Day 4 ELA Session

Attending to Language, Craft and Structure

Grades 6-8
# The Craft and Structure Standards (4-6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard 4: Vocabulary in Context</th>
<th>Reading Literature</th>
<th>Reading Informational Text</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grade 6</strong></td>
<td>Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.</td>
<td>Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grade 7</strong></td>
<td>Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.</td>
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<td><strong>Grade 8</strong></td>
<td>Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.</td>
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<th>Standard 5: Analyzing Structure</th>
<th>Reading Literature</th>
<th>Reading Informational Text</th>
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<td><strong>Grade 6</strong></td>
<td>Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.</td>
<td>Analyze how a particular sentence, paragraph, chapter, or section fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the ideas.</td>
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<td><strong>Grade 7</strong></td>
<td>Analyze how a drama's or poem's form or structure (e.g., soliloquy, sonnet) contributes to its meaning</td>
<td>Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.</td>
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<td><strong>Grade 8</strong></td>
<td>Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.</td>
<td>Analyze in detail the structure of a specific paragraph in a text, including the role of particular sentences in developing and refining a key concept.</td>
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<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.</td>
<td>Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.</td>
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<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.</td>
<td>Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others.</td>
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<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.</td>
<td>Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.</td>
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# Language Standard Example

**Language Standard 3**: Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

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<tr>
<th>Grade 6</th>
<th>a. Vary sentence patterns for meaning, reader/listener interest, and style.*</th>
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<td></td>
<td>b. Maintain consistency in style and tone.*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>a. Choose language that expresses idea precisely and concisely, recognizing and eliminating wordiness and redundancy.*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>a. Use verbs in the active and passive voice and in the conditional and subjunctive mood to achieve particular effects (e.g., emphasizing the actor or the action; expressing uncertainty or describing a state contrary to fact).</td>
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Directions
Read this article. Then answer questions 1 through 7.

Excerpt from *Into the Unknown*
by Walter Dean Myers

When, in 1728, James Cook was born in Yorkshire, England, the entire world could have been described as “new” in the sense that most people had little idea of what life was like beyond the borders of their own country. Maps of the day would show Europe itself, the eastern coast of North America, the western coast of Africa, and only parts of what we now know as the Middle East and Far East. Could there possibly be great cities in central Africa? In the South Pacific? Was the bottom of the earth capable of sustaining human life?

There were many places on Earth where no Europeans had visited, even places where no human beings at all had visited. Scholars tried to guess what these places would be like. Some imagined monsters, or beings only half human, living in wildly exotic and scary lands. Others thought there might be wonderful areas with fertile soil for food crops and rich mineral deposits. But these were all guesses. To discover the reality, human beings needed to go to these places.

Cartographers, those who made maps, weren’t sure how to represent these places. On maps the vaguely drawn lower regions of the earth were often labeled *Terra Australis Incognita*, “Unknown Southern Land.” Great Britain, the world’s leading sea power in the eighteenth century, decided to send an expedition to these unknown lands. They chose James Cook to lead it.

James Cook was born into a farm family and might well have spent his life in the family business. But Cook was an exceptional youngster and, unlike most English boys of his time, was allowed to attend school when he was twelve years old. As a teenager, Cook became apprenticed to a man who owned a *collier*, a ship that transported coal, and soon found himself carrying cargoes of coal from northern England to the bustling docks of London.

Cook was ambitious and quickly learned that his ability to read set him apart from other sailors, even ones much older than he was. Ships at that time had none of the sophisticated electronics found on ships today. Instead, they found their way around the oceans using instruments that determined their position relative to the sun and stars. This took considerable skill. Cook read whatever books he could find on navigation and learned to use the instruments to find his position on the ocean. While the merchant ships he worked on carried cargo from port to port, James Cook assumed more and more
responsibility as a navigator and learned the ways of the sea. Perhaps the greatest idea that he absorbed was that self-discipline gave one a huge advantage at sea.

After ten years on the collier, Cook decided to join the Royal Navy. The British navy was the most powerful in the world. Its officers were recognized not only as outstanding sailors but also as "gentlemen." For a young man born on a farm, it was decided to a step up the social ladder. Again, Cook relied on his discipline and skills, thinking they would set him apart. He was right. Before long he was made a junior officer.

Cook, who had already taught himself a great deal about navigation, soon taught himself to draw accurate maps.

Cartography, the art of making maps, was a truly important skill. With so much of the world unknown, each time a ship left port, it was in danger of never finding its way back. A small error on a map, showing a body of land to be in one direction when it was not, could lead a ship hundreds of miles off course. Ships that needed to find sources of food or water could scarcely afford the days, and sometimes weeks, an errant map would cause them. But Cook's calculations were so well done, and so well thought out, that his reputation grew quickly. He was sent to the east coast of North America and directed to draw charts of the Canadian border, which he also did successfully.

