

# Literacy Learner Project

## Part III

### VII. Reflections on Your Literacy Lesson Plans

Rita and I had an excellent summer involving numerous tutoring sessions regarding her reading and writing abilities. Although the child was not particularly happy to be spending time on her summer vacation cooped up in a library with me working on her reading skills, her and I both believe she made some valuable adjustments to her reading and writing habits. Rita has attempted to read outside of school for the majority of her academic career, but it has not been a regular occurrence as it once was when her mother read to her as a small child. I gave her a survey at the beginning of this course where she filled out her level of engagement with her Language Arts classes at school. I found that she “somewhat agreed” with the majority of the prompts that asked her if she participated, understood, and enjoyed her ELA classes. I believe one of the causes of her writing and reading deficiencies stems from her lack of background knowledge that is needed in order to aid comprehension when she reads. I came to this conclusion based on the pre-tests I gave the student. She scored a 10/20 on the vocabulary words that were in the first few chapters of *Tuck Everlasting*. I figured she would score higher simply from context clues, but again the student was only able to correctly identify half of the words. Secondly, she scored a 6/11 on her reading comprehension pre-test of a fictional story. I knew I would work with her using a fictional book, and so I used a pre-test that assessed her ability to recall and comprehend a story. This indicated to me there were significant gaps in her understanding. Third, I had her write an essay arguing to her mother that she

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deserved a new privilege at home. I noticed significant gaps in her writing – specifically with her “ideas” and “organization”, and so I designed lessons to help her improve the structure of her essay. I found all three of my literacy interventions for Rita to be helpful.

The first lesson I taught her was the importance of using vocabulary strategies to help her improve her understanding of the information she is reading. Rather than just reading the word and memorizing the definition, I set up a specific strategy for her to engage with the word in a authentic way. Research defends teaching vocabulary by exposing the word in multiple ways that is significant to the reader. One author suggests “another aspect of word learning is the need for multiple exposures to words in a variety of contexts” (Harmon, Wood, Hedrick, Vintinner, Willeford, 2009, 4). I allowed for Rita to learn new words and express this understanding in a variety of ways. I had her read the first several chapters of *Tuck Everlasting* prior to meeting with her, and then when I began to discuss the text with her, one can notice on video of our lessons just how much she struggled to explain what had actually happened in the first half of the story. I had to help her out quite a bit as she explained the events that had occurred.

Furthermore, I gave her a list of many of the words in the first five chapters and she was only able to correctly identify half of them. The readings during our course placed much emphasis on building vocabulary, and so I knew a big part of why Rita struggled to explain what happened in the first half of the book was because of her lack of understanding words. According to one piece of research, “in the classroom, reading comprehension and vocabulary are best served by spending extended time on reading and listening to texts on the same topic and discussing the facts and ideas in them” (Learned, Stockdill, Moje, 2011, 162). Due to this strategy, before I simply told her what the word

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meant, we discussed what was happening in the book so she could understand it in context with the story. For instance, I helped Rita understand in the first chapter that Winnie Foster, the protagonist, was upset with a toad because the toad was able to run free and she was limited to the space inside her yard. This gave Rita some context to understand that “resentful” meant to be angry toward someone. She was able to additionally look up the information on dictionary.com to receive a specific definition for the word. Then, based on her knowledge and discussions with me, she could complete the assigned vocabulary square packet using synonyms, example sentences, and visualizations. Research suggests this specific approach to understanding word meanings helps to improve comprehension: “In order to make sense of increasingly dense academic texts, middle-level students must possess strategies to understand and use words, which will, with other types of text-based support, increase comprehension” (Larson, Dixon, and Townsend, 2013,17). I used dialogue with her surrounding the text to help improve her comprehension; However, I believe the drawing of pictures to help represent new words was particularly meaningful for her. For instance, she drew a turtle (as seen in the artifacts) for the term “ambled” –this image has been proven to help students associate, remember, and learn new vocabularies. Scholarly research suggests, “Still another facet of vocabulary instruction underlying the word wall lessons is associative learning – the notion of acquiring knowledge in varying degrees through associations made with our own existing knowledge and experiences. These associations are reinforced when we use visual images to represent new ideas” (Harmon, Wood, Hedrick, Vintinner, Willeford, 2009, 5).

