

Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays

College Application Essays

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Published by *K20 Center*

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Grade Level	11th – 12th Grade	**Time Frame**	300 minutes
Subject	English/Language Arts	**Duration**	6 Class Periods
Course	A.P. Language and Composition, A.P. Literature and Composition, Composition, Creative Writing		

Essential Question

How can we use narrative nonfiction to obtain a college acceptance letter?

Summary

Most college-bound seniors know that they must submit their college applications in the fall of their senior year of high school, but many do not know that one component of the application is a personal essay. In this lesson students look at blunders people make in their college entrance essay, using an example video clip from the show FRIENDS. Students also look at an excerpt from To Kill a Mockingbird and both good and poor college entrance essays. Students use a number of video resources to help teach their classmates tips and tricks for writing a successful essay in a gallery walk. Once students understand the characteristics and components of the college application essay, they will create a rubric to evaluate a successful personal essay. Finally, they will write a rough draft and do a peer review of their rough drafts using the rubric.

Snapshot

Engage

Students will identify "$10" words they might use in their essay.

Explore

Students will annotate and summarize 2 chapters of *To Kill a Mockingbird* using the C.R.U.S.H and Smush strategy to explore the ways in which vocabulary affects the way we perceive characters in narrative.

Explain 1

Students will work in groups to create anchor charts for videos about writing personal narratives for the college application process and do a gallery walk.

Extend 1

Students will work in groups to create rubrics for evaluating personal narratives for the college application essay.

Explain 2

Students will use a rubric to score sample personal narratives for the college application essay.

Extend 2

Students will hand write the first draft of their personal narratives for the college application essay.

Evaluate

Students will do a self review and peer review of their personal narratives for their college application essay.

Standards

AP English Literature Course and Exam Description 2024 (AP English Literature (2024): Enduring Understandings and Skills)

1.A: Identify and describe what specific textual details reveal about a character, that character's perspective, and that character's motives.
4.A: Identify and describe the narrator or speaker of a text.

Oklahoma Academic Standards: English Language Arts (Grade 12)

12.3.W.1: Compose narratives reflecting real or imagined experiences that:
- include engaging plots involving well-developed, complex characters resolving conflicts
- establish narrator(s) that enhance(s) the narrative
- are intentionally sequenced in a way to achieve a specific effect (e.g., create suspense, establish mood, reflect theme)
- provide clear descriptions, using precise language, sensory details, and dialogue
- include varied syntax to enhance readability
- emulate literary elements and/or literary devices from mentor texts

12.4.W.1: Use precise, grade-level vocabulary in writing to clearly communicate complex ideas.

Attachments

- Analyzing the Essays (Teacher's Guide)—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays.docx
- Analyzing the Essays (Teacher's Guide)—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays.pdf
- Essay Examples—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays - Spanish.docx
- Essay Examples—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays - Spanish.pdf
- Essay Examples—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays.docx
- Essay Examples—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays.pdf
- Lesson Slides—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays.pptx
- Peer Review Questions—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays - Spanish.docx
- Peer Review Questions—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays - Spanish.pdf
- Peer Review Questions—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays.docx
- Peer Review Questions—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays.pdf
- Rubric Template—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays - Spanish.docx
- Rubric Template—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays - Spanish.pdf
- Rubric Template—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays.docx
- Rubric Template—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays.pdf
- Teacher Rubric—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays - Spanish.docx
- Teacher Rubric—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays - Spanish.pdf
- Teacher Rubric—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays.docx
- Teacher Rubric—Identifying Character Traits for College Application Essays.pdf

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Devices that can access the internet
- *To Kill a Mockingbird* (book by Harper Lee; one per student)
- *To Kill a Mockingbird* audiobook (Chs. 2 and 3; available through Hoopla with a library card)
- Transparent sticky notes
- Pad of sticky easel paper
- Pencils/pens
- Rubric Template (attached; one per group)
- Teacher Rubric (attached; one per student)
- Essay Examples (attached; three per group)
- Peer Review Questions (attached; one per pair)

10 minutes

Engage

Teacher's Note

Before beginning this lesson, set up a free Mentimeter account. To add the template to your account, click this link while logged in and select "Copy to your account." You can now find the Mentimeter on your dashboard. Then add the Menti 8-digit join code and QR code to **slide 6** before presenting. Information on obtaining the Mentimeter QR code.

