

Seeing the Big Picture: Incorporating Thesis, Evidence, Elaboration, and Concluding Statements in Your Essay

Elements of an Essay

Jane Baber, Jane Fisher, Gage Jeter
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Grade Level	10th Grade	**Time Frame**	3- class period(s)
Subject	English/Language Arts	**Duration**	150 minutes
Course	Composition		

Essential Question

How do writers use structural elements of an essay to make their writing clear and effective?

Summary

In this lesson, students will engage in multiple independent and group strategies to both identify and analyze essential structural elements of an essay. By doing this, students will both practice and gain a clearer perspective of how to write with greater clarity and effectiveness.

Snapshot

Engage

Students engage in the Word Splash strategy in order to work both with prior knowledge and form new connections between terms related to the elements of an essay.

Explore

In groups, students analyze a set of sentence strips for elements of an essay, then use prior knowledge to organize the strips into an organized passage. To reflect on their organization process, students then work in their groups to record observations and questions about the elements of an essay featured in their passage.

Explain

Students read and examine a similar "snapshot" passage to the one worked with in the Explore stage. With this passage, students use the Why Lighting strategy in order to locate the thesis, evidence, and concluding statement and annotate their significance. Next, using the I Notice, I Wonder strategy, students compose elaboration/commentary for each piece of evidence in the "snapshot" passage.

Extend

Students again engage in the Word Splash strategy, this time to revise and extend their initial summaries.

Evaluate

Students complete the post-test in reflection of this lesson. This is a follow-up to the pre-test given at the beginning of the lesson.

Standards

ACT College and Career Readiness Standards - English (6-12)

ORG 402: Determine the most logical place for a sentence in a straightforward essay

Oklahoma Academic Standards: English Language Arts (Grade 10)

10.3.W.2: Compose informative essays, reports, or technical writing that:
- objectively introduce and develop topics
- include a defensible thesis
- incorporate evidence
- maintain an organized structure
- use sentence variety and word choice to create clarity and concision
- establish and maintain a formal style
- emulate literary devices from mentor texts

10.6.W.2: Develop a clear, concise, defensible thesis statement.

Attachments

- Lesson Slides—Seeing the BIG Picture.pptx
- Sentence Strips - Spanish.docx
- Sentence Strips - Spanish.pdf
- Sentence Strips.docx
- Sentence Strips.pdf
- The Big Picture Handout 1.pdf
- The Big Picture Handout 2.pdf
- The Big Picture Handout 3.pdf

Materials

- The Big Picture Handouts (attached)
- The Big Picture Sentence Strips (printable, can be separated into packets/envelopes)
- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Post-it Easel Pad paper
- Markers
- Highlighters
- Tape

Engage

Teacher's Note: Pre-test

This lesson will begin with a pre-test. See **slide 3** in the attached PowerPoint.

Begin class by engaging students in the Word Splash strategy. For this lesson, the terms used in the Word Splash will be displayed on the board using **slide 4** on the attached **Lesson Slides**. The words displayed will include: thesis, paraphrases, direct quotations, explanation/commentary and concluding statement. Students will need either their composition books or paper and a pencil to write about these terms. Once these words are displayed, give students enough time to look at them and reflect, and then tell students that they will have 5 minutes to write. During this time, students will use both their prior knowledge and form new connections to these words to find how they work together; based on their analysis of the terms, students will compose a 3-5 sentence summary of the words.

While they are engaged in the Word Splash strategy, students will also be participating in the Think-Pair-Share strategy. **Slides 4-6** hold the directions for this activity.

After students have composed their Word Splash summary, they will share their writing with a partner sitting closest to them. Give students a minute to share their writing, and then hold a whole-class discussion where students share the connections formed about the Word Splash terms. This is a great time to establish how students see thesis, paraphrases, direct quotations, explanation/commentary, and concluding statement fitting together, as well as hearing similarities and differences from students' writing. After this whole-class sharing session, the terms from Word Splash should have been correctly defined, connections and real-world application discussed, and a basic understanding of their use in an essay understood.

Explore

If students are not already sitting in groups, instruct them to divide into six groups. Once in groups, students will be given a sheet of Post-it Easelpad paper (pre-folded in half), a set of markers, and an envelope of sentence strips. Ensure that each group has the materials needed before giving directions.

Teacher's Note: Activity Preparation

When passing out the envelope of sentence strips to each group, you will notice that there are three different colors inside the envelopes. Since there are three colors of sentence strips to correspond with the three different passages being used, two groups will have gold, two will have blue, and two will have green. Directions for this process are on Slide 7.

The first task students will engage in will be to read the sentence strips they were given. Tell students that these strips all belong to one paragraph, and that this paragraph is a "snapshot" of a full informative essay; the text they are working with is only a "snapshot" because, while it contains vital elements of an informative essay, it does not have all elements needed. Using the Word Splash strategy as brainstorming, instruct students to take the sentence strips out of the envelope and spread them out on the top half of their Post-it. Based on their knowledge of the structure of an essay, students should then organize the sentences to form an organized paragraph that follows a traditional essay structure. Encourage students to talk together as a group to establish how they are making decisions about the order of the sentences.

Teacher's Note

As groups are working together to put their sentence strips in order, consider referring back to the Word Splash terms on Slide 4. Having these terms displayed may serve as a useful visual for groups who are struggling.

