



Grade 6 Informational Writing Guide

Student Pages for Print or Projection

SECTION 1: Recognizing Genre/Organization

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Name _____

NARRATIVE, INFORMATIONAL OR OPINION?

Read the following paragraphs. Determine whether each paragraph is Narrative, Informational or Opinion. Circle your response.

1. The canoe started to rock back and forth as the wind swept it farther and farther from shore. "Paddle," Darcy called from the beach. "Paddle harder, Rachel! Fight it!" I heard the panic in her voice and paddled as hard as I could, but it was a losing battle. I was no match for the powerful winds and rising white-capped waves that swept over the lake. One chilly gust later, I lost sight of shore.

Narrative

Informational

Opinion

2. I am opposed to competitive team sports like soccer and football. As everybody knows, the pressure to win makes it nearly impossible to enjoy the game. Many players have such a drive to win that they risk painful injuries such as torn muscles and fractured bones in their quest to score the next point. It is easy to understand how the overwhelming focus on winning can lead to cheating. I much prefer taking long, relaxing hikes and bike rides.

Narrative

Informational

Opinion

3. While the Pony Express lasted less than two years, it was a truly amazing mail service for the early settlers of the American west. Young, tough and adventurous, the riders of the Pony Express traveled the 1,900 mile route from Missouri to California in 9-10 days. Even in the winter, traveling over the icy Rocky Mountains and the steep Sierra Nevada range, they made the journey in no more than 12 days!

Narrative

Informational

Opinion

Name _____

INFORMATIONAL, OPINION OR RESPONSE TO TEXT?

Read the following paragraphs and determine whether each paragraph is an example of Informational, Opinion or Response to Text writing. Circle your response.

1. The remotest forests of Canada and the northern United States are the realm of the beautiful and secretive Canadian Lynx. Rarely spotted by human eyes, this medium-sized wild feline lives alone and hunts at night. While often confused with the more common bobcat because of its short tail, a lynx can be easily recognized by its lush coat and the long tufts of fur on both sides of its face. On oversized paws, the handsome cat moves silently and swiftly as it stalks its favorite prey, the snowshoe hare. The skillful hunter also has the benefits of great hearing and super sharp eyes that can spot a mouse from 250 feet away! Although the Canadian Lynx is hunted for its thick golden fur, the population of these reclusive predators is considered stable.

Informational

Opinion

Response to Text

2. The article, The Genius of the Mountain Gorilla focuses on the keen intelligence of the Mountain Gorillas of central Africa. The author details an instance when the perceptive primates were observed working together to dismantle a snare set by poachers. Further, the text explains that these endangered mammals appear to have their own language. Communicating through grunts, howls and other vocalizations, the gorillas warn each other of danger and resolve conflicts. The author points out that these brainiacs even seem to joke with and comfort one another. I've known for a long time that gorillas have the ability to learn sign language, but this article opened my eyes to the other amazing abilities of our closest cousins.

Informational

Opinion

Response to Text

3. If you are struggling with math or any other subject, I think you need to enroll in summer school this July. In my opinion, this is the best thing you can do to keep yourself from falling further behind when school starts up again in the fall. Summer school is especially valuable for middle school students as we prepare for our upcoming high school years. Nothing makes learning easier than individual attention from your teacher and you will receive just that at summer school, where the classes are almost always small. Of course, you're busy during the season of sunshine, but all responsible students make time for summer school. For sure, it's an invaluable experience!

Informational

Opinion

Response to Text

IS THAT A FACT OR AN OPINION?

At first it might be challenging to tell informational writing and opinion writing apart. After all, the two types of writing are organized in much the same way with introductions and conclusions as well as main ideas (informational) or main reasons (opinion).

Here are some hints to help you tell the two apart.

Informational writing focuses on facts that inform you. Facts can be checked in books or online. For example:

1. The Mayan people created intricate cities of stone that still stand today.
2. A group of jellyfish is called a “bloom” and can include more than 10,000 individuals.

These two sentences would likely be found in informational texts.

While opinion writing may include facts, its purpose is to communicate an author’s personal opinion on a topic. You could agree or disagree with it.

For example:

1. Everybody knows that the Mayan people created the most prosperous and humane civilization in the ancient world.
2. I would rather be attacked by a whole hive of bees than get stung by a slimy jellyfish.

These two sentences present statements that you could agree or disagree with. They would likely be found in opinion writing.

So, as a general rule, when you’re trying to decide if text is informational or opinion, just ask yourself:

- Does this sentence say something that I could check in a book or online? If so, it’s probably a fact.
- Does this sentence say something I could agree or disagree with? If so, it’s probably an opinion.

Here’s another hint: Sentences that use phrases like “my favorite” or “my least favorite” are likely to be stating opinions. While there is no hard and fast rule about the language of opinion writing, phrases like “everybody” “nobody,” and “always” often alert you too that you are probably reading somebody’s opinion. Note the differences in the opinion vs. informational sentences below.

Opinion

Nobody enjoys math class.
My favorite food in the world is pizza.
Golf is always boring to watch.

Nobody would choose a laptop over a tablet.

Remember: Opinion writing will include facts but informational writing should not include opinions.

Informational

Many students find math difficult.
Pizza is a favorite food around the world.
Golf is not the most popular sport to watch on TV.

Tablets have some advantages over laptops.

SENTENCE STARTERS FOR OPINION WRITING



Pro

One thing I enjoy is _____.
My favorite _____ is _____.
I absolutely love _____.
It's easy to see why I like _____.
I really appreciate _____.
I heartily approve of _____.
I get really excited when _____.
I feel positive about _____.
There's nothing I'd rather do than _____.
I look forward to _____.
I am in favor of _____.
I adore _____.
I'm very impressed by _____.
I strongly support _____.
I'm fond of _____.



Con

One thing I dislike is _____.
My least favorite _____ is _____.
I absolutely hate _____.
It's easy to see why I dislike _____.
I just can't appreciate _____.
I completely disapprove of _____.
I get very disappointed when _____.
I feel negative about _____.
There's nothing I'd like to avoid more than _____.
I dread _____.
I am against _____.
I abhor _____.
I'm unimpressed by _____.
I strongly oppose _____.
I don't care for _____.

Opinion Statements

In my opinion, _____.
To me, _____.
According to my point of view _____.
My belief is that _____.
As I see it, _____.
My attitude is that _____.

My stance is that _____.
From my point of view, _____.
I think that _____.
It seems to me that _____.
My position is that _____.

Transition Words

- because
- since
- as
- for the reason that
- as evidenced by
- seeing that
- given that
- in view of the fact that
- in light of the fact that
- as cited by
- as illustrated by
- supported by the fact that
- as demonstrated by the fact that

SENTENCE STARTERS FOR ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

Research confirms _____

Experts agree _____

Statistics indicate _____

An informal survey revealed _____

The fact is _____

According to _____

Numerous studies suggest _____

This is evidence that _____

This is proven by _____

A surprising percentage of _____

Research corroborates _____

It's difficult to ignore _____

Studies published in _____

It is a well-known fact that _____

Authorities claim that _____

It seems obvious that _____

When I polled my classmates, I discovered _____

I created a survey to illustrate _____

Name _____

STATING FACTS OR SHARING OPINIONS?

Look at the sets of sentences below. One states a fact; one shares an opinion. Write an “E” next to the sentence that states a fact. This is the kind of sentence that is meant to inform, which is the focus of informational text. Write an “O” next to the sentence that shares an opinion. This is the kind of sentence you would find in an opinion piece. The first one is done for you.

1. Science is part of the middle school curriculum. E
Everybody loves doing science experiments. O
2. Alaska is a popular vacation destination.
I think an Alaskan vacation would be unforgettable.
3. There’s nothing I enjoy more than playing board games.
Research confirms that many board games have educational benefits.
4. You’d have to be crazy to enjoy a horror movie.
Comedies and thrillers are two popular movie genres.
5. During the holiday season, more than 20% of all flights are delayed.
I am not a fan of air travel.
6. More than 4 million tourists visit Rome every year.
It would be a dream come true to visit the city of Rome.

Name _____

OPINION OR ARGUMENTATIVE?

Look at the sets of sentences below. One simply states an opinion. The other presents evidence that supports a point of view. This is the kind of sentence you'd find in an argumentative piece. Write an "O" next to the sentence that shares an opinion. Write an "A" next to the sentence that makes an argument in support of a point of view. The first one is done for you.

1. I am not in favor of an extended school day. O

Research indicates that an extended school day does not lead to consistent gains in academic achievement. A

2. When surveyed, 89% of all middle school students said they had their own cell phone and used it on a daily basis. _____

I believe that middle school students need their own cell phones because they're valuable in an emergency situation. _____

3. In my opinion, our school should definitely have a swimming team so that students can compete with our rival school. _____

"Competitive swimmers rarely suffer sports related injuries," said coach Mark Williamson. _____

4. Studies have shown that a great camp experience helps young teens build confidence and gain independence. _____

Everybody knows that going to sleepaway camp is an awesome experience. _____

Name _____

READING #1

Title

Since the 1600s when Italian astronomer Galileo first used a telescope to study the stars and the planets, people have been eager to understand the mysteries of outer space. Let's look at some of the highlights of our quest to understand the mysteries of our universe, from the Russian launch of Sputnik I and Neil Armstrong's historic walk on the moon to the operation of the International Space Station.

