

Place and Writing

The Woven Essay

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Author Note:

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Context

Navajo Preparatory School (NPS), located in Farmington, NM is a unique school in that it is funded in part via BIE funding and thus falls under their guidelines and requirements, it also receives funding from the New Mexico Public Education Department, and therefore dances to its tune and requirements in some areas. It is also a private school whose parents pay tuition and whose students experience dormitory life Monday through Friday, returning home every weekend and for holidays, parents therefore are engaged and quick to make personal demands on the school, its teachers, and administration such as, “Send me a copy of the assignment and the rubric so that I can help my child with this assignment.” Lastly, NPS is a World International Baccalaureate (IB) school and thus it also must meet IB requirements and go through IB reviews. Because it is a private school with tuition requirements, the students of NPS go through a rigorous recruitment process that requires previous teacher recommendations, GPAs from feeder schools, test cut-offs, student personal essays, parent and student interviews, and finally teachers and admin meet to discuss and vote to accept students. Some students are accepted in sophomore year, though most students enter their freshman year. Due to the IB requirements of junior and senior students, only under the rarest circumstances would a student be admitted in junior year and not at all in senior year. NPS is 99% Native American with students coming from primarily, but not exclusively, the Navajo Reservation. We have students coming from across the United States, and next year will have a student coming in from Japan. Our parent involvement is exceptionally high, and our students are, in general, grade driven. All are college bound and many get into some of the best colleges and universities across our country. There is a huge emphasis, in our school, on Native American culture and identity. All students are required to take Navajo language classes, Navajo cultural classes, Navajo history classes as well as New Mexico and Arizona history classes and Navajo Government classes. This emphasis on Navajo culture and language makes us unique among IB schools and extends beyond the classroom and into after school activities as well as experiential school-wide activities throughout the year.

Freshmen students are historically mostly amenable to writing personal essays, and our NPS students are usually prepared to write this type of essay. They are not always terribly detail orient, and, their command of vocabulary is relatively basic in word choice. Some time will need to be spent in discussing vocabulary and building vocabulary during the first quarter. Because of the students’ familiarity with narrative, introduction of a woven essay that will provide them with the opportunity to supplement their narrative writing with “mini” sections of research, may help those who might be reluctant to dive in deeply to the personal nature of narrative as it can provide the writer with a safety zone to distance themselves from areas that might feel too personal. Because many of our students are gifted and talented, they relish any form of research.

I have written this curriculum specifically for the 9-10 grade band as found in CCSS for English Language Arts (ELA) class. At NPS we do not yet have the Middle Years Program (MYP) which is the pre-IB 6th through 10th grade curriculum. Still, NPS has vertically aligned its English Coursework such that grades 9 and 10 ELA are preparatory courses to ensure student readiness for the rigor of IB in their junior and senior year. To use the curriculum with 10th grade one need only scaffold the lessons upward. For example, 9th and 10th graders complete a modified Extended Essay (2000 word for 9th grade essays and 3000 words for 10th grade research essay). In addition to the research essay, students also are provided opportunities to complete a

colloquium presentation of 5 and 10 minutes respectively. Readings done by 9th and 10th grade students have a world focus (this is more reflective of the traditional survey of world literature usually found in 10th grade curricula) and include selections listed on the IB reading list in order to prepare them for junior and senior year reading analysis at the IB level (see addendum 1). Unlike public schools, however, we do have wider discretion in lesson planning within the guidelines of TOK and IB International mindedness and preparedness.

At the beginning of the year, I will administer an initial writing assessment to all students that will provide insight into students' current level and skill in writing in both analytical and narrative writing. This will provide a baseline in mechanics, diction, syntax, and content and will also provide me with the differentiation needs of my students (see Appendix 1).

This unit will begin in the second quarter of the year and will be preceded by a unit covering primarily fiction in a variety of genres, poetry, short stories, novellas and novels. This will provide a rich background for students in written storytelling as well as opportunities for both oral and written analytical skills via Socratic Seminars and written responses to literature.

Because the writing unit begins in October, much work will have been accomplished in trust building, team building and comfort levels in working both individually and in small groups will be well-established. Since both learning and sharing knowledge, through both written and verbally require considerable risk-taking on the part of students, the placement of the writing unit in the second nine-weeks should support student willingness to achieve total engagement.

Rationale

This unit will help to blend cross-curricular relationships with Navajo language and culture classes, afterschool cultural activities, as well as with built in school-wide experiential learning. Because the unit is designed for Freshman students in an IB World School, I will be drawing off of the IB Ways of Knowing (WOK). IB Schools utilize the Theory of Knowledge (TOK), of which, WOK make up the greater portion. The focus how we know what we claim to know. TOK is composed almost entirely of questions such as: questions include: What counts as evidence for X? How do we judge which is the best model of Y? What does theory Z mean in the real world? According to the IB website, through these inquiry-based questions, it is expected that students will gain a greater awareness of "their personal and ideological assumptions, as well as developing an appreciation of the diversity and richness of cultural perspectives" ("What is TOK").

Because my students are 99% Navajo, I will be mindful of the need to keep the Navajo Ways of Knowing, aligned with the WOK of IB. The two are very similar, but care needs to be taken to keep these two ways of looking at knowing aligned. According to Herbert John Benally, in his article Navajo Philosophy of Learning and Pedagogy, the Navajo ways of knowing are broken into four subsections, represented by the Navajo directional way of viewing the world, as well as incorporating the colors associated with the directions. These four ways of knowing are: Thinking (East – White), Planning (South – Blue), Life -interconnectivity (West – Yellow), and Reflection (North – Black) (1994, pp 28-29). These relate to the IB World Ways of Knowing as defined by IB: Language, Sense Perception, Emotion, Reason/Logic, Faith, Intuition, and Memory.

As students learn to weave together IB and Navajo Ways of Knowing, I will use Navajo Weaving as a model and metaphor for writing essays. Teaching students the stages of weaving the Navajo Way will build cultural connectedness and help students see how the framework, the steps taken in warping the frame, build a foundation in which the weft can create the design. The need to beat the weft tightly into place and how the design changes at midpoint to the reverse using repetition to complete the design. It shows how the design can incorporate the weaver's knowledge and how place has historically played a role in the traditional design and ultimately gives way to more modern interpretations for those who wish to adventure beyond the tradition. This will be the emphasis in the first lesson for the unit. While I am a weaver, I will be inviting Roy Cady, a weaver who has both skills in very early weaving and has also found joy in less traditional explorations of weaving while always keeping himself firmly rooted in the old traditions. This will provide my students and I with a common language in discussing writing, theirs as well as others.

Through a mixture of reading exemplar essays that show this weaving or braiding, if you will, students will also begin to look at essays critically and identify the various patterns. Using exemplar text will also provide students with examples of the types of writing they will be asked to do throughout the unit. Students will read 8 to 10 exemplar texts through the unit. Texts will be selected from a variety of writers, with an emphasis on Indigenous writers, although not exclusively Indigenous in keeping with IB standards. Students will write 8 essays that emulate the type of writing of various of the essays read.

The focus of the unit is narrative writing and the individual interrelationship to place and culture. Differentiation will be achieved by providing prompts to students for each type of essay being worked on. Students who struggle will be expected to follow a more scripted prompt while slowly but increasingly being released to less and less prescription. ELL strategies will be employed for those students to whom English is a second language. Other strategies that may be used as needed are graphic organizers specific to the tasks assigned.

Experiential Learning Opportunities

It is fortunate that NPS is built on Navajo Land and that the campus itself, while in the town of Farmington, maintains a bucolic atmosphere. Wildlife abounds within this gated community. Deer, raccoons, skunk, chipmunks, squirrels and a myriad of birds as well as flora both domesticated and wild flourish. The campus itself, then, will serve for one of the place writings. Another place writing will be one of the mountains visited as a school on "Mountain Day." We will also travel to at least two other places as a class to incorporate place and research. Additional assignments will be based on places familiar to students personally. These experiential locations will, however, have to be adapted in the time of COVID 19 and the resultant quarantine that will prohibit students from accessing campus and likewise the usual field trip to one of the mountains. Students though, will be encouraged to go to a place where they find inspiration and peace.

Essays will be pulled from Native Americans such as Leslie Marmon Silko, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Joy Harjo. Luci Tapahanso, Louise Erdrich, Sherman Alexie, Lori Aviso Alvord, N.

Scott Momaday, and Tommy Orange as well as various non-Native Americans such as: Julia Alvarez, R K Narayan, Chinua Achebe, and others.

Students will participate in writer workshops in small groups and similar to those used by the National Writing Project. The teacher too, will provide guidance through workshopping with students. Students will be encouraged to share their work with the class in an Author's Chair time, and, we anticipate that each student will submit at least one work to a book to be produced by the freshman class and distributed to each member.

Content Objectives

In my Diné Institute Seminar I was introduced to the concept of the Braided Essay, one which I was not familiar with, but one that I think I some ways I had perhaps been using to a certain extent in my own personal writings. The idea of an essay being braided may sound odd but it really is quite simple, just as one may plait their hair into braids, one may combine a section of narrative with a section of research plaiting each section together into a single, thick, richer if you will braid for the combining of the two types of writing. This was the idea of braided essay was introduced to me by my seminar leader, Nicole Walker who wrote "The Braided Essay as Social Justice Action: Between the Lines" in *Creative Nonfiction*. She hypothesizes, "What is creative nonfiction writing but the shaping and reshaping of self against fact?" (*Creative Nonfiction*, Issue #64 np). Walker goes on to justify her hypothesis by explaining, that a personal story section can be followed by a seemingly completely unrelated topic that actually reshapes the original narrative and that this juxtaposition of one factual with the other narrative or vice versa, actually reshape or redefine the other, repositioning one to another, braiding the essay into a while not a new meaning perhaps it is better to say, an nuanced meaning..

