UNIT 2

APPLYING TO COLLEGE

Lesson Descriptions

Applying to College 1: College Application Basics
What do I need to complete a college application? (And why should I care about this if I'm not planning on going to college?)

Applying to College 2: Writing the Essay I
What is the college essay and how can it help me get into college or land a job?

Applying to College 3: Writing the Essay II
Which personal strengths do I want to highlight in my essay, and what experience reflects these strengths?

Applying to College 4: Writing the Essay III
Which facts and details of my experience will create the most clear and compelling essay?

Applying to College 5: Writing the Essay IV
What are the most important things to remember when organizing and writing my essay?

Applying to College 6: Writing the Essay V
What do I need to consider when I proofread and revise my essay?

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PLANNING PYRAMID

GRADE 12, Unit 2, Applying to College

Some Students Will:

- Solicit help from a parent or teacher to proofread their college essay and make recommended changes.

Most Students Will:

- Complete an online college application.
- Understand the difference between a good and poor college essay.
- Identify personal qualities that would appeal to an employer or college admissions officer, and provide evidence of the writer's character.
- Write and revise a college essay, or an essay suitable as an answer to a "tell me about yourself" interview question.

All Students Will:

- Undertand the elements that may be included in a college application: transcript, SAT/ACT scores, essay, letters of recommendation, portfolio, and application fee (or fee waiver).
- Understand the purpose of a college essay and the kinds of questions typically asked.

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ROADS to SUCCESS

Grade 12 Applying to College

Family Newsletter

College Admissions 101

Congratulations on being the proud parent of a high school senior! There's a lot to do in the year ahead, particularly if your student plans to go to college in the fall. The decisions are big, the stakes feel high, and every step may be filled with drama. Here's a list of what to expect and resources to help you cope.

Choosing Colleges
If your teen isn't sure what school she wants to attend, now is the time for further research. Online tools like IHaveAPlanIowa.gov can help narrow her search.

Students sometimes sort college choices as reach, match, and safety schools to rate their chances of getting in. Applying to at least one of each is recommended. Research shows that students often do well at the most difficult schools that will accept them, so it's good to aim high for at least one (reach) school.

If possible, students should visit their top choices to see how each campus feels.

Completing Applications
Applications are usually due in late fall or early winter. Some schools have rolling admissions, and accept applications throughout the year. Check college websites for details.
Note: Encourage your teen

to write all deadlines on a calendar, and refer to it often.

Finding Financial Aid
Students should not reject a college choice because it costs a lot. Expensive schools often have financial help available, so it's definitely worth applying. It's good to have a cheaper option in mind as a backup.

All needs-based federal and state financial aid is triggered by the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), and parent info is required. You can begin the application on January 1. State deadlines and more info can be found at www.fafsa.ed.gov. (Some schools also require families to complete the CSS Profile. See www.collegeboard.com for details.)

Following Through
College acceptance letters arrive in March and April. If your student has applied for financial aid, he will also receive a letter from each school explaining what's being offered. Students have until May 1 to accept or reject a school's offer of admission. Then, they'll send a deposit to guarantee a spot for fall. During the summer, the school will provide information about housing assignments and freshman orientation.

For more info . . .
www.IHaveAPlanIowa.gov
parentingteens.about.com
www.college.gov

Grade by Grade

Roads to Success seniors receive a **College Application Tracker** to chart the admissions requirements at their chosen colleges and plan their progress for each. All students try an online application to a local school, and write an essay suitable for a college application or job interview.

Roads to Success is a new program designed to help middle and high school students prepare for their futures. This newsletter will keep you posted on what we're doing in school, and how families can follow through at home.

For more information about Roads to Success, please visit our website: www.roadstosuccess.org.

Did you know?
Of college freshmen surveyed at 4-year schools in 2008:

61% attended their first-choice college.

43% considered financial aid offers to be "very important" or "essential" in choosing their schools.

SOURCE:
The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2008
Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA

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College Application Basics

The BIG Idea

- What do I need to complete a college application? (And why should I care about this if I'm not planning on going to college?)

AGENDA

Approx. 45 minutes

I. Warm Up (5 minutes)

II. Application Review (10 minutes)

III. Complete an Application (25 minutes)

IV. Wrap Up: Next Steps (5 minutes)

MATERIALS

- ❑ **PORTFOLIO PAGES:**
  - Portfolio pages 3-4, College Application Tracker (from Introduction unit)
- ❑ **STUDENT HANDBOOK PAGES:**
  - Student Handbook page 8, What's My College Application Status?
  - Student Handbook page 9, Websites and Passwords
- ❑ **FACILITATOR PAGES:**
  - Facilitator Resource 1, College Application Chart
- ❑ Overhead and LCD projector
- ❑ Laptop with Internet connection

OBJECTIVES

During this lesson, students will:

- Review what they need to know, and what they need to do, to complete a college application.
- Understand the similarities between a college and work application.
- Complete an online city or state college application in class.

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OVERVIEW

Students review the different components of a college application, and how they figure into admissions decisions. Then, they begin an online application for a local city or state university.

PREPARATION

- ❑ List the day's **BIG IDEA** and activities on the board.
- ❑ The following handout needs to be made into an overhead transparency or copied onto chart paper:
  - **Facilitator Resource 1, College Application Chart**
- ❑ Consult with your school counselor on the execution of this lesson, including her recommendations regarding fee waivers, and procedures for requesting transcripts and letters of recommendation. You'll also want to discuss any system already in place for tracking college application activities, share **Portfolio pages 3-4, College Application Tracker** (from Grade 12 Introduction unit), and determine how you can best combine resources to avoid duplication of effort.
- ❑ Prior to class, create your own account on www.IHaveaPlanIowa.gov
  Be prepared to supply students with the web address and instructions accessing their account or creating an account if students have not accessed the site before. Also be prepared to give students instructions for completing an application.
- ❑ If you are unable to project the online application using an LCD and laptop, you may wish to make transparencies of the application pages.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Roads to Success students are encouraged to apply to at least three colleges – a reach, match, and safety school. Many college access organizations advocate more – as many as 10 to 12 applications to maximize opportunities to find a good match.

Completing multiple applications and keeping track of all the components can be a daunting task. One way to economize on effort is to complete application forms accepted at more than one school.

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Examples:

1. To apply to multiple public colleges in the same state:

   IA: IHaveAPlanIowa.gov (online applications)
   www.IHaveAPlanIowa.gov

2. To apply to multiple selective private colleges:
   The Common Application:
   www.commonapp.org

IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

In **Activity III**, you may choose to focus on a single popular college choice instead of state/local application websites, depending on your school counselor's recommendation.

IHaveAPlanIowa.gov (www.IHaveAPlanIowa.gov) also provides an online Practice Application. You may prefer to demonstrate its use rather than selecting a specific IA college.

If any students do not currently have a IHaveAPlanIowa.gov account, they will need to create one. In order to provide students who are creating an account for the first time with step-by-step directions, you may want to print out the **IHaveAPlanIowa.gov Basic Directions** page of **Facilitator Resource 3, Career Research**. This can be found in Unit 1: Introduction, Lesson 1.

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ACTIVITY STEPS

I. Warm Up (5 minutes)

1. [As students enter, ask them to complete the "Do Now" on **Student Handbook page 8, What's My College Application Status?** Give them 2 minutes to complete the activity.]

2. [Invite volunteers to share what they wrote down.]

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: If you're feeling a little stressed out over college applications, take a deep breath. Over the next six lessons, we're going to tell you everything you need to apply to college. As you just saw, there are several parts of the college application. Some of you are already pulling these together, and others are still figuring out the next step. Wherever you are in the process, that's okay for now. In this unit, we're going to walk through the application process together, answer all your questions, and help you get started.

   And if you're not planning on attending college, this unit should still be very helpful. Many people decide to return to college after entering the workforce, and understanding the application process gives you a head start. There are also many similarities between applying to college and applying for a job. I'll point these out as we go along. It's all about knowing how to highlight your experience, your skills, and qualities that make you stand out.

4. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Here's a quick overview of what we'll do over the next six weeks. Today, we'll review the different components of the college application and how each one should be completed and sent to the college of your choice. Then we're going to walk through an online application that can be used for most colleges in your city/state.

   In weeks two through six, we'll work on a piece of writing that tells the world who you are – your college essay. If you're not applying to a college that requires an essay, this will be a good exercise in thinking about what you have to offer a school or employer.

5. [Have students turn to the **Portfolio pages 3-4, College Application Tracker**, from the introductory lessons.]

   SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Already feeling a little overwhelmed? To help you keep track of the requirements at each school, and remember where you are in the application process for each, you can use **Portfolio pages 3-4, College Application Tracker**, to help you keep track.

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II. Application Review (10 minutes)

1. [Project **Facilitator Resource 1, College Application Chart** on the overhead projector.]

   SAY SOMETHING LIKE: If you're applying to colleges, you're probably wondering what the admissions people are looking for. Well, this chart takes a look at the eight main factors considered by admissions teams in colleges across the country. Let's take a closer look at each component, why it's important, and how you'll send it to the colleges of your choice.

2. [Review the chart with the class.]

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Remember, not every school will require each of these components, but all schools will require some of these — at minimum, a high school transcript, and often standardized test scores as well. Large public colleges often have fewer requirements — they have too many applicants to carefully consider extra materials from each person. Colleges that have more resources for screening applicants will require more.

4. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Now you know the main components of the college application, but how do you get started? The first step is to find the application for each school you're interested in. Many schools will have their applications posted on IHaveAPlanIowa.gov. After you sign in to IHaveAPlanIowa.gov, click on the **College Planning** tab and then on the **Applications** section. Next, you'll click on **Apply to College** and **Track Your Applications** to see the list of schools with applications available. By clicking on the **Apply** button next to any of the listed colleges, you will be able to access the application for that college.

   If your college is not listed in IHaveAPlanIowa.gov, you can also search for an application on the school's website. This is usually pretty easy to find under Admissions or in catalogs you received in the mail. The application asks for basic information about yourself, your school, and your activities. It also specifies which components are expected, such as the essay, recommendations, and interviews.

5. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Now if you're worried about filling out lots and lots of applications, I have good news: In many cases, you can fill out one application that can be used for several colleges. For example, many states have online applications that can be used for all the state schools. Similarly, the Common Application is a website providing one application that can be used for over 300 private colleges and universities.

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Please take note: Even if a college uses one of these sites for its online application, you should always look carefully at that college's website to double-check admissions requirements. Some have additional forms that need to be completed. You may have to pay a separate application fee for each school. (Check the rules in your city or state.)

III. Complete a College Application (25 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Let's take a look at an online application for our state. Chances are, many of you will apply to a state school in our system, so we're going to spend the next 25 minutes or so completing this application. If you're unable to complete the application today, you can save it and return to it anytime.