On October 4, 1957, the Space Age officially began when the Soviet Union launched the satellite Sputnik 1. The Sputnik 1 spacecraft was round and just under 2 feet in diameter with four antennas that transmitted messages back to earth. It looked like nothing more than an orb with whiskers, but it was able to orbit the earth 96 times and transmit radio messages back to earth for 21 days. The historic launch sparked the "Space Race" between the United States and Soviet Union as the two most powerful nations on earth competed to take the lead in space exploration. The Soviets got off to a good start. When they launched Sputnik 5 in 1961, it carried two small mixed breed dogs named Belka and Strelka. The two former strays became the first living beings to survive a trip into space.

The United States caught up in 1969 with Apollo 11, the first manned mission to touch down on the moon. Astronauts Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong landed the lunar module known as "The Eagle" on its four shock-absorbing legs. Then they emerged from the module via a small exit, climbed down an aluminum ladder and set foot on the surface of the moon where they collected samples of lunar material and planted the American flag. They returned to earth 21 hours and 36 minutes later and were welcomed home with one of the biggest ticker tape parades of all time. Armstrong famously called the mission "one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."

Today the focus of the space program is more cooperative. Canada, the United States, Russia (the former Soviet Union), Japan, Brazil and eleven European nations have contributed to the construction and operation of the International Space Station, the largest space station ever built. From earth, it looks like a very bright, fast-moving star in the sky as it orbits the earth. Aboard are a crew of six scientists from all corners of the earth who are conducting ongoing experiments and research. One experiment is looking at plant growth in space and another is examining the impact of space travel on human bones. The overall goal of the space station is to make further space exploration possible.

Space exploration began with Sputnik 1 and continued with Apollo 11 and today's International Space Station. It seems clear that the competitive space race of earlier decades has evolved into a cooperative, worldwide effort to explore the universe for the benefit of all.

Name _____

READING #2

Title

Take my word for it: when you're 14 in the year 3033, the last thing you want to do is go to Mars for the weekend with your mom, your dad and your three little brothers. I took the lead as the six of us trudged into the crowded Intergalactic Spaceport. My brothers were already wearing their hefty gravity boots and every step was a struggle. They looked as if they were moving in slow motion. I was carrying my boots and my shoulders were already sore beneath their weight.

"Hold up, Zenith," my dad called. I stopped and waited for the rest of my family to catch up. We were off for a family hike up Olympus Mons, the largest volcano in the whole galaxy. How much fun would it be to hike up a gigantic volcano in heavyweight gravity boots? Not much would be my guess.

"Cheer up, Zenith. You'll see. This will be an experience you'll never forget," my mom said. "I promise." One thing about mom was that she always kept her promises. My three brothers nodded in unison and chanted, "Unforgettable, unforgettable, unforgettable."

I wasn't excited about the coming weekend, but being in a spaceport was always fascinating. Flying saucers were taking off and landing at the rate of 136 per second and the whole place bustled with beings from all over the universe. A family of Venusians, with their wrinkled, sun-scorched skin and dark, glowing eyes, scurried by beneath a gigantic umbrella. A group of rowdy earthlings, en-route to Jupiter for some deep-sea fishing, laughed and joked as they elbowed their way through the crowd. I heard one of them ask another, "Hey, what's with those great big yellow umbrellas the Venusians always carry?"

"I don't know," his friend answered. "I've never been to Venus." I had always wondered about those umbrellas too. You never saw a Venusian without one. Suddenly, something beautiful caught my eye. It was a female being with a snowy mane of pure white hair and ice-blue eyes that shimmered like a hailstone. A Neptunian! I'd always wanted to meet one! Without thinking, I followed her aboard a flying saucer and found a seat beside her for the short flight.

Wwwwoosh. Off we went. A loud voice rang out, “Next stop, Venus! It’s a breezy day on the Morning Star with temperatures not expected to exceed 877 degrees. Of course, you’ll still need your umbrellas so keep them handy and enjoy your voyage to Venus.”

Venus? I was supposed to be going to Mars! And where was my family anyway? Instant panic. I was all alone and on my way to Venus. There was only one explanation - that Neptunian had given me a brain freeze! I turned to her.

“Why did you...”

She giggled. “Sorry. I just couldn’t resist.”

When I stepped from the saucer, the heat almost knocked me off my feet! I felt as if I were going to burst into flames when the Neptunian, who’s name I’d learned was Fria, grabbed my arm and pulled me underneath her big yellow Venusian umbrella. An icy mist spritzed from each spoke of the umbrella, making the heat not only bearable, but actually pleasant.

“Thanks,” I said. She smiled at me and reached out to take my hand.

Of course, I forgave her for the brain freeze, but I knew it could easily happen again. So, I gave her a quick handshake, bought my own umbrella at the nearest souvenir stand and boarded the next flying saucer for Mars.

Name _____

The Mayan Empire

Imagine a city of stone in a tropical jungle, ruled by kings and bustling with builders, star-gazing astronomers and fierce warriors. That could be what a Mayan settlement looked like the earliest days of **Mesoamerica**, the southern regions of North America from the year 2000 BC until the early 1500s. As the native people of this region, the Maya created one of the best known civilizations of ancient times in what is now Mexico and Central America. Let's take a look at how the Mayan empire rose and fell, and the legacy left behind by this fascinating civilization.

Early Mayan Settlements

The Maya civilization probably began as small settlements of hunter-gatherers began trading with one another. These settlements got together and formed regional **chiefdoms**, an organized system of rule usually based on kinship. They became skillful farmers, clearing acres of rain forest to grow crops such as corn, squash, beans and **cassava**, a starchy vegetable that tastes like a sweet potato and grows in the tropical regions of the Americas. As their farms thrived and their

population grew, they set down roots. They began constructing vast cities of stone with tall pyramids that had steep stairs leading up the sides to the top where powerful rulers were laid to rest. Some of these pyramids still stand today. They also built palaces for their **kuhul ajaw** or holy lords that were often situated on elevated stone platforms to keep them safe from seasonal flood waters. While the Maya were once considered a peaceful people, it is now believed that they were anything but. The inscriptions on the stonework they left behind show that the Maya went to war with their neighbors often, fighting not only to protect their cities, but for the prestige of victory and to take prisoners who became their slaves. Despite those bloody battles, the Mayan empire thrived for nearly 2,000 years.



At its peak, the Mayan Empire covered about 37,000 square miles in southern Mexico and Central America.

The Mysterious Fall of the Mayan Empire

In the 800s A.D., the Mayan empire had great leaders and mighty armies. Trade seemed to flourish, but the population began a slow decline. One hundred years later, many of the great Mayan cities had been abandoned and swallowed up by the jungle. What happened? There are many theories surrounding the mysterious decline of the Mayan civilization. One of the most recent and widely accepted is that drought and the process of clearing, but not replanting trees in a rainforest known as **deforestation**, brought it to an end. In a recent study, researchers at Arizona State University concluded that the great Mayan city of Chitzen Itza was abandoned at a time when “severe reductions in rainfall were coupled with a rapid rate of deforestation.” This makes sense when we consider that the Mayans used massive amounts of wood to fuel their fires. The rapid deforestation, combined with drought, depleted the soil of nutrients so that crops could no longer grow in the region. The people left the Mayan cities and dispersed into small villages. Centuries later, many were taken as slaves by Spanish conquistadors. In spite of the struggles of the past, an estimated 7 million Maya keep their colorful culture alive today in southern Mexico and Central America.

The Legacy of the Maya

The Mayan people were among the most advanced and innovative of their time. Amazing mathematicians, they developed the concept of zero. This feat of brilliance allowed them to work with once unimaginable sums and learn how to measure time. Simply by observing the stars and the cycles of the moon, they created an accurate calendar that is still used in some Mayan communities today. The Maya had their own complex language and kept their own historical records. They harvested rubber from the rainforest tree and used it to make glue, water-resistant cloth and book bindings. If you’re a chocolate lover, you’ll surely appreciate the Maya’s discovery and cultivation of the cocoa bean, with which they made a thick bitter version of the hot chocolate we enjoy today. It is interesting to note that the Maya people created one of the most complex looms for weaving cloth of its day, but they built their cities of stone without even using as basic a tool as the wheel.

From its primitive beginnings to its unpredictable decline, the Mayan Empire made an indelible mark on world history and left us with a legacy of innovation. Without a doubt, it is fascinating to study the rich history and culture of the extraordinary Mayan people.

Name _____

YOU BE THE EDITOR!

Imagine you're the editor of a travel magazine for middle school students. Your assistant sent you this article but forgot some of the most important parts that will help the reader learn from the text. Your job is to provide the missing parts.

1. Read the entire piece. What is the **topic** – in other words, what is the text **all about**?

Is this an informational or opinion piece? How do you know?

2. Based on the **topic**, create a **title** for this piece that will help the reader figure out what they'll be learning about. Write your title, in large print, across the top of the article.
3. Number each paragraph.
4. Circle the **introduction**.
5. Bracket the **body** of the piece.
6. Box the **conclusion**.
7. Read the first paragraph in the body of the piece (*paragraph 2*). It is missing a **heading** that tells the reader what the entire paragraph is about. Identify the main idea in order to create a heading and write it in the blank at the beginning of the paragraph. Do the same thing for paragraphs 3 and 4.
8. Read paragraph 2 again. The writer has forgotten to italicize or bold the **key vocabulary words**. Underline these words to help the reader.
9. Insert a **caption** beneath the map to explain what the reader is looking at.
10. Fill in the summarizing framework, below.