Further, this braiding process mystically allows the writer to actually look far more closely at the object, the event, the history, because there is the section of the braid, that allows the writer to breath, to escape, to pull back when the depths of writing become a bit too intense and they bring in that seemingly unrelated section of braid. Walker, however, states it much better than I, "...the braided essay lets me pop in and out of different realities—not so much manipulating the facts as pacing them—and digest reality in drops." An example of a braided essay can be found in appendix 2.

As stated in prior sections, my Navajo students are well aware of Navajo weaving. Most are aware of this form of weaving because either they themselves or they have relatives who are weavers. As a person who has learned Navajo-style weaving, and as a person who often thinks in terms of metaphors, as I dipped more deeply into braided essays, I began to see parallels between writing a braided essay, to weaving an essay. The two actually were extremely similar in-as-much as coming from New England, I grew up with braided rugs, so the leap from a braided rug which was my mental image of the braided essay, to a Navajo-style woven rug, actually was rather a simple adjustment.

Comparing weaving with writing is actually a fairly small leap, we have often heard of storytellers weaving their tales together. So, for me it was the next step to combine that with the Navajo Loom. The more I considered the Navajo Loom with its framework, it's flexibility to adjust for the length and width of a rug, the easier the connection to an essay became. While the

frame is flexible, it is also solid, it has a specific structure which is comparative to the structure of an essay – an introduction, a thesis, body paragraphs, a conclusion of some sort.

The warp is applied, it runs lengthwise, ultimately it is hidden by the weft, but it is essential to the weaving and it is held in tension to the loom. It is through the warp that the weft is laid, weaving in and out through the strands of the warp. The warp then is similar to the grammar, the punctuation, the mechanics of writing that are rarely noticed unless, of course, one violates a rule of grammar, punctuation, or mechanics. Like those grammatical violations, the tragedy occurs when the tension is not enough in the warp causing the weave to be too loose, or forming an hour-glass shape, or the tension is too tight potentially causing the warp strand breaks. Although repairable, in that event, it sometimes causes the weaving to be less strong in an area. Warping is not, at least for me, the pleasant part of weaving, but then neither have I ever gotten terribly excited by diagramming sentences or fascinated with grammar, punctuation and the mechanical aspects of writing. Word play, yes, but words are the color of one's writing, and thus they are the fun part, the actual creation of the design, the color selections of the yarns, the weft and woof.

The choice of the weaving metaphor will provide a chance to bring in students and their families to the classroom as experts in the skills of weaving. I will invite students or their weaving relatives to attend the initial class where they can demonstrate weaving and discuss the steps of weaving. This will be an engrossing way to have students engaged. Additionally, I will create cardboard/cardstock looms and warp material that students can “warp” their “looms” and then use yarns to create a design and thus students will learn the basic steps of Navajo weaving to introduce both a metaphor for writing as well as introducing cultural relevancy to the language of weaving and writing. This will provide students and educator with a common language to discuss student writing as the unit proceeds. Through the weaving metaphor, students will understand and perform the steps involved in drafting, reviewing, rethreading, and revising their work so that they can improve their portfolio of writing just as the steps of weaving ask that the weaver use the structure of the loom, the warping to add stability to the design, revisiting the design at the midpoint is almost identical to the rereading of the text or the style of the essay such as revisiting the central idea to assure that the essay is aligned. Making slight changes where necessary to ensure the repeating design will be a perfect replica or, in some cases will complete the vision.

This unit is designed for a 9th grade English Language Arts class with an emphasis on reading, analyzing, and writing nonfiction/creative nonfiction essays. Students will need to have an understanding of how to analyze using the SOAPStone (Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, and Subject) as well as analyzing with SIFT (Symbols, Images, Figures of Speech, and Theme, and Tone) both of which are used in AP Lang and Comp and Lit and Comp. This prior knowledge will have been provided to students in the preceding quarter in reference to literature. Students will be analyzing exemplar texts using the aforementioned analyzing techniques as well as noting patterns used by the authors in each. These considerations are of course as important to writing a piece as they are to reading to analyze it. Thus, student's knowledge of this analytical tool will sharpen their understanding of how, in turn, to apply these to their own writing. The reading unit, therefore, that precedes this unit will lay the foundation for students' understanding of how to consider their use in the students' writing.

Because the braided/woven essay requires students to both use their own knowledge and creativity and to apply a focus of research weave with the creativity, students will need knowledge of how to do basic research. Rather than needing to dive deeply into research, students can have a more limited approach to research in the woven essay, however; short research projects essentially provide the skills that can be transferred to longer research projects which will prepare them for their Extended Essay undertaken in their junior and senior year. Students will have several chances to experiment with researching various topics in the first two weeks of this unit. They will be introduced to (or reacquainted with) how to use the library resources/databases and will have an understanding of how to determine the credibility of a source. Students will attend a lecture by our school librarian which will provide them hands on ability to narrow down topics, find sources, and check credibility of sources prior to this unit.

The exemplar texts that students will read each week will be selected from among both Native American essayists as well as other essayists from around the world to comply with the “international” focus of the IB school. Students will be encouraged to discover patterns in exemplar texts through close reading and analysis of a selection of essays written by a variety of authors to include Indigenous authors, canonical authors, and contemporary Native and non-native authors. The reason for the variety of backgrounds of authors is primarily to accomplish the goals of the IB School which is to be familiar with literature not simply from their own culture, but to provide “International Mindedness” as stated by the IB school philosophy. Students will be able to draw conclusions about the role that place plays in writing and the way that creative nonfiction blends culture and research into a pattern or into various patterns. This will also provide students with the understanding that there are different ways to write and how to express culture within the writing that they do.

To prompt or not to prompt, that is the question. Prompts in writing can be very traditional. It would, of course, be difficult in teaching writing to hand paper to students, supply a pen or pencil and say, “Here you go!” I personally haven’t tried that, and, perhaps that might be worth a class hour to do so. Most classrooms however provide the students with some kind of prompt such as, write an essay about what were the mitigating causes of WWII. Write an essay about...is even most likely the prompt that is on that all of the important end of the year test that the state department of education requires of the students to prove that they have learned how to synthesize information that they have learned throughout the year. These are the usual prompts, but the prompts I will use for my students, particularly in the initial assignments of the unit will be more controlled, more explicit, more guided, than these general prompts are. Students will write to a variety of highly structured prompts in the beginning, related to the specificity of place with a gradual release of form as students’ progress in their writing allowing them to experiment with the concept of woven writing. This process was reintroduced to me in my Diné Fellowship class and it was so helpful in helping me to both focus myself on a subject and then draw back the microscope, enlarging the view, applying research and then returning to the focus, each time creating almost a picture within a picture effect. I want my students to enjoy writing, to find their creative writer side and to also pull in facts and knowledge from their research. I want also to provide my students with the creative nonfiction genre rather than simply the strictly analytical writing so often the focus of freshmen and sophomore writing. By blending the self with research, I think my students will open themselves to bringing more of themselves, their culture,

and their personal knowledge to their writing instead of the ho hum this is what I learned sort of writing so often prevalent in this age group.

Have you ever asked students to peer edit their writing? Have you ever been disappointed in the result? I have. One of the things I want to focus on with my students is how to give appropriate and useful feedback. To use the same techniques with feedback that students use when analyzing any other piece of writing. Getting students to find evidence that supports their feedback. Students will, of course, use the three-point rubric developed for each assignment as their guide through the peer editing process (appendix 3). Additionally, for the first few feedback lessons, we will give Students' oral feedback. I will demonstrate this to students, offering my own feedback and then drawing students into that conversation by specifically asking them what they felt, though, reacted too. In my fellows classes this was done with each of our writings, and it really helped, for those who were strong with feedback, others were able to also find ways to provide additional feedback, discussions about similarities to what we had felt or what resonated with us as a group were found routinely. By mimicking this same introduction to feedback, my students will learn how to provide meaningful feedback to each other about the exemplar writing allowing students to improve critical reading skills as well as learning how to improve their own essays.

It is important to celebrate success in the classroom. It is important to reward hard work and dedication. Students love to have this celebratory moment in my classroom. While Principals often are on the lookout to see the display of student work, and while students do love to see their work displayed in the classroom, I want to celebrate this unit with students choosing from their writing portfolio a piece or pieces of work that they are particularly proud of and spend a little time in a last revision. I will have students work together to layout and illustrate as needed their collective works into an electronic book as the students' final project for this unit. By involving all the students in the editing and development of this electronic collection, I feel students will learn also the role of editors and illustrators in creating anthologies.