2. [Ask students to open an internet browser and enter the web address www.IHaveA-Planlowa.gov. Demonstrate how to navigate to the website. Explain that each student will need to access their IHaveAPlanIowa.gov account by entering their account name and password in the spaces provided in the upper right corner of the screen. If students do not have an account, they will need to create one by clicking **Create an Account** and following the instructions on each screen. If students need more specific instructions, distribute a copy of **Facilitator Resource 3, IHaveAPlanIowa.gov Basic Directions** (See Implementation Suggestions). Once this is done, students can use their username and password to access IHaveAPlanIowa.gov in order to complete the application, save their work, and return to the application any time. Students should complete the following steps in order to access applications:

   Step 1: Click the **College Planning** tab at the top of the screen.

   Step 2: Click **Applications**, then **Apply to College and Track Your Applications**.

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Now let's review the steps for completing an application on IHaveAPlanIowa.gov:

   Step 1: Review the list of colleges that appear and click Apply next to the name of a college that you would like to apply to.

   Step 2: Carefully read the details about application procedures for that school. You may wish to print out this page or you can return to it from within the application as well. Remember that many schools waive application fees for low-income families. (You should check with the school counselor for details.) You may need to check the individual college website for the mailing address if additional materials are needed. **Remember to use Portfolio pages 3-4, College Application Tracker to record each school's requirements.**

   Step 3: Click **Begin application for [school name].** Let's click each of the screens so that you are familiar with the information that will be requested. To do this

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without filling in the form, you can select a screen from "Skip & Jump to" among the left-hand navigation buttons. Briefly review the information on each of these screens:

Step 4: There are two addition buttons on the left-hand side:

- Introduction (to see the first page of this school's application)
- Save (to save work)

Be sure to save your work as you go along so that you can stop this application and work on it at a later time, if you wish.

5. [Next, point out the button "Submit Your Completed Application."] **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Keep in mind that you will not be able to submit an application until all the information is complete. If you have completed the application, this button will take you to a final screen called "Application Submittal." You must "sign" this page by typing your name to verify that all the information is correct. (**Please make sure you're seriously considering this college before you hit "submit."**)

6. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** After submitting your application, you will see an application agreement statement. Remember that you must print this agreement and mail it to the school's address with your application fee.

7. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** If you've finished, take a moment to check off the box on your **College Application Tracker** that shows you've submitted your application. Don't worry if you did not complete the application today, or if you want to send this application to another school as well. You can return to this website anytime, type in your username and password, and work on your application for this or other schools.

IV. Wrap Up: Next Steps (5 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: You've done a great job today getting started on the college application process. The main thing I want you all to come away with is the "big picture" of a college application.

2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Next week, we'll take a look at another part of the college application — the college essay. Over the next few weeks, we'll review lots of sample essays so you know what's required, and you'll also get a chance to write your own — with a little help from your classmates and me.

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College Application Chart

How are admissions decisions made? No single factor determines a student's admission to a given college. Here are some of the factors schools consider:

What They Look At	Why It's Important	Who Provides This
High school transcript	The high school transcript (the four year report card) is always the most important factor in evaluating an applicant. The transcript includes: Grades received, courses taken, teachers' comments, attendance and lateness record, as well as effort in studies.	School counselor, at your request
Admission Test Scores (SAT, ACT)	Most colleges will have a range of SAT or ACT scores that they would like to see from an applicant. Few colleges have a cut-off score. Most colleges require the SAT or ACT and like to see two attempts at the test. Some colleges require the SAT II (subject area tests) as part of the application. See these website for instructions on sending your scores: ACT: http://www.actstudent.org/scores/send/index.html SAT: http://sat.collegeboard.com/scores/	ACT or SAT, as directed by you
Essay	Included on many college applications. The essay is evaluated for content as well as style. Often a strong essay will make up for the weaker transcript or SAT score.	You
Activities	Colleges want students who will get involved on campus. They look for high school and community activities such as athletics, volunteer work, student government, summer experiences, and part-time jobs.	You
Letters of recommendation	Plan to ask at least one teacher for a recommendation. Some will ask a second person outside of school (coach, boss, religious leader) to write a letter.	Teacher or other, at your request
Interview	Required for some colleges, most make it optional. An interview is a great chance to learn more about the college and present your special situation to the admissions committee. Interviews may take place on campus or in your community with a graduate (alumnus) of the college.	You set up
Audition or Portfolio	Music and art colleges or programs may ask for samples of your work, such as a portfolio, video, audio CD, etc. to demonstrate your ability. Ask your high school teachers for advice on what to include.	You
Application Fee	Not a factor in an admissions decision. Pays for the processing of your application. Low-income families may qualify for fee waivers. Ask your school counselor.	You

Adapted from CollegeBound, Young Women's Leadership Foundation.

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What's My College Application Status?

The chart below lists the main components of the college application. For each one, check the box that describes your preparation.

Application Component	I'm all set – I know how to complete and send this component.	I'm a bit confused – I'm not quite sure what I need to do for this component.	I'm clueless – I definitely need more info about this component. Help!
Basic application (personal info, activities)	☐	☐	☐
Essay	☐	☐	☐
High school transcript	☐	☐	☐
Admission Test Scores (SAT, ACT)	☐	☐	☐
Letters of recommendation	☐	☐	☐
Interview	☐	☐	☐
Application fee	☐	☐	☐
Audition / Portfolio (music or art school)	☐	☐	☐

How do you feel about the college application process?
Below, write what you're most concerned about.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Websites and Passwords

The following websites may be used to access multiple college applications. Use this sheet to record your username and password for sites you use.

Type of Applications	Website	Your Username & Password
Iowa (state schools)	www.IHaveAPlanIowa.gov/	Username: _____ Password: _____
Common Application (300+ selective private schools)	www.commonapp.org	Username: _____ Password: _____

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The BIG Idea

- What is the college essay and how can it help me get into college or land a job?

AGENDA

Approx. 45 minutes

I. Warm Up (5 minutes)

II. Unit Introduction: An Essay About You (10 minutes)

III. What Makes a Successful Essay? (15 minutes)

IV. Types of Essay Questions (10 minutes)

V. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

MATERIALS

❑ **STUDENT HANDBOOK PAGES:**

- Student Handbook page 10, Essay Excerpt
- Student Handbook pages 11-12, Sample Essays I
- Student Handbook page 13, What Makes a Strong Essay?
- Student Handbook pages 14-15, Sample Essay Questions

Overhead and LCD projector

OBJECTIVES

During this lesson, students will:

- Understand the purpose of a college essay and its relevance to job hunters as a tool to highlight their "unique selling proposition."
- Identify characteristics of a quality essay by reviewing a successful example and an unsuccessful one.
- Identify the types of questions commonly asked in college essays.

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OVERVIEW

This lesson kicks off a five-week unit in which students complete a personal essay suitable for a college application. Students will review the main purpose of the essay and learn how writing one will benefit job seekers as well. In the first part of the lesson, students will read and compare two essays, one that is very strong and one that still needs work. Then they'll identify and discuss characteristics of a successful essay. Finally, they'll discuss different types of essay questions. Their assignment for the next lesson will be to find the essay questions for the colleges to which they're applying.

PREPARATION

- List the day's **BIG IDEA**, vocabulary, and activities on the board.
- The following handouts need to be made into overhead transparencies or copied onto chart paper:
  - **Student Handbook page 10, Essay Excerpt**
  - **Student Handbook pages 11-12, Sample Essays I**
  - **Student Handbook page 13, What Makes a Strong Essay?**
  - **Student Handbook pages 14-15, Sample Essay Questions**
- Prior to facilitating this lesson, consult with your school counselor about developing college essays.

VOCABULARY

Unique selling proposition: An advertising term borrowed by career counselors. The one thing that makes a person or product different from others.

IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

Prior to beginning **Activity Step II, Unit Introduction**, you may wish to have students list what makes them anxious about writing a college essay. When discussing the activities for the upcoming weeks, you can illustrate how each lesson will address their concerns.

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ACTIVITY STEPS

I. Warm Up (5 minutes)

1. [As students enter, ask them to read **Student Handbook page 10, Essay Excerpt**, in which they read a few paragraphs from a college essay. In the space provided, students characterize the writer, then underline the passages that led them to this conclusion.

2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: What do these paragraphs say about this person? What kind of person do you think he is? Would you want this person as a friend? A roommate? Why? [Have volunteers share details or specific phrases that reflect the person's character. For example, the writer comes across as honest, admitting he was too shy to pull the bull's horns, or that he was jealous of his friends' big houses and fancy cars. He also seems thoughtful or insightful, appreciating what his parents sacrificed to move to America.]

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: What you just read is part of an essay from a college application. As you can see, a good college essay doesn't repeat stuff that's in the application — it gives a look at who a person is: what's important to them; how they see the world; how they respond to challenges. The college essay describes you in a way that statistics — grades and test scores — cannot. It also highlights what makes you stand out from other applicants.

II. Unit Introduction: An Essay About You (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Over the next five weeks, each of you is going to write your own essay. For those of you applying to college, you should be able to use this essay for applications that require them. But this essay will also be helpful for job hunters. Just as an admissions committee wants to know what makes you special, potential employees will want to know what sets you apart from other applicants. People in advertising call this your "unique selling proposition." Maybe you're dependable, motivated, or a real problem solver. For job seekers, writing this essay will be valuable preparation for any job interview.

2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: If you're already feeling a little stressed out by the idea of writing an essay, take a deep breath. You'll have five weeks for this task so you'll have plenty of time to plan, write, and revise your essay. And you're not in this alone. We'll walk through the process together, so you'll have help from me and all your classmates. Here's a quick look at what we'll do over the next five weeks:
   - Today, we'll read two sample essays and pinpoint what makes a strong one. Then we'll look at the different types of essay questions you might encounter.

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- Next week, you'll identify the one or two personal strengths you want to highlight in your essay, and think about evidence of these strengths in your life.
- In week 3, you'll identify a single experience or event that reflects those strengths — in short, your essay topic. You'll brainstorm specific details about this event and write a description.
- In week 4, we'll review techniques for writing and organizing essays and you'll write your drafts.
- In week 5, we'll work in small groups to proofread each other's essays and make revisions based on this feedback.

3. [As a class, turn to **Portfolio pages 3-4, College Application Tracker** from previous lessons. Remind students that this will help them keep track of which colleges require essays.]

III. What Makes a Successful Essay? (15 minutes)

1. [Have students turn to their **Student Handbook pages 11-12, Sample Essays I**. For each essay, students should underline the sentences that tell what the writer is really like.]

2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: What's different about these two essays? Which one highlighted more of the person's activities or accomplishments? Was this one more effective? Why or why not? Which essay gives you a better sense of this person? [Point out that the second essay does not include many details about the person. You don't get a sense of what this writer thinks and feels. Rather, the writer just repeats information that would be included in the application. Also, the second essay isn't focused – it's not clear what the applicant wants to say about himself or herself. Finally, it includes clichés and weak language.]