<p>TOPIC: _____</p> <p>MAIN IDEA #1: _____</p> <p>MAIN IDEA #2: _____</p> <p>MAIN IDEA #3: _____</p>
--

Name _____

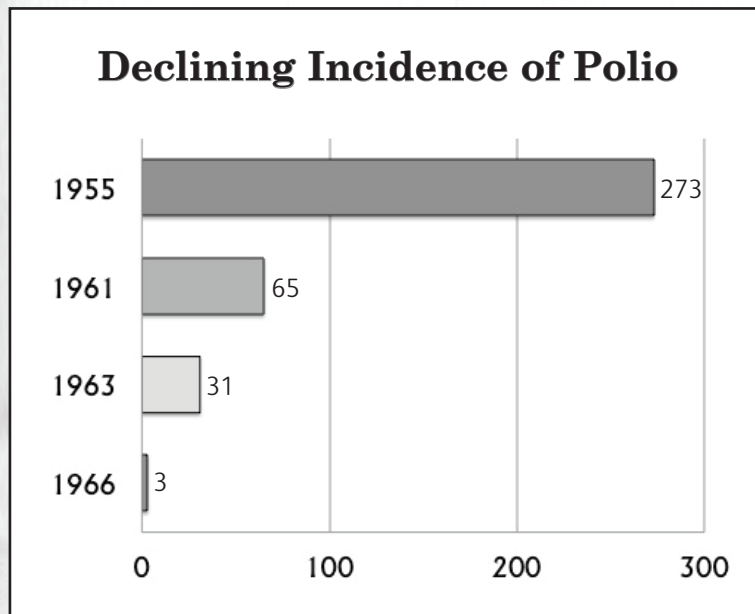
Title

Who doesn't want to live a long, healthy life? If you're interested in science, you're probably fascinated by the historic breakthroughs in medicine that help us prevent or recover from disease and injury. Over the past century there have been scores of these exciting discoveries. Three that touch the lives of us all are the discovery of penicillin, the development of the Polio vaccine and the identification of the health risks associated with tobacco use.

Heading:

Here's an amazing fact: 38% of the World War I soldiers stricken with bacterial pneumonia died from it, but during World War II, that rate fell to less than 1%. What made the difference? The answer to that question is penicillin. The miracle drug of its time, penicillin was the first effective, widely available antibiotic, a

drug that kills the bacteria and fungi that cause many diseases and infections. This revolutionary medicine was discovered by accident in 1928 by Sir Alexander Fleming, a researcher at St. Mary's Hospital in London. Fleming observed that a naturally occurring mold seemed to prevent the growth of certain dangerous germs. After further research, penicillin started being produced in quantity in 1944.



Source: Los Angeles County Health Index

(caption) _____

In later years, other types of antibiotics that targeted specific bacteria made these miracle drugs even more effective. Today, many of us take our easy access to antibiotics for granted. But we need to be careful not to overuse them or we might develop an immunity, a resistance to the healing effects of antibiotics.

Heading:

Imagine it's the summer of 1952. There's no air conditioning, it's sweltering hot and you're forbidden to jump into the cool lake just around the corner. Why? Because Polio Panic had come to your town. Nobody knew what caused this horrible disease that targeted little kids, killing some and crippling others, but there was a rumor that the germs might fester in water so nobody went swimming. Since 1952, we've learned that Polio is caused by a virus that is transmitted by mouth from one victim to another and thanks to Dr. Jonas Salk, we know how to prevent it. Salk, a medical researcher, created the Polio vaccine in 1953 just after the last widespread outbreak of the disease. Today, the disease has been eliminated in 80% of the world and it is estimated that Dr. Salk's vaccine has prevented 1.5 million childhood deaths and countless additional cases of paralysis. Sadly, children in the countries of Pakistan, Nigeria and Afghanistan are still falling victim to polio.

Heading:

It seems obvious now that tobacco is bad for us, but that was not always the case. In fact, in the 1940s and 50s, some cigarette companies advertised their products as "soothing to a sore throat and cough." Other ads recommended that weight conscious women "reach for a smoke instead of a sweet." That all changed in 1964 when the Surgeon General reported on the health risks of smoking. Since, tobacco use has steadily declined and many cigarette-related deaths prevented. Further warnings came from the Surgeon General in the 1970s with the discovery of the link between disease and passive smoking, which means breathing the smoke of others. Second hand smoke was said to contribute to the deaths of 500,000 nonsmokers during the 1970s and 80s. Chewing tobacco was once thought of as a safe alternative to smoking, but we now know that it is highly dangerous too. Just a few of the health problems associated with both smoking and chewing tobacco are tooth loss and gum disease, heart attacks, strokes and deadly cancers of the lungs and mouth.

Where would we be without the groundbreaking medical discoveries of the past few decades? Using antibiotics carefully, making sure we're vaccinated against polio and avoiding tobacco are three important ways in which we can safeguard our health. Without a doubt, our well-being has been greatly enriched by the pioneering scientists in the field of medical research.

Name _____

Frightening Fun!

What's just as much fun as scaring yourself silly with a wild ride on a roller coaster or a spine-tingling ghost story told around a campfire in the dark of night? If you're like me, your answer to that question is a great horror movie! Let's explore the genre of the horror film, from its European beginnings to its rising popularity in the 1930s, and onto the more recent trend in terror.

Suffering in Silence

The earliest horror films were all silent. French filmmaker Georges Melies takes credit for the first horror film of all time. It was called *Le Manoir du Diable*, which translated to English is *The Haunted Castle*. Released in 1896, this spooky silent film runs only three minutes long, but it packs a lot of action. Bubbling cauldrons, vampire bats, ghosts and dancing skeletons all appear one second and vanish the next in a cloud of smoke. In the 1920s, pioneering German filmmakers brought their talents to the genre and created surreal, shadowy vistas and complex, creepy characters that reflected the grim mood of post-World War I Europe. In 1922, German film director F.W. Murnau made the world's first vampire movie, *Nosferatu*, which was based on Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula*.

Howling and Growling!

When sound was introduced in motion pictures in the 1930s, American monster movies became popular. With the invention of sound, cinematic monsters like Frankenstein and King Kong howled and growled – and audiences screamed in reply! It was during this era that character actors Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff rose to fame bringing monstrosities like mummies and werewolves to life. While it may be hard to believe, it's true that filmmakers and theatre owners at the time occasionally planted “fainters” and “screamers” in



the audience to intensify the viewing experience. They also built “buzz” for their horror movies by stationing fake nurses inside the theater while an ambulance idled outside ready to whisk those overcome with terror off to the hospital.

Deader than a Doornail

In more recent times, the Zombie movie seems to rule the horror genre. In most, the Zombie is depicted as a dead body that somehow comes to life, mute and menacing, and must be STOPPED. The first zombie movie was probably *The Night of the Living Dead*, directed by George A. Romero and released in 1968. Since then, filmmakers around the globe

have been creating their own sometimes scary, and sometimes just silly, versions of the classic. From Norway, comes *Dead Snow*, the story of Nazi zombies in the frozen wilds of Scandinavia. The Spanish-made series *Quarantine* has zombies attacking fire fighters in a burning building and the British film *Doghouse* follows a group of guys into a remote English village where bloodthirsty female zombies are eager to feast on them.

With short, silent oldies, classic monster movies and zombie cinema from around the world, the horror genre offers entertainment for all sorts of tastes. From the goofy to the gory, horror films are definitely here to stay!



INFORMATIONAL PILLAR

INTRODUCTION

Lead/Topic Sentence

Main Idea #1 _____

Detail

Detail

Detail

Detail

Main Idea #2 _____

Detail

Detail

Detail

Detail

Main Idea #3 _____

Detail

Detail

Detail

Detail

CONCLUSION

Informational Summarizing Framework

TOPIC: _____

MAIN IDEA #1: _____

MAIN IDEA #2: _____

MAIN IDEA #3: _____

OPINION PILLAR

INTRODUCTION

Lead/Opinion Statement

Main Reason #1 _____

Detail

Detail

Detail

Detail

Main Reason #2 _____

Detail

Detail

Detail

Detail

Main Reason #3 _____

Detail

Detail

Detail

Detail

CONCLUSION

Creative Restatements of Main Reasons

Opinion Summarizing Framework

TOPIC: _____

MAIN REASON #1: _____

MAIN REASON #2: _____

MAIN REASON #3: _____

Name _____

BABYSITTING: THE BEST FIRST JOB!

Wouldn't you love to earn some extra money? Most middle school students would, but the problem is that they are still too young for most part-time jobs. In my opinion, however, they are just the right age for the truly fantastic job of babysitting. Babysitting is one of the best ways to earn money because there are always many opportunities available. Additionally, caring for children is always fun and taking on the demanding job of babysitting is an ideal way to boost a young teen's self-confidence.

Whether you live in a city or a small town, you can be sure that there is always a need for reliable babysitters in your community. After all, children need to be cared for around the clock and babysitters allow parents to work, shop, run errands, go out to dinner or just take a break. It is easy to find the parents who are in need of your services. Simply place a classified ad in the "Work Wanted" section of your local newspaper or on an appropriate website. Chances are jobs will quickly come flooding your way. If they don't, ask your family, neighbors and friends to help you spread the word that you are looking for babysitting jobs and give it time. You can be sure that overworked parents will track you down.