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I did more than just tell Rita the word meaning, she was able to use and apply the word in a way that made sense to her individually, and in a way that it stuck in her memory so she could use that information to build more vocabulary later on (I initially stated she lacked prior knowledge in her reading, this is one example of a word she did not know prior to beginning her reading that would have helped her understand the story more). She began to organize her “vocabulary squares” in a packet so she could refer to them as needed. The same research indicates this is a powerful practice: “Vocabulary journals in content areas allow adolescent students to work with vocabulary terms using an ‘introduce, define, discuss, and apply’ sequence.” (19) I used this framework to help Rita improve her vocabulary skills. The evidence I have for her vocabulary improvement is our dialogue about the vocabulary in the lessons that are videotaped, her post assessment in which she scored a perfect 20/20, and her “vocabulary squares” which indicate her approach to remembering difficult words.

The next skill I noticed my student was lacking confidence in was reading comprehension levels. Specifically, she could not recall information she read from a story shortly after reading it, and was not able to accurately answer multiple choice questions from a fictional reading (she scored a 6/11 on her pretest). I noticed during my instruction, which can be viewed on the attached YouTube videos, that Rita struggled to formulate her thoughts and explain the main events from the previous chapters she had read. I relied heavily on interactive discussion as well as modeling to teach her these reading comprehension skills. I showed her many of my own personal annotations to make deep connections with the text, so she understood what her final product should look like. Teacher “modeling” has been proven to be important based on the level of

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students' needs. According to research, it is one of five "teacher roles" to help students build their literacy skills. Explicit instruction should occur before modeling, and it is followed by scaffolding, facilitating, and participating (Griffo, Madda, Pearson, Raphael, 2015, 51). She needed assistance from a teacher to activate her prior knowledge, engage her in dialogue, and connect her to her reading experience in meaningful and interesting ways. The dialogue between her and I helped her create her own meaning from the text. One piece of literature indicates "meaningful talk about complex text drives close reading lessons" (Fisher and Frey, 2015, 157) In research on fourth graders, literacy analysts found that students needed to be metacognitive when they begin the reading process. It says, "The researchers focused in particular on comprehension monitoring among the children and found that the better readers consistently showed more evidence of awareness of their own comprehension and reading process" (Learned, Stockdill, and Moje, 2011,165) Therefore, I used this strategy explicitly with Rita and during my dialogue with her she had to use a color coordinated highlighting and annotation guide to make personal connections, inferences, predictions, etc., about what she was reading. This system allowed for Rita to easily distinguish and become accustomed to which reading strategies she was employing to connect with the text.

One article in my research indicated that teachers cannot simply tell a student what a text means (see text evidence below). It argues that comprehension is self-constructed, or in other words, the learner is necessary (along with his or her background knowledge) to develop meaning from a text. In other words, Tuck Everlasting may take on an entirely different meaning and purpose for Rita as a student as it would for me as a teacher. Therefore, I did not make these connections for her, but encouraged her through

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dialogue to piece together the hidden meanings inside the text. This “Shared Evaluation Pedagogy “ (SHEP) allows for the student to interact with the text to construct individual meaning. The idea states, “it is not simply the teacher who decides what a text means and evaluates claims made about the text: the students work together with each other and with the teacher to share in that deciding and evaluating” (Aukerman, 2008, 52-60) I particularly enjoyed one aspect of this research and found it meaningful for Rita. The study suggests teachers should “open up spaces” for children to participate in dialogue about the text (I frequently prompt Rita in the videos to search for deeper meanings), and teachers should ask students how they arrived at their thinking demanding they articulate how their understandings of the world helped them to decide the meaning of the text.