Teaching Strategies

Development of Common Language

Create a Metaphor for Writing. After the basic skills have been retaught, we will work as a whole class developing the common vocabulary by creating a metaphor for writing based on Navajo style weaving. While there are many metaphors that can be taught for writing such as sculpture as writing. As a weaver who uses Navajo methods for weaving I will provide students with information with the help of a Navajo Weaver who taught me – or as a back-up plan, I have decided I will ask my students if they or their family members weave and would they be willing to come talk to me about coming into class to help me with demonstrating this concept. This will be done as whole class instruction. Students will complete a reflection following the weaving demonstration in which they make the connections of weaving and writing. for the reading of the text, the annotation of the text, and creation of the dialectical journal. I know that not all teachers are necessarily weavers or know weavers but there are many metaphors for writing within the arts that show how planning, creating, revising, adding detail to improve writing etc. One that is on the National Writing Project is Writing as Sculpture and is very easy to use.

Reading Strategies:

Close Reading and Annotating

This unit is primarily a writing unit, yet students will be given exemplar essays to guide each writing project see: Selection of Classroom Sources in Bibliography. Therefore, it will be necessary for students to incorporate close reading along with close writing each week. Some of the close reading of fiction will be taught in the preceding unit but will be reviewed and discussed specifically within the context of woven essays or creative fiction writing. Selections of essays for this unit will, to a great extent, be culled from essays by Native American writers. When students of color and otherwise are exposed to authors and writing that reflect their own culture, they gain a better understanding of their own culture, fosters positive self-esteem, and prevents the feelings of cultural isolation. Further, it promotes and nurtures respect, empathy and acceptance among all students (Steiner et al, 2008). Because it is my belief that history rhymes if not repeats itself again and again when we choose to accept half-way measures of change and problem solving, many of the text that I am choosing for this curriculum will be heavily connected with social justice and connection to the body politics (particularly as this is a political year). It is important to creating and honing critical thinking skills for our students to looking at writers who invoke strong emotional reactions, and, creative nonfiction is a media that is immersed in those emotional responses both from the author and the reader.

Annotation/Dialectical Journals. Students will apply SOAPStone with specific “look fors” for each exemplar text such as purpose, audience, voice, point of view. Additionally, students will learn what “signposts” are and how to identify them in essays found in Beers and Probst’s *Notes and Notice for Nonfiction: Contrasts and Contradictions, Numbers and Stats, Quoted Words, Extreme Language, Word Gaps* (unknown words). Students will create dialectical journals (introduced in prior unit) to log look fors and to make the essays more accessible for the purpose of analysis. Dialectical journals provide students with a way to annotate when the informational text is only available in a hard copy book and takes the place in many ways of annotating text on the actual text and has the added flexibility for SLD or ELD students to receive focused questions written by the teacher with line or paragraph numbers for students to reference.

While many of the students in my class are strong, and avid readers, most of them love to read text out loud in class. It gives them the opportunity to practice reading with feeling. The sad thing about the educational system, in my opinion, is that we have taught our students to read for speed. Sadly, reading for speed eliminates reading evocatively. All text will be read aloud in class, having students volunteer to read the text (ELL strategy). During these out loud readings, the teacher participates in voluntary reading as well. When students read in my classroom, the inevitable question at the beginning of the year is: “How Long do I need to read?” My answer is always, read for as long as you wish and are enjoying reading. Some students then read much longer than other students. This actually has made my classroom one in which every student does read aloud. Consider no pressure reading in your own classroom. When audio versions of the reading are available, they may be used to provide listening opportunities for ELLs.

Writing Strategies:

Write with students: I learned long ago in the Bisti Writing Project, a local project of the National Writing Project, that it is important for students to see the importance the teacher places on writing. To do this, the teacher must write along with her students, and, when asked to, to share their writing with their students. For each assignment given to my students, I will spend time in class writing with my students. When we share excerpts of our writing drafts with one another, I sometimes share my own. I share my writing primarily to show my students that first drafts can be messy and so that they understand that drafts are the first step, but revision provides the opportunity to improve writing. I believe this teacher involvement in writing is a key step that is most often nonexistent in writing classes.

Additionally, I will be providing one on one time with each student in class to provide support as students write, whether that is guidance on mechanics, or discussing ideas with students. This is a modified version of the strategy know as: I Do, You Do, We Do that specifically get students far more engaged with the writing process as they see that the teacher too struggles at times to channel their creativity and focus in writing.

General Strategies:

Small Groups: Students will work in small groups (triads and pairs) for reading exemplar text and in their author's groups. Authors groups will be utilized for peer review and edits. Students will be randomly assigned groups but also attention will be paid to matching students who work well together but are not best friends. At the 9th grade level, best friends would rather take a zero than tell their friend that anything is wrong with their work. Care will also be made to keep students together at similar levels as low-level students (although there are not many of these at my school) hate to be paired up with a gifted student as much as gifted students often rebel against being paired with a low level student, especially in high school after having done so frequently in the previous eight years.

Organizers: Students will be given a choice of using a variety of graphic organizers for organizing writing drafts and/or for planning. These organizers are generally left in a crate for any student to use. When I ask students if they want to use an organizer, they all look down and shake their heads until I pick out a few that I think are useful for the task and set a few on desks randomly. I wait, counting to four, and watch all the students go up to the crate and look through the hanging folders for the ones that they saw on the desks. It is funny how that works, but I'm just happy that students avail themselves of them. Many students at that age need help getting organized to write.

Assessments

Pre-Assessment BOY- type Writing Pre-assessment: During the first week of this unit, I will give students an initial writing assessment to give me feedback on skills that my students are lacking or need to enhance before we begin the unit. The writing assessment will be to choose an activity that they did over the summer that gave them joy and to describe the activity and why it brought them joy. After the assessment has been reviewed by me, I will implement mini lessons to be give either in small group or in whole class depending on the levels of need students have in areas that need improvement.

Use Rubrics for Writing Assessments. I will be introducing many opportunities for students to take agency of their assignments by involving them in producing the rubrics that will be used to grade student writing. I will post the Learning Objectives on the board and these objectives will be discussed with students. Small groups of students will tackle evidentiary ideas that will demonstrate the objectives. As a whole group class, we will narrow down the “look-fors.” The rubric that I will use is a single-point rubric. See addendum 2 for an example of the rubric.

Multiple forms of feedback – students will learn to deliver feedback to peers by using single point rubrics after students have helped develop the rubrics. Single point rubric will focus attention on approximately 3 look-fors per project and will facilitate the achievement of mastery throughout the curriculum of various writing skills. Single point rubrics allow for better feedback by giving the teacher the ability to point out areas of growth as well as pointing out specific areas of strength. For Student to Student feedback, sentence stems will be provided until students develop competency in feedback. Stems will include both comments for areas of growth as well as areas of strength. Students will only have to add the evidence that reflects the stem area. Teacher will assess student growth for both giving accurate feedback as well as assessing student writing with student developed rubric.

Writing using Prompts – There are writing prompts, and then there are guided writing prompts. Most teachers use some sort of prompt that looks more like: Write an essay about a time in your life when you learned a lesson. There is nothing wrong with this type of prompt and it is used on many national tests as well as being standard essay fair. The difference between this prompt and a guided prompt however, can make all the difference in teaching a student *how* to develop a piece of writing that has depth and interest. Students will be given guided prompts for each piece of writing. The prompts to be used will be of a guided nature and will provide students with directional guides of how to move through their essays. Prompts will have varying degrees of guidance to provide more support to less support as students become more comfortable with writing personal essay, creative nonfiction, and woven essay (See Addendum 3). As stated in other areas of this curriculum, students will have exemplar texts that will provide the types and styles of writing that students will be creating. These prompts will begin as highly scripted and gradually release and let student creativity and response become less scripted. Examples: Essay 1 will be in the form of poetry, using a fill in the blank poem “I Am From...” Students will weave a memoir using prompts from Nicole Walker during the 2020 Diné Institute which will help students to focus their writing on the details and then slowing pulling back to incorporate a wider view.

Classroom Activities

As has been stated many times, this unit is heavily built around the metaphor of Navajo weaving for writing. As has also been stated, this is especially useful for the targeted students who are generally Navajo and therefore quite familiar with this type of weaving. For those who may use this curriculum, perhaps there will be more appropriate metaphors for the type of writing that this unit investigates. There are many writing metaphors to be found, but because this particular type of writing is often referred to as the “braided essay,” it is quite possible to simply rely on the braid as a metaphor.

Classroom activities for this unit will follow a pattern for several weeks. The original intent of this curriculum was for a nine-week unit, however this will likely need alteration in a virtual reality world as it is taking more time than one might use in a full on classroom setting due to issues of connection, virtual classrooms such as Zoom or Big Blue Button/conference, and similar types of platforms. It should be stated that this year, at Navajo Preparatory we have a block schedule of two 90-minute classrooms per week. This also has caused a degree of delay in getting through lessons more quickly. In normal times, it would likely be possible to complete each lesson within 3 class periods however due to the every present issue(s) of lack of internet connectivity, not having an actual classroom environment where the teacher provide one on one and small group assistance, and to attempt to minimize undo stress on students experiencing emotional upset, the time frame will take longer and I am assuming that at least four class periods (2 weeks) will be necessary for most assignments.

Generally, students will be given an exemplar text to read on the first-class period,

Writing's Metaphor

Beginning of the Unit: Students will be given cardboard "looms" pre-strung with the warp yarn. The lesson will focus on how each part of the weaving process equates to a step in the writing process. Relatives of students and I will discuss the preparation process of setting up the loom. As the "experts" discuss their approach to the pattern of their weaving, students too will be given various colors of yarn that they can "weave" with. Students will have time to select colors, work on achieving patterns and experience the "creative" process of writing through yarn and weft. Discussions regarding "traditional" designs will lead to discussions of the role place has played in these designs as well as the traditional structures of essays and subsequently explore less traditional designs and structures. Students will title their design and all students will do a "gallery walk" to see peers work. Students will reflect on what they learned about writing at the end of the class and how it reflects the stages of weaving.