Not only are babysitting jobs readily available, but they are fun! After all, what could be better than teaching an interested kid about your favorite sport or hobby? As a babysitter, you'll have a chance to do just that. You'll also rediscover the books and board games you loved when you were little as you share them with the kids you're babysitting. If you're creative, you could introduce little ones to finger painting or clay modeling and if you're caring for several children at once, join them in a game of Capture the Flag or Duck, Duck, Goose. They'll have a great time and so will you!

As the children grow to love you and you earn their parents' respect, your self-esteem will definitely skyrocket. Your job will require that you take charge of the children, and you will feel very proud of yourself when you learn how to assert authority. Learning how to communicate effectively with parents is another important skill that babysitting will give you a chance to master. Let's not forget that you will be earning money while you're gaining this invaluable experience! Just imagine how wonderful and self-sufficient you will feel when you have extra money to save or spend as you please.

Do you remember your own favorite babysitter? If you do, you'll surely agree that babysitters touch the hearts and minds of children in many, many memorable ways. A readily available, fun and confidence building first job, babysitting is a great way for middle school students to start earning money. No doubt, there are many babysitting opportunities in your town. Check them out today!

Name _____

BABYSITTING: THE BEST FIRST JOB!

1. This is an example of what kind of writing? Circle one:
Informational Opinion
2. Number each paragraph.
3. Circle the *introduction*.
4. Box the *conclusion*.
5. Circle the *title* and identify the *topic*.
6. Underline the *lead* in red.
7. Underline each **MAIN IDEA** or **MAIN REASON**. Write a blurb (a word or two) in the margin next to the paragraph explaining what the entire paragraph is about.
8. Read this detail: *On winter days, you'll share the excitement of sledding with the children you're babysitting.*
Where does this detail belong? Paragraph # _____
9. Number the references to each main idea restated in the conclusion. Use paragraph numbers.
10. Fill in the summarizing framework/author's prewriting plan. If the piece is informational, circle "Main Idea." If it's an opinion piece, circle "Main Reason." Remember, informational text explores a **TOPIC** while opinion writing focuses on an **ISSUE**.

TOPIC/ISSUE: _____

MAIN IDEA/MAIN REASON #1: _____

MAIN IDEA/MAIN REASON #2: _____

MAIN IDEA/MAIN REASON #3: _____

Name _____

THE BASICS OF BABYSITTING

When my aunt hired me to babysit, I thought it would be easy. I imagined myself chatting away on my phone or watching TV as my two little cousins played together happily and quietly. Was I ever mistaken! From the moment I arrived until I left, the children needed my full attention. Since then, I have learned that there are three basic skills you need to be a great babysitter. You must know how to care for children, have an endless supply of ideas about how to entertain them, and be able to communicate with parents effectively.

Knowing how to care for children means becoming an expert at changing diapers, filling sippy cups, finding lost toys and preparing snacks. A great babysitter must be able to help children bathe, dress and brush their teeth. The caregiver must know how to clean and bandage a “boobo” and comfort a crying child. In the summer, a great babysitter will never forget to apply sunscreen. In the winter, he or she will make sure children are properly bundled up when playing outdoors. Many local community centers offer babysitting classes that can help you learn these skills. If you really want to impress parents, complete a first aid class too!

For many babysitters, entertaining children is the best part of the job. Childcare professionals recommend that you assemble your own “goodie bag” to take along on babysitting jobs. It could include picture books, card games, play dough and art supplies to keep the children busy. With a parent’s permission, you might want to take the children on a hike or walk to a nearby playground. As a general rule, your goal is to keep the kids safe and active! Surveys say that parents’ most common complaint about babysitters is that they park the kids in front of the TV instead of actually playing with them. Don’t be that kind of babysitter!

Successful babysitters also must know how to communicate with parents. Always be upfront about how much you expect to be paid. Make sure the parents understand your own curfew so that you won’t worry your own mom or dad by being out later than expected. Report any injuries or accidents to the parents as soon as you can. If such an incident occurs while you’re in charge, it’s best that the parent learns about it from you. Share good news with parents as much as you can. If, for example, the child picked up toys without being asked to, parents will appreciate your letting them know.

If you know how to care for and entertain children as well as communicate with parents, you are well on your way to becoming a terrific babysitter! For sure, these three basic skills can help you build a babysitting business and earn the extra money you need.

Name _____

THE BASICS OF BABYSITTING

1. This is an example of what kind of writing? Circle one:

Informational

Opinion

2. Number each paragraph.

3. Circle the *introduction*.

4. Box the *conclusion*.

5. Circle the *title* and identify the *topic*.

6. Underline the *lead* in red.

7. Underline each **MAIN IDEA** or **MAIN REASON**. Write a blurb (a word or two) in the margin next to the paragraph explaining what the entire paragraph is about.

8. Read this detail: *On winter days, you'll share the excitement of sledding with the children you're babysitting.*

Where does this detail belong? Paragraph # _____

9. Number the references to each main idea restated in the conclusion. Use paragraph numbers.

10. Fill in the summarizing framework/author's prewriting plan. If the piece is informational, circle "Main Idea." If it's an opinion piece, circle "Main Reason." Remember, informational text explores a **TOPIC** while opinion writing focuses on an **ISSUE**.

TOPIC/ISSUE: _____

MAIN IDEA/MAIN REASON #1: _____

MAIN IDEA/MAIN REASON #2: _____

MAIN IDEA/MAIN REASON #3: _____

Name _____

HOW TO MAKE CHILI CON CARNE

Just about everybody loves a warm, spicy bowl of Chili Con Carne! While the exact origins of this popular meat stew are unknown, many believe it was first created in the city of San Antonio, Texas. Making good Chili Con Carne is not difficult. All it takes is fresh vegetables, spicy ground beef and lots of gooey melted cheese!

Your first step in concocting Chili Con Carne is chopping up the vegetables. You're going to need a few cloves of garlic, plenty of tomatoes and several different kinds of peppers. If you crave intensely spicy chili, use jalapeños or, if you dare, a few searingly hot habanero peppers. For a milder flavor, stick with green and red peppers. Select your peppers and chop them up along with the tomatoes and garlic. Add chopped onions. If your eyes are sensitive, you might want to chill your onions in the freezer before chopping. The colder the onions, the less likely that your eyes will tear up while you prepare them. Add all your chopped vegetables to a large pot and simmer on low heat in a light beef broth.

While your vegetables simmer, brown your ground meat in a frying pan and sprinkle in the spices. You'll surely want to add some chili powder and fresh cilantro, an herb with a grassy, refreshing taste. Try sprinkling in some cumin seed, too. How much depends on your personal preferences. Cumin seed adds a nutty, peppery flavor to Chili Con Carne that definitely heats up the dish. Of course, you're going to need to add salt and pepper, too. Add your spices a little bit at a time, tasting often, until you're sure your ground beef is just spicy enough. Then, add it to the simmering vegetables.

Once your meat and vegetable mixture has simmered for several hours (the more the better), it's time to add a few cups of shredded cheese. Monterey Jack is the preferred cheese in Chili Con Carne. First produced in Spain in the 1700s, this tangy white cheese melts well and adds a rich, creamy flavor. If you prefer, you could also use cheddar or Colby cheese, or any combination of the three. When you serve your Chili Con Carne, you might want to add a sprinkling of shredded cheese to the bottom of the bowl and spoon the chili over it. This provides a wonderful surprise ending to the dish!

Outlined above is a basic recipe for delicious Chili Con Carne. You could also add black beans, corn or any number of extra ingredients to make your recipe uniquely your own. Without a doubt, your friends and family will appreciate it when you make them a bowl of spicy, delicious Chili Con Carne with plenty of vegetables, spicy beef and creamy cheese.

Name _____

HOW TO MAKE CHILI CON CARNE

1. This is an example of what kind of writing? Circle one:
Informational Opinion
2. Number each paragraph.
3. Circle the *introduction*.
4. Box the *conclusion*.
5. Circle the *title*.
6. Underline the *lead* in red.
7. Underline the *topic sentence* (for informational pieces) or the *claim* (for argumentative text) in blue.
8. Underline each **MAIN IDEA** (for informational pieces) or **MAIN REASON** (for argumentative text). Write a blurb (a word or two) in the margin next to the paragraph explaining what the entire paragraph is about.
9. Circle the *word referent* for Chili Con Carne in the first paragraph.
10. Read this detail: *Adding diced celery is always an option, too.*
Where does this detail belong? Paragraph # _____
11. Number the references to each main idea restated in the conclusion. Use paragraph numbers.
12. Fill in the summarizing framework/author's prewriting plan. Remember, informational text explores a TOPIC while opinion writing focuses on an ISSUE.

TOPIC/ISSUE: _____

MAIN IDEA/REASON #1: _____

MAIN IDEA/REASON #2: _____

MAIN IDEA/REASON #3: _____

Name _____

BIRDS VS. THEROPODS

Are there dinosaurs flying in our skies today? While it sounds like something out of a science fiction story, it may be so! Over the past decade, scientists have uncovered convincing evidence that modern birds evolved from one diverse class of dinosaurs called theropods. Let's examine the similarities and differences between the anatomy, feeding behavior, and breeding habits of birds today and the theropods of long ago.