In August 1768, the Royal Society decided to fund an expedition to the South Seas. It would be headed by Lieutenant James Cook.

Cook carried out the expedition, which was to chart the astronomy of the planet Venus from the South Seas. He did so successfully, using a converted collier, the *Endeavour*. During the trip, he also explored New Zealand and the east coast of Australia, which had never been visited by a European. Cook claimed the lands for Great Britain and drew highly accurate maps of the region. On his return to England in 1771, he was given a hero's welcome. By then, some geographers, people who studied the physical features of the earth, thought that there might be an undiscovered continent on the bottom of the earth.

In July 1772, Cook sailed from England in the sloop *Resolution* in company with the ship *Adventure*. His instructions were clear, to continue to explore the southern regions and to claim for Great Britain any new lands he discovered. When he said good-bye to his wife, Elizabeth, he knew it would be years before he would see her again.
Why are lines 14-18 important to the article?
A. They explain how old maps were inaccurate
B. They emphasize the limited knowledge of geography at the time
C. The emphasize Great Britain's knowledge of sea exploration
D. They explain Great Britain's choice for using James Cook to explore unknown lands

How does the author organize ideas in the article?
A. by explaining how James Cook encourages Great Britain to seek out new lands
B. by showing how the lack of reliable maps caused dangers in early ocean expeditions
C. by relating events sequentially to elaborate on James Cook's accomplishments
D. by describing the ship instruments to show the development of sea navigation
Directions
Read this story. Then answer questions 15 through 21.

A kit car is a car bought as a kit of parts and assembled by the owner. Fourteen-year-old Terry has always been curious about the kit car his father had purchased but never finished putting together. Now that Terry has grown up, today would be the day.

Excerpt from The Car
by Gary Paulsen

And the kit car was still in the garage.

He looked once at the clock on the kitchen wall. It was in the shape of a cat with eyes that went back and forth and the hands were in a circle on the cat’s belly. It was, Terry thought, the ugliest thing he had probably ever seen. He had bought it for a Christmas present when he was nine years old, trying to get his mother’s attention. It hadn’t worked except that she’d put the clock on the wall over the kitchen window where Terry could see it every day.

Nine-thirty.

He could, of course, sit and watch television—the thought hit him even as he was moving toward the door that led to the garage. He could sit and watch the tube and munch on some junk, or he could go to bed because it was getting late, or . . .

He opened the door to the garage, pulled the cord that turned on the overhead light, and looked at the pile near the wall.

Yeah, he thought. I could go to bed or watch the tube, or I could go over there and just take a look at what’s involved.

He went to the workbench at the end of the garage where he worked on his mower. He had a complete set of tools—sockets and wrenches, feeler gauges, everything to work on motors. He’d bought the set at a rummage sale for thirty dollars two years before without knowing how complete the set was; it had belonged to an old man who had passed away, who had done all his own work on his car, and the tools were so complete they included a torque wrench and special deep-well sockets. There was even a small dental mirror for looking up in hard-to-see places, and everything, from the mirror to the largest wrench, every tool had been kept in top condition.

Terry kept them the same way. He’d bought a large bag of clean red mechanics’ rags at the discount store and each time he used a tool he wiped it carefully before putting it back.
His toolbox was the kind that sat upright with four drawers that pulled out, and he moved to the box now and opened the top, pulled the drawers out, and made sure—as he always did—that the tools were all there.

30 Then he turned to the car.

The boxes and parts were in a haphazard pile on top of the frame. The man who had initially owned the kit car had done some basic work on it. The frame was bolted and welded together correctly and the wheels and tires had been put on. The motor and transmission were also bolted into position on the frame, set in rubber motor mounts, and the drive shaft was in place back to the rear differential, but none of the body was on nor any of the controls for the wheels or motor. The car sat on the floor on tires—the frame, the motor—and stacked on top was the rest of the car in torn paper wrapping and cardboard boxes.

“Let's see what we've got . . .”, Terry said under his breath and started taking the boxes off, setting them around the garage on the floor, looking in each one as he did so.

40 Much of the stuff he couldn't identify. There were large boxes with the fenders, the rear trunk lid, the hood (tags called the hood a bonnet and the trunk lid a boot), doors, interior panels, molded black dashboard, windshield. All of that he knew, could understand, but there were numbered bags and boxes with just bolts and parts, and many of them made no sense to him, and he despaired of ever understanding it all when in the bottom of one of the boxes he found the instructions.

They were in the form of a book or magazine and seemed incredibly complete, explaining things in detail with step-by-step instructions and with photos to show each step being accomplished.

50 “A monkey could do this,” he said, sitting on the frame, going page by page. “You don't have to know anything about cars at all. It's beautiful . . .”

