

Teacher Edition

Revised Edition

Performance

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English Language Arts

8



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Write an Informative or Explanatory Text

Student Edition pages 236–249

LESSON OVERVIEW

Objectives

Students will:

- write informative and explanatory texts to examine a topic.
- define a topic and form a thesis statement that states the central idea.
- connect ideas using appropriate transitions.
- develop the topic with relevant facts and concrete details.
- provide a conclusion.
- use precise, domain-specific language to establish and maintain a formal style.
- use text and graphic features to clarify information.
- form and use verbs in the active and passive voice.

Discussion Questions

- ▣ What are the characteristics of informative or explanatory text?
- ▣ How can you make a strong thesis statement?
- ▣ What suggestions would you give to a fellow writer about how to organize and format an informative text?

Differentiation

Lesson Support For students who have difficulty evaluating the appropriateness of text evidence, provide additional questions they can ask: “Does the fact or detail relate to my thesis statement? Does it appear to be correct based on other facts that I have? Is the source trustworthy?” Students can write those questions, and others they think of, on index cards to keep as a reference.

For students having trouble writing with a formal style, have them review a sample text step by step. First have them look for and correct any contractions. Then have them find examples of slang to replace with more formal words. Finally, suggest that they read each sentence and look for ways they can express it more clearly and properly in terms of grammar and word choice.

Key Terms

active voice

credible

domain-specific

vocabulary

explanatory

text

formal style

graphic

heading

informational

text

passive voice

relevant

subhead

thesis statement

Lesson Extension As an extension activity, have students build their own moai models from modeling clay and use them to demonstrate some of the theories about how these statues were moved on Easter Island. For example, students can use wooden dowels to show the sled and log model. Students should write brief informational reports explaining their findings.

Write an Informative or Explanatory Text

In this lesson, students will be asked to write an **informative** or **explanatory text**. As they write, students can build on what they know from reading these types of texts—including information about structure, main ideas, and relevant details.

Have students write a few sentences that tell about a topic they recently studied, such as butterfly metamorphosis or Chinese New Year celebrations. Discuss elements of the writing type that distinguish it from stories or poetry, such as its focus on a topic and presentation of facts.

► Define Your Topic

Have students read the sample writing prompt in the Student Edition and underline the topic (“different theories about why the Ancient Pueblo people abandoned the Mesa Verde region”). Discuss how students know this part of the prompt is the topic. (It tells what an essay based on this prompt would be about.)

► Form a Thesis Statement

Emphasize that a well-written **thesis statement** includes the central idea, addresses the prompt (when applicable), and previews what the text will be about. Ask a volunteer to read the sample thesis statement at the bottom of the Student Edition. Then ask students to identify how the sample meets each criterion (central idea: “scientists have developed several theories...migration”; preview: indicates that the text will tell about the theories). As students write, encourage them to return to the thesis statement to check that they are staying on task. Note that the thesis statement should always appear toward the beginning of an informative text, but it does not have to be the first sentence.

► Organize Your Ideas

Use the flowchart in the Student Edition to review the main parts and order of a longer informative or explanatory text. Explain that this chart shows the organization of the informative text about possible reasons why the Pueblo people abandoned the Mesa Verde region. Focus on the arrows showing how the text moves from the introduction to the body paragraphs to the conclusion. If students have trouble visualizing how much space to devote to each section, explain that in a typical five-paragraph essay, the introduction is one paragraph, the body is three paragraphs (one for each major supporting reason), and the conclusion is one paragraph.

► Choose Information to Support Your Thesis

Tell students that research usually yields a lot of information, but good writers use only the information that is both **relevant** and **credible**. Have students determine which fact in the Student Edition is most relevant, or related, to the thesis statement about the Pueblo people and the Mesa Verde region. (Some scientists use tree-ring dating to show evidence of a severe drought.) Ask students to justify that choice.

► Keep Your Audience in Mind

After reviewing **formal style**, write word pairs on the board. Ask students to identify which word would be appropriate for an informative or explanatory text: yeah/yes (yes); house/crib (house); is not/isn't (is not); could have/coulda (could have).

Have students find an example of **domain-specific vocabulary** in their science textbooks and write a few sentences to explain the term so that a second grader would understand it. Then have partners read each other's sentences to confirm that the explanations are clear and offer suggestions to clarify the writing.

▲ **Common Errors** *Students might think that formal style means that the text has overly long and complicated sentences. Point out that formal does not mean "difficult," but "correct." It refers to a tone and specific word choice that make writing clear and accurate. Students do not need to make their writing fancy or complex in order to write in formal style.*

► Use Formatting and Graphics

After reviewing **headings, graphics, and subheads**, name social studies topics and ask students to identify a graphic feature that would enhance the explanatory text about each one. For example, subheads would help organize a text about the key events during the civil rights movement, a map would be useful in an essay about the Louisiana Purchase, and a timeline or photograph would enhance a biography about Harriet Tubman.

► Informative Writing Checklist

After reviewing with the class the writing checklist in the Student Edition, ask, "Why is it important to reread your writing? How is a writing checklist useful? What specific things do you look for when you reread an informative or explanatory text?" Encourage students to modify or add to the checklist as appropriate for each writing task.