At first glance, it may be hard to spot the similarities in the anatomy of birds and dinosaurs, but the two share many traits. Fossil evidence has shown that some of the earliest theropods had feathers and could fly for short distances. Many theropods had a bony tail that helped them stay balanced as they pounded the prehistoric terrain. In modern birds, this has evolved into a fan of tail feathers that give these graceful flyers stability in the air. Most theropods had lightweight, hollow bones, just as birds do today. On the other hand, birds have beaks and theropods had snouts with wide mouths full of teeth. Birds have a strong pair of legs situated near the back of their bodies, just as many theropods did. However, early theropods had short, clawed arms which seem to have developed into the wings of modern-day birds.

New research has emerged about the feeding behavior of birds and theropods. For a long time, it was believed that theropods were predators. However, studies conducted at the Field Museum in Chicago, IL have found that 90 species of theropod dinosaurs ate a primarily plant-based diet. The theory is that somewhere along the evolutionary timeline, most theropods developed into omnivores, eaters of both meat and plants, much like many birds, including crows, chickens, emus and ostriches. Those that remained carnivorous, like the fearsome Tyrannosaurus Rex, evolved into today's hawks and other birds of prey. While they can be omnivores or carnivores, both birds and theropods burn energy at a rapid rate and need a large amount of food to survive.

At this time, the breeding habits of birds and theropods seem identical. Like birds today, theropods built nests and laid eggs during a recurring breeding season. Just as theropods did in prehistoric times, birds protect their young from predators and keep them warm with their own body heat. Further, a study published in a recent edition of Science magazine reveals that the male's involvement in nurturing the young is very similar between most types of theropods and birds, with the male often shouldering most of the responsibility for feathering and guarding the nest. On the other hand, the eggs of theropods were much larger than those of birds, even in relation to their larger overall size. Furthermore, theropods usually laid a large number of eggs at a time, sometimes as many as 30, while birds ordinarily lay no more than four at a time.

Isn't it fascinating to follow the progress of science as it explores the evolution of life on earth? The similarities and differences in the anatomy, feeding behavior and breeding habits of prehistoric theropods and modern-day birds are undeniable. Of course, there is always more to learn. Let's keep asking questions and looking for answers.

Name _____

BIRDS VS. THEROPODS

1. This is an example of what kind of writing? Circle one:

Informational

Opinion

2. Number each paragraph.

3. Circle the *introduction*.

4. Underline the *main idea* or *main reason sentences* in paragraphs 2, 3, and 4.

5. Write a blurb (a word or two) in the margin next to the paragraph explaining what the entire paragraph is about.

6. Box the *conclusion*.

7. Circle the word referent for bird in paragraph #2.

8. Where does this detail belong?: *Like some species of birds, some theropods were scavengers, making a meal of a predator's leftovers.*

Paragraph # _____

9. What do the bones of **theropods** and **birds** have in common? Why is this significant?

10. Fill in the summarizing framework/author's prewriting plan. Remember, informational text explores a TOPIC while opinion writing focuses on an ISSUE.

TOPIC/ISSUE: _____

MAIN IDEA/MAIN REASON #1: _____

MAIN IDEA/MAIN REASON #2: _____

MAIN IDEA/MAIN REASON #3: _____

Name _____

THE VOYAGE OF LUCY P. SIMMONS

Set on the windswept coast of Maine in 1906, *The Voyage of Lucy P. Simmons* is a great novel of fantasy and adventure on the high seas with a heroine I will remember forever. Lucy is courageous in the midst of heartbreaking circumstances, determined to save her family's beloved home from greedy relatives and remains forever loyal to those she loves. These are the reasons that I admired Lucy and cared about what happened to her in the novel.

Stormy weather visits Lucy early in the book when her beloved parents are lost at sea and Lucy bravely faces the unimaginable loss. Her happy life of picnics and boat rides is over, but she doesn't wallow in grief or feel sorry for herself. Instead, she recognizes that she's got an enemy in her Uncle Victor, as this quote illustrates: "And then and there, I knew that I was no longer going to be safe - and not in the sense of being well loved and cared for. I shuddered to think beyond that, refused to consider what my uncle might have in store for me." Confused and very much alone, Lucy braces herself to take on her scheming Uncle and his equally greedy wife. Her courage is extraordinary.

Lucy's determination to save her family's home is not only commendable, but it shows her regard for the memory of her parents. The home that her father calls "his ship on shore" seems as fond of Lucy as she is of it. When it looks as if Lucy is leaving its comforting confines for boarding school, she says, "The house seemed to watch me go, the large upper-story windows, their shades halfway drawn like sleepy eyelids, gazing after me." As Lucy fought to protect the home and the "ship on shore" worked its own powerful magic, I started thinking about how our houses are so much more than beams, walls, and floors to us. They are the galleries of our family histories. No wonder Lucy is so determined to protect hers!

Another way in which Lucy won my admiration was with her intense loyalty to those she loved. She has endless regard for Addie, her caregiver who tries to protect her from the villainous Uncle Victor's wrath. She loves her little dog, Mr. Pugsley, too, and is willing to be punished herself rather than see the cute canine hurt. Too bad some of the other characters in this book don't have Lucy's loyalty! As the story develops, a betrayed Lucy learns that Uncle Victor is not her only enemy, but the "ship on shore" rewards her for her devotion in a truly magical way!

As I read this book, I kept wishing Lucy blue skies and smooth sailing as she dove full-steam ahead into her adventures. What's next for Lucy? I hope there is a sequel to this book in the works, because the character of Lucille Prudence Simmons completely captured my imagination and touched my heart.

Name _____

THE VOYAGE OF LUCY P. SIMMONS
BY BARBARA MARICONDA

1. Number each *paragraph*. Circle the *introduction* and box the *conclusion*.
2. Put a bracket around the three *body paragraphs* and underline the *main reason sentence* in each.
3. Write a blurb (a word or two) in the margin next to the paragraph explaining what the entire paragraph is about.
4. Highlight the quotes in the 2nd and 3rd paragraphs.
5. Fill in the summarizing framework/author's prewriting plan.

<p>TOPIC: _____</p> <p>MAIN IDEA/MAIN REASON #1: _____</p> <p>MAIN IDEA/MAIN REASON #2: _____</p> <p>MAIN IDEA/MAIN REASON #3: _____</p>
--

6. How does the author feel about the character Lucy P. Simmons?

7. Use the sentence starter below to summarize the piece.

This piece introduces us to _____

Name _____

HAWAIIAN HISTORY

As I eagerly anticipated my Hawaiian vacation, I dreamed about balmy breezes and windswept beaches. I pictured myself diving into the crystalline waters of the Pacific, hopping on a surfboard and catching a wave on my very first try. My mouth watered just thinking about a classic Hawaiian luau with sweet pineapple and fresh seafood served by the light of a tikki torch. But I never imagined that there was so much fascinating history to discover on these gorgeous volcanic islands. The Pearl Harbor memorial, the legendary whaling village of Lahaina, and the birthplace of Hawaii's first and greatest king, are some of the amazing historic sites on the Hawaiian Islands.

Pearl Harbor is located in the bustling city of Honolulu on the island of Oahu. There you'll find the *World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument* that pays tribute to the fallen heroes of December 7, 1941, the infamous day of the Japanese attack on the United States. Visited by almost 2 million people each year, this complex of memorials and museums includes the *U.S.S. Arizona Memorial*, which is built over the wreck of the sunken battleship. You'll see a marble wall engraved with the names of all who died on the ship and hear the voices of survivors who share their accounts of that horrifying day in recorded oral histories. Amazingly, the U.S.S. Arizona still weeps "Black Tears" of oil every day and you can see these glistening droplets on the surface of the water. The *U.S.S. Missouri Memorial* takes you aboard an awesome American battleship and contains a large collection of photographs, artifacts and weapons that bring the vessel's history to life. As you explore the decks, remember that this is where the Japanese surrendered to General Douglas MacArthur on September 2, 1945, bringing an end to World War II. The *U.S.S. Bowfin Submarine Museum* and the *Pacific Aviation Museum* spotlight the epic underwater and aerial operations that contributed to America's victory in the Pacific. To see all that this national monument has to offer will certainly take more than a day, but it'll give you genuine insight into the tragedies and triumphs of World War II.

Once you've experienced Pearl Harbor, it's time to revisit the Golden Age of Whaling! The charming village of Lahaina on the island of Maui bustled with sailors from around the world during the whaling boom that lasted from 1825-1860. Visit *Hale Paahao*, a tiny jailhouse dating back to the 1830s where whalers were shackled to the walls as a punishment for rowdy behavior. See the restored *Seaman's Hospital*, a two-story stone building with a massive anchor on its front yard, that was built in 1844 to tend to sick and

injured whalers. The *Whalers Village Museum* will give you a good idea about the harshness of life as a sailor with its scale model of a whaling ship. You'll see sturdy tools crafted from whale ivory. You'll discover a fascinating collection of *scrimshaw*, pictures intricately carved into the bones and teeth of whales by sailors during the quiet days of their long voyages. To this day, the warm, shallow waters around Lahaina are one of the most important habitats in the world for humpback whales. Take the time for a whale watching trip and maybe you'll be lucky enough get a close look at one of these majestic creatures.