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: I think we're starting to see what makes a good essay. [You may want to write this phrase on the board.] **Depth, not breadth!**

   The point is, the more focused the essay, the stronger it is. Your essay is a chance to write your own story, rather than be defined by your transcript. A good essay doesn't try to say it all. Instead, it focuses on one event that highlights one positive quality, and provides evidence of that quality.

4. [Have students turn to their **Student Handbook page 13, What Makes a Strong Essay?** Review this page together, discussing the characteristics of an effective essay:
   - **Focused:** Describes a single event or experience. Clearly answers the essay question.
   - **Convincing:** Supports claims you make about yourself with specific, strong details.

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- **Descriptive:** Provides several vivid details about the experience – makes readers feel like they're there.
- **Organized:** Starts with a strong opening; provides a clear purpose; clear, logical transitions; ends with strong conclusion.
- **Personal:** Shows clear, insightful thoughts and feelings; reflects personal strengths.
- **Easy to read:** The language is conversational and easy to read aloud; writing is clear.
- **Grammatically correct:** Does not contain grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors.]

IV. Types of Essay Questions (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: As you've seen, the point of a college essay is to tell about yourself. But colleges ask this question in different ways.

2. [Have students turn to **Student Handbook pages 14-15, Sample Essay Questions** and show the page on an overhead projector. With the class, review the three types of questions, examples, and the approach or strategy suggested for each one.]

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: For next week, your assignment is to find the applications for the colleges you're interested in and write down the essay questions for each college. For those of you not planning to apply to college at this point, you'll consider either of two questions that you'll hear in many job interviews: "Tell me about yourself." Or "Why should we hire you?"

V. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Now that we've read some essays and looked at different kinds of questions, I hope everyone's getting excited to begin — or at least, a little more comfortable with the idea of writing essays.

2. [Wrap up with a brief class discussion:
   - How are you feeling about the college essay?
   - What did you learn today that makes you feel better about the essay?
   - What things are you still worried about?
   - What questions do you still have that we can answer in the coming weeks?]

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Next week, you'll start some serious self-exploration! You'll think about some of your own strengths, then identify one or two you'd like to highlight in your essay. Then you'll think about how you show these strengths through your life and actions.

   That's it for today. Remember to bring in your essay questions for next week.

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Essay Excerpt

Read this excerpt from a college essay and answer the questions below.

I was introduced to Wall Street when I was two. My parents and I had just arrived in New York from China to visit relatives. They took me to Wall Street and showed me the famous statue of the Charging Bull, a bronze giant ready to charge forward. They tried to get me to pull on his horns, which are supposed to be good luck, but I was a shy child, so all I would do is reach out and cautiously pat his nose.

A few years later, my family returned to New York, this time as new immigrants. I was nervous to move to the United States. I didn't want to leave my friends and settle in a foreign land. I didn't recognize that my parents were sacrificing much more than friends and familiar surroundings. They were giving up their homeland and their hard-won stable jobs, but they did it so that I could have better opportunities. "The schools are better in America," I heard them whisper to each other late at night.

Living in New York, my English improved quickly, while my parents' English lagged behind. While I flourished in school, my parents struggled. Instead of the office jobs that they had previously held, my father became a warehouse clerk and my mother went to work as a home health attendant. Although I didn't realize it at the time, it would have been much easier for my parents had we stayed in China. They would have kept their friends, they would have kept those office jobs, and they wouldn't have to face the difficulties of learning a new language.

Growing up in America, I was often jealous of my peers, those who lived in big houses and whose parents drove fancy cars. We lived in a small one-bedroom apartment and rode the subway for hours each day to get to work or school.

How would you describe the writer? _____

_____

_____

_____

Underline the sentences that lead you to this conclusion.

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Sample Essays I

Read the two essays below. Underline the passages that reveal what the writer is really like – something you wouldn't know from his or her application.

Essay #1

There is a street in New York called Wall Street. It's very much a New York street: cars honk as they lurch and weave around each other, busy people race forward in thick streams along two strips of sidewalk, and food stands dot every other corner. Some of the stands hawk fragrant chicken halal sandwiches and others offer juicy kosher hot dogs and salted pretzels. But the real wonder of the street is in its soaring buildings that seem to hang from the sky.

I was introduced to Wall Street when I was two. My parents and I had just arrived in New York from China to visit relatives. They took me to Wall Street and showed me the famous statue of the Charging Bull, a bronze giant ready to charge forward. They tried to get me to pull on his horns, which are supposed to be good luck, but I was a shy child, so all I would do is reach out and cautiously pat his nose.

A few years later, my family returned to New York, this time as new immigrants. I was nervous to move to the United States. I didn't want to leave my friends and settle in a foreign land. I didn't recognize that my parents were sacrificing much more than friends and familiar surroundings. They were giving up their homeland and their hard-won stable jobs, but they did it so that I could have better opportunities. "The schools are better in America," I heard them whisper to each other late at night.

Now that we were living in New York, my English improved quickly, while my parents' English lagged behind. While I flourished in school, my parents struggled. Instead of the office jobs that they had previously held, my father became a warehouse clerk and my mother went to work as a home health attendant. Although I didn't realize it at the time, it would have been much easier for my parents had we stayed in China. They would have kept their friends, they would have kept those office jobs, and they wouldn't have to face the difficulties of learning a new language.

Growing up in America, I was often jealous of my peers, those who lived in big houses and whose parents drove fancy cars. We lived in a small one-bedroom apartment and rode the subway for hours each day to get to work or school. So while my middle school classmates dreamed of being firefighters and astronauts, I decided to work on Wall Street. I didn't really know what exactly it meant to work on Wall Street, but I saw characters on TV or real people on magazine covers who worked on Wall Street, and they always seem to have mansions in the Hamptons or Ferraris in the garage. I thought that if I made enough money, I could buy my parents a big house and a nice car. Then they wouldn't have to work anymore. They could retire and enjoy life.

As I entered high school, I felt I had a direction, a goal: I wanted to work on Wall Street and get rich. I joined Model UN and was delighted when I was assigned to the World Bank Committee — I saw it as an opportunity to hone my financial skills. We were supposed to debate about the food crisis in Africa and how to combat corruption within partner nations. As I researched and debated the issue, I began to realize what true poverty really was. It was where a piece of bread meant a meal for a family of eight, where babies cried for days without food to comfort them,

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where children's skin hung slack off their bones, where the loss of a family member to war and strife was so common that tears no longer flowed. Yet here I was, in my own little world, wanting to get rich on Wall Street.

When I returned from the conference, Wall Street looked different to me. I saw cold concrete canyons, where workers walked with their backs hunched, their eyes to the ground as though they were carrying burdens that were almost too much for them to bear. Street-corner hawkers short-changed their customers, natives elbowed tourists out of their way, and the homeless slept on the subway platforms while the morning commuters hurried past. The giant skyscrapers no longer soared to the sky—they were obstacles blocking out the sun.

I spent the next several months trying to decide my next steps. I spoke to my parents and they smiled at my naïveté. They asked me to follow two rules: to do no evil and to be happy. I began to realize that my true passion lay with Model UN. I started to seriously consider how I could help others through similar work after college. I thought about the actual United Nations, where I would put the skills from Model UN to real use, to be able to help others and to solve the world's problems.

A few days ago, I walked to Wall Street again. The Charging Bull is still there. Once again, I rubbed his nose. But this time, I gave his horns a good, hard tug. Hopefully, good luck and guidance will follow.

Essay #2

As my high school career comes to a close, I reflect on my many accomplishments both in academics and in extracurricular activities. These achievements reveal my commitment to success and show that I am hard working, ambitious, a team leader, optimistic, detail-oriented, imaginative, modest, a people person, and ready for all the challenges that lie ahead.

First, I have worked hard in school to maintain a 3.8 GPA. I did not shy away from challenging courses, including three AP classes. My high SAT scores also reflect my commitment to academic excellence.

I am also proud of my achievements in sports. I play volleyball and basketball and am captain of both teams. I give it my all in practice and in competition. I take my position as team leader very seriously because I am representing my team and my school and people look up to me. I have received many sports awards, too.

School clubs are another area in which I have excelled. I am very active in the Spanish Club, the Prom Committee, and the Recycling Club. I am also the chairperson of the Double-Blue Club, which takes an exceeding amount of time and energy.

In addition to these numerous commitments, I have also held a part-time job for the past two years at our local ice cream shop. This job taught me people skills and shows that I am reliable and responsible.

In college, I will continue to excel in academics and I will be active out of the classroom too. It will be hard work, but life won't hand me success on a silver platter. I can achieve anything I set my mind to. I know that my accomplishments have prepared me for many of life's challenges.

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What Makes a Strong Essay?

All good college essays share common strengths. A good essay is

- **Focused**:
  Describes a single event or experience. Clearly answers the essay question.
- **Convincing**:
  Supports claims you make about yourself with specific, strong details.
- **Descriptive**:
  Provides several vivid details about the experience — makes readers feel like they're there.
- **Organized**:
  Starts with a strong opening; provides a clear purpose; clear, logical transitions; ends with strong conclusion.
- **Personal**:
  Shows clear, insightful thoughts and feelings; reflects personal strengths.
- **Easy to read**:
  The language is conversational and easy to read aloud; writing is clear.
- **Grammatically correct**:
  Does not contain grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors.

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Sample Essay Questions

College applications tend to ask three types of questions:

Tell Us About Yourself

These questions ask to tell about who you are, a significant experience, or how you've become the person you are today. Examples:

- Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you. (Common Application)
- Identify a person or an experience that has had a significant influence on the formation of your values.
- Life is a process that challenges us to respond, grow and change. Select an experience or event that has challenged you this past year and describe its impact on you.
- If we only had one space left in our freshman class, tell us why we should offer that space to you. Consider, for example, how your extra-curricular activities in high school and in your community have shaped you, what you have learned from those experiences, and how you will use those experiences to contribute to the campus community.

Strategy: While this is a great way to reveal your personality, be sure to keep your essay focused on one or two qualities. Remember, you're telling about yourself, so keep the tone conversational.

Tell Us Why You Chose This College

These questions ask you to reflect on your choice of school or major. Examples:

- Describe what you expect from yourself as a student.
- Who or what influenced you to apply?

Strategy: Make a clear connection between your goals and what the school offers. Be sure you've researched the college carefully so your essay reflects the programs and opportunities that the school actually provides.

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Tell Us What You Think About…

These questions ask you to reflect on something beyond yourself or the school, such as a national issue, a famous person, a work of literature, or a quotation. Or it may tap into your creativity. Examples:

- It has been said that high school is "four years of being misunderstood." What do you think?
- Respond to the statement, "We do not read great books, they read us."
- We are a global community. Choose a national or international issue and describe its importance to you.
- Describe a character in fiction, a historical figure, or a creative work (as in art, music, science, etc.) that has had an influence on you, and explain that influence.

