



# **Grade 7 Informational Writing Guide**

## **Student Pages for Print or Projection**

### **SECTION 1: Recognizing Genre/Organization**

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## NARRATIVE, INFORMATIONAL, OR OPINION?

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

1. The oldest of the natural sciences, astronomy is the study of the universe. It looks at how planets, stars, moons, comets and other celestial bodies were formed and how they change over time. There is evidence that ancient people charted the movements of the planets and the moon to predict the future. One of the most fascinating recent discoveries in astronomy was the freshwater lake on Mars that could have made the Red Planet habitable many years ago.

Narrative

Informational

Opinion

2. I absolutely love going to the ocean. What could be better than strolling in the soft, wet sand and finding beautiful shells? Who could resist the fun of splashing in the surf and riding the waves on a hot day? Even the salty smell of the air is exhilarating! Swimming in a lake is relaxing and pool parties are definitely fun, but neither compares to a summer day at the ocean. If you've ever visited a windswept ocean beach, you will certainly agree.

Narrative

Informational

Opinion

3. I heard a smothered peal of laughter as something wet and sticky hit the back of my neck. Another slimy spitball had come my way, launched with loathing by the kids who'd been my friends just a week ago. "Just ignore it," I told myself. As the teacher's voice droned on, another spitball flew into my hair. My heart pounded with rage and I broke out in a cold sweat. "Stay calm and ignore it," I told myself again, but it was no use.

Narrative

Informational

Opinion

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## INFORMATIONAL, OPINION, & ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

Read the paragraphs below and decide if they are examples of informational, argumentative or opinion writing. Circle your response.

- In 1991, a frozen mummy was unearthed in the high mountain peaks near the borders of Italy and Austria. Known as the Iceman of the Alps, he was preserved in a glacier for an estimated 5,300 years. Scientists have studied the Iceman extensively and, at first, they thought he died from exposure to the cold. But, after further study of the wounds on his hands and the astonishing discovery of an arrowhead in his back, it is now quite certain that he died at the hands of another human. We may never know exactly why the Iceman was killed, but one theory is that he was ambushed by hunters who stole his catch. However, if that was the case, why didn't his killers steal the valuable copper axe that was found near the Iceman's corpse? Clearly, there's still a lot to learn about this ancient murder mystery.

Informational

Argumentative

Opinion

- Quick! Who uttered the infamous line "*What's up Doc*" in some of the most entertaining cartoons ever to grace the silver screen? If you answered "Bugs Bunny," you're right and you probably agree with me that this wise-cracking carrot chomper is the greatest animated character of all time. If you have any doubt that Bugs rules the colorful world of cartoons, just ask yourself: Was Daffy Duck ever named an honorary Marine Master Sargent? No, but Bugs was in 1942. Did Porky the Pig ever win an Academy Award? No, but the rambunctious rabbit did (and he was nominated for two more)! In terms of 'toons, there is no question that Bugs Bunny reigns supreme.

Informational

Argumentative

Opinion

- There are many good reasons to avoid energy drinks, but the most compelling one is the effect of these highly caffeinated beverages on your heart. A total of seven recent studies found that people between 18 and 45 years old who consumed up to three energy drinks a day experienced a 3.5 point increase in blood pressure as well as a 4% faster heart rhythm. While those changes seem small, they could trigger an irregular heartbeat or even sudden cardiac death. American Heart Association recommends that "persons with an existing heart condition or a family history of cardiac problems avoid energy drinks entirely."

Informational

Argumentative

Opinion

**BONUS:** What evidence does the argumentative paragraph cite? Circle any facts, statistics or quotes you can find within the text.

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

## 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.

### 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.

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## OPINION VS. ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

Read the sentences below and decide if they belong in an opinion piece or an argumentative essay. Circle your choice.

- I believe Mrs. Susan Strong is the most effective principal our school has ever had.  
Opinion                      Argumentative
- When surveyed, four out of five teachers agreed that Mrs. Susan Strong has superior leadership skills.  
Opinion                      Argumentative
- “Test taking sparks intense anxiety in about 25% of all teenagers,” says adolescent psychiatrist Dr. Laurie Perry.  
Opinion                      Argumentative
- There’s nothing 7th graders dread more than taking final exams.  
Opinion                      Argumentative
- In my opinion, a dog is the greatest pet ever.  
Opinion                      Argumentative
- Nearly 70% of all people in North America have a dog and 25% have more than one cherished canine companion.  
Opinion                      Argumentative

**Now, your turn...** Write two sentences on an issue you care deeply about -- one opinion, the other argumentative. Go online or use print resources to gather facts, statistics, and/or quotes to support your argument.

- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## VOTE FOR BRIDGET BROWNLY: A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Read the Letter to the Editor below. Is this an example of opinion writing or argumentative writing? Why?

### Dear Editor:

I am writing to let everybody in our community know that I believe Mrs. Bridget Brownly is definitely the best choice for our next mayor.

Do you support the small businesses in our town? Bridget Brownly certainly does! Many of her extended family and close friends operate businesses on Main Street and this qualified candidate understands the challenges they face. She knows that lots of people avoid shopping on Main Street because of the limited parking there and has a plan to alleviate this problem.

I am very impressed by Mrs. Brownly's ideas for improving our schools too. After all, she's the mother of three so she has a personal interest in these very important issues. In my opinion, we can

definitely depend on her to spearhead efforts to create the educational enrichment programs our children need.

Finally, this wise candidate opposes the plan to build a high-rise condominium on our waterfront. As we all know, in the neighboring town of Brentwood a similar construction project limited community access to the beaches and destroyed the nesting sites of several species of native birds. I completely disapprove of this unnecessary and ecologically irresponsible plan and so does my choice for mayor.

I get really excited when I think about the future of our town when Bridget Brownly is in charge. All in all, I can't imagine a better candidate for mayor.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Reese

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**VOTE FOR BRIDGET BROWNLY: AN EDITORIAL**

Read the editorial below. Is this an example of opinion writing or argumentative writing? Why?

In our two hundred year history, we have faced some difficult times here in Rockville, but perhaps none more challenging than the present. Today we are tasked with the problem of maintaining our main street for the small business owners of our community. We must invest in our schools and protect our beaches from development too. Next month, our community will vote to elect a new leader to address these very important issues and the most qualified person for the job is Mrs. Bridget Brownly.

