

Teacher's Worksheet 2: Informative/Explanatory Texts

Can LAL Assist Students in Meeting Common Core State Standards for Writing?

LAL is confident that teachers can successfully adapt LAL's writing prompt and activities as tools to help students achieve Common Core State Standards for writing. Consider, for example, the letter below. Diana Lanni, an eighth grade student from Fairbanks, Alaska, wrote this letter to poet Robert Service for the Letters About Literature 2012 competition. Her entry took Alaska's first place prize on Level 2 (grades 7 - 8) and advanced to take one of the two national awards. We have noted in sidebar comments where we believe the letter meets specific CCSS for writing in grades 6 – 8. Although Diana uses narrative techniques in her essay, we've analyzed her letter as an "informative/Explanatory" text, consistent with Common core "Text Type and Purposes."

TEXT TYPE AND PURPOSES

W2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

Dear Robert Service,

I have known your poem "The Three Voices," since I was just a small child. I don't even remember the first time I heard it. Back then, it was just the soothing rhythm of your words that mattered to me. Something familiar, something calming to help me fall asleep at night. I always loved it when my father read poetry to me, and "The Three Voices" was my favorite. I memorized it without even noticing.

But now that I'm older, now that I can understand the words, it has come to mean so much more to me. One line, "cling with my love to nature, as child to the mother-knee," has meant more to me than any other. I remember as I read it, being a very little girl, at daycare, clinging to my mother's knee, begging her not to leave me. But I always let go. Thinking about this has let me let go of other things, and know that letting go is not the end of the world. I can now look at something, and know that I don't need it, that I can let it go, and everything will be all right. When I'm upset about something, I often find myself reciting this poem to myself. It inspires me in my writing, and my music. When I can't remember how to play a song on my guitar, I fit the words of "The Three Voices" into my melody, and after awhile, the cords come more naturally.

W2A: Introduce the topic clearly. Writer reflects on a time when she first experienced the author's poem and describes the experience: *soothing rhythm . . . calming to help me fall asleep . . .*

W2B: Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples. Writer cites a specific experience "at daycare" and notes how the poem's words relate to her now that she is older, applying it to her writing and her music.

When I read the lines of your poem, I can feel the hard packed dirt and roots under me, feel the warmth of the fire on my face, and feel the very longing you describe. All my memories come rushing back, and I remember something forgotten each time I read it. Once I remembered (as I read the lines about the wind), a year when I went to China to go fishing with my family. I was very little, and I had insisted on sleeping by myself in a one-man tent. The wind was blowing like a hurricane; so hard and fierce that I feared I would blow away and end up in the river, but I was also too stubborn to admit that I was too little to have my own tent, so I sat awake all night. I had forgotten this until your poem brought it back to the front of my mind.

“The Three Voices” has helped to shape who I am as a person, and to remind me of my love for nature when I’ve spent too long indoors. I live in Alaska too, and spend a whole lot of time out in nature, at family cabins, or just camping. So I know just how beautiful and enchanting this world can be. And like you, I know that the places where some people say there is nothing, just the middle of nowhere, there is really everything, and the center of what really matters. I have gazed up at the stars so many times in my life, and heard them singing to me too, and I always feel so lucky to live in Alaska. Thank you for being my teacher.

Your reader,

Diana Lanni

W2C: Use appropriate and varied transitions to clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts. Examples: “Back then” (par 1); “Now that I am older” and “thinking about this” (par 2); “When I read . . .”, “Once” and “I had forgotten this until . . .” (par 3)

2D: Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic. Examples: “hard packed dirt and roots”, “feel the warmth of the fire”, “blowing like a hurricane” (par 3)

2E: Provide a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences or events. Restates the name of the poem and so mirrors the opening paragraph; she states directly that its effect on her, i.e. “helped to shape” the person she has become and then she clarifies to state specifically the change, i.e. her “love for nature.” She states she has heard the stars “singing” which reinforces her statement that the poem changed her perspective of her world and herself.