Strategy: Your essay should reflect your creativity and the breadth of your knowledge. Be sure your essay is well informed and honest — it should reflect your views. Don't be afraid to be creative, but use common sense.

Based on information from "The College Application Essay" by Sarah Myers McGinty.

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The BIG Idea

- Which personal strengths do I want to highlight in my essay, and what experience reflects these strengths?

AGENDA

Approx. 45 minutes

I. Free Form Writing: It's All About You (10 minutes)

II. Your Best Qualities and How You Show Them (10 minutes)

III. Sample Essays (10 minutes)

IV. Selecting One Event — A Character Snapshot (10 minutes)

V. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

MATERIALS

❑ **STUDENT HANDBOOK PAGES:**

- Student Handbook pages 16-21, Sample Essays II
- Student Handbook page 22, All About Me
- Student Handbook pages 23-24, My Main Strengths
- Student Handbook page 25, Homework: My Character Snapshot

❑ **FACILITATOR PAGES:**

- Facilitator Resource 1, Sample Character Snapshot

❑ Overhead and LCD projector

OBJECTIVES

During this lesson, the student(s) will:

- Identify personal strengths that can be demonstrated in an essay.
- Brainstorm life experiences that support each of those strengths.
- Choose one or two personal characteristics that could be developed into an essay.

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OVERVIEW

This is the second week in the essay-writing unit. In this lesson, students will identify their own personal strength(s) and evidence of how they show that strength in their own life. They'll also discuss how an effective essay focuses on a single event or experience. Their assignment for the next lesson will be to identify a single experience in their own lives that reflect the strength(s) they selected. This experience will be the topic for their essay.

PREPARATION

- List the day's **BIG IDEA** and activities on the board.
- The following handouts need to be made into overhead transparencies or copied onto chart paper:
  - **Student Handbook pages 16-21, Sample Essays II**
  - **Student Handbook page 22, All About Me**
  - **Student Handbook pages 23-24, My Main Strengths**
  - **Student Handbook page 25, Homework: My Character Snapshot**

IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

To permit more time for self-reflection, you could begin the lesson with the free-form writing activity, **Student Handbook page 22, All About Me,** as the DO NOW activity.

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ACTIVITY STEPS

I. Free Form Writing: It's All About You (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Today, we're going to address the first concern of essay writers everywhere: what to write about. You're going to do some personal reflection – not just about your best qualities, but also examples of how you've demonstrated these qualities at important points in your life. By the end of the lesson, you'll select one or two strengths that you can highlight in your essay. What positive qualities should you focus on? That's not always an easy question. Before we try to identify what those are, you're going to take a few minutes to reflect on who you are and what's important to you.

2. [Have students turn to their **Student Handbook page 22, All About Me**. Give them about five minutes to participate in this free form writing activity in which they brainstorm words and phrases about themselves — their personality, beliefs, goals, experiences, and proudest accomplishments. Remind them there are no rules and no one will read this. Just encourage them to dig deep and be honest!]

3. [After five minutes, ask students to take a few minutes to look over what they wrote. As they do, circle things they think best describe or define who they are and cross out things that don't reflect their true selves.]

II. Your Best Qualities And How You Show Them (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Now that you've spent some time thinking about yourself, you're going to take a few minutes to identify the qualities or strengths that best describe you.

2. [Have students turn to **Student Handbook pages 23-24, My Main Strengths**.]

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: First, you're going to look through this list and check the top three to five qualities that describe you best. You can also add qualities to the list. As you work on this, it might help to refer to the **All About Me** page for inspiration and ideas.

4. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Next, I'd like you to list at least two examples from your life that reflect each quality, writing these in the "Evidence" column. For example, if you checked "compassionate," how do you show this in your life? Do you devote time to helping others, like working in a soup kitchen or tutoring? If you're "confident," describe how you've handled a tough situation. If you checked "persistent," think of times when you've stuck with a task or job even though it was difficult. Or if you think you're "open-minded," how have you shown that you're open to new people, experiences, or ideas?

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Also, try to be specific in your evidence. For example, for evidence of "risk taking" you wouldn't write, "likes try to new things." Instead, give a specific example, such as, "only guy to take dance freshman year."

If you can't provide good, honest evidence for a specific quality, don't worry – that's probably not a quality you want to highlight in your essay!

5. [Give students 10 minutes to complete the activity.]

6. [After doing this exercise, have students choose the one or two qualities they think best describe them and that they'd want an admissions committee to know about them. Then they should circle these qualities on their sheet.]

III. Sample Essays (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Now let's take a look at some sample essays and see how other students described their best qualities.

   [Assign each student the number 1, 2, or 3. Explain they are to read this essay number in their **Student Handbook pages 16-21, Sample Essays II**. Students should read their assigned essay, describe what the essay's about and place a check next to the paragraphs that support that theme or topic. Then they should describe the writer in their own words. What personal qualities can they infer from the essay?]

2. [Debrief the activity as a class, asking volunteers to share their answers from each of the three essays. Note that the writers of these essays have chosen very different topics, but each creates a memorable picture of the student. Remind students that an effective college essay focuses on one topic or theme, and that every paragraph should support that theme.]

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Like the college essay you just read, your essay should focus on one topic that highlights a positive personal quality. Remember, it doesn't highlight *all* your positive qualities, just one or two.

IV. Selecting One Event — A Character Snapshot (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Now that you've narrowed down one or two qualities you want to highlight in your essay, how do you know what to write about? Of course, the answer is going to be different for everyone, but the key is to describe a single event or experience from your life that reflects that quality. Think of it as a "character snapshot" — a glimpse of the person you really are. Imagine your essay as a photograph or a short video that will be viewed by an admissions counselor, scholarship committee,

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or prospective employer. (It's your YouTube moment.) You want it to capture an experience that reflects a specific quality about yourself.

2. [On overhead projector, display the **Facilitator Resource 1, Sample Character Snapshot**. Cover the final paragraph.]

   SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Here's an example. [Read the story aloud.]

   When I was in high school, I tutored my next-door neighbors in reading. They were two boys, second and third grade, great athletes (which I was not), and struggling in school. I really had no idea how to teach reading, but I was game to try. Reading can be a struggle when you're just learning how, and I thought my neighbors needed a better idea of all the adventures that awaited them between the covers of a book.

   I was only 15, and I seldom had a chance to venture beyond my small town, about 45 minutes from the much-bigger city of Cleveland. Despite my lack of knowledge of the big, wide world, I decided that a trip to the city library downtown was just what we needed. I had never been there. And we'd have to travel by bus, something I'd only done once or twice before.

3. [Ask students how this brief event is a "character snapshot" of this person? What one or two qualities does this reflect? Then uncover the final paragraph, with this thought from the writer:

   Looking back, I can't believe I took those two kids into the city by bus when I was just 15. I think this story reflects two qualities I still have today: my desire to educate kids and my determination — even in the face of fear!]

4. [Point out that the story focused on a single event in the person's life. Have students look back at the qualities they circled on **Student Handbook pages 23-24, My Main Strengths**. What evidence reflects each of those qualities?]

V. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

1. [Have students turn to their **Student Handbook page 25, Homework: My Character Snapshot**. Explain that their assignment for next week is to choose an event or experience from their lives that reflects the qualities they chose. This will be their essay topic. This page offers suggestions if they get stuck thinking of a topic.]

2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Next week, you'll begin the process of turning your experience into a college essay. You'll brainstorm specific facts and details about the event, and start a rough draft. You'll also have a chance to get feedback from other students.

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Sample Character Snapshot

When I was in high school, I tutored my next-door neighbors in reading. They were two boys, second and third grade, great athletes (which I was not), and struggling in school. I really had no idea how to teach reading, but I was game to try. Reading can be a struggle when you're just learning how, and I thought my neighbors needed a better idea of all the adventures that awaited them between the covers of a book.

I was only 15, and I seldom had a chance to venture beyond my small town, about 45 minutes from the much-bigger city of Cleveland. Despite my lack of knowledge of the big, wide world, I decided that a trip to the city library downtown was just what we needed. I had never been there. And we'd have to travel by bus, something I'd only done once or twice before.

Looking back, I can't believe I took those two kids into the city by bus when I was just 15. I think this story reflects two qualities I still have today: my desire to educate kids and my determination — even in the face of fear!

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Sample Essays II

Directions: Read the essay you've been assigned, then answer the questions.

Essay #1

The legendary Sam Cooke once sang, "It's been a long time comin', but I know a change is gonna come," and he was exactly right. Last year at this time, I was strapping on shoulder pads under my dirt-and-bloodstained jersey and lacing up my metal spiked cleats. I was springing forward at the sound of "hike," wrapping 200-pound guys around the waist and slamming them to the ground. It was football season, and like every fall for as long as I could remember, I was looking for quarterbacks to crush.

But this year, things are different. Instead of shoulder pads, I am wearing padded shoulders. Instead of the bloodstained jersey, I am wearing a sparkling silver full-length dress. Instead of cleats, my shoes are size 14 sling-back high heels that match my dress. I've got a wig full of blonde curls and I'm practicing my curtsy. "*What happened?*" you might ask. The answer is simple. It was time for a change. After nine years of being one of the most feared middle linebackers in Pennsylvania, I decided to hang up my cleats and sign up for the school play.

I was always known as an athlete, but over the years I also built a reputation as a charismatic, outgoing individual — the type of kid that would be a natural on stage. The theater director kept asking me to sign up for the fall play. I kept resisting; fall was for football. I thought she would give up, but I was mistaken. During baseball season last spring, she turned up the heat: every game, in between every inning, she kept prying until eventually I cracked and agreed to do it.

She said I would play Joe. E. Brown, a movie star from the 40s, in a comedy called "Shakespeare in Hollywood." I thought, "All right, maybe this won't be so bad. At least I have a cool part." Little did I know that in this play, Joe E. Brown is forced to dress in drag. When I found this out, I reconsidered my decision. "Dress as a woman in front of hundreds of people? That would kill my reputation, I can't do that." But, as rehearsals went on, I started to realize something. People weren't looking at me saying, "Wow, he's dressed as a girl. What a loser." They were looking at me saying, "Wow, he has the courage to dress up as a girl on stage in front of everyone."

At first, I doubted my decision to give up football for acting, but it turned out to be one of the best decisions I've ever made, and one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. The football team went on to have a miserable 1-5 season, while I made new friends, and found a new appreciation for the theater. I received more praise and admiration for the play than I did for any football game I played in my nine-year career.

The great John F. Kennedy once said, "There are three things which are real: God, human folly, and laughter. The first two are beyond our comprehension, so we must do what we can with the third." I have taken JFK's advice, and used laughter as my medium towards happiness. I just hope I never have to walk in high heels again.

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What is this essay about? _____

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_____

_____

Place a check next to the paragraphs that support this theme or topic.