Here in Rockville, four local businesses closed their doors last year. All were long-time fixtures on Main Street and they went out of business for the same reason. "Nobody shops on Main Street anymore," explained Stan Green, who owned Rockville Hardware for thirty years. "There's no place to park and the big chain stores can offer lower prices." Brownly is well aware of this problem and poised to act! This thoughtful public servant has a plan to add 56 new parking spots and establish a small business initiative to promote Main Street. Small business owners in other towns like Rockville have reported that their sales increased by about 35% after such programs were established in their communities.

Enrollment in the Rockville Public Schools has increased by 14% over the past decade. Yet each year the budget has been slashed by another 2%. As a result, academic enrichment programs have been eliminated and class size in the elementary school exceeds 28! How will Bridget Brownly address this crisis situation? Well, her budget proposal allows our school district to hire five new full-time teachers. Additionally, as mayor,

this mother of four plans to establish a dramatic arts program as well as an after-school academic support center for the students of Rockville. How will we pay for these programs? That might be the best part of the plan. We won't. Both will be staffed by volunteers, including retired teachers and students from the nearby state college! This is just one example of the superior problem-solving skills and forward-thinking that Brownly will bring to the job of mayor.

Most of us feel very lucky to live in a seaside community and enjoy swimming, fishing and sunbathing on our beaches. Six gorgeous and graceful species of seabirds nest of the dunes in and around Rockville and we have a responsibility to protect them. Bridget Brownly shows her commitment to protecting our beaches by opposing the construction of a waterfront high-rise condominium on Sandy Boulevard. This ecologically unsound project would provide luxury housing for more than 200 people, but restrict beach access for all other Rockville residents. Marine biologist Terry Thompson warns that the high rise would "destroy the nesting sites of our native seabirds and the grasses upon which they feed, resulting in a 65% decline in bird populations within five years." When surveyed, almost 85% of all Rockville residents agree that this project must be stopped and Bridgit Brownly is determined to do just that!

Rockville is a wonderful community today but we must address our urgent problems in order to keep it that way. Without a doubt, Mrs. Bridget Brownly has a viable plan to promote our local businesses, support our schools, and protect our environment.



Name \_\_\_\_\_

## The Great Depression

Try to picture yourself living in a one-room shack with no heat or running water in a crowded place called Hooverville. Imagine seeing the once fertile soil of your farmland swept up into an enormous cloud of dust. During the years of the Great Depression, thousands of people had just such experiences as homelessness and unemployment skyrocketed and farms failed. Desperate, they put their hopes for the future on a newly elected president with a “New Deal” to offer.

### Finding a Home in Hooverville

The Great Depression began with the largest stock market crash the world had ever known in October of 1929. People lost their savings, their jobs and their homes. Dreary, makeshift encampments where the homeless took shelter sprang up in cities across the nation. One of the largest was in New York City’s Central Park. Covering 9 acres, it was home to 15,000 down-and-out individuals. By 1931, such large shantytowns could be found in the cities of Chicago and St. Louis, and on the outskirts of many other cities.



One of the first settlers in the Hooverville of New York’s Central Park.

The “homes” of these encampments were unsightly, often not much more than a large cardboard box, and conditions were decidedly unsanitary. But, because it was clear that the destitute residents had nowhere else to go, they were generally tolerated by luckier citizens and law enforcement. They were called **Hoovervilles** because blame for the dismal state of the economy was placed squarely on the shoulders of President Herbert Hoover. Hoover’s mistake was probably that he failed to recognize the signs of an economic decline known as a **recession** before the crash of 1929. Among those signs were the end of the post-war housing boom and the excess of new consumer products flooding the market, especially automobiles. Consumer spending was not keeping pace with the average worker’s wage of \$1,500 per year and disaster loomed on the horizon.

## Life in the Dust Bowl

While city dwellers suffered in Hoovervilles, life on the prairies of the United States and Canada was no less difficult. The stage was set for disaster when farmers overworked their land to take advantage of rising wheat prices throughout the 1920s. When drought struck and temperatures soared during the summer of 1931, crops died. Dust from the overused land began to blow in **Black Blizzards** that darkened the skies and drifted into mounds large enough to bury a tractor. In 1931, fourteen such storms were reported; by 1932 that number had risen to 38. According to the Yearbook of Agriculture, by 1934 approximately 35 million acres of farm land had been destroyed and another 125 million acres had lost most of its topsoil. Schools were closed as the winds walloped the flat lands hard enough to blow vehicles right off the road. Desperate families abandoned their farms and many headed to the unwelcoming west where they struggled to eek out a bare-bones existence. The state of Oklahoma was hardest hit by the Dust Bowl and lost more than 40% of its farms. Conditions in Canada, especially in the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan were equally dismal, and by the end of the decade,

more than 1/3 of Canada's farmers were receiving public assistance and another 1/3 had abandoned their farms.

## Finally, FDR's "New Deal"

Life in North America was bleak but there was a beacon of hope on the horizon and his name was Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR). Considered the greatest U.S. president by many historians, Roosevelt beat Hoover by a landslide in the 1932 election and introduced his bold "**New Deal**", a plan that set economic recovery in motion during the first 100 days of his presidency. Among his speedy accomplishments was the creation of the **Civilian Conservation Corps**, which put more than 250,000 young men to work in national parks. While they fought forest fires, planted trees and built roads in the national parks, these men also received education. Some were taught to read and others prepared for college. More than 2.5 million young men benefited from this program and



*April 14, 1935 became known as "Black Sunday" when the largest dust storm yet roared across the plains.*



many served the nation further in the upcoming World War II. For the farmers, Roosevelt provided federally funded assistance with loans and crop **subsidies**, money granted by the government to support an industry that serves the public interest. **The Federal Theatre Project** put performing artists to work and great artists like Jackson

Pollock weathered this difficult decade with help from a New Deal program. The **Civil Works Administration** provided 4 million persons with jobs working on municipal improvements across the country. While not every program was a success, most people were encouraged by FDR's vision, and it was an exciting

time in history as agriculture, the arts and industry slowly came back to life.