Not only were the instructions complete but they explained what was in each numbered box or bag—what each set of bolts was for—and he set about organizing all of them to get ready for starting work on the car.

55 Time seemed to stop while he worked. He used a notebook to catalog and place items, writing them down as he put them in order on the garage floor, and after a period he felt hungry and went into the kitchen for some lunch meat. Once he started to eat he was amazed at his hunger and he looked up to the cat clock, stunned to see that it was three in the morning.

60 *I should feel tired*, he thought, but the sandwich seemed to give him energy, and he moved back to the garage to start work on the car.
How do lines 16 through 23 mostly contribute to the story?

A  by describing the types of tools made for fixing cars
B  by revealing details about the previous owner of the tools
C  by suggesting that Terry has had previous experience fixing cars
D  by showing that Terry has all the necessary tools for the work he plans to do

In lines 55 through 59, what does “Time seemed to stop” suggest about Terry?

A  Terry works very quickly.
B  Terry is absorbed in his task.
C  Terry forgets to eat his dinner.
D  Terry is ignoring the cat clock.
Directions

Read this story. Then answer questions 1 through 7.

In Ireland in 1937, Kathleen Murphy represents her dance school at a recital. She scans the audience for her Aunt Polly as she nervously awaits her turn to perform.

Excerpt from

Kathleen: The Celtic Knot

by Siobhan Parkinson

I put my weight on my left foot and stood with my right foot poised, wondering what on earth I was going to do when the music started, because I couldn’t remember even the very first step of the dance. But as soon as I heard the squeezebox¹ leading into my tune, everything that had happened over the past few weeks flew out of my head, and the knowledge of the steps came flooding back.

The split second the bar note sounded, I leaped into action. This was it. Either my legs were going to give way under me and I was going to end up in a heap on the floor with Polly’s green curtains all around me, or I was going to dance my heart out. I gave one big, joyful bound and gave myself up to the dance, and the dance did me proud.

I kicked and soared and pranced and whirled, stepped and twirled and spun and flew, tripped and skipped and skimmed and sailed, all over that stage. I hardly knew where I was, and I was completely oblivious to the audience, the strange hall, even the adjudicator,² though I knew she must be out there somewhere in the blur of humanity beyond the stage, watching carefully and taking notes. I didn’t care about that. I was filled with the joy of the dance, and I didn’t give a rattling toss about Tess O’Hara and her sky blue frock and her snoopy ways. All I wanted was for the music never to stop, so that I could dance and twinkle and leap in its magic nets forever.

The music did stop, of course, and I did, too; and as soon as I stopped, I knew it was just as well that the music had, because suddenly I was worn out, weak-kneed and panting, fit to collapse.

A terrific noise started up out of nowhere. I thought maybe the roof was coming down or a tremendous thunderstorm had started up, and I stood there, as if nailed to the stage, waiting to be overwhelmed by whatever force it was that had set this thunderous sound in motion. I breathed deeply, blinking and looking around me, still standing center stage, with my toes pointed in front of me and my knee crooked, as I had been taught. Then I realized what the noise was, and I started to smile. It wasn’t a natural disaster or a storm.

¹ squeezebox: slang for an accordion
² adjudicator: a judge
It was applause, a thunderous clapping and stamping of feet and rocking of chairs. And it was for me, for me and my dance. I beamed. I beamed and beamed until my face ached. I felt like the sun, up there on the stage, the center of a little universe, all eyes toward me, and me beaming and radiating triumph and pleasure and gratitude and exhaustion all at once.

I made a little curtsy, and then I tripped quickly and lightly offstage.

“She’s so light on her feet,” I could hear people say, as I flew down the steps at the side of the stage. “It’s like watching feathers floating on the breeze,” some poetic type said.

“She’s a champion, that’s for sure.”

They were talking about me, but I’d lost interest now. I wanted to see if Polly was there. I needed to know that she’d seen me dancing. I wanted her to be able to tell my mam about it. Madge and the others wouldn’t have the words to describe it, I knew that, and I couldn’t describe it myself, but Polly would be able to tell it all with great panache.

I stood near the top of the hall, by the stage, and I scanned the rows and rows of people. A figure was coming toward me, but I couldn’t make it out properly in the semi-dusk of the seething room.

“Polly?” I called uncertainly. It couldn’t be Polly, though; it was too big and blustering. I was right. It was Mrs. Maguire.

“Maith thú, a Chaíthlin!” she was saying delightedly, pumping my hand. “Well done, Kathleen! That was a champion performance if ever I saw one. You’re my star pupil, do you know that? I’m proud to be your teacher.”

I smiled nervously at her. I wasn’t used to having my hand shaken, and I certainly wasn’t used to people being proud to be my teacher. I kept on smiling, and at the same time I was trying to look around Mrs. Maguire’s bulk to see if I could catch a glimpse of Polly’s flying figure and wide smile.