In another research study, one high school teacher engaged her struggling readers by allowing them make connections about stereotypes in the TV series “Friday Night Lights”. She gave students assignments surrounding the show and they engaged in literacy practices to help build knowledge around the text. The characters share similarities with the students given that they are the same age and have similar experiences. Similarly, this same study engaged readers of David Levithan’s *Every Day*. I employed this strategy with Rita as I knew she would notice many similarities between herself and the protagonist Winnie Foster. They are about the same age, and therefore have shared experiences. I used this as an opportunity for Rita to emotionally insert herself into the novel to motivate her to think deeply about what was occurring in the text. In the story, Winnie faces many challenges, such as running away from her own family when they are too controlling, breaking a prisoner out of jail (because she knows it will benefit everyone), and having to decide whether or not to drink water to live forever.

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One of our authentic close reading strategies was to make “text to self” connections and draw visual images to support understanding of what the text says. For instance, she drew a picture of a jail cell with Mae Tuck behind the bars to help her picture what the scene in the book actually looked like. In the research study “had the students turn the youth lens on themselves to show them how their complex identities might compare with the identities of young adult characters in the media images and popular fiction” (Heron-Hruby, Trent, Haas, Allen, 2015, 57) Later in the same study, the teacher “directed the students to choose and illustrate a scene from the novel that demonstrated a way the character in the novel surprised them by defying their expectations” (Heron-Hruby, Trent, Haas, Allen, 2015, 57) I employed a similar strategy by prompting Rita to connect with her text by completing different close reading strategies.

In her post-assessment following *Tuck Everlasting*, Rita scored a 38/40 on a grade level comprehension assessment after employing these strategies multiple times throughout the text and engaging in discussions about the text with me. I have shared two of the artifacts in the following section(s) of this report. This is a significant increase from the previous 6/11 on her pre-assessment. Rita repeatedly acknowledged that she understood the text significantly better after our intense learning sessions where we reflected together on the events of the story. One critical moment during her reading instruction was when she began making several predictions (without my asking her too) about how the “Man in the Yellow Suit” was going take Winnie back to her family and not be stopped by the Tucks. This showed me she was fully engaged in the story, and prior to starting the book she was not very excited for this project. She asked several questions about the characters and was basically begging me to finish the book with her

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because she was so anxious to know how everything ended. She knows this process will help build her background knowledge and help her become a more disciplined reader so she can make this meaningful interactions with her reading assignments without having to constantly write everything down and highlight material. The evidence I have for her improved comprehension is the attached multiple-choice posttest in which she scored a 38/40, as well as the close reading artifacts (as well as our dialogue in the video) which indicates her ability to interact with her text.

The final skill Rita and I worked to improve together was her argumentative writing skills. In her pre-assessment, she scored either a “3” or a “1” in all of her categories (the rubric is attached). She scored particularly low in “I can use words to make the relationship between my claim and supporting reasons clear”, and “I can establish and maintain a formal style”. One piece of scholarly research suggests the skill connecting our reasons to the claim, and our details to our reasons, is called a “bridge” for students. This means that students are connecting the ideas in their essays to one specific claim, and providing additional evidence so the essay flows well and there are examples to back up claims made in the writing. The text says, “students were taught to bridge each reason and opinion by writing facts, statements defending values, and if-then statements spelling out casual reasoning. (It) was designed to prompt students to fill in missing premises needed to connect reasons to claims” (Yeh, 1998, 60) This study suggests that many middle school students struggle with their writing organization for implementing argumentative writing in the classroom.