Routine for weeks beyond the first week: A. reading an exemplar text; B. Socratic discussion of exemplar text; C. putting pen to paper – guided writing prompt read to students by teacher as students write along.

A. Exemplar Texts:

In a normal year, I would have classes reading the exemplars aloud using some form of shared reading – popcorn, asking for volunteer readers, or some similar type of read aloud strategy although it must be stated that I never call on students to read personally. I find it too much of a "gotcha" move that tends to make students less inclined to volunteer their reading skills.

Reading the text together provides for students to practice their reading skills, but more than that, it creates an atmosphere not unlike a storyteller might create. Students find comradery in reading aloud, sometimes compete to be the best reader on that particular day, sometimes simply get to exercise their academic voice in a completely non-threatening environment.

Text 1 Week 1 – Lyons: The first reading assignment will be to read George Ella Lyon’s poem, “Where I am From” <http://www.georgeellalyon.com/where.html>.

Text 2 Week 3 – Kimmerer: Another exemplar to be used is: Robin Wall Kimmerer’s essay, “An Offering”, found in her book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*. The essay tells of a search for one’s connection to others and a simple ceremony’s connection to a people. I selected this essay because it is not overly long, but it does bring up discussion points about how a culture can be taken away, but not completely erased, because the roots grow deep and a natural need sometimes provides entry back to a culture even if not in the precisely correct way.

Text 3 Week 5 – Silko: Students will read an essay titled “The Border Patrol State” by Leslie Marmon Silko. The selection of this essay written some thirty years ago, is so germane to current events that have unfolded over the last two years, that it will provide the perfect exercise to involve students in a mini-research project to be woven.

Text 4 Week 7– Levchuk: Students will read Berenice Levchuk’s essay “Leaving Home for the Carlisle Indian School” in which Levchuk explores the Carlisle Barracks years after it had been a boarding school and now housed the Army War College. She provides historical information in her search to identify the graves of children who are buried on the grounds and weaves their stories with her own stories of her boarding school days.

B. *Socratic Discussions*

This type of discussion allows for students to plan and to think more deeply as they discuss text with one another through either guided discussions or with students taking over their own learning and facilitate the discussions collegially on their own. This allows a wider view as each student brings their prior knowledge, their backgrounds and their interpretations of text to the fore. In a face to face classroom setting, depending on class size, these discussions can be set up as a single circular desk configuration or as a fishbowl with two concentric circles, one an inner circle and one an outer circle. Fishbowl seminars are best for larger classes to split the roles from speakers to active listeners. For further information on these styles of discussions see: <https://sites.google.com/a/dcsdk12.org/etil-academycadre/fishbowl-socratic-seminar>.

Week 1 – Lyons: Students will discuss what we learn about Lyon’s from her poem, and what role place plays in the poem. Students will discuss how important is the role of place in their lives. How do we know?

Week 3– Kimmerer: Who’s Custom Is It Anyway? Analyzing the essay and discussing the strands of weave found. Can traditional custom bring us to our true home?

Week 5 – Silko: Targeting Skin Color is it Ever Okay? Discuss the erosion of freedoms based on race, skin color, or hair color and length?

Week 7 – Levchuk: Weaving Our History to Others? What can we learn about ourselves by looking at those who have gone before us?

C. Putting Pen to Paper: Guided Writing Prompts

The writing prompts used for this unit are very scripted and as students begin to understand the weaving of an essay, students will be able to vary from the script as they feel more comfortable. Those who still are learning their way, will no doubt stick more to the scripting. These scripts are shown in the appendix of this text. After each guided writing assignment, students will present their writing to the class by reading their writing in an “Author’s Chair” style. Students will discuss writing

Week 1 – Lyon:

Prompt: Students will then be given directions of a “Where I am From” poem template for their first writing assignment

<https://www.sausd.us/cms/lib/CA01000471/Centricity/Domain/3043/I%20Am%20From%20Poem.pdf>.

Week 3 – Kimmerer:

Prompt: Students will be given a prompt describing routines/custom and weaves interruptions with routines/customs and how interruptions change things, or sometimes make them better. (See Appendix 4 for the essay prompt)

Week 5 – Silko:

Prompt: This essay provides a perfect opportunity to look at weaving research into personal and creative nonfiction (see Appendix 5 for the writing prompt for this essay).

Week 7 – Levchuk:

Prompt: Students will be writing to a prompt in which they describe a place known to them where they go to think. Students will focus on something that they see in this place, some research on the thing that they notice, woven with a past memory.

Student Assessment Plan

Formative:

As you will note, that each section of this curriculum has at least two formative assessment within it with the Socratic Seminar(s). Students will write a reflection after each seminar where they will reflect on their contributions to the seminar, and what they learned as a result of the seminar. Where their views extended, changed, redeveloped and why or why not? Each individual writing piece is itself a formative assessment as it will be graded as a rough draft by the teacher. It is possible to, instead of grading the entire writing piece as a whole, to focus on one or two features of the writing so that teacher feedback is focused more on the student’s weaving the essay for example.

Summative:

The summative assessment, however; is for the student(s) to choose two of their writing pieces to peer review and to edit into a final draft. This will take them through the peer review and

rewriting process. Students final draft will be graded by the teacher for a summative grade on writing.

Once student(s) have a final draft for their two selections, the final draft will be submitted for inclusion in an electronic journal. Small group work: Students will take roles as editors to engage in creating the title and cover page, table of contents, a forward, and illustrations/artwork. This will be a final project grade based on final product plus student reflection of the assigned task.

Students will receive two grades for this assessment. One grade will be given for the two final drafts and another grade will be given for the small group work of creating the electronic Journal. Students will receive copies of the E-Journal to keep from this experience.

Alignment with Standards

The curriculum and student outcomes in this unit will address the following: Diné Standards and Benchmarks, IB TOK and CCSS:

Diné Character Building Standards 9th -12th

Diné Character Standards 9-12

Concept 1: Student will be able to use critical thinking to establish relationship with setting in writing. Through preparation and participation in Socratic Seminars students will explore the concepts of place within writing.

Diné Cultural Standards 9-12

Concept 1: Student will recognize and value their thoughts and personality as shown through their writing and reflections from Socratic Seminar.

PO1: Student will apply and practice what he/she has learned about self-respect and awareness as demonstrated through personal narrative and combined with research.

IB Theory of Knowledge (TOK)

TOK A. Analyzing Text: Students will analyze exemplar text and use these as models for self-expression is and how it reflects their point of view. Socratic Seminars will provide students with opportunities to view the essay in a 360° point of view

TOK B. Producing Text: Students will produce literature that reveals the nature and purpose of cultural expression and helps them to make connections to the histories of ideas by incorporating various culturally relevant text and creating text that weaves cultural histories with fiction.

TOK D. Using Language: Students will understand the concepts that modern society is fluid and based on the transference of social, historical, and cultural relevance through analyzing and creating writing that blends and weaves these concepts together.

Common Core State Standards (NM)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3](#)

Students will write woven narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3.a](#)

Students will engage and orient the readers by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3.b](#)

Students will develop their ability to use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters within their writing.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3.c](#)

Students will be able to use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3.d](#)

Students will use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.5](#)

Students will be able to analyze how an author's ideas or claims and provide evidence to support their analysis.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.6](#)

Students will identify the author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetorical devices.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.7](#)

Students will analyze by comparing and contrasting how different medium using the same or similar emphasize details in each account.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.8](#)

Students will evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, and assess the credibility of the reasoning.

Resources:

- Del Nero, J. R. (2017) Fun While Showing, Not Telling: crafting vivid detail in writing. *The Reading Teacher*. 71(1), 83-87
- Dollins, C. A. (2016). Crafting Creative NonFiction: From Close Reading to Close Writing. *The Reading Teacher*. 70(1), 49-58.
- Gerard, P. & Forche, C. (Eds). (2001). *Writing Creative Nonfiction: Instruction and insights from teachers of the Associated Writing Programs*. Cincinnati: Story Press.
- Hart, J. (2012). *Storycraft: The Complete Guide to Writing Narrative Nonfiction*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Kitto, S. (2013). Place, Writing, and Voice in Oral History. *Oral History Review*, 40(2), 410–412. <https://doi-org.libproxy.nau.edu/10.1093/ohr/oht089>
- IB organization. (2018, July 02). What is TOK? <https://www.ibo.org/programmes/diploma-programme/curriculum/theory-of-knowledge/what-is-tok>.
- Kimmerer, Robin. (2017). Speaking of Nature: Finding language that affirms our kinship with the natural world. *Orion Magazine*. <https://orionmagazine.org/article/speaking-of-nature/>
- Kimmerer, R. W. (2015). *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Canada: Milkweed Editions. (selected sections to be decided)
- Louis, Bojan. (June/July 2015). “Fear to Forget & Fear to Forgive: Or an Attempt at Writing a Travel Essay. *Chapter House Journal*. Singapore, Singapore. <https://chjournal.com/bojan-louis>.
- Lowell, B. and Rohde, J. (2010). *Reflections on the Art of Place Writing*. Geographical Review. 472-479. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2001.tb00503>.
- Moore, D. W. (2010), *Crafting the Personal Essay: A guide for writing and publishing creative nonfiction*. New York: Writer’s Digest Books.
- Ortiz Cofer, Judith. (2005). Silent Dancing. In Atwan, R. ed. *Convergences*. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s.
- Purpura, L. (2010). There Are Things Awry Here. *Orion Magazine*. <https://orionmagazine.org/article/there-are-things-awry-here/>
- Richgels, D. J. (2002) Writing Instruction. *The Reading Teacher*. 56(4), 364-368.
- Skeets, J. This Long Century: Mapping the field from the camera roll.
- Spinner, J. (2004). When “Macaroni and Cheese Is Good” Enough: Revelation in Creative Nonfiction. *Pedagogy*. 4(2), 316-320.
- Uehling, K. S. (2004). The Flow of River Writing: framing a Creative Nonfiction Class. *Pedagogy*. 4(2), 313-325.
- Walker, N. (2017). The Braided Essay as Social Justice Action: Between the lines. *Creative NonFiction*. Issue 64, Adaptation. Summer 2017.
- Wandersee, J. H. et al. (2006) A Writing Template for Probing Students’ Botanical Sense of Place. *The American Biology Teacher*. 68(7), 419-422. <https://online.ucpress.edu/abt/article-abstract/68/7/419/17602/A-Writing-Template-for-Probing-Students-Botanical?redirectedFrom=fulltext>
- Washuta, E. (2019). White Witchery. *Guernica*.
- Wood, J. R. (n.d.). Creative Writing in the Natural World: A framing. *Readwritethink.org NCTE*. <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/creative-writing-natural-world-30607.html?tab=2>

