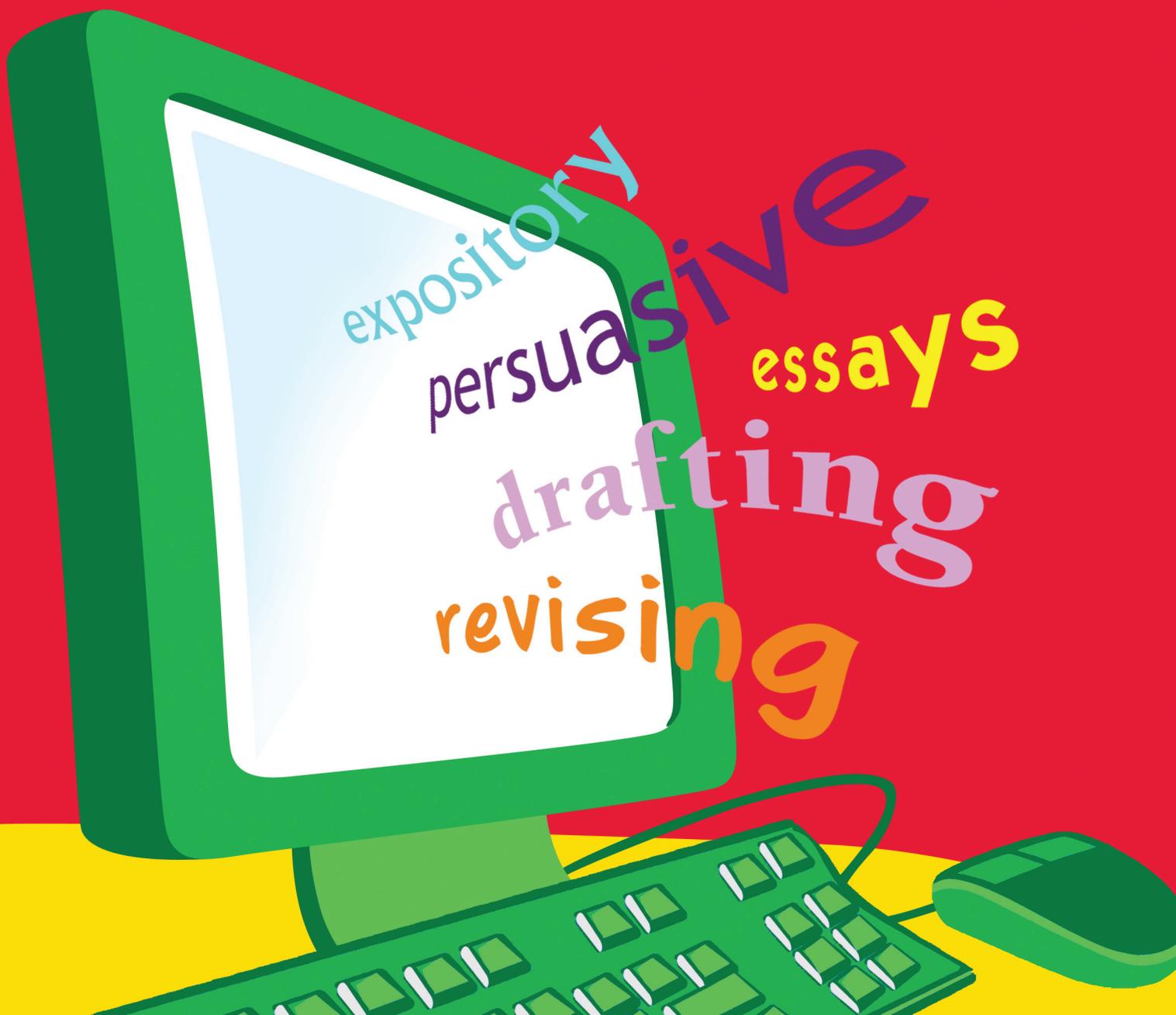


Level E

SADLIER

Writing Workshop



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THE WRITING PROCESS

PREWRITING

Finding an Idea

- Freewrite or brainstorm ideas for a topic.
- Choose and narrow a topic.
- Gather details.

Making a Plan

- Identify your purpose (to explain, persuade, entertain, describe, or convey an experience).
- Identify what your audience does and does not know.
- Organize your details in an outline.