Describe the writer in your own words. What personal qualities can you infer about the writer from this essay? _____

_____

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Essay #2

My eighth-grade math teacher, Mrs. Natalie Sezbenski, has been one of the greatest influences in my life. She has changed me in ways she'll never know. Because of her, I know I'm not a nobody. However, four years ago when I first stepped into Riley Middle School, I thought I was. Before that, I lived in a part of Kentucky where everything revolved around basketball and cheerleading. Although I had nearly all A's, I was always told about the things that I didn't do: I didn't play ball and I didn't cheer.

When I moved to a new school in West Virginia, I had no idea what to expect. I certainly wasn't expecting Mrs. Sezbenski. The first thing she taught me was not math. It was that I was worth something. When I was finally brave enough to ask a question, she took me seriously. She showed me that not asking questions when I'm confused would get me nowhere. I had to take nine weeks of an AP Math class, which was basically a logics class. It was awful! Not only was it difficult, there were many problems for which there was no concrete answer. You had to support your opinion with your work. I was amazed that she cared about what I said. She listened to my opinions even if they were off the mark.

After she got me to speak up, she began to teach me math. The math curriculum was different at Riley than at my former school. All types of math were combined with geometry and I had never seen geometry before. I was behind, so she helped me by staying after school and coming in early to tutor me. After the first nine weeks, I still didn't understand math very well, but I was doing better. She didn't give up on me when most other people would have. She was determined that I would succeed, and made me feel the same way.

Mrs. Sezbenski also helped me develop a sense of perspective. As an eighth-grader, if I got a bad grade, it seemed like the end of the world. Mrs. Sezbenski helped me to stop turning everything into an "issue." When I got frustrated, she would calm me down and explain each error. She told me that she couldn't help me if I was so uptight about everything. When things didn't go just right, she would help me understand what I did wrong so I could do better next time. She really helped me see that not everything is a cataclysmic event.

Mrs. Sezbenski was the most influential teacher I've had, although she didn't mean to be. She didn't intend to show me that I could act like myself with my friends. She never meant to teach me not to get embarrassed when I answered incorrectly or said something silly. She never realized that she helped raise my self-confidence to a new level. She won't know all the ways she helped me, but because of her I finally feel that I can be myself.

Mrs. Natalie Sezbenski was a real teacher, and I am absolutely a better person for having known her.

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What is this essay about? _____

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Place a check next to the paragraphs that support this theme or topic.

Describe the writer in your own words. What personal qualities can you infer about the writer from this essay? _____

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Essay #3

I wasn't exactly raised with a "silver spoon" in my mouth. All my life I had to struggle to get what I needed. I went from living with a drug-addicted mother to being thrown into foster care for seven years, where I had to fend for myself. While other children were out playing on the playground, I was stuck at home taking care of my younger siblings. I was worrying where our next meal was going to come from and how long my mother would be gone this time before she remembered that she had kids at home. Every night as I put my little brothers and sisters to sleep, I prayed and promised myself I would grow up to be someone better.

My mother became a cocaine addict when I was just ten years old. Her addiction grew to the point where she cared little about my three younger siblings, leaving me to take care of them. So I became the mother of the house. While my mother was passed out in her room, I would get my siblings up, dress them, feed them and take them to school. Every day, I had to ask the neighbors if they had money we could borrow to buy food with. They knew we couldn't pay them back, but most of them helped us out of kindness. On days I couldn't get money for food from the neighbors, I would go to the supermarket and pack bags all day or run errands for people in the area for a dollar or two. The kids became my one and only concern. They became dependent solely on me and I was determined not to fail them.

When I was twelve years old, the Administration for Children's Services took me and my little brothers and sisters away. I was happy because it felt good to be away from my mother. I thought I would finally be released from her grip and be able to live my life, or so I thought.

Going through foster care wasn't exactly a walk in the park either. I've been in and out of nine homes over the years. I've dealt with serious depression, feeling like my life was cursed and I would never be happy. My grades fluctuated between the semesters, depending on which home I was living in. But with the support of my friends and school, I'm back on track, determined to improve my future and eventually go to college.

Life is full of lessons, and my lesson has been to never give up or lose hope. Growing up with a drug-addicted mother and going in and out of foster care taught me to fight for what I want and that with hard work and dedication anything is possible. No matter what I'm going through, I still try to have an optimistic attitude about my life. I know that one day I will be successful and show my younger siblings that even though you had a hard life, you can still succeed and make a future for yourself.

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What is this essay about? _____

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Place a check next to the paragraphs that support this theme or topic.

Describe the writer in your own words. What personal qualities can you infer about the writer from this essay? _____

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All About Me

Directions: For the next five minutes, fill this sheet with statements about yourself — your personality, your beliefs, your goals, your experiences, your proudest accomplishments. Write anything down as it comes to mind.

- What words describe you best?
- What people, events, or places help define you?
- What are you most proud of?
- What are the places you've been, and places you dream of going?
- What are the daydreams and concerns that keep you up at night?
- Which moments or events from your life are so vivid it's like they happened yesterday?

Don't worry about your audience, or about spelling, grammar, or neatness. The only rules are to dig deep and to be honest!

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My Main Strengths

First, look through the list of qualities below and check the three to five that describe you best. Feel free to add to the list. Next, under "evidence," list at least two examples from your life that reflect each quality you checked. Be as specific as possible. When you're done, choose the one or two qualities you feel are your strongest, and that you could highlight in your essay.

QUALITY	MY TOP QUALITIES (check 3-5)	EVIDENCE (How do you show this quality through your actions, your achievements, your relationships, and in your day-to-day life?)
Ambitious	☐	
Caring, compassionate	☐	
Curious, questioning	☐	
Confident	☐	
Courageous, risk-taker	☐	
Creative, innovative	☐	
Diligent, persistent	☐	
Enthusiastic	☐	
Fair, principled	☐	

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QUALITY	MY TOP QUALITIES (check 3-5)	EVIDENCE (How do you show this quality through your actions, your achievements, your relationships, and in your day-to-day life?)
Good-natured, sense of humor	☐	
Honest, genuine	☐	
Introspective, self-aware	☐	
Leader, consensus-builder	☐	
Mature, responsible	☐	
Motivated, takes initiative	☐	
Open-minded, tolerant	☐	
Optimistic	☐	
Organized, disciplined	☐	

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Homework: My Character Snapshot

Which personal qualities do you want to highlight your essay?

_____

Before next week, try to think of a single event or experience that reflects these qualities. If you're stuck, think about a time or specific way that you were influenced by:

- Your family, ancestors, or heritage
- Your pastimes or favorite activities
- Significant people outside your family
- Travel to different places or exposure to different people
- Your strongest beliefs or values
- A difficult or challenging event
- Criticism or failure
- Your dreams for the future
- A piece of literature or art

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The BIG Idea

- Which facts and details of my experience will create the most clear and compelling essay?

AGENDA

Approx. 45 minutes

I. Warm Up (5 minutes)

II. Fleshing it Out: The Main Facts and Little Details (15 minutes)

III. Tell Your Story (15 minutes)

IV. Share Your Story (5 minutes)

V. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

MATERIALS

- ❑ **STUDENT HANDBOOK PAGES:**
  - Student Handbook page 26, My Story, My Essay Topic
  - Student Handbook page 27, Story Facts
  - Student Handbook page 28, Story Details
  - Student Handbook page 29, Story Feedback
- ❑ **FACILITATOR PAGES:**
  - Facilitator Resource 1, Story Facts (Example)
  - Facilitator Resource 2, Story Details (Example)
- ❑ Overhead and LCD projector
- ❑ Notebook paper, pens, and pencils

OBJECTIVES

During this lesson, students will:

- Identify important facts and vivid details from an event or experience that highlight their personal strengths.
- Write a description of the event.
- With help from classmates, identify the most effective images and phrases to use in their essays.

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OVERVIEW

This is the third week in the essay-writing unit. In this lesson, students will identify the "story" they'll tell for their college essay — an event or experience in their own lives that reflects specific strengths. They'll begin by identifying important facts and vivid details from the experience. Then they'll use this information to write a description of the event. Finally, they'll share their writing with a partner, who will provide specific, constructive feedback for next week's draft stage.

PREPARATION

- List the day's **BIG IDEA** and activities on the board.
- The following handouts need to be made into overhead transparencies or copied onto chart paper:
  - **Student Handbook page 26, My Story, My Essay Topic**
  - **Student Handbook page 27, Story Facts**
  - **Student Handbook page 28, Story Details**
  - **Student Handbook page 29, Story Feedback**
  - **Facilitator Resource 1, Story Facts (Example)**
  - **Facilitator Resource 2, Story Details (Example)**

IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

Activity II, Fleshing it Out: The Main Facts & Little Details: To permit more time for student writing, you may choose not to review the examples provided in **Facilitator Resource 1, Story Facts (Example)** and **Facilitator Resource 2, Story Details (Example)**.

Activity IV, Share Your Story: If students need more time for writing (**Activity III, Tell Your Story**), you could wait until the beginning of the next class to have them share their writing with a partner. If students are reluctant to share their work with each other, you could ask volunteers to read their essays aloud for class feedback, rather than working in pairs.

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ACTIVITY STEPS

I. Warm Up (5 minutes)

1. [As students enter, ask them to complete their **Student Handbook page 26, My Story, My Essay Topic**. As homework in the previous lesson, students were asked to come up with a personal experience that reflects the strengths they identified. In this activity, they will briefly summarize the story, or personal experience, that they will describe in their essay.]

2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: At this point, you have identified your personal story, or the experience you're going to write about in your essay. Now that you know your essay topic, you're going to spend most of this lesson fleshing out the facts and details to write your essays. Towards the end of the lesson, you'll write a more complete description of your story. Then you will share your writing with a partner, and exchange feedback about the most effective images and phrases.

II. Fleshing it Out: Main Facts and Little Details (15 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Any strong story answers the basic questions: who, what, when, where, how, and why. It's the same for a college essay. Whatever your essay topic, you'll want to provide a complete picture for the reader. You don't want the admissions officer to read your essay and be left wondering, "When did this happen?" "Why was that event significant?"

2. [Have students turn to their **Student Handbook page 27, Story Facts**. On an overhead projector, show the **Facilitator Resource 1, Story Facts (Example)**.]

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: You're going to use this page to record important facts about your story. Remember the story we discussed last week about the teenager who took the two kids by bus to the city library? This example shows how the writer might identify basic facts of this story. [Briefly walk through this example with students.]

4. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: A good story also includes vivid details that make readers feel as if they're there. One way is to describe the experience through your different senses — the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, even the emotions. Listen to these two descriptions of the teenager's experience taking the kids to the city library:
   - *I was really nervous taking the kids to the library, but I tried not to show it.*
   - *As the bus took off, I felt a wave a panic. My heart was pounding and my palms were sweaty. But I smiled at the boys and pointed out the sight of Lake Erie through the trees.*

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5. [Point out how the first description *tells* about the experience, but the second one uses vivid details to *show* the reader what it was like to be there.]