From the despair of life in Hooverville and the whirling menace of the Dust Bowl came the promise of FDR's inspirational leadership and his daring New Deal. Without a doubt, the years of the Great Depression were among the most challenging in history for the people of North America.



*Workmen cleaning and painting the gold dome of the Denver Capitol.*



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.

**TOPIC:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA #1:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA #2:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA #3:** \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Title

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Who can resist the lure of an island? The word island brings to mind unforgettable images of crystal clear tropical waters and gorgeous pink sunsets. While the beauty of Caribbean and Hawaiian islands is legendary, the Greek Isles have equally beautiful beaches as well as fascinating historic sites that date back to ancient times. Let's hop into a water taxi and take a tour of the islands of Crete, Rhodes and Hydra.

## Heading:

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Of the 60 islands in this Mediterranean paradise, the Greek Island of Crete is the largest and the most visited. Spanning about 8,000 square kilometers (or 3,088 square miles) this gorgeous island attracts more than 3 million

tourists a year. Many come to see the archaeological sites of the island, particularly Knossos Palace which dates back to the Minoan dynasty of 1900 BC. In its time, the palace was not only home to the royal family of Crete, but it also had public areas where everybody was welcome to gather and trade goods. Tall, clay-colored columns stand at the entrance to the palace. Covering many of the stone walls are frescos, elaborate, long-lasting works of art painted directly into wet plaster, that tell the story of Minoan life. The well-preserved ruins



(caption) \_\_\_\_\_

of the ancient city of Gortys is another highlight of a trip to Crete. To explore Gortys, follow a path lined with olive trees and you'll see the oldest church in Crete. Continue on to the acropolis, a fortress in an ancient Greek city usually found on a hill where people took shelter during times of war. While the acropolis of Gortys is impressive, the world's largest and best known of these ancient structures is in the city of Athens on mainland Greece.

## Heading:

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Northeast of Crete and just off the coast of Turkey, lies the island of Rhodes where you'll find a well-preserved ancient city of the same name that's definitely worth exploring. Enclosed by thick stone walls that have stood since medieval times, the city of Rhodes is a blend of past and present. Ancient structures with elegant columns and gothic turrets are home to tourist shops and cafes. Stroll through thousands of years of history along the Street of Knights where holy warriors once spent their time in prayer or in training

to defend the island against the next Turkish or Roman invasion. There are two other ancient settlements on the island and both have their charms. Lindos is a pleasant fishing village of white-washed cottages, vine-covered walkways and rooftop restaurants with spectacular views. It also has a history dating back to 408 BC and long stretches of beautiful beaches where you can spot an array of colorful sea life in the calm, clear waters. The third and smallest of the island's ancient cities is Kamiros. Originally built in the 6th century, this farming community produced oil, wine and figs. Twice destroyed by earthquakes and rebuilt, Kamiros was gradually abandoned as the nearby city of Rhodes grew more important.

## Heading:

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After you've explored Rhodes and Crete, take a few days to relax with a visit to Hydra. Part of the Saronic Gulf archipelago, which means a group of islands, Hydra is a charming blast from the past where you'll find no cars or motorcycles. Donkeys are your only means of transportation and there are hundreds of



them! The hiking is great in Hydra and you'll have your choice of many paths that lead you into small villages and past fields of vibrantly colored wildflowers. While Hydra means "water" in Greek, there are few sandy beaches on this tiny island. Instead, folks flock to the Spilia Swimming Rocks, a short walk from the center of town. This rocky shoreline area has cliffs from which daredevils can jump into deep blue pools. There are also ladders leading down into the water, flat rocks for sunbathing and beautiful views of the Aegean Sea. It is definitely fun for all!

Whether you're curious about ancient history, eager to enjoy some of the world's finest beaches or both, the Greek Isles are a



(caption) \_\_\_\_\_

fascinating place to visit. Discovering all that the islands of Crete, Rhodes and Hydra have to offer will surely keep you busy from dawn to dusk. Start saving for your trip today!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Island Adventures

Welcome to the largest island in the Caribbean. See the vintage cars cruising down the highway. Listen to the buzz of the **Bee Hummingbird**, the smallest bird on earth, in the flowering shrubs. You've arrived in Cuba. This essay will trace the stormy history of this island nation from its earliest days through the arrival of Christopher Columbus and the rise of Fidel Castro. It will also look at the bright promise of Cuba's future.

### On the Warpath!

The story of Cuba begins way back in 1000 B.C. when Taino Indians ventured north from Venezuela and Guyana to settle on the islands of the Caribbean. These early inhabitants gave Cuba its name, which means "where fertile land is abundant" and

they grew thriving gardens of cassava, maize and other crops. Farmers and fishermen, these gentle people lived simple, peaceful lives in villages called **yucayeques** that were governed by chiefs known as **caciques**. For centuries, their only enemy was the **Caribs**, a fierce South American tribe, who disrupted the serenity of their days by invading the island and taking Tainos as slaves.

### European Nightmare

Then came Christopher Columbus and the colonial era began. On October 28, 1492, the infamous explorer arrived in the northeast corner of the island. According to legend, Columbus exclaimed "esta es la tierra mas hermosa que ojos humanos vieron" (this is the most beautiful land that human eyes have

ever seen) when he saw the rolling hills and white beaches of Cuba for the first time. He claimed the land for Spain and in 1511 conquistador **Diego Velasquez** established the first European settlement on the island. Of course, this was not good news for the native people, many of whom were forced into slave labor. Tainos, along with hundreds of thousands of African slaves, worked endless painful hours on Cuba's plantations and made it the world's largest exporter of sugarcane for many years to come. The Spanish colonial period ended in 1898 after the United States defeated Spain in the Spanish-American war.



## Politics & Pigs

Cuba was occupied by the U.S. until 1902 when it finally became an independent nation with Estrada Palma as its first president. In 1959, **Fidel Castro** led the Cuban revolution and established a communist government, which led to serious tension between Cuba and the U.S. Despite efforts to remove him from power, including the disastrous **Bay of Pigs invasion** in 1961, Castro led Cuba for nearly five decades. During that time, Castro established high quality healthcare and educational systems for his nation, but the people enjoyed little liberty or prosperity.