Potential Classroom Teacher Sources:

- Achebe, C. (2009). *The Education of a British-Protected Child: Essays*. Alfred A. Knopf: New York.
- Dillard, Anne. (1994). *Seeing*. Reprinted by *Anchor Books*. New York: NY.
- Harjo, J. (2013). *Crazy Brave: A Memoir*. (Kindle DX) New York: W.W. Norton & Co; Reprint edition. Retrieved from Amazon.com.
- Kimmerer, Robin. (2017). Speaking of Nature: Finding language that affirms our kinship with the natural world. *Orion Magazine*. <https://orionmagazine.org/article/speaking-of-nature/>
- Kincaid, Jamaica. (2013). On Seeing England for the First Time. Second ed. *The Language of Composition, Reading Writing Rhetoric*. New York: Bedford/St. Martins. 1006-1015.
- Levchuk, B. (1997). Leaving Home for the Carlisle Indian School. *Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary native women's writing of North America*. Harjo, J. et al, Eds. W. W. Norton & Co: New York. 175-186.
- Louis, Bojan. (June/July 2015). "Fear to Forget & Fear to Forgive: Or an Attempt at Writing a Travel Essay." *Chapter House Journal*. Singapore, Singapore.
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- Narayan, R. K. (1988). *A Writer's Nightmare: Selected essays 1958 to 1998*. Penguin Books: India
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- Walker, N. (2017). The Braided Essay as Social Justice Action: Between the lines. *Creative NonFiction*. Issue 64, Adaptation. Summer 2017.

Exemplar Text Resources (actually selected for use in this Curriculum Unit. Text were narrowed down due to the need to reduce the number of text from 10 to 5 as a result of the move to a virtual classroom experience.

- Kimmerer, R. W. (2015). *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Canada: Milkweed Editions. (selected sections to be decided)
- Levchuk, B. (1997). Leaving Home for the Carlisle Indian School. *Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary native women's writing of North America*. Harjo, J. et al, Eds. W. W. Norton & Co: New York. 175-186.
- Lyon, G. E. (nd) Where I am From. *Smithsonian Education.org*
http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/professional_development/workshops/writing/george_ella_lyon.pdf
- Silko, L. M. (1996). The Border Patrol State. *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of Spirit*. Touchstone: New York. 115-123.

Appendix 1

Writing Assessment:

Directions to students: I am giving you a short little passage to read. Your job, after reading the passage, is to write me a passage with the same theme. Try to write this similarly to the passage you read. This is not a test, this is not for a grade. The purpose of this passage is to give me an idea of your writing style. Remember you are giving me your take on the information shared in the passage. Do not copy it word for word.

Passage from: Rief, L. (2018). *The Quickwrite Handbook*. Heinemann: Portsmouth, NH. 20.

The screenshot shows a PDF document titled "Rambling Autobiography.pdf" in an Acrobat Reader window. The document is displayed at 150% zoom. On the left side, there is a "TRY THIS" section with the following text: "TRY THIS (as quickly and as specifically as you can for 2-3 minutes)". Below this, there are three bullet points: "Write your own 'rambling autobiography.' Let each new phrase take you in any direction.", "If one phrase tends to send you in a direction about one topic, jot down all that comes to mind.", and "If you are stuck, and not yet putting words to paper, start with one of the phrases in my piece: 'I was born at . . . I have lied to . . . One of my friends once said . . .' Change anything to make it yours." The main body of the document is a sample paragraph titled "Rambling Autobiography" by Linda Rief. The paragraph reads: "I was born at the height of World War II just as Anne Frank was forced into Bergen-Belsen by the Nazis. I adore Brigham's vanilla ice cream in a sugar cone and dipped in chocolate jimmies. October is my favorite month, when the air turns green pear crisp. I roll down the car window and listen to the maples turn apple red and the oaks pumpkin orange. I bought my favorite jacket for a dime at the Methodist Church rummage sale. I have lied to my parents. With four high school friends I cut down a tree in the town forest for our Holiday Dance. I didn't know until the police arrived at the high school that each tree had been dedicated to a WW II veteran. I never read a book for pleasure until I was 38 years old. One of my students once leaned in to me in an interview and said, 'My mother's having a baby; this is the one she wants.' When I was 12 I set the organdy curtains in our bathroom on fire, playing with matches. My not-so-secret place to hide was high in the maple tree in our front yard where I could spy on neighbors. I can still smell wet white sheets pulled through the ringer washer when I think of Grammy Mac. I dated Edmundo in high school because it angered my father. I fainted when I heard the sound of the zipper as the mortician closed the body bag holding my mother. I gave birth to twin sons. I once had dinner with Judy Blume. I am a teacher who writes. I want to be a writer who teaches." The document is displayed in a window with a standard macOS interface, including a menu bar at the top and a dock at the bottom.

Appendix 2 – Sample Braided Essay

(highlights represent the various plaits that form the braids of the essay)

Total Eclipse

By Annie Dillard

from *The Atlantic* August 8, 2017

Ever since it was first published in 1982, readers—including this one—have thrilled to “Total Eclipse,” Annie Dillard’s masterpiece of literary nonfiction, which describes her personal experience of a solar eclipse in Washington State. It first appeared in Dillard’s landmark collection, Teaching a Stone to Talk, and was recently republished in The Abundance, a new anthology of her work. The Atlantic is pleased to offer the essay in full, here, until the end of August. - Ross Andersen

It had been like dying, that sliding down the mountain pass. It had been like the death of someone, irrational, that sliding down the mountain pass and into the region of dread. It was like slipping into fever, or falling down that hole in sleep from which you wake yourself whimpering. We had crossed the mountains that day, and now we were in a strange place—a hotel in central Washington, in a town near Yakima. The eclipse we had traveled here to see would occur early in the next morning.

I lay in bed. My husband, Gary, was reading beside me. I lay in bed and looked at the painting on the hotel room wall. It was a print of a detailed and lifelike painting of a smiling clown’s head, made out of vegetables. It was a painting of the sort which you do not intend to look at, and which, alas, you never forget. Some tasteless fate presses it upon you; it becomes part of the complex interior junk you carry with you wherever you go. Two years have passed since the total eclipse of which I write. During those years I have forgotten, I assume, a great many things I wanted to remember—but I have not forgotten that clown painting or its lunatic setting in the old hotel. The clown was bald. Actually, he wore a clown’s tight rubber wig, painted white; this stretched over the top of his skull, which was a cabbage. His hair was bunches of baby carrots. Inset in his white clown makeup, and in his cabbage skull, were his small and laughing human eyes. The clown’s glance was like the glance of Rembrandt in some of the self-portraits: lively, knowing, deep, and loving. The crinkled shadows around his eyes were string beans. His eyebrows were parsley. Each of his ears was a broad bean. His thin, joyful lips were red chili

peppers; between his lips were wet rows of human teeth and a suggestion of a real tongue. The clown print was framed in gilt and glassed.

To put ourselves in the path of the total eclipse, that day we had driven five hours inland from the Washington coast, where we lived. When we tried to cross the Cascades range, an avalanche had blocked the pass.

A slope's worth of snow blocked the road; traffic backed up. Had the avalanche buried any cars that morning? We could not learn. This highway was the only winter road over the mountains. We waited as highway crews bulldozed a passage through the avalanche. With two-by-fours and walls of plywood, they erected a one-way, roofed tunnel through the avalanche. We drove through the avalanche tunnel, crossed the pass, and descended several thousand feet into central Washington and the broad Yakima valley, about which we knew only that it was orchard country. As we lost altitude, the snows disappeared; our ears popped; the trees changed, and in the trees were strange birds. I watched the landscape innocently, like a fool, like a diver in the rapture of the deep who plays on the bottom while his air runs out.