▲ **Journal Prompt** *Suppose you are researching the Mesa Verde cliff dwellings online. How could you tell if a Web site about the topic is credible? Write a short paragraph to tell how you would evaluate the site as a source.*

Language Spotlight • Active and Passive Language

Have students use what they know about **active** and **passive voice** to explain which sample sentence is clearer and why. (Students should recognize that the sentence written in the active voice is clearer because the subject of the sentence, *ranchers*, comes before the object so it is apparent who rediscovered the dwellings. It emphasizes the importance of the ranchers in rediscovering the cliff dwellings. In the passive-voice sentence, the subject comes at the end of the sentence. It places the importance on the rediscovery, not the ranchers.) Remind students to be aware of their choice of active or passive voice and to be sure that it supports their writing purpose.

Standards Focus

Oral Presentations Have students create informational presentations about places, real or imagined, they would like to visit. Ask students to use print or online searches to find video, audio, photographs, maps, diagrams, and other graphic features to include in the presentation. Students should make sure their presentations state a clear claim and offer credible supporting evidence. Model for students how to maintain eye contact, use appropriate volume, and speak with clear pronunciation.

2 COACHED EXAMPLE

Using the Passage

Students will read “Easter Island,” an informational text that gives facts and details about the island. Encourage students to draw on what they learned in **Getting the Idea** to prepare for writing their own informative text using evidence from this passage.

▲ **ELL Support** To help students visualize the structure and content of the passage, fill out a flowchart or outline together as a group. Reread the passage aloud to the students. After each paragraph, ask, “What was this paragraph about?” As students answer (“This paragraph was about _____.”), fill in the organizer with their responses. Then review the organizer/outline and have students explain what they learned.

 **Text Complexity Details**
“Easter Island”

Qualitative

LOW MIDDLE LOW **MIDDLE HIGH** HIGH

Implicit connections between ideas; conforms to conventions of a specific discipline; graphic feature essential to textual understanding; contains dense and complex language that is unfamiliar and domain specific

Quantitative 920L

Reader-Text-Task Students may have little prior knowledge of the topic. Many scientific terms, often without much context, may provide challenges to comprehension. Students will be asked to analyze the text and answer questions about its claims, evidence, and vocabulary. Students will later use this information to write their own informative text.

Answers

1. Students explain why the origin of Easter Island's inhabitants and its settlement date remain in question.

Possible response: The inhabitants' ancestry is unclear. Most historians agree that they were Polynesian, but anthropologist Thor Heyerdahl thought that they were Peruvian. He based his conclusion on the similarities between the Rapu Nui stonework and work by South American Indians. Additionally, he built a Peruvian-style balsa-wood raft and showed that the journey from South America to Easter Island was possible. It is also unclear when the island was first settled. Based on Heyerdahl's findings, most historians agree that the island was inhabited around 400 CE. Recent radiocarbon analyses, however, suggest that the island was not inhabited until 700–800 CE or even as recently as 1200 CE.

2. Students identify an appropriate replacement for *wacky* that maintains a formal style of writing.

C

Students should look for a synonym for *wacky* that is not conversational or too familiar in tone.

3. This item has two parts. Students identify which claim is supported by evidence and identify specific facts that support this claim.

Part A Students should circle "Easter Island is a small, isolated island in the Pacific Ocean with an intriguing history."

Part B Students might underline (1) "It is only about sixty-three square miles, just a little larger than Washington, D.C." (2) "The inhabitants' ancestry and the settlement date are still a mystery, but there is no doubt that the island once supported an advanced civilization. This included tattooing and petroglyphs."

4. Students identify how a particular graphic feature supports the author's claim.

D

Students should look at the map, read the caption, and compare it to the details in the text.

Using the Passage

Students will complete the **Lesson Practice** independently. The **Reading Guide** helps students monitor their comprehension while they read. Students can take notes in the margins, mark up the text, or think about key ideas.



Text Complexity Details "The Mysteries of Easter Island"

Qualitative

LOW MIDDLE LOW MIDDLE HIGH **HIGH**

Implied multiple purposes; complex organizational structure with some explicit connections between ideas; graphic feature helpful to understanding of text; occasionally contains complex, domain-specific language; requires moderate levels of domain-specific content knowledge with some references to outside ideas

Quantitative 1160L

Reader-Text-Task Students will find sufficient information throughout the text to understand the overall meaning of unfamiliar concepts, though students will benefit from some geographical and archaeological background. Students will analyze how information is developed and compared through the text structure. They will use facts and details from this passage to write their own informative text.

Answers

1. B (DOK 3)
2. A—Charles Love; B—Carl Lipo and Terry Hunt; C—Jo Anne Van Tilburg (DOK3)
3. Students should indicate that the word *whopping* does not belong in the formal style text.

Possible response: The word *whopping* seems out of place in the passage because it sounds too informal. It is a word you might use in everyday conversation, but it doesn't convey a polished or academic tone. It seems out of place because the rest of the passage correctly uses formal language that is appropriate for academic writing. (DOK 3)

4. B (DOK 3)
5. Accept well-reasoned and supported responses that argue that the conclusion is or is not effective.

Possible response: The conclusion is effective because it restates the main idea of the passage that "the mysteries of Easter Island have fascinated scientists and explorers for hundreds of years" and the claim about conflicting theories. It also ends with an interesting final thought by asking the reader to consider the role modern technology will play in the future to help resolve outstanding questions about the mysteries. (DOK 3)

6. Responses will vary. Refer to the Informative and Argumentative Writing Rubric. Top-scoring student responses should:
 - focus on the history of Easter Island.
 - include a clear thesis statement.
 - include relevant evidence from both sources to support the thesis statement.
 - follow a logical pattern of organization that includes an introduction, supporting body paragraphs, and a conclusion.
 - use precise language and a formal style.
 - be appropriate for the purpose and audience.
 - use correct spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation. (DOK 4)