Once each group has put their sentence strips in the order they think is appropriate, ask students to tape their sentences down onto the top half of their Post-it sheet. On the lower half of their Post-it, students should draw a simple T-chart in preparation to analyze their organized "snapshot" using the I Notice, I Wonder strategy. An example is shown on **slide 8**. Instruct students to label each category as it appears on the slide, the first being "I Notice" and the second being "I Wonder". In the "I Notice" column, students will work together in their groups to compose a list of true statements that they observe about how their "snapshot" was organized.

Teacher's Note

An example of an "I Notice" statement that may be made would be something like "The thesis statement came before the piece of supporting evidence."

Next, in the "I Wonder" column, students will work together in their groups to compose a list of questions they have about their "snapshot". For the I Notice, I Wonder strategy, consider giving students about 5 minutes to work together.

Teacher's Note

An example of an "I Wonder" statement that may be made would be something like "Why are there so many quotes? Are essays supposed to have that many quotes with nothing in between?"

After giving students enough time to complete this activity, hold a whole-class discussion to share 1) how students organized their sentence strips and 2) what they "noticed" and "wondered". This will bring closure to this activity and serve as a segue to the next stage.

Explain

Now that students have been actively involved in organizing the informative "snapshot" passage according to what order the elements of an essay should go in, they will now have the opportunity to discuss the importance of each element to the structure and flow of an essay. Later in this stage, students will also practice composing elaborating commentary for the cited evidence included in their passage.

Teacher's Note

At this point, pass out copies of "The Big Picture Handout" to students. There are three versions of this that correspond with the sentence strip activity students participated in; make sure that students have the handout with the passage that corresponds with the sentence strips they already have.

First, ask students to turn to the side of their handout with the camera graphic. Inside this camera graphic is the same "snapshot" passage that students already composed using their sentence strips.

An excellent strategy to use for students to deepen their knowledge of why and how the elements of thesis, paraphrases, direct quotations, explanation/commentary, and concluding statement are used in an essay is the Why-Lighting strategy. To practice this strategy, students will need a packet of highlighters (pass out packets to student pairs to share, 2 students to a pack). Directions for this activity are on **slide 9**.

After reading the directions at the top of the handout (all directions are the same, even though the passages are different), instruct students to work together with their groups to read back through the "snapshot". While they read, they will again locate the elements identified during the sentence strip activity. This time, however, students will highlight each element in a different color (elements with their corresponding colors are listed on the handout). As they highlight, students will justify and explain why each element is essential and what its role in an essay is through annotations in the handout margins.

Once students have completed Why-Lighting on the "snapshot" side of their handout, take the opportunity to refer back to the I Notice, I Wonder discussion that was held concerning the sentence strip activity. Ideally, students would have noticed that in the "snapshot" passage, there are too many cited quotations in a row with no elaboration in between.

This is a great time to have a whole class discussion of what element is missing from this "snapshot" and what needs to be included either before or after each piece of cited evidence. From this discussion, students will likely be able to come to the conclusion that what is missing is the elaboration/commentary component.

Ask students why it is problematic for an essay to have multiple pieces of evidence without any elaboration in between. Why is elaboration necessary? What makes strong elaboration? Display these questions using Slide 10 and give students time to work in their groups at establishing answers.

Teacher's Note

Possible student responses may include, "If there is no elaboration, then the reader can't tell what why the writer is including this evidence" and "Without elaboration, the writer's voice is lost. It's just a bunch of direct quotes and paraphrases". For the question "What makes strong elaboration?" student responses may include, "Elaboration backs up the evidence that the writer included".

As a final step in using The Big Picture handout, instruct students to go back through their "snapshot" passage one more time, this time focusing on composing elaboration/commentary for each piece of evidence.

Teacher's Note

To scaffold composing elaboration/commentary for cited evidence, it may be useful to examine a few examples of what elaboration looks like as a companion to textual evidence. This is also a good time to get students' ideas of where elaboration can be. How would it look as an introduction before a piece of evidence? What about after a piece of evidence?

Working in groups, students will write out the elaboration/commentary necessary for each piece of evidence in their "snapshot". These pieces of elaboration should be written on the back of the handout inside the picture image. The theme of this lesson is to show how the elements of an essay help the writer explain and the reader to see "the big picture". By writing out the elaboration, students will be able to see how their words and thoughts on the evidence chosen for the passage brings the information to a deeper level.

After students have composed their elaboration, they will continue the Why-Lighting strategy as detailed on the handout. Once all pieces of the text on the handout have been analyzed and Why-Lighted, ask students to share their final passages including their new elaboration/commentary.

Teacher's Note

These completed handouts can be collected as a grade for a formative assessment and then given back to students to keep as a resource to help them revisit when writing essays.

As concluding food-for-thought, ask students: "How does understanding and incorporating the elements of thesis statements, supporting evidence, elaborative commentary, and concluding statements help the BIG picture be realized?"

Extend

Remember the Word Splash strategy that students wrote to at the beginning of this lesson? To complete this lesson, ask students to go back to the Word Splash summary that was written first. Using **slide 11** on the attached PowerPoint, display the same Word Splash words again and have students write a new summary, this time elaborating or revising their initial ideas. As an additional formative assessment, this revised or extended Word Splash summary can be collected as an Exit Ticket.

Evaluate

This lesson will end with a post-test. Please see **slide 12** in the attached PowerPoint. At this point, handouts and/or writing from groups can be collected for a formative assessment grade.

Resources

- Passages come from the McDougal Littell American Literature textbook, 2008
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