## Sunny Days

Today, a bright new future is dawning for Cuba. While it remains a communist state, new policies are emerging that give citizens more personal power and encourage entrepreneurship as well as tourism. Diplomatic relations between the U.S.

and Cuba have been reestablished and trade embargos prohibiting imports and exports between the U.S. and Cuba may soon be lifted. Among other things, this means that there will be an American embassy in the capital city of Havana and that Americans will be able to partner with Cuban businesses. Perhaps most importantly, it means the end of travel restrictions between the two nations, which is likely to result in a surge in tourism for Cuba. This will definitely bolster the Cuban economy.

From the days of the Taino Indians through the colonial era and onto its establishment as an independent nation, Cuba's past is stormy, but its future seems filled with hope. This essay has touched upon only the highlights of this colorful nation's history. It would be interesting also to learn about Cuba's Ten Year War with Spain as well as the reign of the ruthless Fulgencio Batista, who rose to

## WHAT WAS THE BAY OF PIGS?



To have a communist nation like Cuba so close to its borders appeared to be a serious threat to the U.S. back in 1961. It seemed critical that Fidel Castro's government be overthrown. In an effort to do just that, a group of Cuban exiles were sent from the U.S. to invade the island. Under the leadership of president John F. Kennedy, it was decided that the invaders would arrive in a swampy place on Cuba's southern coast known as the Bay of Pigs. However, when they reached this destination, they found themselves grievously outnumbered by Cuban forces and all were killed or captured. The mission was an embarrassment to the U.S. that served only to strengthen support for Castro throughout Cuba.

power after a military coup in 1933. Without a doubt, the story of Cuba is complex and fascinating.



# 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: \_\_\_\_\_



# ARGUMENTATIVE PILLAR

## INTRODUCTION

Lead/Claim Statement

Main Reason #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Evidence	Evidence
----------	----------

Evidence	Evidence
----------	----------

Main Reason #2 \_\_\_\_\_

Evidence	Evidence
----------	----------

Evidence	Evidence
----------	----------

Main Reason #3 \_\_\_\_\_

Evidence	Evidence
----------	----------

Evidence	Evidence
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## CONCLUSION

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## THE FACTS ABOUT MIDDLE SCHOOL DATING

In middle school, some of your friends will probably begin a dating relationship. This is controversial as some research shows that early dating can spark complex emotions that tweens and young adolescents are not ready to cope with. Others, however, say that middle school dating provides practical experience in cultivating healthy relationships. Let's look at some of the statistics about middle school dating as well as its impact on academic achievement and social development.

Exactly how many middle school students are actually dating? That's hard to say because young teens define "dating" in so many different ways. Some might say they are going out with someone when all they do is eat lunch together in the cafeteria or exchange text messages in the evening. Others actually ask someone out to a movie or a dance. The best estimate, based on a study published in the Journal of Research on Adolescence, is that 38% of all kids begin dating regularly in sixth grade. Informal surveys suggest that girls are slightly more likely to begin dating during the middle school years than boys.

Parents often fear that dating during the middle school years will cause their children to lose interest in school. There is some evidence that this is indeed true. It is a fact that students with high academic goals are the most likely to delay dating until late adolescence. Additionally, the study cited above showed that students who dated in middle school had lower test scores and were four times more likely to drop out of high school than those who started dating when they were older.

Popularity is paramount to a middle school student, and many believe that dating will help them earn the admiration of their peers. However, many middle school teachers have observed that kids who become involved in a consuming romantic relationship during these years often isolate themselves from the larger peer group. While a healthy dating relationship will provide fun and friendship, an unhealthy one can cause substantial damage. Tweens and young teens may grow depressed and anxious as they cope with the feelings of rejection and jealousy sparked by romantic relationships.

Clearly, the issue of middle school dating is complex. Since children develop at differing rates, some may be ready for a romantic relationship during the middle school years and some will not. If you're thinking about dating, talk it over your parents and consider the statistics related to middle-school dating as well as how it might affect your grades and your social life.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## THE FACTS ABOUT MIDDLE SCHOOL DATING

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

Informational

Opinion

Argumentative

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 the *topic sentence* in blue.

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

9. Read this detail: *Other studies indicate that urban dwellers usually start dating earlier than those growing up in rural communities.*

Where does this detail belong? Paragraph # \_\_\_\_\_

10. Number the references to each main idea/reason restated in the conclusion. Use paragraph numbers.

11. Fill in the summarizing framework/author's prewriting plan:

**TOPIC:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA/REASON #1:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA/REASON #2:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA/REASON #3:** \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## DATING: HOLD OFF UNTIL HIGH SCHOOL

Are you for or against dating during the middle school years? After watching several friends struggle with the drama of dating, I firmly believe that it is more trouble than it is worth. Dating during middle school causes kids to lose interest in school, damages friendships, and generates conflict with their families.

Everybody knows that school becomes less important to you when you get a boy or girl friend. Dating takes up time that could be spent studying, developing musical and artistic talents or playing sports. I think these are important to teens and middle school students for a productive high school experience. What's more, Pamela Orpinas, professor of public health at the University of Georgia, researched this issue and believes that the poor educational performance of early daters is "part of an overall pattern of high risk behaviors," including the use of alcohol and drugs, and I agree.

Are you willing to trade your friends for your dating relationship? Middle school students often have to make that painful choice when they begin dating as former friends start fighting over a boy or a girl. I feel this is especially sad because middle school dating relationships are likely to be short, while good friendships can last a lifetime. From my experience, I think dating also generates a lot of careless gossip and rumors that can end a friendship. Furthermore, just imagine that you are the first in your group to start dating. If you have problems in your relationship, who can you talk them over with? Your friends who aren't dating yet won't understand what you're going through. You will feel frustrated and isolated from your friends as you work out the problem alone. I don't ever want to find myself in that situation!

If your parents are like most, they will disapprove of dating. There's a good chance you'll have to sneak around and lie to them in order to see your boy or girl friend. You'll surely get caught and that will cause lasting damage to your relationship with your mom or dad. I would hate that. For me, dating is not worth breaking the bond of trust I've built with my parents. Why not stick to going out with a group of boys and girls? This safe, easy alternative is definitely fun and parents almost always approve.