DRAFTING

- Concentrate on getting your ideas down—*not* on fixing errors!
- Keep your audience in mind as you write.
- Write a complete introduction, body, and conclusion.

REVISING

- Evaluate your draft, identifying ways to improve it.
- As you review your draft, focus on five of the six traits of good writing (ideas and content, organization, sentence fluency, word choice, and voice).
- Ask a peer reviewer to give feedback on your draft.

EDITING AND PROOFREADING

- Look for mistakes in the sixth trait of good writing, conventions (grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling).
- Proofread your draft.

PUBLISHING AND PRESENTING

- Write a final version of your paper.
- Share your writing with your audience.

Chapter

5

Writing a Personal Response to Literature

WORKSHOP

When you write a response to literature, you write your personal reaction to or interpretation of a piece of literature. An effective response to literature is clear and is supported strongly with specific textual evidence.

LESSON 1

Develop Ideas

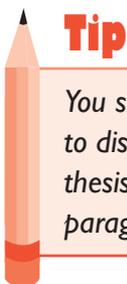


Craft a **thesis** about your reaction to a piece of literature. Gather **specific textual evidence** that supports your thesis.

When you write a personal response to literature, keep in mind that you are writing to inform your reader of what you thought and felt when you read that piece of literature.

Use these sentence starters. . .

- ✓ "This reminded me of. . ."
- ✓ "This made me feel. . ."
- ✓ "This (book/story/poem) is like my life because. . ."
- ✓ "I can identify with this because. . ."
- ✓ "I found/did not find this compelling because. . ."
- ✓ "Words, phrases, and images that stood out to me include. . ."
- ✓ "After reading this, I wondered. . ."



Tip

You should be able to discuss your thesis for several paragraphs.

Use your responses to the sentence starters to craft a **thesis**. Focus on one specific aspect of your reaction to the text.

Thesis I appreciate "When You Are Old" by William Butler Yeats because the speaker paints a tender portrait of an old person, like my grandmother, who is looking back on life.

LESSON 2

Organize Ideas

★ In a personal response to literature, **organize your ideas** in a clear and logical way.

Tip

Try to hook your reader's interest in your introduction, perhaps by asking a question, by explaining an incident from the work, or by giving an interesting piece of information about the work.

Since your reader might not know the piece of literature you are writing about, you should begin by stating its title and author, explaining what type of literature it is, and offering a brief summary of it. At the end of your introductory paragraph, include your thesis.

Sample Introduction

“When You Are Old” by William Butler Yeats is a lyric poem in three stanzas. The speaker addresses a person who will someday be nodding by a fire and remembering being loved in her youth. I appreciate “When You Are Old” because the speaker paints a tender portrait of an old person, like my grandmother, who is looking back on life.

As you plan the body paragraphs, be sure to . . .

- ✓ give the reader any background information he or she needs to understand your response
- ✓ organize your paragraphs in a logical way
- ✓ make sure that each paragraph discusses one main idea and that each detail and example relates to that main idea
- ✓ include at least two examples from the text for every main point



Sample Outline—Introduction and Body

The writer includes specific examples from the poem.

The writer makes personal connections to the poem.

I. Introduction

- A. “When You Are Old” by William Butler Yeats
- B. lyric poem; addressed to person in old age
- C. I appreciate the poem because the speaker paints a tender portrait of an old person, like my grandmother, who is looking back on life.

II. Convincing description of old person

- A. sleepy, grey, nodding by fire
- B. slowly reads a book and “dreams” of herself at a younger age
- C. specific memories, very clear, like my grandmother’s

III. Old person remembers one special person

- A. loved personal qualities like “pilgrim soul”
- B. loved for a long time; “sorrows of your changing face”
- C. like grandmother—remembering grandfather makes her “a little” sad

In your body paragraphs, you may focus on a literary element such as plot, setting, characters, figurative language, imagery, mood, tone, or style. Skim the work several times to record details that will help you explain your points. Consider reviewing the work once for the sole purpose of choosing quotations that clearly illustrate your points.

Activity A Continue the literary response you began in Lesson 1 by writing an outline on a separate sheet of paper. Use the sample outline above as a model.

Activity B Now, using your outline as a guide, write a first draft of the introduction and body of your literary response. Write your draft on a separate sheet of paper.

LESSON 3

Write a Conclusion



Finish your personal response with a **conclusion**, a paragraph that summarizes the main points of your response and your feelings about the work.