You can also add a link to the results within your slide: Once the presentation is in your account, select "Share." At the top of the window that pops up, select "Results." Copy the link and paste it into your slide so that participants can access it to see the results.

Introduce the lesson using the attached **Lesson Slides**. Share the lesson's essential question and learning objectives on **slides 3–4**.

Move to **slide 5** and play the *Friends* video clip for students to watch. After the students have watched the clip, ask them to share their thoughts. Do they know anyone like that? Are they like that?

Display **slide 6** with the Mentimeter code/QR code. Students will use their devices to answer the question, "What $10 words would you use in your essay that your classmates might not know, or could help everyone out?"

65 minutes

Explore

Show **slide 7** and let students know they will begin the lesson by listening to an audio recording of Chapters 2–3 of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* as they follow along in their books. Introduce students to the C.R.U.S.H. and Smush strategy. Pass out pads of transparent sticky notes for students to use in annotating their books, rather than marking the books themselves. While they listen to an audio recording of the selection, they will **circle** any new vocabulary (or words that are used in a way that make them new for the given context) as they **read** the passage. Once they have finished reading the passage, in the margins of the text, students should write the definitions of the words they have circled, paying particular attention to usage when choosing the definition if multiple definitions exist for the word. For example, If the word is used as a noun in the passage, the definition the student uses for the word should be the one for the word when it is used as a noun.

Display **slide 8**. Students will re-read the passage and **underline** the names of the characters Scout encounters or interacts with, **star** the points in the passage where each "encounter" begins, and **highlight** words/phrases that reveal the lesson(s) Scout has learned from each "encounter."

Transition to **slide 9** and have students open a Google Doc. Let them know they will have 5 minutes to write a 100-word **summary** of the passage, focusing on what is revealed about Scout's character traits in the passage.

Move to **slide 10**. In the same Google Doc, students will spend 3 minutes writing a new 50-word summary of the same passage, still focusing on what is revealed about Scout's character traits. Finally, display **slide 11**, and still in the same Google Doc, students will spend 2 minutes writing a 6-word summary of the same passage, still focusing on what is revealed about Scout's character traits.

On **slide 12**, students will share their 6-word summaries with their Elbow Partners, and as a pair, students will agree on 2 adjectives that best describe Scout as a character.

50 minutes

Explain 1

Display **slide 13.** Explain to students they will be working in groups to create an Anchor Chart based on the video they will watch. Each group will have a sheet from the sticky easel pad and a pack of colored markers. Let students know their Anchor Charts will need to include the most important details from the video, keeping in mind that their Anchor Chart will be a teaching tool for the other groups.

On **slide 14** share the video links with the class or embed them in your school's LMS. Once all groups have completed their Anchor Charts, display the charts around the room. Move to **slide 15**. Divide students into groups. Each student will leave at least 2 sticky notes with comments or questions at each chart as they do their Gallery Walk, gathering information about writing personal narratives for their college applications.

75 minutes

Extend 1

Display **slide 16**. Assign the students to small groups; these can be the same groups they were in for the Gallery Walk, or they can be different. Distribute the attached blank template rubric. The group will work together to create a rubric for scoring personal narratives.

Using the attached **Rubric Template**, each group will work together to create a rubric for scoring personal narratives (i.e., college application essays). The rubric each group creates will be informed by the information regarding successful college application essays that they have collected from the Gallery Walk, as well as from the videos they have watched.

Show **slide 17** and introduce the strategy, Affinity Process. Once the rubrics have been completed, re-form the groups so that a representative of each rubric group is in the new groups. Each new group will have at least one member from each of the groups who collaborated on the rubric creation. In these new groups, students will use the Affinity Process to compile "One Rubric to Rule Them All."

Display **slide 18** and distribute the attached **Teacher Rubric**. Ask the class to compare and contrast it with the rubrics they created. Encourage students to notice similarities and differences as well as the level of rigor for each. Have a discussion as a class that compares the rubrics they made to the teacher-made rubric, noting similarities and differences. Often the rubrics students make are more rigorous than those made by teachers.