6. [Have students turn to their **Student Handbook page 28, Story Details.** On an overhead projector, show the **Facilitator Resource 2, Story Details (Example)**. As you did before, walk through this example to show students how they could use their senses to identify the most vivid details from the story.]

7. [Give students about 10 minutes to complete these two handbook pages.]

III. Tell Your Story (15 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Now I'd like you to use these facts and details to tell your story in your own words. Don't worry about how you structure the writing – we'll focus on that next week. For now, just tell the story as it comes to you. [Provide paper, pens, and pencils to students who need them.]

2. [Give students 15 minutes to write.]

IV. Share Your Story (5 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Now it's time to share what you've written with a partner and give each other some constructive feedback. Keep in mind this is very early in the writing process. Don't worry if you feel like your writing is not ready to share. There are three main goals for this step:
   - First, to make sure you've provided enough facts to make the story clear;
   - Second, to identify some of the most compelling words and phrases;
   - Third, to make sure your essay reflects the qualities or strengths you want to highlight.

2. [Have students turn to their **Student Handbook page 29, Story Feedback**. Briefly review the feedback they should provide.]

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: To share your writing, you might prefer to read your story aloud to your partner rather than have him or her read it. This is your choice. Either way, do not write your feedback on your partner's writing. Instead, use this form to write down your feedback.

4. [Have students find a partner. Give them an opportunity to share their writing, evaluate their partner's work, then read their partner's feedback.]

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V. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

1. [Have student volunteers share favorite phrases and images from their partner's story.]

2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Great job today, everybody. Next week, we'll spend a little time reviewing some tips for writing and organizing your essay. Then you'll spend most of the period writing your drafts.

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Story Facts (Example)

WHAT

(What happened?)

I took two neighbors to the Cleveland city library by bus. I had never been there and had only ridden the bus a couple times in my life. It was an amazing experience for all of us!

WHO

(Who are the important people in the story? Was there someone you learned from, someone you affected, or someone who reacted in a different way? What was your relationship with them?)

My two next-door neighbors, in second grade and third grade. They were great athletes, but struggled in school, especially with reading.

WHEN

(When did this take place? Over how much time? How old were you? If it's significant, what was the season? What else was happening then?)

I was 15, a sophomore in high school. I had only ridden the bus once or twice before. It happened one day in July.

WHERE

(Where did it take place? What was important about this setting?)

Three main places: my hometown, about 45 minutes from Cleveland; on the bus to Cleveland; and Cleveland, which was a big city compared to my hometown.

HOW

(How did the experience happen?)

I thought the boys should see the big library in downtown Cleveland. I thought it would be exciting and inspire them to want to read and learn.

WHY

(Why was this experience important to you?)

I was so nervous, but really proud of myself for going through with it. I guess I had more determination than I thought! It also showed me how much I enjoy working with kids. Even if it's really hard, it can be very rewarding.

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Story Details (Example)

SIGHTS

Nervous faces before the trip. Seeing Lake Erie through the trees. Bumper to bumper traffic downtown. The library's soaring marble façade.

SOUNDS

The hiss of the bus door closing. The boy's silence on the trip there. The horns of downtown Cleveland, and the quiet of the library. Excited chatter on the way home.

SMELL

Exhaust and roasted nuts on city streets. The smell of books in the reading room.

TASTE

Cinnamon mints I passed around on the ride there.

TOUCH

Sweaty palms, heart pounding on the bus ride. Hot air from the sidewalk. The heavy library door. The cool air of the reading room.

EMOTIONS

I felt panic as the bus pulled out, but I was trying to act calm and excited. The boys seemed pretty nervous, too. They were fascinated by the city and the library. On the way back, we were all really excited.

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My Story, My Essay Topic

Main Idea: I am _____
(list the qualities you want to highlight in your essay).

Describe a single event or experience that reflects these qualities. This is your "story" that you'll share in your essay. It could be something that happened to you one day, over a summer, during a semester, or throughout your life — as long as the story is focused. **(Note: it's ok to summarize in a couple of sentences here. You'll be adding details later.)**

If you're stuck, think about a time or specific way that you were influenced by:

- Your family, ancestors, or heritage
- Your pastimes or favorite activities
- Significant people outside your family
- Travel to different places or exposure to different people
- Your strongest beliefs or values
- A difficult or challenging event
- Criticism or failure
- Your dreams for the future
- A piece of literature or art

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Story Facts

Use this form to write down the basic facts about your event or experience.

WHAT
(What happened?)

_____

_____

WHO
(Who are the important people in the story? Was there someone you learned from, someone you affected, or someone who reacted in a different way? What was your relationship with them?)

_____

_____

WHEN
(When did this take place? Over how much time? How old were you? If it's significant, what was the season? What else was happening then?)

_____

_____

WHERE
(Where did it take place? What was important about this setting?)

_____

_____

HOW
(How did the experience happen?)

_____

_____

WHY
(Why was this experience important to you?)

_____

_____

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Story Details

Close your eyes for a minute and imagine yourself in the story you will write for your essay. Describe the experience using your different senses.

SIGHTS

_____

_____

SOUNDS

_____

_____

SMELL

_____

_____

TASTE

_____

_____

TOUCH

_____

_____

EMOTIONS

_____

_____

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Story Feedback

Listen to or read your partner's story carefully. Write down the words and phrases that are most compelling and descriptive. Which part of the story makes you feel like you're there?

After you've listened to or read the story, write any questions you still have about the experience. What facts or details would help the reader understand this story?

Finally, write a few words to describe the writer, based on the story.

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Writing the Essay IV

The BIG Idea

- What are the most important things to remember when organizing and writing my essay?

AGENDA

Approx. 45 minutes

I. Warm Up (5 minutes)

II. Essay-Writing Tips (10 minutes)

III. Write Your Draft (25 minutes)

IV. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

MATERIALS

- ❑ **STUDENT HANDBOOK PAGES:**
  - Student Handbook page 29, Story Feedback (from previous lesson)
  - Student Handbook pages 30-32, Sample Essays III
  - Student Handbook page 33, Ten Tips for Well-Written Essays
  - Student Handbook page 34, Essay Evaluation
- ❑ Overhead and LCD projector
- ❑ Notebook paper, pens, and pencils

OBJECTIVES

During this lesson, students will:

- Describe important elements of a well-organized, well-written essay.
- Review a rubric for assessing an essay.
- Write drafts of their essays.

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OVERVIEW

This is the fourth week in the essay-writing unit. Students will begin by reading a few sample essays. Using these as examples, they'll review important tips for writing and organizing the essay. Students will review a rubric for evaluating essays, then spend the rest of the class working on their drafts.

PREPARATION

- List the day's **BIG IDEA** and activities on the board.
- The following handouts need to be made into overhead transparencies or copied onto chart paper:
  - **Student Handbook page 29, Story Feedback** (from previous lesson)
  - **Student Handbook pages 30-32, Sample Essays III**
  - **Student Handbook page 33, Ten Tips for Well-Written Essays**
  - **Student Handbook page 34, Essay Evaluation**

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ACTIVITY STEPS

I. Warm Up (5 minutes)

1. [As students enter, assign them the number 1, 2, or 3. Explain they are to read this essay number in their **Student Handbook pages 30-32, Sample Essays III**. For the essay they've been assigned, they are asked to circle the main idea, or the claim that the writer is making about himself or herself. Then they should underline the evidence that supports this claim.]

2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: You just read one of three very different essays. We'll talk about these in just a minute, and you'll see how their topics, structure, and tone vary greatly. But they do share some important elements of any good writing. In today's class, we're going to review these elements, along with a few other writing tips. Then we'll review a rubric, a chart to help guide and assess your writing. Finally, you'll spend the rest of the class writing your drafts.

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Before we begin, I want to stress the importance of a thoughtful, well-written essay. Remember, the college essay is your chance to show admissions officers who you are. Therefore, a college essay should reflect your maturity, your insight, and your ability to clearly express yourself.

II. Essay-Writing Tips (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Now let's look back at those essays you read when you came in. Like any good writing, they each had a clear topic or thesis. In this case, that topic was a particular claim that the writer was making about himself or herself, such as a strength or personal goal. They also supported this claim with strong evidence.

2. [For each of the three sample essays, have volunteers share the main topic and evidence they identified. As each essay is discussed, show a copy on an overhead projector.]

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: These are two elements of good writing you should remember when writing your own essay. Let's turn to your **Student Handbook page 33, Ten Tips for Well-Written Essays** to review a few others. [As you review this list, ask students to provide examples from the sample essays. For example, point out the strong starts, transitions, and conclusions in the sample essays. Note that not every essay states its main theme in the beginning; in our examples, the writers reveal their themes at the end.]

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4. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Now please turn to your **Student Handbook page 34, Essay Evaluation**. [Show a copy on an overhead projector.] This will probably look familiar. This is based on a list we reviewed a few weeks ago about what makes a strong essay. Now that it's your turn to write a strong essay, I'd like you to look it over before you begin to write. Once you have a draft, you'll ask two adults to evaluate your essay using this chart.]

III. Write Your Draft (25 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Before you begin writing your drafts, turn to the description you wrote last week, along with your partner's feedback in the **Student Handbook page 29, Story Feedback**. Last week, your partner helped you identify strong words or phrases, as well as missing facts. I'd like you to consider your partner's feedback as you write your drafts.

2. [Give students the remaining time to draft their essay. Provide paper, pencils, and pens to those who need them. Circulate around the classroom, coaching students who are stuck, bolstering confidence, and providing a chance to be recognized.]

IV. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Next week, you are going to exchange drafts with two other students and proofread each other's essays. For this stage, you'll want to share your very best work. So for homework, I'd like you to use the Essay Evaluation chart to honestly assess your own writing. If you can, make revisions to your essay before next week.

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Sample Essays III

Read the essay you've been assigned. Then circle the main idea, or the claim that the writer is making about himself or herself. Next, underline the evidence that supports this claim. If you have time, read another essay.

Essay #1

I grew up watching my mother struggle to raise a family alone, providing for three children with one income. My mom was always working, so she didn't have a lot of time to concentrate on my progress at school. Sometimes I would get angry at her when she was too exhausted to attend parent teacher conferences. I blamed her for my grades, too. After all, nobody punished me for bringing home a bad report card, so I didn't put effort into my classes or to push myself to do better. I was just the student that showed up to class but didn't bother to participate or hand in homework. I would always go home not expecting anyone to bother with me and just watch TV all night.

Then at the beginning of junior year, I started to feel ashamed of myself. I noticed that most of my friends were honor students, happy to see 90s and 80s on their report card. I was the outcast of the group, because I had the easy classes and was barely passing them. I knew I needed to change my outlook on school, because not caring wouldn't get me anywhere. Watching "Family Guy" instead of doing homework wouldn't help me pass any classes.