Mrs. Maguire moved away then, after giving my hand one last good yank, to talk to another pupil’s mother, and as she did so, I spotted Polly, hanging back, waiting for me to finish my conversation with my teacher.

I was so glad to see her. I waved, and she came running forward and scooped me into a tight, tight hug, whirling me around and around the floor at the side of the rows of seats, till I could hardly breathe.

“Did you see me?” I asked when she finally let me go.

“I only caught the end of it, love,” she said, “but you were brilliant, absolutely brilliant.

You weren’t dancing. You were flying!”

“That’s what it feels like,” I said. “Flying.”
Read this sentence from lines 10 and 11 of the story.

I kicked and soared and pranced and whirled, stepped and twirled and spun and flew, tripped and skipped and skimmed and sailed, all over that stage.

The author **most likely** includes this description of Kathleen's dancing to

A  emphasize that the dance ends quickly
B  demonstrate Kathleen's desire for recognition
C  provide an image of a spirited performance
D  demonstrate Kathleen's skills as a dancer

Read this sentence from lines 11 through 14 of the story.

I hardly knew where I was, and I was completely oblivious to the audience, the strange hall, even the adjudicator, though I knew she must be out there somewhere in the blur of humanity beyond the stage, watching carefully and taking notes.

What is the meaning of the phrase “oblivious to” as it is used in this sentence?

A  unaware of
B  confused by
C  scornful of
D  afraid of
Directions
Read this article. Then answer questions 36 through 42.

How to Fix School Lunches
by Peg Tyre and Sarah Staveley-O’Carroll

Celebrity chefs, politicians and concerned parents are joining forces to improve the meals kids eat every day.

For Jorge Collazo, executive chef for the New York City public schools, coming up with the perfect jerk sauce is yet another step toward making the 1.1 million schoolkids he serves healthier. In a little more than a year, he’s introduced salad bars and replaced whole milk with skim. Beef patties are now served on whole-wheat buns. Until recently, “every piece of chicken the manufacturers sent us was either breaded or covered in a glaze,” says Collazo. Brandishing the might of his $125 million annual food budget, he switched to plain cutlets and asked suppliers to come up with something healthy—and appealing—to put on top. Collazo tastes the latest offering. The jerk sauce isn’t overly processed and doesn’t have trans fats. “Too salty,” he says with a grimace. Within minutes, the supplier is hard at work on a lower-sodium version.

A cramped public-school test kitchen might seem an unlikely outpost for a food revolution. But Collazo and scores of others across the country—celebrity chefs and lunch ladies, district superintendents and politicians—say they’re determined to improve what kids eat in school. Nearly everyone agrees something must be done. Most school cafeterias are staffed by poorly trained, badly equipped workers who churn out 4.8 billion hot lunches a year. Often the meals, produced for about $1 each, consist of breaded meat patties, french fries and overcooked vegetables. So the kids buy muffins, cookies and ice cream instead—or they feast on fast food from McDonald’s, Pizza Hut and Taco Bell, which is available in more than half the schools in the nation. Vending machines packed with sodas and candy line the hallways. “We’re killing our kids” with the food we serve, says Texas Education Commissioner Susan Combs.

As rates of childhood obesity and diabetes skyrocket, public-health officials say schools need to change the way kids eat. It won’t be easy. Some kids and their parents don’t know better. Home cooking is becoming a forgotten art. And fast-food companies now spend $3 billion a year on television ads aimed at children. Along with reading and writing, schools need to teach kids what to eat to stay healthy, says culinary innovator Alice Waters, who is introducing gardening and fresh produce to 16 schools in California.

It’s a golden opportunity, she says, “to affect the way children eat for the rest of their lives.” Last year star English chef Jamie Oliver took over a school cafeteria in a working-class suburb of London. A documentary about his work shamed the British government into spending $500 million to revamp the nation’s school-food program. Oliver says it’s the United States’ turn now. “If you can put a man on the moon,” he says, “you can give kids the food they need to make them lighter, fitter and live longer.”
Most school cafeterias are staffed by poorly trained, badly equipped workers who churn out more than 4.8 billion hot lunches a year.

What does the phrase "churn out" suggest about the school lunches?

A. They are mass produced without careful planning
B. They are easily prepared using modern kitchens
C. They are economically made and use nutritious ingredients
D. They are thoughtfully created and use wide-ranging menus
Directions
Read this story. Then answer questions 22 through 28.

An Uncomfortable Bed
by Guy de Maupassant

One autumn I went to spend the hunting season with some friends in a chateau in Picardy.

My friends were fond of practical jokes. I do not care to know people who are not.

When I arrived, they gave me a princely reception, which at once awakened suspicion in my mind. They fired off rifles, embraced me, made much of me, as if they expected to have great fun at my expense.