Tip

Use one of the methods below in your conclusion:

- End with a quotation from the literary work.
- End with a question that ties to your overall response.

An effective conclusion will remind your reader of the main points of your response, summarize how you felt overall about the literature, and leave the reader thinking about your response, as well as the work itself. Remember to keep your conclusion brief; make it no more than one paragraph.

Before writing your conclusion, ask yourself. . .

- ✓ How would I briefly restate the points I've made in my response?
- ✓ What would I say, in a sentence or two, to tell someone how I feel about this piece?
- ✓ What can I say that will make my reader continue to think about my response after reading it?

Sample Conclusion

Yeats uses simple details to portray an old person who remembers being loved. Some sensory details make me picture older people I know. Other details make me think of how those people were when they were young and happy. The poem portrays the kind of gentle remembering my own grandmother does when she thinks about my grandfather. Someday all of us will probably “Murmur, a little sadly” when we remember the one person who loved us best.

Activity A

On a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions from the checklist above.

Activity B

Using your answers from Activity A, draft a concluding paragraph. Write your paragraph on a separate sheet of paper.

WORKSHOP

Writing Model

An excellent personal response to literature. . .

- ✓ includes the title, author, and genre of the piece of literature and gives a brief summary of the work
- ✓ has a statement of response, which acts as a thesis statement, at the end of the introductory paragraph
- ✓ has two or more body paragraphs, each with a main point
- ✓ has at least two examples with textual evidence supporting each main point
- ✓ concludes with a brief restatement of the main points, an overview of how the student felt about the piece, and a final thought

Below is a complete personal response to literature. Ask your teacher how long your response should be.

The introduction identifies and briefly summarizes the plot of the story.

The thesis statement presents the writer's response to the literary work.

Each body paragraph makes a main point.

“How Much Land Does a Man Need?” is a short story by Leo Tolstoy that features elements of folktales and fables. The Devil overhears a peasant named Pahom express a desire for more land and decides to give him what he wants. As Pahom acquires land and wealth, it only whets his appetite for more. In the end, he kills himself in a gamble to claim a vast piece of land. The moral of “How Much Land Does a Man Need?” seems to be that ambition itself is wrong. My interpretation of the moral of Tolstoy’s fable is not that ambition is wrong, but that uncontrolled ambition is wrong.

Tolstoy’s moral is clear from the beginning. He immediately links Pahom’s ambition with the arrogant over-reaching that will lead him to ruin. Pahom overhears his wife and sister-in-law arguing about the differences between living in the town and the country. He agrees with his wife that peasant life is better, but also makes a boast that proves fatal “ ‘Our only trouble is that we haven’t land enough. If I had plenty of land, I wouldn’t fear the Devil himself!’ ” Tolstoy presents Pahom’s rise and fall as an inevitable process in which land and money fuel his hero’s greed for more land and money. After each acquisition, Pahom is briefly content, but he soon itches to

continued

Each main point is supported with textual evidence.

own more land: “At first, in the bustle of building and settling down, Pahom was pleased with it all, but when he got used to it he began to think that even he had not enough land.”

In reading Tolstoy’s fable, my response at each stage of Pahom’s rise is to wonder why he doesn’t quit while he is ahead. The wisdom of this rule seems particularly clear when he succeeds in acquiring his first parcel of land. His world has been transformed by becoming a landowner; the fields he tends are now his own. “When he went out to plow his fields, or to look at his growing corn, or at his grass-meadows, his heart would fill with joy.” At this point, Pahom really has it all. I keep wondering at each stage why his sensible wife does not try to stop him. She clearly understands from the beginning that the important thing in life is to be just rich enough to be independent. In defending peasant life, she tells her sister, “ ‘Of course our work is rough and coarse. But on the other hand, it is sure, and we need not bow to anyone.’ ”

The response concludes with an observation for the reader to reflect on.

Tolstoy intended “How Much Land Does a Man Need?” as a fable about the danger of ambition, but I interpret his short story as a warning against over-reaching. Pahom is not unlike a lot of pioneers in the 19th century who settled the U.S. frontier. As an American reader, I can appreciate Pahom’s desire for room to grow. But many of the stories of our westward migration were, like Pahom’s, tales of ambition that led to disaster. The Oregon Trail was lined with graves like his.

Assignment

Now write your own response to literature. Be sure to select a literary work that creates a strong personal response in you.