Why put yourself in a situation that might cause problems with school, friends and parents? Without a doubt, it is a smart choice to say no to middle school dating!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## DATING: HOLDING OFF UNTIL HIGH SCHOOL

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

Informational

Opinion

Argumentative

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 the *author's opinion* in blue.

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

9. Circle all of the *opinion language*.

10. Number the references to each main idea/reason restated in the conclusion. Use paragraph numbers.

11. Fill in the summarizing framework/author's prewriting plan.

**TOPIC:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA/REASON #1:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA/REASON #2:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA/REASON #3:** \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## DATING: WHY WAIT UNTIL HIGH SCHOOL?

As soon as puberty kicks in, most young people start having romantic feelings. This is often dismissed as “puppy love” and children are discouraged from acting on their healthy, natural emotions by dating. However, in this essay, I will argue that dating during the middle school years is quite safe and valuable to tweens and young teens. These fumbling attempts at romance are short, easy for parents to supervise, and they provide necessary experience in nurturing great relationships.

The most obvious reason middle school relationships are safe is that they are usually so short. Consider that the length of the average middle school romance ranges from a low of two days to a high of six weeks. In an informal survey, 26 out of 30 middle school teachers agreed that these fleeting relationships are simply too short to have any impact on learning or on the child’s emotional health. One teacher went so far as to say that these relationships often involve “only two clumsy conversations: the asking out and the breaking up.” Of course, opponents of middle school dating say that this speedy process causes sensitive tweens and young teens to feel the sting of rejection, but middle school teachers report that the kids “bounce back in no time at all.”

Middle school dating is easy for parents to supervise simply because these children depend on adults for transportation. When tweens and young teens plan a movie date, both must endure the awkward drive to the theatre with a parent at the wheel. Often, the parent stays for the movie too! Middle school dances are well-supervised by both parents and teachers. How much trouble could the young couple get into in either situation? It is important to note also that a middle school “date” can consist of nothing but an online chat or texting session, both of which are equally easy for parents to oversee.

Perhaps most importantly, middle school dating prepares kids for the more serious romances of high school. It gives them a chance to reflect on what they want and need in a relationship and recognize the features of a healthy vs. unhealthy relationship. This is especially important when we consider that studies conducted by domestic violence advocacy groups estimate that 12-27% of all teenagers experience relational violence during their high school years. Well-supervised middle school dating can give kids the experience they need to recognize the controlling and jealous behaviors that may lead to violence among young couples. Without such experience, teens might confuse this dangerous conduct with love.

Considering the evidence, it is clear that tweens and young teens deserve the opportunity to experiment with dating during the middle school years. These early romantic relationships are almost always short-lived. They are easy for parents to supervise and provide invaluable preparation for the more intense romances of high school. While they always run the risk of heartbreak, most middle school students would surely benefit from occasional, casual dating.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## DATING: WHY WAIT UNTIL HIGH SCHOOL?

1. This is an example of what kind of writing? Circle one:  
Informational                  Opinion                  Argumentative
2. Number each paragraph.
3. Circle the *introduction*.
4. Box the *conclusion*.
5. Circle the *title* and identify the *topic* or issue.
6. Underline the *issue statement* in red.
7. Underline the *author's claim* in blue.
8. Underline each **MAIN/IDEA REASON**. Write a blurb (a word or two) in the margin next to the paragraph explaining what the entire paragraph is about.
9. Circle the “*Yes, but*” statement in the second paragraph.
10. Underline the *statistic* in the fourth paragraph.
11. Number the references to each main reason restated in the conclusion. Use paragraph numbers.
12. Fill in the summarizing framework/author's prewriting plan. If the piece is informational, circle “Main Idea.” If it's an argument piece, circle “Main Reason.” Remember, informational text explores a **TOPIC** while argumentative writing focuses on an **ISSUE**.

**TOPIC/ISSUE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA/REASON #1:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA/REASON #2:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA/REASON #3:** \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## HAIR DYING: YES OR NO?

When I asked my mother if I could dye my hair pink, her reply was a definitive, “Don’t you dare!” Most of my friends’ parents had the same sort of reaction. At some schools, students have actually been suspended for coming to school “rocking” an unnatural shade of dyed hair. I believe this is totally wrong. What’s the big deal about hair dying? As everybody knows, it is safe and temporary, plus it may help a middle school student build self-confidence.

Common throughout the world, the use of hair coloring is safe. Extensive testing conducted by the National Cancer Institute failed to establish any consistent links between the use of hair dye and cancer. Of course, it is possible to have an allergic reaction to hair dye, but you can easily test your own sensitivity with a simple “strand” test. The directions for completing such a test are explained clearly on the hair dye box. Furthermore, while most hair dye does contain chemicals, all-natural options are widely available for those concerned about safety.

It is fun to experiment with hair dye because it is temporary. Even if you make a big mistake, you don’t have to live with it for long. Your brilliant color can be gone overnight if you use a spray-in product. Hair chalk, which gives you pretty pastel highlights, also washes out in one shampoo. Semi-permanent color lasts through only 4-6 shampoos and even if you use permanent color, it will fade as it grows out. The worst case scenario is that you have to go to a salon for corrective color or cut it out and live with short hair for a few months.

A bold new hair color is a great way to give a middle school student the confidence he or she needs to take on other risks, such as auditioning for the school play or trying out for the softball team. Experts agree that tweens and young teens need opportunities to make choices and accept their consequences in order to develop a strong, confident sense of self. Allowing them to dye their hair in any color of the rainbow is a harmless way in which they can enjoy just such an opportunity for growth.

Unlike tattoos and piercings, hair dying does not cause infections or leave behind scars. I am definitely in favor of middle school students being allowed to enjoy this safe, temporary, confidence-boosting means of self-expression.