I said to myself:

"Look out, old ferret! They have something in store for you."

During the dinner the mirth was excessive, exaggerated, in fact. I thought: "Here are people who have more than their share of amusement, and apparently without reason. They must have planned some good joke. Assuredly I am to be the victim of the joke. Attention!"

During the entire evening everyone laughed in an exaggerated fashion. I scented a practical joke in the air, as a dog scents game. But what was it? I was watchful, restless. I did not let a word, or a meaning, or a gesture escape me. Everyone seemed to me an object of suspicion, and I even looked distrustfully at the faces of the servants.

The hour struck for retiring; and the whole household came to escort me to my room. Why?

They called to me: "Good-night." I entered the apartment, shut the door, and remained standing, without moving a single step, holding the wax candle in my hand.

I heard laughter and whispering in the corridor. Without doubt they were spying on me. I cast a glance round the walls, the furniture, the ceiling, the hangings, the floor. I saw nothing to justify suspicion. I heard persons moving about outside my door. I had no doubt they were looking through the keyhole.

An idea came into my head: "My candle may suddenly go out and leave me in darkness."

\(^1\text{chateau}:\) a large house in France
Then I went across to the mantelpiece and lighted all the wax candles that were on it. After that I cast another glance around me without discovering anything. I advanced with short steps, carefully examining the apartment. Nothing. I inspected every article, one after the other. Still nothing. I went over to the window. The shutters, large wooden shutters, were open. I shut them with great care, and then drew the curtains, enormous velvet curtains, and placed a chair in front of them, so as to have nothing to fear from outside.

Then I cautiously sat down. The armchair was solid. I did not venture to get into the bed. However, the night was advancing; and I ended by coming to the conclusion that I was foolish. If they were spying on me, as I supposed, they must, while waiting for the success of the joke they had been preparing for me, have been laughing immoderately at my terror. So I made up my mind to go to bed. But the bed was particularly suspicious-looking. I pulled at the curtains. They seemed to be secure.

All the same, there was danger. I was going perhaps to receive a cold shower both from overhead, or perhaps, the moment I stretched myself out, to find myself sinking to the floor with my mattress. I searched in my memory for all the practical jokes of which I ever had experience. And I did not want to be caught. Ah! certainly not! certainly not! Then I suddenly bethought myself of a precaution which I considered insured safety. I caught hold of the side of the mattress gingerly, and very slowly drew it toward me. It came away, followed by the sheet and the rest of the bedclothes. I dragged all these objects into the very middle of the room, facing the entrance door. I made my bed over again as best I could at some distance from the suspected bedstead and the corner which had filled me with such anxiety. Then I extinguished all the candles, and, groping my way, I slipped under the bed clothes.

For at least another hour I remained awake, starting at the slightest sound. Everything seemed quiet in the chateau. I fell asleep.

I must have been in a deep sleep for a long time, but all of a sudden I was awakened with a start by the fall of a heavy body tumbling right on top of my own, and, at the same time, I received on my face, on my neck, and on my chest a burning liquid which made me utter a howl of pain. And a dreadful noise, as if a sideboard laden with plates and dishes had fallen down, almost deafened me.

I was smothering beneath the weight that was crushing me and preventing me from moving. I stretched out my hand to find out what was the nature of this object. I felt a face, a nose, and whiskers. Then, with all my strength, I launched out a blow at this face. But I immediately received a hail of cuffings which made me jump straight out of the soaked sheets, and rush in my nightshirt into the corridor, the door of which I found open.
Oh, heavens! It was broad daylight. The noise brought my friends hurrying into my apartment, and we found, sprawling over my improvised bed, the dismayed valet, who, while bringing me my morning cup of tea, had tripped over this obstacle in the middle of the floor and fallen on his stomach, spilling my breakfast over my face in spite of himself.

The precautions I had taken in closing the shutters and going to sleep in the middle of the room had only brought about the practical joke I had been trying to avoid.

23 What does the phrase "as a dog scents game" in line 14 of the story suggest about the narrator's actions?

A He is enjoying the laughter of the other guests.
B He feels on the verge of finding the prankster.
C He feels left out of the dinner conversation.
D He is alert to some hidden plan.