Venture even further back in history to the days of Polynesian voyagers and native royalty with a visit to the big island of Hawaii. *Kohala Historical Site* is believed to be where Kamehameka the Great was born in 1758. A fierce warrior and legendary leader, Kamehameka came to power at a time when the islands were in constant conflict with each other. He fought fearlessly against invaders from other islands and eventually united all of the Hawaiian Islands under his rule. His reign was a time of peace and plenty in the tropical paradise. Among his accomplishments was the creation of the "Law of the Splintered Paddle," which provided protection to unarmed noncombatants in war and was considered extremely compassionate at the time. "Let the aged, men and women, and little children lie down safely in the road," he said. It was under Kamehamaka's leadership, too, that the Hawaiian Islands started to trade with China, America, and Europe, bringing prosperity to paradise. Other historic landmarks on the Big Island are the lush *Royal Grounds* where Hawaiian chiefs met for important ceremonial rites and the innumerable sculpted wooden images of native idols. It is interesting to note that they are carved from *Ohia tree*, one of the first plants to take root in a cooling lava flow. As you explore the Big Island, you will surely wonder at the richness of Hawaiian history.

So if you're planning a trip to the Hawaiian Islands, take the time to explore extraordinary history of this exotic place. Pay a visit to Pearl Harbor and remember those who fight for freedom today. Stroll through the charming village of *Lahaina* and learn about its dramatic, seafaring past. Immerse yourself in native Hawaiian culture and history on the Big Island. Without a doubt, you will learn there is much, much more to a Hawaiian vacation than basking on the beach and splashing in the surf.

Name _____

HAWAIIAN HISTORY

1. This is an example of what kind of writing? Circle one:
Informational Argumentative Opinion
2. Number each *paragraph*.
3. Circle the *introduction*.
4. Box the *conclusion*.
5. Circle the *title*.
6. Underline the *lead* in red.
7. Underline the *topic sentence* or *claim statement* in blue.
8. Underline each **MAIN IDEA** (for informational pieces) or **MAIN REASON** (for argumentative text). Write a blurb (a word or two) in the margin next to the paragraph explaining what the entire paragraph is about.
9. Circle the *statistic* in the second paragraph.
10. Highlight the *quote* in the fourth paragraph.
11. Number the references to each main idea restated in the conclusion. Use paragraph numbers.
12. What is the Law of the Splintered Paddle? Do you think this law is recognized in the world today? _____

13. What is meant by the phrase “bringing prosperity to paradise?” Where is the paradise the author refers to? _____

14. Fill in the summarizing framework/author’s prewriting plan. Remember, informational text explores a **TOPIC** while argumentative or opinion writing focuses on an **ISSUE**.

TOPIC/ISSUE: _____

MAIN IDEA/REASON #1: _____

MAIN IDEA/REASON #2: _____

MAIN IDEA/REASON #3: _____

Name _____

WRITING SIMPLE SUMMARIZING PARAGRAPHS

Look at the following summarizing framework and summarizing paragraph:

TOPIC: Birds of the Arctic

MAIN IDEA #1: Puffins

MAIN IDEA #2: Snowy Owl

MAIN IDEA #3: Little Auk

This article provided information about birds of the Arctic. The reader learns about puffins and discovers the characteristics of the Snowy Owl. The author also introduces us to the Little Auk.

Select one of the following summarizing frameworks and use informational verbs to help extend it into a summarizing paragraph as the author did, above.

TOPIC: Chemical Reactions

MAIN IDEA #1: Characteristics

MAIN IDEA #2: Examples

MAIN IDEA #3: Experiments

TOPIC: Nocturnal Animals

MAIN IDEA #1: Owls

MAIN IDEA #2: Lemurs

MAIN IDEA #3: Bats

TOPIC: Meteorology

MAIN IDEA #1: The Water Cycle

MAIN IDEA #2: Clouds

MAIN IDEA #3: Barometer

MAIN IDEA #4: Careers

TOPIC: Winston Churchill

MAIN IDEA #1: Family Background

MAIN IDEA #2: Struggles with learning

MAIN IDEA #3: The War Years

INFORMATIONAL VERBS

discusses	explores	uncovers	notes that	delves into
presents	explains	predicts	illustrates	learns about
recognize	notes	highlights	emphasizes	demonstrates
discovers	observes	argues	introduces	describes
outlines	scrutinizes	determines	presents	investigates
recognize	argues	reveals	examines	analyzes
compare	contrast	shares		

Name _____

THE APPALACHIANS: THE OLDEST MOUNTAIN RANGE IN THE WORLD

Have you ever heard the expression “older than the hills?” Maybe you’ve even used it yourself to describe an aged relative or neighbor (but never your teacher!). Did you know that the saying refers to the fact that mountains, as they age, tend to erode from mighty peaks into gently rolling hills? Keep this in mind as you read about the physical features, plant life, and people of the Appalachian Mountains, the oldest mountain range in the world.

Extending nearly 2,000 miles from the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador to the U.S. state of Alabama, the Appalachians are more than 100 million years old with a diverse topography. As you’d expect from such an elderly landform, it is made up of hills and valleys rather than towering peaks like the younger Rockies to the west. Standing 6,684 feet, Mount Mitchell is the highest point in these North American highlands. Many streams, some of which have been harnessed for hydroelectricity, tumble their way through the region and there are many caves and caverns hidden deep within the earth. The mountains are famous for their rich, deep pockets of clean-burning, electricity-generating coal. Sometimes called “Black Diamonds,” nuggets of coal have been mined from these fertile hills extensively since the mid-1800s, providing work, although difficult and dangerous, for generations of Americans.

Today some of the oldest **deciduous** forests in the world and other wild plants flourish in the Appalachian Mountains. The deciduous forest is characterized by trees that adapt to four seasons and there are about 140 such species standing tall in the Appalachians. To the north, you will find fragrant evergreens and the syrup-producing Sugar Maples. Further south are one of the most long-lived of all trees, the shady Sycamore. Chestnut trees were once a common sight on the landscape, but they were almost entirely wiped out by a fungal disease in the early years of the 20th century. There are also thriving fields of wildflowers and edible plants in these scenic wilds. Dark blue in color and as sweet as a strawberry, huckleberries are in generous supply. So are wild grapes and, if you find a dark green plant that smells like chewing gum, it’s probably wintergreen, which makes a tasty, soothing tea.

Over the years, Native Americans, coal miners and, quite possibly, giants have all lived in the Appalachian Mountains. The remains of humans who stood over eight feet tall with double rows of teeth and skulls twice as thick as our own have been found in several burial

mounds in the southeastern reaches of these rolling hills. Furthermore, stories passed down from one generation to the next by Native Americans describe bloody encounters with towering, light-skinned giants. Where did they come from? How long did they inhabit the area? We don't know. While the giants of Appalachia are still a mystery, we are quite familiar with the gentle ways of the Cherokee Indians who hunted in these ancient hills and built villages in their valleys. Farmers and craftspeople known for their intricately beaded textiles, they led quiet, peaceful lives for centuries until they were ousted from their homes and driven west. Of course, the Cherokee were just one of many Native American tribes that lived in the Appalachians. Others include the Creek and the Shawnee. During the industrial revolution, when demand for coal skyrocketed, the area boomed with miners who eventually led the fight for worker's rights in America.

Wouldn't you like to take a hike through the ancient Appalachian Mountains? Do you think you could identify some of the plant life you'll see along the way? Could it really be possible that giants once lived in these rustic hills? Without a doubt, the ancient Appalachian Mountains are full of natural history and at least one great big mystery.

Name _____

The Himalayas: The Youngest Mountain Range in the World

Welcome to the lofty land of long-tailed snow leopards and the mysterious Yeti! Here in the Himalaya Mountains, where icy peaks salute the sky and extreme adventurers meet their match, you will discover an ever-changing world of snowy summits and jagged cliffs. Prepare to be impressed by the dramatic physical features, diverse plant and animal life, and strong indigenous people of this high altitude wonder.

Their interesting topography sets the Himalayas apart from other mountain ranges. At just under 30 million years old, this dramatic mountain range is the world's youngest. It includes Mount Everest, which at an elevation of almost 30,000 feet, is the highest peak in the world. Amazingly, there are 14 other peaks in the Himalayas that are very nearly as high. Sprawled for 1,500 miles across the northeastern portion of India and six other nations, this enormous spectacle also includes deep river gorges and the largest glacier in the world outside the polar regions. There are wide, flat plateaus and deep freshwater lakes. A total of 19 rivers carve their way through the landscape from the highlands down into the valleys. Although some believe the interior of these mountains contain large deposits of gold and zinc, natural resources have rarely been mined from them. Many experts believe that extracting these minerals from the earth might cause devastating landslides and most definitely will pollute the rivers.

From the base of the mountains to the highest peaks, the Himalayas are a botanist's paradise. With more than 10,000 tree, shrub and flowering plant species, the diversity is amazing! At the eastern base of the mountains, you'll find tropical evergreen rainforest, with a great variety of **resin**-producing trees, trees that secrete sticky substances that are often used as medicines. To the west, there are enormous stands of fragrant cedars. At elevations of 10-11,000 feet above sea level, you enter the Alpine Zone where wild orchids and rhododendrons bloom in a rainbow of bright colors. Continuing up the mountains, you'll discover bamboo growing on steep slopes and diverse flowering plants and lush green mosses that have adapted to survive in **permafrost**, a layer of soil that is frozen year-round. At the very top, of course, the air is too thin to support plant life.