Name \_\_\_\_\_

## HAIR DYING: YES OR NO?

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

Informational

Argumentative

2. Number each paragraph.

3. Circle the *introduction*.

4. Box the *conclusion*.

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

6. Underline the *lead* in red.

7. Underline the *claim* in blue.

8. Bracket the “*Yes, but*” statements in the second paragraph.

9. Underline each **MAIN IDEA/REASON** (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.

10. Read this detail: *The biggest danger you face is getting hair dye in your eyes and that’s easily avoidable.*

Where does this detail belong? Paragraph # \_\_\_\_\_

11. Number the references to each main idea/reason restated in the conclusion. Use paragraph numbers.

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

**TOPIC/ISSUE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA/REASON #1:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA/REASON #2:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA/REASON #3:** \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## BATMAN VS. SUPERMAN

Who would you choose to save you from the clutches of an evil villain? Would you opt for Batman to sweep you to safety in his supremely sleek batmobile? Or, perhaps you'd prefer to have Superman fly to your rescue? Of course, both superheroes are up to the job. They've faced down bad guys in hundreds of comic books, on television and even on the silver screen. Whether you're a tried and true Batman fan or a diehard Superman fanatic, you've got to admit that the two have some interesting similarities and other striking differences. Let's examine both as we take a look at their childhoods, their superpowers and their alter egos.

While Batman was born an ordinary earthling, Superman hails from planet Krypton. Like the epic heroes of Greek mythology, both had traumatic events in their early childhoods that inspired them to greatness. Batman witnessed the murder of his parents as a boy and vowed to devote his life to fighting crime. As a baby, the Man of Steel saw the destruction of his home planet and survived only because his father sent him skyrocketing to earth in a space capsule. Batman was raised by his butler, Alfred in gloomy Gotham City, while Superman was adopted by a farmer and spent his childhood in the pastoral peace of Smallville, Kansas where he grew up determined to use his powers to promote justice.

Both Batman and Superman are mighty forces against evil, but only Superman has true superpowers. As we all know, he is "faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive and able to leap tall buildings in a single bound." He also has x-ray vision and supersonic lungs. The amazing alien can inhale and exhale with enough force to extinguish a forest fire or move heavy objects out of his way. Batman has none of these gifts. Instead, the Caped Crusader depends on his super-human intelligence and awesome gadgetry. Criminals beware. His batcave is filled with advanced crime-fighting equipment of his own design. Just a few of many are the bat-rope that he uses to climb tall buildings and the Batcopter, which is tricked out with Bat-pontoons for water landings.

Superman and Batman have alter-egos that allow them to interact with mere mortals whenever they please. Batman's Bruce Wayne is tall, dark and handsome. Rich and sophisticated, he runs a big business and gives generously to charity. The moody aristocrat catches the eye of many a society belle, but prefers the company of his trusted sidekick Robin and, of course, Alfred. Superman masquerades as Clark Kent, a small-town boy making a home for himself in the city of Metropolis. He wears thick, black-framed glasses and works hard as a newspaper reporter, but he has yet to fully earn the respect of his editor. Clark is an honest man who is often forced to lie in order to mask his true identity, especially when he's late to work. That's not something Bruce Wayne worries about since he's the boss!

Isn't it fun to look at the early childhoods, the extraordinary powers and the distinctly different alter egos these two classic superheroes? Without a doubt, Batman and Superman are unique individuals who happen to share some special characteristics.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## BATMAN VS. SUPERMAN

1. This is an example of what kind of writing? Circle one:  
Informational                      Argumentative
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 Superman in paragraph #2 and for Batman in paragraph #3.
8. Where does this detail belong? At the push of a button, Batman's thick utility belt can fire electrifying batarangs that shock criminals into surrender.

Paragraph # \_\_\_\_\_

9. While Batman and Superman both have alter-egos, the two are quite unique. How are Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne different?

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

**TOPIC/ISSUE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA/REASON #1:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA/REASON #2:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA/REASON #3:** \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**FEED BY M.T. ANDERSON**

Welcome to the materialistic future. The fascinating dystopian novel Feed by M.T. Anderson fast-forwards us into a world of beauty and luxury, where nature has been obliterated and war looms but nobody seems to notice.

Just about everybody is beautiful in this story. That's because they've been custom-designed from only the finest gene pools in the universe. One character isn't as good-looking as the rest, but he's richer and wiser. You've got to wonder if maybe his parents got ahold of some super special DNA. Not only are these characters beautiful, but they enjoy luxurious lives. They rocket off to the moon on a whim and fly around in their very own sleek and speedy upcars. They go on lavish vacations deep beneath the sea. Best of all, they've got "feeds" implanted in their brains that send them a constant stream of advertising messages so that they can buy everything their hearts desire around the clock. Of course, they are expert consumers. They have, after all, attended School Inc. where they learned all about the many, many products they need and want.

Clearly, the "feed" is quite distracting because nobody seems to care that nature no longer exists on earth. The oceans emit a toxic odor and glow different shades of blue, purple and green. Whales, laminated to protect them from the polluted waters, exist for the corporate adventure of whale hunting. Farm animals have been replaced by lush gardens of artificial filet mignon that are watered by blood. All trees have been bull-dozed to make way for efficient air factories. Houses are encased in their own private bubbles, each with its own sun and the occupant's choice of season. Clouds are created by corporations and trademarked. If you look up to the actual sky, you see that it is peeling away.

War looms on the horizon as an environmental disaster turns the rest of the world against this creepy nation of consumers. There is an underground explosion that nobody saw coming. A riot breaks out. Black snow begins to fall. All the while, the clueless president just keeps babbling into everybody's feed, corporate-sponsored words promising peace and plenty. "What we wish for is ours," the powerless leader declares, and everybody believes him. Life goes on as always for the happy consumers who just keep listening to their feeds and buying, even when their own skin begins to peel away. One character admits, "When I think of really living, living to the full – all my ideas are just the opening credits of sitcoms." As the story ends, "feeds" begin to fail and we witness the final days of a civilization ruined by greed.

M.T. Anderson's vision of a future where corporations are in control of our lives is clever and chilling. Feed is set in an unforgettably ugly world filled with beautiful people where greed has destroyed nature and started a war. It made me question whether I am doing enough to resist the "feed" in my own life. Doing so would certainly be worth the effort.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## **FEED BY M.T. ANDERSON**

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. Underline the quotes in paragraph 4.
5. How does the author feel about the setting of the novel Feed?

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

***This piece describes*** \_\_\_\_\_

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7. Fill in the summarizing framework/author's prewriting plan.