26 Which words reveal the irony of the narrator's situation?

A "I thought: 'Here are people who have more than their share of amusement, and"
B "The hour struck for retiring; and the whole household came to escort me to my room." (line 17)
C "However, the night was advancing; and I ended by coming to the conclusion that I was foolish." (lines 35 and 36)
D "The precautions I had taken in closing the shutters and going to sleep in the middle of the room had only brought about the practical joke I had been trying to avoid." (lines 68 and 69)

27 What effect does the point of view of the story have on the reader?

A The point of view increases suspense by limiting the reader to the narrator's understanding of events.
B The point of view creates humor by showing how the narrator's friends misunderstand him.
C The point of view raises the reader's sympathy for the questions the narrator faces.
D The point of view adds to the reader's mistrust of what the narrator reports.
How Rebecca Skloot Wrote the Immortal Life of Herietta Lacks by David Dobbs, posted November 22, 2011

Rebecca Skloot

Rebecca Skloot needs little introduction to most readers of The Open Notebook: Her book The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks has been a bestseller since its publication in February 2010, and she has toured the U.S. and Europe almost constantly since then talking about the book and the many issues of race, science, and privacy it raises. She’s also been interviewed many times as well. Here she talks with TON guest contributor David Dobbs about two particularly writerly issues the book raises: structure, and the use of the writer as character:

You’ve been interviewed to death about this book, so I’ll limit this to two areas readers of The Open Notebook might be interested in: one is structure and the other is your decision to put yourself in the book and how you handled that.

That’s good. I honestly think that structure is one of the most important tools in writing, yet it’s not something that people often pick apart and really get obsessed with.

Did you carry your concern about structure into this project, or was it something you developed as you wrestled with it?

No, I came to the book already fixated on structure. I did my MFA in nonfiction at the University of Pittsburgh, and Lee Gutkind, who was one of my professors there, taught a readings class where he constantly harped on structure. Every class, the first exercise we had to do with every piece we read was map out the structure. The first day of class we read an essay in class and his first question when we were done was, “What’s the structure of this piece?” We had no idea what he meant. And he wouldn’t tell us. He would just push us and push us, and people would randomly guess things … He’d say, “It’s a profile.” He’d say, “No, that’s not a structure.” SAY SOMETHING

Eventually it clicked for me when he walked me line-by-line through a piece he’d written and said, See how the piece starts here, then goes back in time here, then forward in time here, but always comes back to that same story I started with, which is actually in chronological order? The story was about a veterinarian facing tough decisions about whether to euthanize various animals; it did jump around in time a lot, and included sections of exposition, or facts—like the history of the field, or whatever—that weren’t part of the narrative, but when you pulled the essay apart it became clear that the structure was just a day in the life of this vet going from one patient to the next. From that point on, I started obsessively mapping out the structures of everything I read. When I started teaching I made my students do the same thing.

Any student who has ever studied with me would think, “Ugh. Structure, structure, structure; that’s all she talked about.” My philosophy is, once you understand what structure is, then you can talk about characters and narrative arcs and how to fill in the story. But for me, structure can just completely make or break something.

SAY SOMETHING

What are some key teaching pieces you used?

I always use John McPhee’s “Travels in Georgia” because it’s such a brilliant structure. Once you figure it out, it’s so basic. But it’s really hard to see it at first. When you say to people, “Read this thing and tell me how it’s structured,” they just can’t. But once you really pick it apart you see he starts in the middle of the story, then he goes forward for a while, then loops back around so by the middle of the piece you’re back at the point where you started, then you continue forward. He’s so subtle and graceful with the structure that few readers even realize they’ve looped back around to the point where the story started because he doesn’t hit you over the head with it. He calls it the lowercase e structure, and once you learn to recognize it you see it everywhere—in so many great stories, books, movies.
Are there other writers or books who have been particular models for you, structure-wise?

When I was working on my book, I knew very early on that I wanted it to be a disjointed structure that told multiple stories at once and jumped around in time between different characters. If you learn the story of the HeLa cells by itself, it’s a very different story than if you learn it alongside the story of what happened to Henrietta and her family as a result of those cells. Each story takes on a different weight when you learn them at the same time.

Plus, if I had just told the story from the beginning—“Henrietta Lacks was born … blah, blah, blah”—nobody would have known why they should care who Henrietta was. Then Deborah, Henrietta’s daughter, would have appeared halfway through the book and the focus of the story would have suddenly shifted completely to her, since she’s really the main character of the book in many ways. Then a few hundred pages later I would have appeared as a character out of nowhere. It would have all been very disjointed and disorienting and wouldn’t have worked.

The other thing I knew was that I wanted my book to read like a novel but be entirely true. That to me is the definition of Creative Nonfiction. So instead of reading nonfiction books as models, I turned to fiction. As soon as I realized I had to structure the book in a disjointed way, I went to a local bookseller, explained the story to her and said, Find me any novel you can find that takes place in multiple time periods, with multiple characters and voices, and jumps around a lot. So she did. Some of the most helpful books early on for me were Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café, by Fannie Flagg; Love Medicine, by Louise Erdrich; As I Lay Dying, by William Faulkner; Home at the End of the World and The Hours, by Michael Cunningham. I read a long list of similarly structured novels that all proved helpful in some way or another: The Grass Dancer, by Susan Power; How to Make an American Quilt, by Whitney Otto; Oral History, by Lee Smith. I also read a lot of important African American authors to immerse myself in their voices, cultures, history: Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, Maya Angelou, Alex Haley, Ida B. Wells, W.E.B. Du Bois, Toni Morrison, Edward P. Jones, Albert French …it’s a long list.