The hotel lobby was a dark, derelict room, narrow as a corridor, and seemingly without air. We waited on a couch while the manager vanished upstairs to do something unknown to our room. Beside us on an overstuffed chair, absolutely motionless, was a platinum-blonde woman in her forties wearing a black silk dress and a strand of pearls. Her long legs were crossed; she supported her head on her fist. At the dim far end of the room, their backs toward us, sat six bald old men in their shirtsleeves, around a loud television. Two of them seemed asleep. They were drunks. "Number six!" cried the man on television, "Number six!"

On the broad lobby desk, lighted and bubbling, was a ten-gallon aquarium containing one large fish; the fish tilted up and down in its water. Against the long opposite wall sang a live canary in its cage. Beneath the cage, among spilled millet seeds on the carpet, were a decorated child's sand bucket and matching sand shovel.

Now the alarm was set for 6. I lay awake remembering an article I had read downstairs in the lobby, in an engineering magazine. The article was about gold mining.

In South Africa, in India, and in South Dakota, the gold mines extend so deeply into the Earth's crust that they are hot. The rock walls burn the miners' hands. The companies have to air-condition the mines; if the air conditioners break, the miners die. The elevators in the mine shafts run very slowly, down, and up, so the miners' ears will not pop in their skulls. When the miners return to the surface, their faces are deathly pale.

Early the next morning we checked out. It was February 26, 1979, a Monday morning. We would drive out of town, find a hilltop, watch the eclipse, and then drive back over the mountains and home to the coast. How familiar things are here; how adept we are; how smoothly and professionally we check out! I had forgotten the clown's smiling head and the hotel lobby as if

they had never existed. Gary put the car in gear and off we went, as off we have gone to a hundred other adventures.

It was dawn when we found a highway out of town and drove into the unfamiliar countryside. By the growing light we could see a band of cirrostratus clouds in the sky. Later the rising sun would clear these clouds before the eclipse began. We drove at random until we came to a range of unfenced hills. We pulled off the highway, bundled up, and climbed one of these hills.

* * *

The hill was 500 feet high. Long winter-killed grass covered it, as high as our knees. We climbed and rested, sweating in the cold; we passed clumps of bundled people on the hillside who were setting up telescopes and fiddling with cameras. The top of the hill stuck up in the middle of the sky. We tightened our scarves and looked around.

East of us rose another hill like ours. Between the hills, far below, 13 was the highway which threaded south into the valley. This was the Yakima valley; I had never seen it before. It is justly famous for its beauty, like every planted valley. It extended south into the horizon, a distant dream of a valley, a Shangri-la. All its hundreds of low, golden slopes bore orchards. Among the orchards were towns, and roads, and plowed and fallow fields. Through the valley wandered a thin, shining river; from the river extended fine, frozen irrigation ditches. Distance blurred and blued the sight, so that the whole valley looked like a thickness or sediment at the bottom of the sky. Directly behind us was more sky, and empty lowlands blued by distance, and Mount Adams. Mount Adams was an enormous, snow-covered volcanic cone rising flat, like so much scenery.

Now the sun was up. We could not see it; but the sky behind the band of clouds was yellow, and, far down the valley, some hillside orchards had lighted up. More people were parking near the highway and climbing the hills. It was the West. All of us rugged individualists were wearing knit caps and blue nylon parkas. People were climbing the nearby hills and setting up shop in clumps among the dead grasses. It looked as though we had all gathered on hilltops to pray for the world on its last day. It looked as though we had all crawled out of spaceships and were preparing to assault the valley below. It looked as though we were scattered on hilltops at dawn to sacrifice virgins, make rain, set stone stelae in a ring. There was no place out of the wind. The straw grasses banged our legs.

Up in the sky where we stood the air was lusterless yellow. To the west the sky was blue. Now the sun cleared the clouds. We cast rough shadows on the blowing grass; freezing, we waved our arms. Near the sun, the sky was bright and colorless. There was nothing to see.

It began with no ado. It was odd that such a well advertised public event should have no starting gun, no overture, no introductory speaker. I should have known right then that I was out of my depth. Without pause or preamble, silent as orbits, a piece of the sun went away. We looked at it through welders' goggles. A piece of the sun was missing; in its place we saw empty sky.

I had seen a partial eclipse in 1970. A partial eclipse is very interesting. It bears almost no relation to a total eclipse. Seeing a partial eclipse bears the same relation to seeing a total eclipse as kissing a man does to marrying him, or as flying in an airplane does to falling out of an airplane. Although the one experience precedes the other, it in no way prepares you for it. During a partial eclipse the sky does not darken—not even when 94 percent of the sun is hidden. Nor does the sun, seen colorless through protective devices, seem terribly strange. We have all seen a sliver of light in the sky; we have all seen the crescent moon by day. However, during a partial eclipse the air does indeed get cold, precisely as if someone were standing between you and the fire. And blackbirds do fly back to their roosts. I had seen a partial eclipse before, and here was another.

What you see in an eclipse is entirely different from what you know. It is especially different for those of us whose grasp of astronomy is so frail that, given a flashlight, a grapefruit, two oranges, and 15 years, we still could not figure out which way to set the clocks for daylight saving time. Usually it is a bit of a trick to keep your knowledge from blinding you. But during an eclipse it is easy. What you see is much more convincing than any wild-eyed theory you may know.

You may read that the moon has something to do with eclipses. I have never seen the moon yet. You do not see the moon. So near the sun, it is as completely invisible as the stars are by day. What you see before your eyes is the sun going through phases. It gets narrower and narrower, as the waning moon does, and, like the ordinary moon, it travels alone in the simple sky. The sky is of course background. It does not appear to eat the sun; it is far behind the sun. The sun simply shaves away; gradually, you see less sun and more sky.

The sky's blue was deepening, but there was no darkness. The sun was a wide crescent, like a segment of tangerine. The wind freshened and blew steadily over the hill. The eastern hill across the highway grew dusky and sharp. The towns and orchards in the valley to the south were dissolving into the blue light. Only the thin river held a trickle of sun.

Now the sky to the west deepened to indigo, a color never seen. A dark sky usually loses color. This was a saturated, deep indigo, up in the air. Stuck up into that unworldly sky was the cone of Mount Adams, and the alpenglow was upon it. The alpenglow is that red light of sunset which holds out on snowy mountaintops long after the valleys and tablelands are dimmed. "Look at Mount Adams," I said, and that was the last sane moment I remember.

I turned back to the sun. It was going. The sun was going, and the world was wrong. The grasses were wrong; they were platinum. Their every detail of stem, head, and blade shone lightless and artificially distinct as an art photographer's platinum print. This color has never been seen on Earth. The hues were metallic; their finish was matte. The hillside was a 19th-century tinted photograph from which the tints had faded. All the people you see in the photograph, distinct and detailed as their faces look, are now dead. The sky was navy blue. My hands were silver. All the distant hills' grasses were finespun metal which the wind laid down. I was watching a faded color print of a movie filmed in the Middle Ages; I was standing in it, by some mistake. I was

standing in a movie of hillside grasses filmed in the Middle Ages. I missed my own century, the people I knew, and the real light of day.

I looked at Gary. He was in the film. Everything was lost. He was a platinum print, a dead artist's version of life. I saw on his skull the darkness of night mixed with the colors of day. My mind was going out; my eyes were receding the way galaxies recede to the rim of space. Gary was light-years away, gesturing inside a circle of darkness, down the wrong end of a telescope. He smiled as if he saw me; the stringy crinkles around his eyes moved. The sight of him, familiar and wrong, was something I was remembering from centuries hence, from the other side of death: Yes, that is the way he used to look, when we were living. When it was our generation's turn to be alive. I could not hear him; the wind was too loud. Behind him the sun was going. We had all started down a chute of time. At first it was pleasant; now there was no stopping it. Gary was chuting away across space, moving and talking and catching my eye, chuting down the long corridor of separation. The skin on his face moved like thin bronze plating that would peel.

The grass at our feet was wild barley. It was the wild einkorn wheat which grew on the hilly flanks of the Zagros Mountains, above the Euphrates valley, above the valley of the river we called River. We harvested the grass with stone sickles, I remember. We found the grasses on the hillsides; we built our shelter beside them and cut them down. That is how he used to look then, that one, moving and living and catching my eye, with the sky so dark behind him, and the wind blowing. God save our life.

From all the hills came screams. A piece of sky beside the crescent sun was detaching. It was a loosened circle of evening sky, suddenly lighted from the back. It was an abrupt black body out of nowhere; it was a flat disk; it was almost over the sun. That is when there were screams. At once this disk of sky slid over the sun like a lid. The sky snapped over the sun like a lens cover. The hatch in the brain slammed. Abruptly it was dark night, on the land and in the sky. In the night sky was a tiny ring of light. The hole where the sun belongs is very small. A thin ring of light marked its place. There was no sound. The eyes dried, the arteries drained, the lungs hushed. There was no world. We were the world's dead people rotating and orbiting around and around, embedded in the planet's crust, while the Earth rolled down. Our minds were light-years distant, forgetful of almost everything. Only an extraordinary act of will could recall to us our former, living selves and our contexts in matter and time. We had, it seems, loved the planet and loved our lives, but could no longer remember the way of them. We got the light wrong. In the sky was something that should not be there. In the black sky was a ring of light. It was a thin ring, an old, thin silver wedding band, an old, worn ring. It was an old wedding band in the sky, or a morsel of bone. There were stars. It was all over.