Therefore, during my instruction, I used a graphic organizer for Rita to organizer her ideas and brainstorm the reasons that support her claim in advance. Research supports



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this practice: “Because graphic organizers are visual representations of information that show relationships and contain key vocabulary, they make excellent planning tools for writing” (Bromley, 2015, 300) Through dialogue, her and I were able to piece together 3 details that support her reasons so her writing would improve –specifically in the categories she struggled in with her pretest. For instance, instead of just saying “One reason Winnie made a great decision is because she wanted to experience change”, Rita goes on in that same paragraph to say “this is important because we experience life differently at different ages, such as when we’re older we can get married or have kids of our own. Winnie would have never experienced this if she would have drank the water”. The in depth analysis shows that Rita used logical thinking to piece together her arguments in a structured format to improve her writing. The scoring rubric was used in a similar fashion during scholarly research to measure the effectiveness of argumentative writing. The author of that study says this in regards to the development dimension: “The development dimension was based on Toulmin’s 1958 model and was defined as the degree to which the writer’s primary claim was supported by strong, developed reasons and arguments that considered important alternatives or objections” (Yeh, 1998, 57). Rita defends in her writing the reasons she gave that suggest Winnie had made the correct decision to not drink the eternal water, and quickly refutes the opposing claim that living forever would be enjoyable. Rita writes, “Mr. Tuck says to Winnie they are ‘stuck like rocks’. This means they don’t change and get to feel how special it is to experience life”.

The critical moment in my argumentative writing instruction was when Rita realized writers had to brainstorm their writing in advance before reading. I showed her a short clip from an educational website, and we broke down the plot summary of the entire

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novel, we wrote down several connections throughout the book, and so she had a lot of her prior knowledge activated before beginning the writing process. During her pre-test, she claimed she simply just started writing down reasons she deserved a new privilege. The student did not realize the amount of time required to put together meaningful written work. This “prior knowledge activation” is crucial for a good piece of argumentative writing. Research says, “without good notes to draw upon, students are not adequately prepared to write using evidence. Instead, they rely too heavily on what they have personally experienced, or what they recall from a text read days or weeks ago. In both cases, the result is vague, weakly constructed information” (Fisher and Frey, 2015, 160) This is why Rita and I discussed the major components of the story prior to beginning her graphic organizer to think about what claims, reasons, details, and examples she wanted to include in her writing. Once Rita had viewed the video, thoroughly discussed her ideas with me, and completed the brainstorming graphic organizer to outline her essay, she was on her way to putting together an excellent essay. Before completing her essay, she typed up a rough draft, received feedback from me, and then finalized her last draft, which scored much higher on the rubric. I found this feedback in writing to be particularly helpful for her specifically with conventions. We had worked on her organization and details, but I did not teach skills to help improve grammar, syntax, punctuation, and spelling. I found she needed a lot of assistance in the feedback stage for improving her mechanics.

If I were to teach these skills again there are a few things I would probably change. First, I would teach the book to her over a longer time period. Since this project was completed during a summer course that is significantly condensed, her and I had to

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meet for long sessions and it is difficult to keep a student's mind engaged while sitting stationary for long periods of time. Secondly, after reading more about vocabulary research, I would have asked Rita to identify her own vocabulary words in the first several chapters instead of my selecting them for her. This may have helped motivate her to want to learn those words and be more in touch with the assignments we were completing together. Before I began the project, I did not realize how truly important discussions are to students' understanding of text. I believe my judgment in this matter was effected by the fact that I rarely teach in a one-on-one setting, it is typically a 25 to 1 ratio. Therefore, most of the discussions I have had in the past in my teaching are classroom discussions. In this new setting, I could really push Rita to make new personal connections and have extremely deep dialogue with her about what was happening in the story. It was amazing to watch her comprehension grow based on her dialogue. So, in retrospect, I would have included instruction and documented exactly how our discussions about the text helped improve her understanding and motivation of the *Tuck Everlasting*. In addition to the discussions, I would have included more opportunities for her to interact with the text in authentic ways that include visual images. When concepts are made visual for students, their comprehension increases. The text says, "During reading, visualizing can assist with comprehension. Students can close their eyes and try to picture aspects of the story such as the characters and the setting" (Tracey and Morrow, 2015, 89). I believe this strategy could have been more effective for Rita had I encouraged her to draw multiple images during the story to help her comprehend what is occurring in the literature. I did use the "visualization" close reading strategy, but if I could do it again I would have her piece together more images to help her comprehend