**TOPIC/ISSUE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA/REASON #1:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA/REASON #2:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIN IDEA/REASON #3:** \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## NATURAL WONDERS OF NORTH AMERICA

From the sandy deserts and tropical rainforests of Mexico to the rugged, polar bear territory of Canada, North America is a continent where natural wonders abound. Let's traverse the continent to explore the extraordinary Crystal Caves of Mexico, hike in the Redwood Forests of the United States, and see the Northern Lights of Canada.

Located in the state of Chihuahua in northern Mexico, the Crystal Caves (or Cuera de los Cristales) glitter with the largest, oldest crystals yet discovered on earth. Some of them are more than 30 feet in length and weigh over 50 tons. The hot, humid conditions allowed the crystals to reach such astonishing proportions. It is estimated that the oldest of the luminous crystals had been growing for about 600,000 years when the cave was discovered in the year 2000. This forest of crystals, many as thick in diameter as a tree trunk, is said to have an eerie, otherworldly beauty, but exploring it is quite risky. The sweltering 136 degree heat of the cave is perfect for crystal growth, but too hot for humans to endure for any length of time.

There are more oversized miracles to see in the sky-scraping redwood forests of the United States. With towering trees that can reach an astonishing height of 300 feet, these enchanted forests are found along the coast of northern California and nowhere else on earth. The amazing endurance of these mighty trees matches their size. Redwoods can live as long as 3,000 years and withstand lightening strikes and forest fires. However, most of the redwood trees that stand today are about 150 years old. Why? Because at the time of the California Gold Rush, much of the wood that built the city of San Francisco came from old-growth redwoods. Efforts to preserve these majestic giants didn't begin until the 1920s.

To the north, Mother Nature is putting on a light show that has to be seen to be believed! The aurora borealis, or northern lights, fill the clear winter skies over Canada with waves of neon-bright color. With emerald green, hot pink and royal purple hues, the northern lights may look magical, but there is actually a scientific explanation for the dazzling phenomena. It starts when charged particles from the sun strike atoms in the northerly reaches of the Earth's atmosphere. This forces electrons into a short-lived high-energy state. As they revert back to their normal energy state, they release the bright lights of the aurora borealis.

When you need a reminder of what a fascinating world we live in, just picture a cave hidden deep within the earth for centuries and filled with shimmering crystals, a stand of ancient redwood trees that soar into the clouds, and a night sky dancing with bright, beautiful colors. If you dream of seeing each of these natural wonders some day, you are certainly not alone!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## NATURAL WONDERS OF NORTH AMERICA

1. This is an example of what kind of writing? Circle one:  
Informational      Argumentative
2. Number each *paragraph*.
3. Circle the *introduction* paragraph.
4. Box the *conclusion*.
5. Circle the *title* and identify the *topic*.
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 word referent for “redwood tree” in the third paragraph.
10. Read this detail: *The crystals are composed of a soft mineral known as gypsum.*  
Where does this detail belong? Paragraph # \_\_\_\_\_
11. What happened to the redwood forests during the time of the California Gold Rush?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. Number the references to each main idea restated in the conclusion. Use paragraph numbers.
13. Fill in the summarizing framework/author’s prewriting plan. Remember, informational text explores a **TOPIC** while argumentative writing focuses on an **ISSUE**.

<b>TOPIC/ISSUE:</b> _____
<b>MAIN IDEA/REASON #1:</b> _____
<b>MAIN IDEA/REASON #2:</b> _____
<b>MAIN IDEA/REASON #3:</b> _____



Name \_\_\_\_\_

## SUMMARIZING YOUR INDEPENDENT READING

What are you reading? If you're reading a story, tell us about it by completing the Narrative Writing Summarizing Framework below. If you're reading nonfiction, please let us know what you are learning from it in the Informational Writing Summarizing Framework.

### Narrative Writing Summarizing Framework

Name of book \_\_\_\_\_

Author \_\_\_\_\_

This story is about \_\_\_\_\_  
*main character*

The problem, adventure or experience was that \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
*single significant main event*

The problem is solved, adventure/experience concluded when \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
*solution/conclusion*

### Informational Writing Summarizing Framework

Name of book \_\_\_\_\_

Topic \_\_\_\_\_

Main Idea #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Main Idea #2 \_\_\_\_\_

Main Idea #3 \_\_\_\_\_

Additional main ideas: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Name \_\_\_\_\_

## WRITING SIMPLE SUMMARIZING PARAGRAPHS

Look at the following summarizing framework and summarizing paragraph:

**TOPIC: Tropical Rainforest Botanicals**

**MAIN IDEA #1: Rubber trees**

**MAIN IDEA #2: Orchids**

**MAIN IDEA #3: Bromelads**

This article provided information about botanicals found in tropical rainforests. The reader learns about Rubber trees and discovers the characteristics of orchids. The author also describes Bromelaid plants..

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: Science**

**MAIN IDEA #1: Botany**

**MAIN IDEA #2: Zoology**

**MAIN IDEA #3: Genetics**

**TOPIC: Omnivorous Creatures**

**MAIN IDEA #1: Bears**

**MAIN IDEA #2: Badgers**

**MAIN IDEA #3: Pigs**

**TOPIC: Influential Artists**

**MAIN IDEA #1: Vincent Van Gogh**

**MAIN IDEA #2: Pablo Picasso**

**MAIN IDEA #3: Leonardo Da Vinci**

**MAIN IDEA #4: Diego Velazquez**

**TOPIC: String Instruments**

**MAIN IDEA #1: Violin**

**MAIN IDEA #2: Banjo**

**MAIN IDEA #3: Cello**

### 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
identifies				

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. We can tell from our dreams that our brains are wide-awake and more active than ever while we rest. Our dreams can evoke strong emotions like fear and sorrow, or they can be highly entertaining. The intricate, mysterious workings of our minds can even conjure up brilliant innovations and visions of the future as we sleep. Elias Howe, inventor of the sewing machine, says that the idea came to him in a dream. President Abraham Lincoln dreamed that he was assassinated just a few nights before it actually happened, and 19 survivors of the Titanic disaster reported that they dreamed of a catastrophe at sea prior to the actual event. Everybody has a sleepless night from time to time, but nobody is at their best without proper rest. Even if you're among the 60% of the population who rarely remember their nightly visions, you are almost certainly dreaming for at least an hour each night.