* * *

It is now that the temptation is strongest to leave these regions. We have seen enough; let's go. Why burn our hands any more than we have to? But two years have passed; the price of gold has risen. I return to the same buried alluvial beds and pick through the strata again.

I saw, early in the morning, the sun diminish against a backdrop of sky. I saw a circular piece of that sky appear, suddenly detached, blackened, and backlighted; from nowhere it came and overlapped the sun. It did not look like the moon. It was enormous and black. If I had not read that it was the moon, I could have seen the sight a hundred times and never thought of the moon once. (If, however, I had not read that it was the moon—if, like most of the world's people throughout time, I had simply glanced up and seen this thing—then I doubtless would not have speculated much, but would have, like Emperor Louis of Bavaria in 840, simply died of fright on the spot.) It did not look like a dragon, although it looked more like a dragon than the moon. It looked like a lens cover, or the lid of a pot. It materialized out of thin air—black, and flat, and sliding, outlined in flame.

Seeing this black body was like seeing a mushroom cloud. The heart screeched. The meaning of the sight overwhelmed its fascination. It obliterated meaning itself. If you were to glance out one day and see a row of mushroom clouds rising on the horizon, you would know at once that what you were seeing, remarkable as it was, was intrinsically not worth remarking. No use running to tell anyone. Significant as it was, it did not matter a whit. For what is significance? It is significance for people. No people, no significance. This is all I have to tell you.

In the deeps are the violence and terror of which psychology has warned us. But if you ride these monsters deeper down, if you drop with them farther over the world's rim, you find what our sciences cannot locate or name, the substrate, the ocean or matrix or ether which buoys the rest, which gives goodness its power for good, and evil. Its power for evil, the unified field: our complex and inexplicable caring for each other, and for our life together here. This is given. It is not learned.

The world which lay under darkness and stillness following the closing of the lid was not the world we know. The event was over. Its devastation lay around about us. The clamoring mind and heart stilled, almost indifferent, certainly disembodied, frail, and exhausted. The hills were hushed, obliterated. Up in the sky, like a crater from some distant cataclysm, was a hollow ring.

You have seen photographs of the sun taken during a total eclipse. The corona fills the print. All of those photographs were taken through telescopes. The lenses of telescopes and cameras can no more cover the breadth and scale of the visual array than language can cover the breadth and simultaneity of internal experience. Lenses enlarge the sight, omit its context, and make of it a pretty and sensible picture, like something on a Christmas card. I assure you, if you send any shepherds a Christmas card on which is printed a three-by-three photograph of the angel of the Lord, the glory of the Lord, and a multitude of the heavenly host, they will not be sore afraid. More fearsome things can come in envelopes. More moving photographs than those of the sun's corona can appear in magazines. But I pray you will never see anything more awful in the sky.

You see the wide world swaddled in darkness; you see a vast breadth of hilly land, and an enormous, distant, blackened valley; you see towns' lights, a river's path, and blurred portions of your hat and scarf; you see your husband's face looking like an early black-and-white film; and you see a sprawl of black sky and blue sky together, with unfamiliar stars in it, some barely

visible bands of cloud, and over there, a small white ring. The ring is as small as one goose in a flock of migrating geese—if you happen to notice a flock of migrating geese. It is one-360th part of the visible sky. The sun we see is less than half the diameter of a dime held at arm's length.

The Crab Nebula, in the constellation Taurus, looks, through binoculars, like a smoke ring. It is a star in the process of exploding. Light from its explosion first reached the Earth in 1054; it was a supernova then, and so bright it shone in the daytime. Now it is not so bright, but it is still exploding. It expands at the rate of 70 million miles a day. It is interesting to look through binoculars at something expanding 70 million miles a day. It does not budge. Its apparent size does not increase. Photographs of the Crab Nebula taken 15 years ago seem identical to photographs of it taken yesterday. Some lichens are similar. Botanists have measured some ordinary lichens twice, at 50-year intervals, without detecting any growth at all. And yet their cells divide; they live.

The small ring of light was like these things—like a ridiculous lichen up in the sky, like a perfectly still explosion 4,200 light-years away: It was interesting, and lovely, and in witless motion, and it had nothing to do with anything.

It had nothing to do with anything. The sun was too small, and too cold, and too far away, to keep the world alive. The white ring was not enough. It was feeble and worthless. It was as useless as a memory; it was as off-kilter and hollow and wretched as a memory.

When you try your hardest to recall someone's face, or the look of a place, you see in your mind's eye some vague and terrible sight such as this. It is dark; it is insubstantial; it is all wrong.

The white ring and the saturated darkness made the Earth and the sky look as they must look in the memories of the careless dead. What I saw, what I seemed to be standing in, was all the wrecked light that the memories of the dead could shed upon the living world. We had all died in our boots on the hilltops of Yakima, and were alone in eternity. Empty space stoppered our eyes and mouths; we cared for nothing. We remembered our living days wrong. With great effort we had remembered some sort of circular light in the sky—but only the outline. Oh, and then the orchard trees withered, the ground froze, the glaciers slid down the valleys and overlapped the towns. If there had ever been people on Earth, nobody knew it. The dead had forgotten those they had loved. The dead were parted one from the other and could no longer remember the faces and lands they had loved in the light. They seemed to stand on darkened hilltops, looking down.

* * *

We teach our children one thing only, as we were taught: to wake up. We teach our children to look alive there, to join by words and activities the life of human culture on the planet's crust. As adults we are almost all adept at waking up. We have so mastered the transition we have forgotten we ever learned it. Yet it is a transition we make a hundred times a day, as, like so many will-less dolphins, we plunge and surface, lapse and emerge. We live half our waking lives and all of our sleeping lives in some private, useless, and insensible waters we never mention or

recall. Useless, I say. Valueless, I might add—until someone hauls their wealth up to the surface and into the wide-awake city, in a form that people can use.

I do not know how we got to the restaurant. Like Roethke, “I take my waking slow.” Gradually I seemed more or less alive, and already forgetful. It was now almost 9 in the morning. It was the day of a solar eclipse in central Washington, and a fine adventure for everyone. The sky was clear; there was a fresh breeze out of the north.

The restaurant was a roadside place with tables and booths. The other eclipse-watchers were there. From our booth we could see their cars’ California license plates, their University of Washington parking stickers. Inside the restaurant we were all eating eggs or waffles; people were fairly shouting and exchanging enthusiasms, like fans after a World Series game. Did you see ... ? Did you see ... ? Then somebody said something which knocked me for a loop.

A college student, a boy in a blue parka who carried a Hasselblad, said to us, “Did you see that little white ring? It looked like a Life Saver. It looked like a Life Saver up in the sky.”

And so it did. The boy spoke well. He was a walking alarm clock. I myself had at that time no access to such a word. He could write a sentence, and I could not. I grabbed that Life Saver and rode it to the surface. And I had to laugh. I had been dumbstruck on the Euphrates River, I had been dead and gone and grieving, all over the sight of something which, if you could claw your way up to that level, you would grant looked very much like a Life Saver. It was good to be back among people so clever; it was good to have all the world’s words at the mind’s disposal, so the mind could begin its task. All those things for which we have no words are lost. The mind—the culture—has two little tools, grammar and lexicon: a decorated sand bucket and a matching shovel. With these we bluster about the continents and do all the world’s work. With these we try to save our very lives.

There are a few more things to tell from this level, the level of the restaurant. One is the old joke about breakfast. “It can never be satisfied, the mind, never.” Wallace Stevens wrote that, and in the long run he was right. The mind wants to live forever, or to learn a very good reason why not. The mind wants the world to return its love, or its awareness; the mind wants to know all the world, and all eternity, and God. The mind’s sidekick, however, will settle for two eggs over easy.

The dear, stupid body is as easily satisfied as a spaniel. And, incredibly, the simple spaniel can lure the brawling mind to its dish. It is everlastingly funny that the proud, metaphysically ambitious, clamoring mind will hush if you give it an egg.

Further: While the mind reels in deep space, while the mind grieves or fears or exults, the workaday senses, in ignorance or idiocy, like so many computer terminals printing out market prices while the world blows up, still transcribe their little data and transmit them to the warehouse in the skull. Later, under the tranquilizing influence of fried eggs, the mind can sort through this data. The restaurant was a halfway house, a decompression chamber. There I remembered a few things more.

The deepest, and most terrifying, was this: I have said that I heard screams. (I have since read that screaming, with hysteria, is a common reaction even to expected total eclipses.) People on all the hillsides, including, I think, myself, screamed when the black body of the moon detached from the sky and rolled over the sun. But something else was happening at that same instant, and it was this, I believe, which made us scream.

The second before the sun went out we saw a wall of dark shadow come speeding at us. We no sooner saw it than it was upon us, like thunder. It roared up the valley. It slammed our hill and knocked us out. It was the monstrous swift shadow cone of the moon. I have since read that this wave of shadow moves 1,800 miles an hour. Language can give no sense of this sort of speed—1,800 miles an hour. It was 195 miles wide. No end was in sight—you saw only the edge. It rolled at you across the land at 1,800 miles an hour, hauling darkness like plague behind it. Seeing it, and knowing it was coming straight for you, was like feeling a slug of anesthetic shoot up your arm. If you think very fast, you may have time to think, “Soon it will hit my brain.” You can feel the deadness race up your arm; you can feel the appalling, inhuman speed of your own blood. We saw the wall of shadow coming, and screamed before it hit.