50 minutes

Explain 2

Move to **slide 19.** Assign students to their small groups from earlier, or to new groups. Distribute to each group a copy of the attached **Essay Examples** from each category—progressing, exemplary, and masterful—and let them know they will need the Teacher Rubric distributed earlier. Let students know they should read the entire essay and then, for each row in the rubric, decide if the essay meets the criteria for either progressing, masterful, or exemplary.

Teacher's Note

The attached **Analyzing the Essays (Teacher's Guide)** handout has been included for teacher use to guide discussion of the essay ratings. Essays 1–5 were created with the help of Magic School AI and include the category (exemplary or progressing) that they fall into in the Teacher's Guide, and essays 6–8 came from 10 Successful Harvard Application Essays | 2023 and fall into the "masterful" category.

Once groups have had time to read and score all three essays, lead a discussion about the ratings they gave the essays and why. Did different groups score the essays differently? Have students explain and support their reasoning using the rubric.

50 minutes

Extend 2

Show **slide 20**. Read the quote to the students related to writing drafts and remind them that it's important to use this time to get a draft down; they can always revise it. Display **slide 21**. Students will use pencil and paper to write the first draft of their college application essay. They will be hand-writing a full first draft to make it extremely difficult (or impossible) to use AI or some other "inspiration" instead of composing original writing.

50 minutes

Evaluate

Display **slide 22**. Students will need their own essays, a copy of the handout **Peer Review Questions**, and a copy of the Teacher Rubric. On the first page of the Peer Review Questions handout, the students will answer questions about their own drafts before passing the draft and the handout to their partner, and receiving theirs in return.

Before they answer any questions about their partner's draft on the handout, they will first read their partner's draft and read their partner's comments on the first page of the handout. Then, the reviewer will read the draft a second time, this time answering the questions on the handout. No talking is allowed at this stage; they should be able to communicate effectively through writing, and if they haven't done so, it will become apparent in the process.

Transition to **slide 23**. At the conclusion of the peer review, the reviewer should create a Six-Word Memoir summarizing the author's (their partner's) personal narrative so that the author will be able to determine if their essay communicated their message about themselves effectively.

Resources

- College Essay Guy. (2021, August 18). *3 awesome personal statements that AREN'T on challenges* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Ab2G7wFd50
- Garden of English. (2020, May 28). *How NOT to SCREW UP your college essay (5 don'ts)* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjIpRV1FbGU
- Garden of English. (2020, June 4). *How NOT to SCREW UP your college essay (5 do's)*[Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQGR_WdMaf0
- Heinrichs, J. (2020, July 16). *The ideal college essay* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gakjxAq6KuQ
- How you doin'? (2018). F.R.I.E.N.D.S - Joey writes a letter of recomendation [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/n_ch8GWnJzQ?si=pqvUB08s4zgG52mD
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Affinity Process. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/87
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Anchor Chart. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/58
- K20 Center. (n.d.). C.R.U.S.H. & Smush. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/821
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Elbow Partners. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/116
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Gallery Walk/Carousel. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/118
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Mentimeter. Tech Tools. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/645
- K20 Center. (2021, September 21). K20 Center 5 minute timer [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/EVS_yYQoLJg?si=fJvuvFWH3vJ3B0z9
- K20 Center. (2021, September 21). K20 Center 2 minute timer [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/HcEEAnwOt2c?si=5K1jIbi9rJpegjED
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- K20 Center. (n.d.). Six-Word Memoirs. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/75
- Lamott, A. (2005). Shitty first drafts. In Eschholz, P., Rosa, A., & Clark, V. (Eds.) *Language awareness: Readings for college writers*. (9th ed., pp. 93–96). Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Magic School AI. (2024). Magic School AI: Academic Content tool. Magic School. https://www.magicschool.ai/
- The Harvard Crimson. (2023). *10* Successful Harvard Application Essays | 2023. The Crimson Brand Studio. https://www.thecrimson.com/topic/sponsored-successful-harvard-essays-2023/