I wanted to change my ways, but I didn't at first. Then one day I found my mother crying because she didn't have enough money to pay bills. She whispered to me, "Be smart about the decisions you make in life." I giggled, but inside I wanted to lie down and cry with her. I realized that a change had to come from within me. I couldn't just sit there waiting for a better report card to arrive. I had to take responsibility for my actions. If I didn't, one day I could just end up like my mother, working very hard and just barely getting by.

I have learned from her mistakes. She was pregnant at the age of nineteen and couldn't attend college because she had to take care of us. I want the opportunity to attend college and make a path for myself so I can be successful in the future. Since it took me so long to get myself together I had to catch up fast. I started attending Saturday school and I grabbed any opportunities that would help me improve. For once, I started to see my grades improve.

Now, looking at my grades I see 80s and above and it makes me proud. I know I am finally living up to my potential. I know I can be successful at anything I strive for as long as I put my mind to it.

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Essay #2

"Olé! Planta Tacón! Ría Ría Pita!" This is what the Spanish say when they saw Flamenco dancers dancing in the streets of southern Spain, clapping these beautiful little castanets in the air and stomping until tomorrow, in big red polka dot dresses, gold lined capes and red velvet vests. I just made up the "Ria, Ria, Pita," but it's how my flamenco teachers would describe what castanets sound like.

In 2002, I moved to New York City with my aunt, Veronica, who has been like my mom. Veronica is a professional dancer. She wanted me to do something after school, so she enrolled me in dance class at the Ballet Hispanico School of Dance, where she began her training long ago. Destroying the floor with three-inch heeled boots with nails on the bottom doesn't really sound like a little kid's ultimate dream until he or she actually tries it.

When my aunt told me I was to take dance classes, at first I completely refused. But since I lived with her, I really had no choice. As if it couldn't get any worse, my aunt was my flamenco teacher. Of course, I was the only boy and I didn't feel comfortable at all. Imagine a sixth grader with a white T-shirt, black sweat pants, and a pair of ugly hand-me-down boots my aunt had found in the basement. I will never forget those smelly boots made of ugly creased leather. The heels were two inches high and didn't even have nails. Where's the fun in that?

I really wasn't happy in my class until we started working on our dance for the recital. My aunt told us the name of our dance, "El Paso Doble!" What a powerful name. When I heard the music, I instantly connected to its beat. The posture of the dance was upright, strong, and prideful. I felt the pride and power in my body and that's the way I danced it. As the recital neared, I was becoming more anxious. I had never felt so excited to do anything in my life, I just wanted to scream for no apparent reason because I had so much "stuff" I wanted to let out. I didn't know what that "stuff" was. All I knew was that on the day of the recital, I would let something out that would flip my world upside down.

When I woke up the morning of the recital, I thought, "It's finally here!" I got up early on Saturday and walked downtown to the high school where the recital was held. The only thing I could think of was, "This is real, this is me. I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be now." The recital began and our class was the third to last. As the other groups danced, I rehearsed my steps: walk, walk, planta, tacon, right, left, and repeat.

The time arrived. My heart was beating so hard and my stomach felt empty, but the show had to go on. As we walked on stage, I started to feel this unknown feeling: flight, freedom. It was a roller coaster ride, twisting and turning. I wanted to scream again. At that point I knew what that "stuff" was — it was contentment, joy, glee. It was a feeling I wanted to carry with me for the rest of my life. When we finished, the crowd cheered and applauded and those feelings elevated to the tenth power. The crowd's reaction made me feel comfortable and happy. It was bliss.

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What I found in flamenco was a relief, an escape from my issues, my life, and the problems I face in the world. It gave me power, something as a sixth grader I had never felt before. It gave me a way to express myself as a person and taught me to use my energy and tension and put it into something powerful and passionate. It showed me how to use my excess energy to make myself and others happy. Flamenco gave me something to look forward to every week. Now, seven years into flamenco, I've been to Spain to study the amazing culture and art behind this art form. Dancing flamenco is one of my passions and I will never stop.

Essay #3

"Life is what you make it." I must have heard my parents say this a million times. But somewhere along the way, I realized the true meaning and power of these words. In my rural community with limited opportunities and resources, it means sometimes you have to make something out of nothing to succeed. It means having the determination to succeed no matter what obstacles are thrown your way.

This determination is what drives my family's business. In our small town, local businesses open, close, and change hands frequently. But my family has owned and operated the White Horse Restaurant and Lounge since 1928. Growing up, I've seen firsthand the hard work and commitment this takes. And it is truly a family effort. For as long as I can remember, I have been a part of the business, helping my older cousins sort silverware on Saturday nights, cleaning in the mornings, organizing shelves, and eventually helping tend bar, hostess, prepare, cook, waitress, and help with the paperwork. My parents and grandparents have inspired me, working 16-hour days for little to no pay, just to keep the business running and to support us.

I've taken this same determination onto the athletic field. Just shy of 5'2" with the coordination of a young giraffe, sports never came easy. During little league softball I was sentenced to the outfield. But I loved the game and stuck with it. Finally, after nine years of playing, I was named the Most Improved Player on our varsity team last spring. Despite my height, I've also played volleyball since seventh grade. I've worked hard, year round, playing during regular season, on a club team, and in summer leagues. Last year, as a junior, I was honored as a first team all-star and am currently considered the top setter in the Lackawanna League.

To me, determination means learning a business from the ground up. It means sticking with a sport despite an apparent lack of athletic talent. It means knowing that hard work will eventually pay off. As my parents say, "Life is what you make it."

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Ten Tips for Well-Written Essays

A well-written essay…

- Starts strong: Grabs the reader at the beginning of the essay.
- States its purpose: Clearly states the main topic or claim early in the essay.
- Backs up its claim: Provides strong, specific evidence to support the claim in the body of the essay.
- Keeps to the point: Focuses on the main topic without extraneous or irrelevant information.
- Flows: Makes clear transitions between each paragraph.
- Ends strong: Ties it all together in the conclusion by summarizing the main point and showing its relevance — how the experience connects to your personal strengths, goals, or selected major.

More writing tips:

- Keep the tone conversational, but be respectful of your reader. Use slang sparingly and carefully — and never use foul language.
- Show your sense of humor, but don't be wacky or silly. Remember, you want to come across as thoughtful and mature.
- Avoid clichés ("live one day at a time"), overused phrases ("I want to give back to my community"), or weak words ("really," "special")
- Don't plagiarize, or try to pass off someone's words as your own. If you use a quotation, name the speaker. For example, you wouldn't say, "I realized that day that to err is human, to forgive divine," without crediting the source (Alexander Pope).

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Essay Evaluation

Thank you for taking the time to read my essay. As you read through it, please consider the criteria in the left-hand column. Next to each, circle the score that best describes the essay. If you have specific comments, write them in the last column, or use the back of this page.

CRITERIA A good essay is:	QUALITY: How well did this essay do this? 4 Very well	3 Fairly well	2 Somewhat	1 Not at all	COMMENTS
Focused	Describes a single event or experience. Clearly answers the essay question.	Focuses mostly on single event, strays some; needs clearer link to question.	Focus isn't clear; needs better link to question.	Covers too much information and/or does not answer question.	
Convincing	Supports claims with specific, strong details.	Some evidence provided, but not very specific.	Little evidence provided; evidence is weak or vague.	Claims not supported by any evidence.	
Descriptive	Provides several vivid details; readers feel like they're there.	Some good details are provided.	Few details provided; may be vague or unclear.	No details provided.	
Organized	Opening grabs reader, purpose is clear; transitions are logical; ends with strong conclusion.	Opening does not grab reader; needs better transitions; ending not clear.	Purpose is unclear; weak transitions; ending does not provide a logical conclusion.	Purpose is unclear; no transitions between thoughts; ends without clear, logical conclusion.	
Personal	Shows clear, insightful thoughts and feelings; reflects personal strengths.	Shows some personal perspective and strengths, but not very revealing.	Shows minor or trivial personal reaction; little or weak reference to personal strengths.	No personal insight; perspective is vague or a cliché; does not reflect personal strengths.	
Easy to read	Language is conversational, easy to read aloud; writing is clear.	Language could be clearer; a few phrases are too formal or informal.	Much of the language is unclear, too formal or informal.	Most language is too formal <u>or</u> inappropriate use of slang; several phrases unclear.	
Grammatically correct	Does not contain grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors.	Few errors of spelling, grammar, or punctuation	Several distracting errors.	Many errors, making it difficult to read.	

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Writing the Essay V

The BIG Idea

- What do I need to consider when I proofread and revise my essay?

AGENDA

Approx. 45 minutes

I. Warm Up (5 minutes)

II. Proofreading Your Essay (5 minutes)

III. Group Evaluation (10 minutes)

IV. Revise Your Essay (20 minutes)

V. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

MATERIALS

❑ **PORTFOLIO PAGES:**

- Portfolio pages 19-22, Grade 12 Skills Checklist (Applying to College section)

❑ **STUDENT HANDBOOK PAGES:**

- Student Handbook page 35, Sample Essay (First Draft)
- Student Handbook page 36, Proofreading Checklist (2 copies)
- Student Handbook page 37, Essay Evaluation

❑ **FACILITATOR PAGES:**

- Facilitator Resource 1, Sample Essay (Revision)

❑ Overhead and LCD projector

❑ Notebook paper, pens, and pencils

OBJECTIVES

During this lesson, the student(s) will:

- Describe what to look for when proofreading an essay.
- Use a checklist to proofread two students' essays.
- Revise essay based on provided feedback.

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OVERVIEW

This is the fifth week, and last lesson, in the essay-writing unit. In this lesson, students will read an essay to review the importance of proofreading. Next, they'll proofread two other students' essays, using a proofreading checklist. Finally, they will revise their own essays using the feedback from each student.

PREPARATION

- List the day's **BIG IDEA** and activities on the board.
- The following handouts need to be made into overhead transparencies or copied onto chart paper:
  - **Student Handbook page 35, Sample Essay (First Draft)**
  - **Student Handbook page 36, Proofreading Checklist** (2 copies)
  - **Student Handbook page 37, Essay Evaluation**
  - **Facilitator Resource 1, Sample Essay (Revision)**
- Make copies of **Student Handbook page 37, Essay Evaluation** (2 copies for each student).

IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

You may wish to solicit help from a senior English teacher to provide proofreading assistance for students who need it.

In **Activity I,** you may wish to skip the proofreading exercise (**Student Handbook page 35, Sample Essay (First Draft)**) if your students will find it childish.

For **Activity II,** you may wish to use a proofreading rubric already in use in English class rather than the **Student Handbook page 36, Proofreading Checklist.**

In **Activity III,** you may wish to offer to proofread the work of students who prefer not to share their essays with classmates.