In a way you have to claim the right to do certain things fairly early in a book, or you can’t do it. In this case you had to claim the right to go backward and forward in time. You wait a while to get you in there—you don’t appear until page 67. But that’s early enough.

Right. This relates to the famous line from Chekov: “If in Act I you have a pistol hanging on the wall, then it must fire in the last act.” You need to set the reader up early for the story that follows while not introducing extraneous stuff that isn’t related to the plot.

In this case, since I knew the book was going to be a braid of three narratives (the story of me and Deborah; the story of Henrietta and the cells; and the story of Henrietta’s family), I needed to introduce all three strands of the braid up front, so I wouldn’t lose readers later. Doing that lets readers know what to expect and gives you license to play with the structure and timeline because you’ve prepared them for it. I spent a lot of time working and re-working how I’d handle introducing all three stories up front since there were so many things to squeeze in.

How do you get all those into the beginning of the book?

In a way there are three beginnings to this book because there are three different narratives. The prologue introduces the “me” side of the narrative where I write in first person. Then right after that I have that one little page in Deborah’s voice, to get her firmly in there. I struggled with that. I knew she had to be in the beginning of the book so you’d know she was going to be a main, strong character. I made countless attempts at that using different scenes from late in the story (for a while the book started with the scene of her seeing her mother’s cells for the first time, which is now part of the climax of the book in the third section). But none of that worked because it detracted too much from the real beginning: the moment Henrietta walks into the hospital for the first time in 1951. Eventually I realized readers just need to hear Deborah’s voice enough at the start to know there’s something big coming from this person later on that we’ll come back to.
Back to the larger structure. You start at 1950, and you pop back to 1920, and then essentially you come back to mid-century, end of century, mid-century, end of century, mid-century, end of century. And you progressively spend more time around 2000, and at a certain point it becomes more the story of you and Deborah, once you have the backstory established. How did you plot these time shifts?

I actually mapped it all out with index cards. The one chronological story that goes throughout the book is the story of me and Deborah. That’s totally chronological, never jumps around in time. Having one chronological story helped anchor the structure so I could jump around with the other stories more, because you always came back to that one straightforward narrative.

As I said earlier, I saw the structure of the book as a braid, with three stories that wove and wove and wove. But at a certain point the three strands of the braid became one and the narrative was just a straightforward chronological story from that point. That happens on page 231 with the sentence, “That reporter was me.” That’s the moment that all three of the narratives come together, and then it becomes just one. There’s no jumping back in time after that.

The story of you and Deborah is the one with the most classic narrative tension—there’s a suspense about what will happen.

It’s a road-trip—a journey where everybody gets transformed. I thought a lot about that element of narrative tension and how structure can help build the suspense. I learned quite a bit about that from novels, but even more so from movies. My boyfriend is an actor, writer, and director, and he started saying, “You should be watching movies because this jumping-around structure is one of the most standard movie structures.”

So I started watching a lot of movies structured like that and eventually found my way to “Hurricane,” about Hurricane Carter, the boxer. As I was watching it, I just freaked out because after the first few scenes I realized, Oh my God, this is the structure of my book. Three narratives braided together, a journey, etc. So I storyboarded that whole movie frame-by-frame on color-coded index cards (one color per narrative thread). I’d already mapped my own book out using the same three-colored index card scheme, and I’d mapped out a structure, but it wasn’t working. After I mapped out “Hurricane” I spread the cards out on a bed and put my book’s index cards on top of them, lining up the colors, to see how the film was braiding differently than I was. I immediately realized the problem with my structure was that it didn’t move around in time fast enough. That was the big lesson I learned from movies: that to make this kind of structure work, it has to move quickly. You can’t linger too long in any one time period or you lose the momentum of the other two.

How many designs did you try but throw out?

Oh man … From the very first version I wrote to the first version I considered a first draft, I probably went through easily 15 different structures. And that doesn’t count the many times I revised it after that: I’m a heavy re-writer. Once I had a first draft done, I rewrote it completely at least six times before my editor had to pry it out of my hands. I could have kept rewriting it forever. There isn’t a single paragraph from the first draft that made it into the final book without being rewritten. I’d bet money that there isn’t a single sentence from the first draft in the finished book.

This will give comfort to others who are struggling.

SAY SOMETHING
Based on what you’ve learned so far, write a paragraph in which you describe two reasons why it’s important to protect fresh water. Include details from any of the texts you read yesterday that still seem relevant and from today's reading, "Water is Life."
Water is Life
By Barbara Kingsolver

Published April 2010, National Geographic magazine

The amount of moisture on Earth has not changed. The water the dinosaurs drank millions of years ago is the same water that falls as rain today. But will there be enough for a more crowded world?