Some of the world's rarest mammals make their home in this youthful mountain range. Roaming the coldest, most remote reaches of the Himalayas are the critically endangered Himalayan Wolf and the rarely sighted Snow Leopard. With thick coats,

these powerful and agile predators are well adapted to their steep, rocky terrain. If you're ever exploring the forested areas just below the Alpine Zone, you better hope you don't run into a Himalayan Black Bear. One of the only known bear species to show aggression toward humans, these massive beasts can be recognized by the crescent of white fur around their chests. Far less intimidating is the appealing Red Panda, who looks much like a raccoon with lovely auburn fur and big, round eyes. This acrobatic animal uses its tail for balance as it swings from tree to tree in the wooded habitats of the eastern Himalayas. The southern foothills of the mighty mountains are the territory of one of the most majestic mammals on the planet, the 12,000-pound Asian Elephant. Sharing that temperate habitat are the One-Horned Rhino and the Bengal Tiger, both of which are facing extinction.

The people of the Himalayas are as diverse as the plant and animal life. For centuries, thousands of different clans and tribes of native people have made their home in this rugged domain. The best known and most numerous remaining today are the Sherpa. A Tibetan ethnic group, the Sherpa led a hardscrabble existence, raising yak and tending to meager gardens in these mountains for decades. In recent years, however, they have found prosperity as guides for tourists eager to reach the summit of Mount Everest. After 3,000 years of living at high altitudes, these hearty people have developed enlarged lungs that allow them to thrive in the low oxygen environment of a mountain peak. They also seem to have superhuman endurance and can maintain a strenuous level of physical activity from dawn to dusk. If you ever get the chance, ask a Sherpa about the presence of Yeti on these rocky slopes. You'll learn that the native people definitely believe that the beast exists, but they don't think it's either abominable or a snowman at all. Instead, the Sherpa are convinced that Yeti the last of an extinct species of human and that there's a breeding colony of them hidden in the nooks and crannies of the Himalaya Mountains. References to the shaggy, secretive beings who haunt the mountains are commonplace in Sherpa folklore.

If you ever need a reminder of what an amazing world we live in, just picture a rocky mountain peak jutting through clouds and wonder about the mysteries that might lurk up there. With dramatic physical features, lush plant life, rare mammals and unique people, the Himalayas are a fascinating place to study. For sure, the earth's youngest mountain range is a one-of-a-kind place.

Name _____

Discussion Questions – Appalachians and Himalayas

You have read two informational texts about the oldest and youngest mountain ranges on earth, the Appalachians and the Himalayas. Write an essay comparing these two ranges. Be sure to discuss the physical features and people of both, citing examples from the text.

1. Fill in the summarizing frameworks, below, for each text:

THE APPALACHIANS

TOPIC: _____

MAIN IDEA #1: _____

MAIN IDEA #2: _____

MAIN IDEA #3: _____

THE HIMALAYAS

TOPIC: _____

MAIN IDEA #1: _____

MAIN IDEA #2: _____

MAIN IDEA #3: _____

MAIN IDEA #4: _____

2. What do you notice about these summarizing frameworks? _____

3. What are the “givens” in the boxed assignment? _____

4. Go back to each text. Based on your main idea “blurbs” in the margins, circle the “physical features” paragraphs in yellow and the “people” paragraphs in pink.

5. If you were going to expand both of the texts, what is another main idea you might include: _____

BONUS: Go back to each source and circle all of the ways the authors refer to the mountain ranges described in these texts. (We call this technique the use of “*word referents*.”)

Name _____

Comparison Grid

	APPALACHIANS	HIMALAYAS
Physical Features		
People		

Name _____

Exemplar Text

Did you know that mountain ranges, like living things, actually age? Wind and weather take their toll on towering peaks and mold them into rounded, rolling hills. Comparing and contrasting the Himalayas, the youngest mountain range on earth, and the far older Appalachians reveals clear differences in the physical features of each range, but surprising similarities among the people of these rugged regions.

As the text explains, the young Himalaya Mountain Range includes not only the highest peak on earth but 14 others that are very nearly as high! While Mount Everest soars nearly 30,000 feet into the sky, the highest peak in the elderly Appalachians is Mount Mitchell, which stands significantly short of 7,000 feet. There are glaciers in the Himalayas, including the largest one found outside polar circles. The Appalachians have hydroelectricity-producing streams as well as caves and caverns. As we learn from article about the Appalachians, these aged mountains have been extensively mined for coal. In contrast, the text about the Himalayas states that while deposits of gold and zinc may lie deep within these rocky cliffs, mining such minerals is dangerous. Doing so, the author tells us, may cause landslides and water pollution.

The youngest and the oldest of our planet's mountain ranges have their own rich human histories. As indicated in the texts, both have been home to a multitude of tribes, ethnic groups and clans over the years. While the Cherokee are the best known natives of the Appalachians, the Sherpa are the most recognized indigenous people of the Himalayas. Sadly, we learn that the Cherokee were driven from the area, which evolved over the years into a stronghold for coal miners who were among the first to fight for worker's rights in America. We discover that the Sherpa, on the other hand, remain on the high-altitude lands of their ancestors. Well adapted to life at a high altitude, these enterprising Tibetians have found a way to prosper in recent years by guiding climbers to the summit of Mount Everest. Surprisingly, the authors illustrate that both mountain ranges have their mysteries. In the Appalachians, human remains of an unknown people who stood more than eight feet tall have been found in several ancient burial mounds. The author states, "The remains of humans who stood over eight feet tall with double rows of teeth and skulls twice as thick as our own have been found in several burial mounds in the southeastern reaches of these rolling hills. Furthermore, stories passed down from one generation to the next by Native Americans describe bloody encounters with towering, light-skinned giants." The Himalayas, we learn, have their legendary Yeti, whom the Sherpa believe is the last survivor of an early human species.

As detailed in the texts, the youngest and the oldest mountain ranges on earth have some obvious differences, but surprising similarities. With scenic physical features and fascinating native people, the Appalachians and the Himalayas are certainly worth studying.

Name _____

IRRELEVANT, EXTRANEIOUS DETAILS IN INFORMATIONAL TEXT

Read the informational paragraphs below and identify the **MAIN IDEA** of each. Then, find the detail sentence that does **NOT** support the **MAIN IDEA** and cross it out.

1. Quilting is both a practical and a decorative art. It requires that two pieces of cloth be sewn together with a padded, pillowy material between them. Needlepoint is another creative form of handwork that some people enjoy. For centuries, thick quilted fabrics have been used for blankets and clothing. In colonial America, large quilts were hung on the walls of poorly insulated log cabins to keep out the cold. It might be difficult to imagine, but the ancient Egyptians used quilted materials as armor in times of war.

What is the **MAIN IDEA** of this paragraph?

2. One of the great mysteries of the world can be found on a remote island in the southeastern Pacific. It is called Easter Island and if you go there, you'll see hundreds of massive statues carved from volcanic rock. Easter Island is a territory of the South American nation of Chile. Did they have spiritual significance to the ancient people of the island? Why do some of them look out at the sea while other face inland? How were they moved and constructed with only primitive tools? We may never get definitive answers to these questions and many more.

What is the **MAIN IDEA** of this paragraph?

3. How do you create smoke alarms for people with hearing impairments? Well, how about a sensor that reacts to smoke and heat by releasing a stench so powerful that it awakens people within seconds? It may seem strange, but such systems are being used with much success in Japan today. Disability dogs can help people live independently with hearing and vision loss. These smelly systems are quickly replacing the alarms of the past that relied upon bright, flashing lights.

What is the **MAIN IDEA** of this paragraph?

Name _____

IRRELEVANT, EXTRANEIOUS DETAILS IN ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

Read the argumentative paragraphs below and identify the **MAIN REASON** of each. Then, find the detail sentence that does **NOT** support the **MAIN REASON** and cross it out.

1. If you had a choice, would you prefer to drive a compact car or a hulking sports utility vehicle? I would definitely choose a safe, but small and fuel-efficient car. After all, how many people really need the gigantic gas-guzzlers that are clogging our highways and using more than their fair share of the road? Keep in mind, these road hogs were originally designed for off-road and military use. Who could disagree that it's also important to save gas by using your bicycle as often as possible? You've got to wonder how many drivers ever take advantage of the off-road features of their SUV. My guess would be very few.

What is the **MAIN REASON** of this paragraph?

2. In my opinion, middle school students are under too much pressure! After all, just think of the many demands on our time! As anybody could tell you, we are expected to keep up with our homework, complete long-term projects, participate in sports and prepare for important testing. Informal surveys reveal that most kids between the ages of 11 and 13, get only 7 hours of sleep each night while experts say they need a minimum of 9. In high school, our schedules will get even more hectic when we add in part-time jobs. I am convinced that we would do better in school and be happier overall if we had more time to kick back with friends and family.

What is the **MAIN REASON** of this paragraph?

3. Do you ever compare yourself to pictures of celebrities, athletes and models? If so, you are not alone. Every day, we are bombarded by deceptive images of beauty that make us feel like we don't measure up. That's why I believe that the tricks of photography used to create these misleading images of perfection should be outlawed. As everybody knows, fashion magazines don't contain many articles that are worth reading. Don't you wonder why anybody would want to look at these lovely lies anyway? Real people, with their quirks and flaws, are so much more interesting.