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the text. The evidence I have for student improvement in her writing is her posttest argumentative essay, and the attached rubric in which she received an almost perfect score. Lastly, in hindsight, I would have included more digital literacies in my instruction and my assessment. For purposes of the project, I was careful to make sure the pre-assessment and the post assessment were similar to show growth. However, I could have assessed the same skills and showed growth with completely different assessments (as long as they measured the same skill). I believe it would have helped Rita's motivation to interact with her vocabulary instruction online more, and I could have developed more games for her to increase her enjoyment of the material. Overall, this project was a success and it helped both her and I grow in our studies of literacy.

## **VIII. Recommendations to Teachers and Parents/Caregivers**

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Joseph,

Thank you for allowing me to work with your child this summer to improve my skill in teaching literacy to young adults. I really enjoyed my experience with her; she has excellent skills in reading and writing and I believe she has a very bright future ahead of her. In addition to allowing me to work with her, I wanted to thank you for participating in my interviews and giving me your honest opinions about her past practices with school and literacy.

I wanted to write you and inform you about some of her strengths and some areas of improvement you may want to focus on with her in the future. First, her strength is in her ability to communicate effectively in discussions. This is a growing skill and need for our future citizens, and based on my conversations with her, she is excelling in her ability to participate in dialogue about a variety of subjects. When prompted, she would share all kinds of information with me and I have no doubt when she takes the time to actively participate in school, her knowledge base will grow and continue to support her future knowledge. I think it is important for her literacy growth that she continues to participate in deep dialogue about text as we have the past month and a half.

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I worked with her specifically on some vocabulary strategies, reading comprehension close reading skills, and argumentative writing structure. Although she fully is capable of performing at or above grade level in these three categories, students today need to be explicitly taught strategies and content-based knowledge to help them perform at proficient levels. Therefore, I would suggest a couple of things for both of you, as well as her future teachers or tutors. First, be sure she reads a variety of texts regularly – fiction, non-fiction, websites, etc. Then, have discussions with her about what she reads. Secondly, she needs to continue to practice learning new vocabulary words. Although many words perhaps can be learned through association (simply through reading), she should take the time to define difficult words. This means in her content area classes, when she brings home homework, she should be keeping some sort of vocabulary journal that she can refer to when she comes across difficult words. Lastly, her and I found that it is very helpful to brainstorm and discuss writing topics before beginning the writing process. She has a helpful graphic organizer in her possession now for completing argumentative writing assignments.

Based on my conversations with your daughter, I believe she needs to be spending more time in the reading process. She acknowledges that she attends the Delta Township Library frequently, and that is fantastic. However, her comprehension will grow when she is able to interact with what she reads in meaningful ways. In our discussions, she could relate to the character Winnie Foster in *Tuck Everlasting*, and when her and I discussed their similarities, Rita became very engaged with the text. I have given her a list of close reading skills, such as predicting, making inferences, and drawing pictures, your daughter should challenge herself by continuing to use these strategies at grade level texts –you could intervene yourself to motivate her to continue to do this. In closing, here are a few suggestions for reading in the next couple of years for your daughter:

- Historical Fiction: *The Family Romanov* by Candice Fleming. This story tells about a royal Russian family and how their autocracy crumbled in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Graphic Novel: *Coraline* by Neil Gaiman. The images provided with the text will help her comprehension.
- Action and Adventure: *Stormbreaker* by Anthony Horowitz
- Poetry: *The Red Pencil* by Andrea David Pinkney. Interesting story written in verse that tells about a girl fighting for her education in Darfur.

She could even start her own blog to express her feelings about these books, or about anything she wants, to continue to practice her writing skills. As I mentioned earlier, she has a bright future ahead of her and I am fortunate to have been able to work with her.

Thank you,  
Jordan Parks

## IX. Appendices of Work

The lesson plans are listed below; However, I have chosen to upload the student work samples as individual documents in the Dropbox. Thank you!

