammar

- Did I use subjects and verbs that agree in number? *(Musicians perform; Lucia dances.)*
- Did I use a consistent verb tense?

Usage

- Did I choose the correct word? *(to, too, two)*
- Did I use specific verbs instead of vague ones? (pages 30-31)

Spelling

- Did I check for spelling errors?
- Did I use a dictionary or the spell checker on my computer?
After you complete pages 30-36, write a neat final copy of your response to literature on pages 38-40. Then proofread your final copy for errors. Keep the following tips in mind:

### Tips for Handwritten Final Copies
- Use your best penmanship.
- Write in blue or black ink.
- Write your name, your teacher's name, the class, and the date in the upper left-hand corner of page 1.
- Skip a line, and center the title on the next line.
- Skip a line, and start your writing.
- Indent the first line of each new paragraph.
- Write your last name and the page number in the upper right-hand corner of every page after page 1.
- Keep a one-inch margin around each page.

### Tips for Computer-Generated Final Copies
- Use an easy-to-read font.
- Use a 10- or 12-point type size.
- Double-space throughout your writing.
- Maintain a one-inch margin around each page.
Publishing
Sharing the Final Copy
Publishing Understanding the Publishing Process

Sending Your Writing Out

What types of writing can I submit to publishers?
Newspapers are interested in essays, editorials, and articles. Some magazines publish stories, essays, and poetry; others publish essays and articles only.

Where should I send my writing?
First consider local newspapers, magazines, and other community publications. For national publications, turn to the Writer's Market (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books) for ideas. Your school or local library will have a copy of this book.

How should I send my writing?
Writer's Market will explain that it is wise to write the publishers to request specific guidelines for submitting writing for their publications. Often, you will be asked to include a letter naming the title and the form of your writing (story, essay, article, and so on), a neat copy of your writing, and a self-addressed stamped envelope large enough for returning your writing after it has been read.

What should I expect?
Expect to wait awhile for a reply. Also realize that your writing may not be accepted for publication. In most cases, publishers choose only a few pieces of writing to publish. You may get a rejection letter. Though that sounds disappointing, even a rejection letter can prove helpful because publishers often explain why they did not select your writing for publication.

Submitting Your Writing On-Line

Where do I start my search for on-line publishing?
Start locally. See if your school has its own Web site for student writing. Also ask your teachers if they know of other Web sites that accept student work.

How do I search for these sites?
Use a search engine to find places to publish. Begin your search by entering a keyword phrase such as “submitting writing” or “student writing.” Then check out sites from the list of results.

Does Write Source have a Web site?
Yes. You can visit our Web site at <thewritesource.com>. We suggest places where students can publish on the Net and invite students to submit for publication on our site as well.
Extension Activities
Extension Activity: **Additional Reading and Responding to Literature**

Respond to a familiar story or novel by answering the following questions.

*Responses will vary.*

1. Name the title of the book or story, and identify its main character or characters.

2. Describe the main character in one or two sentences. Give a detail or a quotation from the story to back up your answer.

3. What problem does the character face, and how does he or she solve it?

4. How does the character change or not change by the end of the story?

5. What theme does the author reveal through the characters in the story?
Extension Activity: Reflecting on Your Writing

Reread your response to literature a day or two after you have finished writing it. If possible, read it to someone else, too. Then think about your writing by completing each sentence starter below. Responses will vary.

- The best part of my response is . . .

- If I could change one part of my response, it would be . . .

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest), I would give my response a score of ___ because . . .

- The next time I write a response to literature, I will . . .
Extension Activity: **Preparing for a Writing Test**

When you take a writing test, you may feel rushed. You will feel more confident if you keep the things you have learned about writing clearly in your mind. Answering the following questions will help you prepare for responding to literature on a test.

1. What is the theme of a work of literature? (See page 3.)
   
   _The theme is a statement that a work of literature makes about life or human nature._

2. Where can you look for details that will support your theme? Why should you look there? (See page 11.)
   
   _You can look at the thoughts, feelings, words, and actions of the main characters. Writers usually state the theme through their characters._

3. What information should your response include in the opening? (See page 16.)
   
   _In the opening, you should name the book or story (its title), its author, and the main character, and you should state the theme._

4. What should you include in the middle paragraphs? (See page 18.)
   
   _In the middle paragraphs, you should include details and quotations that support the theme. Each paragraph should focus on a different part of the theme._

5. What should you include in the ending? (See pages 20 and 24-25.)
   
   _The conclusion should restate the theme and make a clear connection between the literature and real life._