This was the universe about which we have read so much and never before felt: the universe as a clockwork of loose spheres flung at stupefying, unauthorized speeds. How could anything moving so fast not crash, not veer from its orbit amok like a car out of control on a turn?

Less than two minutes later, when the sun emerged, the trailing edge of the shadow cone sped away. It coursed down our hill and raced eastward over the plain, faster than the eye could believe; it swept over the plain and dropped over the planet’s rim in a twinkling. It had clobbered us, and now it roared away. We blinked in the light. It was as though an enormous, loping god in the sky had reached down and slapped the Earth’s face.

Something else, something more ordinary, came back to me along about the third cup of coffee. During the moments of totality, it was so dark that drivers on the highway below turned on their cars’ headlights. We could see the highway’s route as a strand of lights. It was bumper-to-bumper down there. It was 8:15 in the morning, Monday morning, and people were driving into Yakima to work. That it was as dark as night, and eerie as hell, an hour after dawn, apparently meant that in order to see to drive to work, people had to use their headlights. Four or five cars pulled off the road. The rest, in a line at least five miles long, drove to town. The highway ran between hills; the people could not have seen any of the eclipsed sun at all. Yakima will have another total eclipse in 2086. Perhaps, in 2086, businesses will give their employees an hour off.

From the restaurant we drove back to the coast. The highway crossing the Cascades range was open. We drove over the mountain like old pros. We joined our places on the planet’s thin crust; it held. For the time being, we were home free.

Early that morning at 6, when we had checked out, the six bald men were sitting on folding chairs in the dim hotel lobby. The television was on. Most of them were awake. You might drown in your own spittle, God knows, at any time; you might wake up dead in a small hotel, a cabbage head watching TV while snows pile up in the passes, watching TV while the chili

peppers smile and the moon passes over the sun and nothing changes and nothing is learned because you have lost your bucket and shovel and no longer care. What if you regain the surface and open your sack and find, instead of treasure, a beast which jumps at you? Or you may not come back at all. The winches may jam, the scaffolding buckle, the air conditioning collapse. You may glance up one day and see by your headlamp the canary keeled over in its cage. You may reach into a cranny for pearls and touch a moray eel. You yank on your rope; it is too late.

Apparently people share a sense of these hazards, for when the total eclipse ended, an odd thing happened.

When the sun appeared as a blinding bead on the ring's side, the eclipse was over. The black lens cover appeared again, back-lighted, and slid away. At once the yellow light made the sky blue again; the black lid dissolved and vanished. The real world began there. I remember now: We all hurried away. We were born and bored at a stroke. We rushed down the hill. We found our car; we saw the other people streaming down the hillsides; we joined the highway traffic and drove away.

We never looked back. It was a general vamoose, and an odd one, for when we left the hill, the sun was still partially eclipsed—a sight rare enough, and one which, in itself, we would probably have driven five hours to see. But enough is enough. One turns at last even from glory itself with a sigh of relief. From the depths of mystery, and even from the heights of splendor, we bounce back and hurry for the latitudes of home.

This post is excerpted from Dillard's book [The Abundance: Narrative Essays Old and New](#). Copyright © 2016 by Annie Dillard. Published by arrangement with Ecco, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

Appendix 3

Three Point Rubric - Editable

Standard:	

Working toward Proficiency Areas that need work	Proficient (3) Meeting Standards	Exceeds expectations Beyond expectations Exceeding Standards
	<p>Standard 4 – Writing Technique -Word choice reflects grade appropriate vocabulary. Details help the reader understand the theme, setting, and purpose.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Score: ____</p>	
	<p>Standard 4 – Structure -Writing structure reflects the weaving of both creativity and research. Evidence of research is present.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Score: ____</p>	
	<p>Standard 4 – Mechanics of Writing Strong grasp of standard writing conventions (spelling, capitalization, and punctuation) Correct sentence structure and variety is used.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Score: ____</p>	

What are you proud of in your essay?

What area do you feel is your weakest area?

Appendix 4

Writing Prompt for Kimmerer

Prompt: What are your usual morning routines, habits, ceremonies that you do throughout your week? I will provide students with an orally delivered guided writing prompt that weaves the student's morning tradition(s) (customs, habits, routines) with other things, interruptions, changes to the routine etc.

Introduce someone new into the routine – describe this person, who are they, what do they look like? Were you expecting them? Do you know them? How does their appearance change your routine?

Next what is happening outside? Do you hear something expected? Unexpected? What is it? How does this affect the visitor? You? Where are you in your routine? Is it finished? What is said? What is your reaction? Does the other person react? Do they go on their own way?

Go back to your morning routine. What has altered? How do you feel? Are you resentful that your routine was broken? Or was your routine better due to the diversion? Do you return to your routine? Or do you begin something new?

After finishing with their writing, students will share their writing within small groups. Students will peer edit one another's work or offer advice on ways to revise or improve the writing after all students have shared their initial draft. Students will make suggestions on which students should share their writing with the whole class

Appendix 5

Writing Prompt for Silko

developed by Nicole Walker Essay

Writing Assignment for Specificity of Place

For our last assignment in this unit write a longer essay of about 4 to 5 pages (or about 2000 words) about place. I'd like you to think deeply about a place. I would also like you to weave in some research so your essay toggles between personal narrative and deeply informative work.

Although I want you to feel free to vary this prompt, I'm going to provide some very specific advice.

1A) Remember a specific place. It could again be a kitchen. It could be a garden plot. A trail. A barn. A restaurant. Use the slow descriptive methods I prompted you for the kitchen. Look at the tiny details of the ground. Or do you see at eye level. Sit down on the ground. Now what do you see at eye level? Zoom in? What do you see at worm level? What do you smell? What are you standing or sitting on? What do you touch?

1B) Incorporate some research. It could be research relevant to this place—research can include interviews, family history, investigation of property rights, mineral rights, animal connections. You can also choose to widen the braid and discuss something not as yet related to the first braid like the difference between black and brown bears, the scientific characteristics of yeast, the history of PVC pipe. Just remember, if you pick something wildly afield, eventually you're going to have to bring it together.

2A) Return to your place. This time, zoom out a little. Give us the bird's eye view. The raven on a telephone pole eye view. The down-the-road point of view. The lying on the ground looking up point of view. What do you see? What do you compare it to? When is the last time you were here? What is different now than then?

2B) Return to your research. Find one characteristic in your "place" that has something to do with your research. It might be one word: a noun, an adjective, a verb. Explore the word that is connected. Research the etymology of your word? Do you find new connections? Do you find new words to research?

3A) Return to your place. Remember someone else being there. Or perhaps someone is coming. Why are they there? What do they want? Can you get them to look at the ground with you? The wood or the bark? The shape of the leaves? The grout in the tile. Show them something surprising.

3B) Return to your research. State a number of facts. Question one fact? Is there one detail—a number, a tiny observation, an aside the researcher states that pulls you in a different direction?

4A) Return to your place. Is there a door? Open it. A window? Open that. Is there something manmade that's interesting? Is there something manmade that is boring? Tell us about it in your most natural, colloquial voice.

4B) If there's a work cited, check out another source. Read about the research from that point of view. If this research contradicts or goes in another direction, tell us your feelings about it. Does this new research annoy you? Does the old research make you mad? Do you feel loyalty to anyone's research? What do you know about the researchers?

5A) Pay attention to your body. What are your feet doing in this place? How does your hair move? Is your skin dry? Are your fingernails splitting? Do you have hangnails? How are your knees. Are your clothes more or less annoying than the researchers. Again, find a word that you wrote in the first section and think about how it might connect to this body section.

5B) And whatever your research, what is its body? If the research is about trees, how does the tree respond to wind? To dry air? What is the tree equivalent of hangnail? You're starting to bring the stories together now. Hit a couple more beats through the body of the subject. If you're writing about bears, why do they stand up? If you're writing about uranium, why is its body yellow? What kind of body does a mineral have? Does it only make sense when we see its impact on human bodies?

6A) Return to your place but put your research inside it. What happens to the place now? What does the bear add? What does it take? The uranium? The tree? The mushroom? The loaf of bread? For everything that's added, something is lost.

6B) Extend 6A) into your research. What would happen if this place disappeared? How would whatever you're researching be affected? Is the research and the place a metaphor for each other? What do you hear in this place now? What do you smell? Return to that first paragraph and use some of the verbs, colors and smells to describe something new. Something we haven't seen before although maybe you, the writer, have known it was there all along.

Appendix 6

Levchuk Essay Prompt

Describe a place where you love to go when you need to just sit and think, or maybe when you feel most comfortable. Look closely at the place. Describe what you see in detail? Is it a living thing? Is it a manmade thing? Is it simply a piece of nature? Why is it there? Should it be there? Do you think someone put it there?

What do you know about the thing? Research it and discover more about this object/thing? What can it do? Does it have mystical properties? Is it a natural phenomenon? Does it acknowledge you? Do you pick it up? Has it always been there? Describe more that you discover through your research.

Remember a time when you were at this place before. What prompted you to go there? What were you thinking about when you were there? Were you alone? Did you see anyone else? What did you do there?

Return to the place and describe it from a different point of view? Stand up and look as far as you can, what else can you see? Which way are you looking? Does this change how you are feeling? What has happened to the thing you found there earlier?

Go back to your research. Or, did something else catch your eye? What else in that place are you curious about? What else could you research? Do other people come to this place? When? Why? What do you think they would tell you about this spot?

Continue to weave these strands together for another few paragraphs until you have two to three pages of writing.