### Lesson #1

#### **Video of Lesson:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XROQIDaV8VY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDgqQdSMMJw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVcVMYQovLk>

**Date:** Wednesday, July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017

**Lesson Foci:** Tuck Everlasting Comprehension Strategies

#### **Objectives:**

Students will be able to comprehend a text using close reading strategies by highlighting the text for different connections with the material, and through analyzing how the protagonist's experiences relate to her own life experiences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1

*Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.*

Students will be able to learn new vocabulary through using context clues and creating vocabulary squares.

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CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.4.A

*Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.4.C

*Consult reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning or its part of speech.*

**Instructional Materials:** Tuck Everlasting novel, printed copies of Chapter 3, pencils, and paper, white board, dry erase marker, question packet

**Procedures:** The student will receive modeling of close reading strategies from the teacher. The teacher will discuss what the student has already read from first several chapters of Tuck Everlasting. The student and teacher will “close read” together and make reading connections on a photocopy of chapter 3 of *Tuck Everlasting*. The student will stop to complete vocabulary squares (definition, part of speech, visual, synonyms, and example sentences), as well as the other close reading comprehension strategies: make predictions, personal connections, visualizations, determining main idea, ask questions, and inferences. The student will use [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com) to define the unknown word after guessing the meaning based on context clues.

**On-going Assessment:** The student will be given two other “close reading” passages that are particularly important in the text to complete on her own. She will also be required to fill out vocabulary squares to connect and comprehend the meaning of difficult words throughout the text. The student will have short questions after each chapter that allow her to reflect on what she has read. The student will complete a post assessment of the text on reading connections, comprehension questions, and vocabulary acquisition.

## Lesson #2

### **Video of Lesson:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grircyVTNMI&spfreload=5>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UcBQXTxR2n0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itmc7mYTE3g>

**Date:** Wednesday, August 1st, 2017

**Lesson Foci:** Tuck Everlasting Writing Strategies – Argumentative and Summary

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**Objectives:**

The student will begin to comprehend what details are necessary to a summary through filling out a story map plot diagram to help brainstorm and activate prior knowledge in preparation for writing assignment.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2

*Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3

*Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.*

The student will be able to write a detailed argumentative essay with proper details and organization about the driving question in *Tuck Everlasting* using a claim, evidence to back up that claim, and an appropriate introduction and conclusion. The driving question is “Did Winnie Foster make the right decision to not drink the eternal water from Jesse?”

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1

*Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.1

*Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.*

**Instructional Materials:** *Tuck Everlasting* novel, loose paper, pencils, and paper, white board, dry erase marker, 4-square graphic organizer, rubric, video about the writing process.

**Procedures:** The teacher will look over previous work from the reading comprehension strategies and vocabulary acquisition exercises and fill in any gaps in comprehension the student may have. Then, they will begin this lesson by viewing a short video about the writing process: [https://learnzillion.com/lesson\\_plans/8680-clarify-how-evidence-supports-the-reason](https://learnzillion.com/lesson_plans/8680-clarify-how-evidence-supports-the-reason).

The student and teacher will discuss the events of the book by filling out a “plot diagram” to ensure the student understands the main ideas of the story, as well as reflecting upon the events of the book and how they impact Winnie’s decision at the end. After this, the student and teacher will review the pretest and the Argumentative Writing Rubric (attached) to see why the student had points taken off on the pretest. Together, the student and teacher will piece together a graphic organizer to outline the five paragraphs necessary to writing an effective argumentative essay. The student will think of reasons and examples from the book that support her topic sentences.



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The student will close the lesson by typing up a rough draft of the new essay, receive feedback, and then finalize her argumentative essay.

**On-going Assessment:** Student will highlight details in the book that help support her claim in response to the driving question. The student may also use her notes from the previous lesson to help her decide which way she wants to answer the question. Student will fill out plot diagram throughout the text to help indicate the most important events of the story. The student will write an argumentative essay to demonstrate her knowledge of the book and her ability to back up her claims with evidence.

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