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ACTIVITY STEPS

I. Warm Up (5 minutes)

1. [As students enter, ask them to read their **Student Handbook page 35, Sample Essay (First Draft)**. As they read this essay, ask them to look for any errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Circle any mistakes and write the correction in the space above.]

2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: The essay you just read was on its way to becoming a strong essay. But how do you think this writer would come across to an admissions committee? [Take answers from a few volunteers.] Lots of spelling and grammatical errors make the writer seem sloppy and careless — as if she didn't give the essay much time or attention. This is *not* the impression you want to give an admissions committee, is it?

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Last week, you had a chance to work on your draft essays. Even if you're feeling pretty good about your essay now, it's not done yet! It is critical that you proofread and revise your essay. In today's lesson, we'll talk about what to look for when you proofread your essay. Next you'll break into small groups of three to proofread each other's essays. Then you'll spend the rest of the period using this feedback to revise your essays.

II. Proofreading Your Essay (5 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Let's take a look at the draft essay you just read. What were some of the errors you found?

2. [Take a few answers from volunteers. You may also want to show **Facilitator Resource 1, Sample Essay (Revision)** on an overhead projector. Point out a few different types of errors, including spelling, grammar, and punctuation.]

3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Let's take a look at some of the things we should look for when we review our essays today. [Have students turn to their **Student Handbook page 36, Proofreading Checklist** and review the list.]

III. Group Evaluation (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Now it's time to share your essays in small groups. You will read and proofread two other students' essays. To guide your feedback, please use the proofreading checklist we just reviewed.

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2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: I'd like you to read each student's essay two times. As you read through the essay, consider the proofreading checklist.

3. [Divide students into groups of three and give them about 10 minutes to read and proofread each other's essays. You may want to alert them halfway through this time to wrap up and work on the next person's essay.]

4. [Give students a few minutes before they break up their groups to review and discuss their feedback.]

IV. Revise Your Essay (20 minutes)

1. [Give students the remaining time to use the feedback they just received and the proofreading checklist to revise their essays in their class notebooks. Provide paper for those who didn't bring their essay to class.]

V. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Once you've incorporated your partner's proofreading notes to create an almost-final draft, you're ready to share your essay with two trusted adults – a teacher and someone else whose writing ability you respect. Give them a copy of your essay and the **Student Handbook page 37, Essay Evaluation.** Be prepared to carefully consider any changes they suggest. [Give each student 2 copies of **Student Handbook page 37, Essay Evaluation**.]

2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE**: Terrific work today, everybody. That's the final lesson in our "Applying to College" unit. Over the past six weeks, you've demonstrated that you have the tools and the skills to complete a strong college application. We'll be talking more about steps to college next week, when we'll learn more about finding financial aid. As you continue your college applications, please use **Portfolio pages 3-4, College Application Tracker** to keep your eye on approaching deadlines, and don't hesitate to ask me or the school counselor if you need help.

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SKILLS CHECKLIST

Direct students' attention to **Portfolio pages 19-22, Grade 12 Skills Checklist**. Have students complete the skills checklist questions for Applying to College skills.

Applying to College

I can…

Identify and keep track of the admissions requirements at the colleges of my choice.	❑ not at all	❑ somewhat	❑ very well
Complete a college application.	❑ not at all	❑ somewhat	❑ very well
Identify one or more personal strengths of interest to an employer or college admissions officer.	❑ not at all	❑ somewhat	❑ very well
Identify an experience that provides appropriate evidence of one or more of my personal strengths.	❑ not at all	❑ somewhat	❑ very well
Create an essay that effectively conveys my personal strengths.	❑ not at all	❑ somewhat	❑ very well

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Sample Essay (Revision)

Below is the revision with corrected words and phrases in bold.

I have wanted to be **a** teacher since I fell in love with Miss Cailor in second grade. In first grade, reading had been a struggle, **and** the **adventures** of Dick and Jane hardly seemed worth the effort. But in second grade, Miss Cailor helped me make sense of all those letters. Before long, I was off and running, brimming with the giddy self-confidence of a brand new reader. It wasn't just the books she brought to life. We learned number facts by **playing** a variation of Bingo, with treats as the reward for a job well done. We learned to knit on simple looms. **For** Christmas that year, I gave everybody scarves, stretched to **their** maximum length so I could finish faster. Suddenly, I felt competent and eager to learn everything. It was like Miss Cailor **had** unlocked the doors to a magical kingdom.

At age seven, I **knew** what I wanted to be when I grew up. In high school, I joined **Future Teachers** of America as soon as I could. When our next-door **neighbor** approached me about tutoring her sons in reading the summer after my sophomore year, I volunteered. They were in second and third grade, already fantastic athletes, though less successful in school. They reported dutifully to my **mother's** kitchen every weekday, bringing the smell of the playground indoors, and probably wishing they could be elsewhere. I'd grown up with sisters, and dusty little boys were like **aliens** to me. They struggled through easy-reader classics **like** "Billy Brown the Baby Sitter," and I wondered what I could do to unlock the magic of books.

That is how we came to make a pilgrimage to the Cleveland Public Library, a 45-minute bus ride from our small suburban town. Cleveland might as well have been a foreign country. My family ventured downtown once a year to visit Santa Claus and **take** in the Christmas lights. **I'd** been on the bus exactly twice, and both times my dad had been waiting for me on the other end. My sense of direction was non-existent, **and** I was shy about asking strangers for help. I was terrified to make the trip, especially with two little boys in tow. But, for me, the "big" library beckoned like Emerald City, full of undiscovered **treasures**.

On the day of the **trip**, **as** the three of us walked the **two** long blocks to the bus stop, my head was bursting with questions: What if we missed the bus? What if we got on the wrong bus? What if we got off at the wrong stop**?** What if the boys escaped my grasp, and I had to tell **their** mother they were missing?

The bus arrived at the scheduled time — a miracle! — in a whoosh of air brakes and a plume of exhaust. And then we were walking up the steps, coins tinkling in the fare box. We settled into our seats. The bus **passed** houses much fancier than **our** own, and we waited for reassuring glimpses of Lake **Erie** through the trees.

By the time we reached the library, most of my anxiety was gone. The boys raced me up the impressive marble steps and flung open the heavy doors, and we entered a brand new world. **It's** a feeling that sticks with me, even now.

That summer, I learned how little I knew about teaching reading, and how eager I was to learn more. I was already intrepid in my pursuit of this mission, and one step closer to being the inspiring teacher I want to be**!**

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Sample Essay (First Draft)

Carefully review this essay for errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Circle any mistakes and write the correction in the space above.

I have wanted to be teacher since I fell in love with Miss Cailor in second grade. In first grade, reading had been a struggle, the advetures of Dick and Jane hardly seemed worth the effort. But in second grade, Miss Cailor helped me make sense of all those letters. Before long, I was off and running, brimming with the giddy self-confidence of a brand new reader. It wasn't just the books she brought to life. We learned number facts by paying a variation of Bingo, with treats as the reward for a job well done. We learned to knit on simple looms. for Christmas that year, I gave everybody scarves, stretched to there maximum length so I could finish faster. Suddenly, I felt competent and eager to learn everything. It was like Miss Cailor has unlocked the doors to a magical kingdom.

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Proofreading Checklist

- ☐ Check your spelling and grammar carefully. Use the spell-check and grammar-check on your word processing program, but remember this won't catch every error.
- ☐ Use a printed copy to proofread. It's easier to proofread a printed copy than catch errors on a computer screen.
- ☐ Read your essay aloud to yourself. If it doesn't sound right, check your grammar. If it doesn't flow, you may need transitions.
- ☐ Check for proper capitalization.
  - First word of a sentence
  - Names of people and places (e.g., Future Farmers of America, Cornell University)
- ☐ Make sure subjects and verbs agree.
  - Jon <u>runs</u> home every night after work.
  - We <u>run</u> home every night after work.
- ☐ Make sure subjects and possessive pronouns agree.
  - Loren will finish <u>her</u> essay.
  - The students will finish <u>their</u> essays.
- ☐ Use plurals and possessives correctly.
  - Dogs (more than one dog)
  - Dog's leash (the leash of one dog)
  - Dogs' leashes (the leashes of many dogs)
- ☐ Use the following words correctly. (Spell-check won't help you!)
  - There (a place) Please put your essay over <u>there</u>.
  - Their (possessive) The students finished <u>their</u> essays.
  - They're (they are) <u>They're</u> writing the best essays ever written.
  - It's (it is) <u>It's</u> almost time for the bell to ring.
  - Its (possessive) The dog chased <u>its</u> tail.
  - To (a preposition) Send your application <u>to</u> URI.
  - Too (also) He's applying there, <u>too</u>.
  - Two (the number) <u>Two</u> people from my high school will attend Freshman Orientation next week.
- ☐ Use punctuation to show where your sentences start and end.
  - <u>Wrong</u>: Read each sentence aloud if you think you should stop use a period if you think you should pause use a comma.
  - <u>Right</u>: Read each sentence aloud. If you think you should stop, use a period. If you think you should pause, use a comma.
- ☐ Avoid sentence fragments.
  - <u>Wrong</u>: Seemed like a bad omen.
  - <u>Right</u>: The impending thunderstorm seemed like a bad omen.

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Essay Evaluation

Thank you for taking the time to read my essay. As you read through it, please consider the criteria in the left-hand column. Next to each, circle the score that best describes the essay. If you have specific comments, write them in the last column, or use the back of this page.

CRITERIA A good essay is:	QUALITY: How well did this essay do this? 4 Very well	3 Fairly well	2 Somewhat	1 Not at all	COMMENTS
Focused	Describes a single event or experience. Clearly answers the essay question.	Focuses mostly on single event, strays some; needs clearer link to question.	Focus isn't clear; needs better link to question.	Covers too much information and/or does not answer question.	
Convincing	Supports claims with specific, strong details.	Some evidence provided, but not very specific.	Little evidence provided; evidence is weak or vague.	Claims not supported by any evidence.	
Descriptive	Provides several vivid details; readers feel like they're there.	Some good details are provided.	Few details provided; may be vague or unclear.	No details provided.	
Organized	Opening grabs reader, purpose is clear; transitions are logical; ends with strong conclusion.	Opening does not grab reader; needs better transitions; ending not clear.	Purpose is unclear; weak transitions; ending does not provide a logical conclusion.	Purpose is unclear; no transitions between thoughts; ends without clear, logical conclusion.	
Personal	Shows clear, insightful thoughts and feelings; reflects personal strengths.	Shows some personal perspective and strengths, but not very revealing.	Shows minor or trivial personal reaction; little or weak reference to personal strengths.	No personal insight; perspective is vague or a cliché; does not reflect personal strengths.	
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Grammatically correct	Does not contain grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors.	Few errors of spelling, grammar, or punctuation	Several distracting errors.	Many errors, making it difficult to read.	

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