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

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2. What can ruin a day at the beach faster than an invasion of slimy, stinging jellyfish? These loathsome sea critters drift around the ocean and use their long, toxic tentacles to paralyze prey before they eat it. They lack a skeleton as well as a brain, but they are able to deliver a painful sting even when they're dead on the beach. The scorpion fish is another venomous creature of the deep. Huge numbers of jellyfish have been spotted off the coasts of Japan and Australian and many marine biologists believe their populations are on the rise around the world. So if you see one of these free-floating fiends in the water, just stay out of its way. Serious stings and allergic reactions are quite rare, but they can be as deadly as a snake bite.

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

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**BONUS:** Find and circle the word referent for “dreams” in the first paragraph and for “jellyfish” in the second.

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. Nothing can smash a kid's self-esteem more effectively than being cyberbullied. If you are targeted, this commonplace cruelty invades your home where you have the right to feel safe. It can sneak into your life any hour of any day of the week. Your humiliation is made available for many, many people to witness. Even the cowardly sort of people who would never dare to confront anybody face-to-face will participate in your torment. Don't you wonder why people think it's okay to be so mean? Research indicates that kids get bullied on the school bus, too. Another problem is that it is hard to catch a cyberbully in action because, as everybody knows, they are extremely sneaky. Let's work together to stop hurtful online abuse today!

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

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2. Can you imagine not having any place to call home? Unfortunately, many people around the world face this sad and scary problem. Without a doubt, we should all be doing something to help the homeless of our community. If you think there's nothing you can do, you are very wrong. Who is too busy to volunteer at a shelter one hour a week? Who can't afford to donate a bag of groceries to a local food drive? Another great idea would be to give your recyclables to a homeless person and let him or her collect the deposits, or to volunteer for an organization like Habitat for Humanity, that builds affordable housing for those in need. Runaway teens are among the homeless, too. What could be more rewarding than helping a fellow human in need?

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

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

## THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

Read and compare the following Informational pieces about the Great Barrier Reef.

### 1. The Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef is in the ocean off the coast of Australia. It is the biggest coral reef in the world.

There's lots of life in the Great Barrier Reef, including plants and animals. There are many sea grasses and weeds. There are many tiny, brightly colored fish. The Great Barrier Reef is a living structure and it grows. But its growth has slowed down and that's not good news.

Whales and sea turtles can also be seen swimming in waters around the Great Barrier Reef. Wouldn't you love to go there?

### 2. The Great Barrier Reef

What exactly is the Great Barrier Reef? How was it created and what kinds of plant and animal life would you find there? Let's find out.

The Great Barrier Reef is the largest coral reef in the world. It is so big it can be seen from outer space.

Lots of fish live around coral reefs. In the warm waters around the Great Barrier Reef, you might see a school of seahorses. You could also see a cute little clownfish and a brilliantly blue Angelfish swim by. But not all the creatures of the coral reef are cute! Fearsome sharks, saber-toothed eels and poisonous sea serpents also lurk in these waters.

There are lots of sea grasses growing around the reef. Sea turtles and other animals feed on these plants.

The Great Barrier Reef is amazing. Wouldn't you love to go there and see all the pretty fish and steer clear of the dangerous ones?

### 3. The Great Barrier Reef

Welcome to an underwater world teeming with extraordinary forms of life. Around every corner, there is breathtaking beauty and vibrant color. You've arrived at the world's largest coral reef. Located just off the coast of Australia, the Great Barrier Reef is one of the world's great wonders. There's so much to learn about the formation of the Great Barrier Reef, the many different types of life it supports and the threats to its future.

According to the Australian Institute of Marine Science, the Great Barrier Reef began to form during the last Glacial Maximum, a period in the earth's life cycle when glaciers are at their largest and sea levels dip to their lowest. The drop in sea levels created an expanse of shallow, clear water where corals began to grow. Corals are made up of tiny living organisms called polyps that have a rock-like, outer skeleton made of calcium. These polyps gather in groups and connect to one another by living tissue to form large communities. As they die, new groups of polyps grow on top of them and the coral reef grows, slowly and steadily, in layers. It is estimated that the Great Barrier Reef is 6,000–8,000 years old.

Life abounds in the Great Barrier Reef. From the cute, colorful clown fish to the giant, but gentle whale shark, 1,500 different types of fish make their home in the Pacific Ocean oasis. Large marine mammals, such as dolphins, porpoises and several different types of whales visit the reef during the winter months. Six different type of sea turtles forage for sea grasses in the warm waters of the underwater refuge. At first glance, the Great Barrier Reef may seem like a peaceful place. Look closer, though, and you'll spot some of the most treacherous sea creatures the world has ever known, including the beautiful, but deadly, blue ringed octopus and the moray eel, whose razor sharp teeth can easily bite a human finger right off.

What does the future hold for the Great Barrier Reef? That is uncertain. Marine biologists have been tracking an alarming decline in coral growth since the 1990s which they attribute to rising ocean temperatures. If the trend continues, they fear that coral growth could stop altogether by the year 2050. Pollution is another threat to the delicate ecosystem. Run-off from pesticides has resulted in the loss of native vegetation as well as blooms of harmful algae. Overfishing continues all over the Great Barrier Reef and in one-third of the delicate marine environment trawling for prawns is still allowed. This outdated practice damages the sea floor and devastates sea life, particularly sea turtles and seahorses.

Isn't it fascinating to learn about the slow, steady growth of the world's largest coral reef? Did you know about the amazing array of life that can be found in this ocean environment and the many serious threats to its healthy future? The Great Barrier Reef is definitely one of the wonders of the world. Let's do our part to protect it for generations to come.



# BE A TEXT DETECTIVE!

## Find the Evidence: NATURAL DISASTERS

- Fires burned out of control after the quake.
- After the San Francisco earthquake, we realized that we had a lot to learn about such disasters.
- New Orleans was not the only city devastated by Hurricane Katrina.
- A category 5 hurricane is much more serious than a tropical storm.
- Elephants were frightened as the tsunami approached.
- There is a museum devoted to those who lost their lives in the 2004 disaster.

**REMEMBER:** You don't need to read the text beginning to end. Use the main ideas to direct your attention and then skim and scan! Post your evidence beside each statement!