What is the **MAIN REASON** of this paragraph?

Name _____

NASTY FOODS OF ALL NATIONS

Read and compare the following argumentative pieces.

1. Nasty Foods of All Nations

Do you have any desire to taste some of the nasty things people eat in other parts of the world? I know that some people might think cheeseburgers and fries are disgusting too, but they're not as bad as fried insects and live octopus tentacles.

Raw fish is not so bad in sushi, but raw octopus tentacles that wiggle around like they're still alive are definitely disgusting. So is a fruit that smells like something rotten. Chowing down on insects is not something I would do, but at least it's better than eating cheese with maggots in it.

Of course, people have the right to eat whatever they please, but I'll stick to macaroni and cheese. Don't you agree?

2. Nasty Foods of All Nations

Are you a fearless eater like me? Do you like tasting unique foods from around the world? I usually like to try new foods. But I have to say that there are some foods too disgusting for even someone daring like me, and they include wriggling raw octopus tentacles, maggot cheese, and the world's worst fruit.

Sannakji is a Korean specialty. It consists of raw, freshly slaughtered octopus tentacles. Even though the tentacles are chopped to pieces, they still wiggle around the plate like they were alive. That is just gross!

Everybody agrees that there is absolutely nothing good about the fruit known as durian. It has a horrible smell and a slimy texture. It leaves a bitter taste in your mouth and it is expensive. Why bother even trying durian?

There are other disgusting foods, too. In many parts of the world insects and eyeballs are eaten. That is disgusting! In Italy, they make something called maggot cheese that sounds too disgusting to even write about, not to mention taste.

In my opinion, it is usually a great experience to taste foods from all over the world. But none of us should feel we have to taste some of the gross and disgusting dishes out there. Just say "No, thanks," to maggot cheese, slithering octopus tentacles, and yucky durian!

3. Nasty Foods of All Nations

Can you imagine yourself sitting down for a meal of fried insects or snacking on the boiled eyeballs of shark? I would certainly prefer a plate of spaghetti and meatballs! We all have our own personal tastes in food and different ideas about what tastes delicious. But most of us would agree that three of the world's nastiest foods have got to be Sannakji, Durian fruit and Casu Marzu, also known as maggot cheese.

Are you reckless enough try Sannakji? This dangerous Korean dish is quite simple: raw, fresh octopus tentacles sprinkled with sesame seeds and drizzled with a spicy oil. What makes Sannakji such a unique and risky dining experience is that those slick tentacles are still squirming and twitching with reflexive movement as you eat them. There is always a possibility that the gray, worm-like octopus arms will latch onto your throat and choke you to death! Those brave enough to taste it say Sannakji has a mild flavor and a rubbery texture that requires a lot of chewing. But even if you chew until your jaw aches, those tentacles never stop wiggling around your mouth. As far as I'm concerned, the only good thing about Sannakji is that the portion is usually small. All in all, I'd say it's more like a dare than a meal.

If a powerful odor of rotting eggs and moldy onions with a hint of gasoline turns your stomach, you probably won't want to snack on a durian. The nauseating smell of this fruit from southeast Asia is so overwhelming that it has been banned from many hotels and on public transportation. The brave few who have tasted the prickly green fruit report that it has the slimy texture of an overripe banana but the mild flavor of almonds. That doesn't sound so bad, does it? Some people actually enjoy it, but before you're tempted to give it a try, you should know that Durian has a bitter, lingering after-taste. I'll never understand why it is one of the world's most expensive fruits, costing an average of \$5 a pound, while sweet, creamy bananas usually go for less than \$1 per pound.

While people from all over the world travel to Italy for its sumptuous food, it's a safe bet that only the natives eat Casu Marzu! From the Italian island of Sardinia, with a name that means "rotten cheese," this is one disgusting dish. To make it, place a traditional sheep's milk cheese in the proximity of dozens of buzzing flies. After the flies have laid their eggs in the cheese and maggots have hatched, chow down on the whole oozing mess. The taste is said to be strong enough to burn your tongue. It is not surprising that Casu Marzu is banned throughout Europe as unhygienic. The only place where you can buy it legally is on Sardinia, where it is considered a traditional food of the countryside. I don't know about you, but I won't be placing my order anytime soon!

If you hope to travel the world, chances are you're going to taste some unfamiliar foods along the way and you'll surely enjoy many of them. But if you're ever offered Sannakji, Durian, or Casu Marzu, you'll probably want to politely decline. Most of us would agree that these three foods are nothing less than repulsive.

Name _____

SCANDINAVIA

Read and compare the following Informational pieces about Scandinavia.

1. Scandinavia

The countries of Scandinavia are in northern Europe. They are nice places to live and to visit.

Five countries are part of Scandinavia. They are Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Norway and Finland. Denmark is the smallest. Norway is the richest. Sweden has the biggest city.

The world's biggest herd of reindeer is in Finland. All five are peaceful countries where people have good jobs and educations. Iceland has lots of beautiful waterfalls, plus hot springs and geysers.

Don't you wish you could visit Scandinavia?

2. Scandinavia

Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway are the countries of Scandinavia. I will tell you all about Scandinavia.

It is a region in northern Europe. These countries are nice. People have good educations and good jobs, but they pay high taxes. Norway is the richest and Denmark is the smallest. I would like to visit both of these countries.

The most interesting thing about the history of the Scandinavian countries is the Vikings. Vikings came from Scandinavia and they raided other places and stole from the people. Mostly though Scandinavia's history is peaceful. Only the Vikings were violent. Mostly, the Scandinavian countries stay out of wars.

The geography of Scandinavia is interesting. There are nice mountains and beaches. In Iceland, there are geysers, hot springs and beautiful waterfalls. They have fjords too, which are deep inlets with towering mountains on both sides. The fjords are mostly in Norway.

Would you like to take a vacation in Scandinavia? I would like to explore these countries and hope I have a chance to someday.

3. Scandinavia

Where does the world's largest herd of reindeer roam? Where can you walk on sidewalks heated by geothermal power in the winter? The answer to both of these questions is Scandinavia, a large peninsula located in northern Europe. Let's learn about life in Scandinavia, and the region's rich history as well as its diverse geographic features.

Life in the Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Denmark and Norway is comfortable and secure. The people of these five countries enjoy a high standard of living with free and equal access to education, health care and other social services for all. All over Scandinavia, but particularly in Norway, people enjoy affluence. Of course, they do pay high taxes, but crime, poverty and unemployment are rare throughout the region. With a population of about 2 million, the city of Stockholm in Sweden is widely considered the capital of Scandinavia. The region also has many charming small villages in its rural areas.

The age of the Vikings, from the late 8th through the 11th centuries, is probably the most dramatic in the history of Scandinavia. While the Vikings are remembered as bloodthirsty warriors, most were really just farmers struggling to grow crops in a land with a short growing season. They took to the sea originally hoping only to establish trade relations with neighboring nations. With the exception of the Viking age, most of Scandinavia's past is peaceful. Sweden has been a neutral country, refusing to become involved in war, for the past 200 years and the nonviolent Danish resistance to the Nazi occupation of World War II was remarkably effective.

The geography of the Scandinavian region is lush and diverse. To the north, it extends into the Arctic Circle where some of Europe's largest glaciers can be found. Both Sweden and Denmark have miles of beautiful coastline and gently rolling lowlands. The region also includes vast, rugged mountain ranges that are broken up by valleys and deep, narrow inlets called fjords. Finland is known for its innumerable lakes and Iceland for its cascading waterfalls and natural hot springs. Iceland is also renowned for its Haukadalur Valley, where the largest geysers in Scandinavia erupt regularly. One can hurl steamy water more than 200 feet into the air!

From the deep fjords of Norway to the beautiful beaches of Denmark, the Scandinavian Peninsula is a captivating land of prosperity, charm and natural beauty. There is certainly much to learn about life in Scandinavia as well as the history and diverse geography of this captivating region.

BE A TEXT DETECTIVE!

FIND THE EVIDENCE

Folk Art

- Chinese folk art paintings tend to be colorful.
- Grandma Moses painted until very late in her life.
- Hand carved and painted bird decoys can be very valuable.
- People who love folk art might collect carousel horses.
- Travel into the country and you might see weathervanes in shapes of farm animals.
- In South America, folk artists create beauty from hand-spun wool.
- Some folk artists weave tiny mirrors into their work.

REMEMBER: YOU DON'T NEED TO READ THE TEXT BEGINNING TO END! USE MAIN IDEAS/REASONS TO DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION AND THEN SKIM AND SCAN! POST YOUR EVIDENCE BESIDE EACH STATEMENT.

BE A TEXT DETECTIVE!

FIND THE EVIDENCE

American Sign Language

- Deaf people are usually proud of their culture and hope you'll want to learn about it.
- Specific rules of etiquette are observed in the deaf community.
- Not all deaf people are willing to read lips.
- You will do better on tests if you study American Sign Language.
- Learning American Sign Language might help you stay focused in the classroom.
- In loud places, using sign language is better than shouting.
- Baseball players could benefit from learn American Sign Language.

REMEMBER: YOU DON'T NEED TO READ THE TEXT BEGINNING TO END! USE MAIN IDEAS/REASONS TO DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION AND THEN SKIM AND SCAN! POST YOUR EVIDENCE BESIDE EACH STATEMENT.