1 We keep an eye out for wonders, my daughter and I, every morning as we walk down our farm lane to meet the school bus. And wherever we find them, they reflect the magic of water: a spider web drooping with dew like a rhinestone necklace. A rain-colored heron rising from the creek bank. One astonishing morning, we had a visitation of frogs. Dozens of them hurtled up from the grass ahead of our feet, launching themselves, white-bellied, in bouncing arcs, as if we’d been caught in a downpour of amphibians. It seemed to mark the dawning of some new aqueous age. On another day we met a snapping turtle in his primordial olive drab armor. Normally this is a pond-locked creature, but some murky ambition had moved him onto our gravel lane, using the rainy week as a passport from our farm to somewhere else.

2 The little, nameless creek tumbling through our hollow holds us in thrall. Before we came to southern Appalachia, we lived for years in Arizona, where a permanent runnel of that size would merit a nature preserve. In the Grand Canyon State, every license plate reminded us that water changes the face of the land, splitting open rock desert like a peach, leaving mile-deep gashes of infinite hue. Cities there function like space stations, importing every ounce of fresh water from distant rivers or fossil aquifers. But such is the human inclination to take water as a birthright that public fountains still may bubble in Arizona’s town squares and farmers there raise thirsty crops. Retirees from rainier climes irrigate green lawns that impersonate the grasslands they left behind. The truth encroaches on all the fantasies, though, when desert residents wait months between rains, watching cacti tighten their belts and roadrunners skirmish over precious beads from a dripping garden faucet. Water is life. It’s the briny broth of our origins, the pounding circulatory system of the world, a precarious molecular edge on which we survive. It makes up two-thirds of our bodies, just like the map of the world; our vital fluids are saline, like the ocean. The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.
Even while we take Mother Water for granted, humans understand in our bones that she is the boss. We stake our civilizations on the coasts and mighty rivers. Our deepest dread is the threat of having too little moisture—or too much. We’ve lately raised the Earth’s average temperature by .74°C (1.3°F), a number that sounds inconsequential. But these words do not: flood, drought, hurricane, rising sea levels, bursting levees. Water is the visible face of climate and, therefore, climate change. Shifting rain patterns flood some regions and dry up others as nature demonstrates a grave physics lesson: Hot air holds more water molecules than cold.

The results are in plain sight along pummeled coasts from Louisiana to the Philippines as superwarmed air above the ocean brews superstorms, the likes of which we have never known. In arid places the same physics amplify evaporation and drought, visible in the dust-dry farms of the Murray-Darling River Basin in Australia. On top of the Himalaya, glaciers whose meltwater sustains vast populations are dwindling. The snapping turtle I met on my lane may have been looking for higher ground. Last summer brought us a string of floods that left tomatoes blighted on the vine and our farmers needing disaster relief for the third consecutive year. The past decade has brought us more extreme storms than ever before, of the kind that dump many inches in a day, laying down crops and utility poles and great sodden oaks whose roots cannot find purchase in the saturated ground. The word “disaster” seems to mock us. After enough repetitions of shocking weather, we can’t remain indefinitely shocked.

How can the world shift beneath our feet? All we know is founded on its rhythms: Water will flow from the snowcapped mountains, rain and sun will arrive in their proper seasons. Humans first formed our tongues around language, surely, for the purpose of explaining these constants to our children. What should we tell them now? That “reliable” has been rained out, or died of thirst? When the Earth seems to raise its own voice to the pitch of a gale, have we the ears to listen?
A world away from my damp hollow, the Bajo Piura Valley is a great bowl of the driest Holocene sands I’ve ever gotten in my shoes. Stretching from coastal, northwestern Peru into southern Ecuador, the 14,000-square-mile Piura Desert is home to many endemic forms of thorny life. Profiles of this eco-region describe it as dry to drier, and Bajo Piura on its southern edge is what anyone would call driest. Between January and March it might get close to an inch of rain, depending on the whims of El Nino, my driver explained as we bumped over the dry bed of the Rio Piura, “but in some years, nothing at all.” For hours we passed through white-crusted fields ruined by years of irrigation and then into eye-burning valleys beyond the limits of endurance for anything but sparse stands of the deep-rooted Prosopis pallida, arguably nature’s most arid-adapted tree. And remarkably, some scattered families of Homo sapiens.

They are economic refugees, looking for land that costs nothing. In Bajo Piura they find it, although living there has other costs, and fragile drylands pay their own price too, as people exacerbate desertification by cutting anything living for firewood. What brought me there, as a journalist, was an innovative reforestation project. Peruvian conservationists, partnered with the NGO Heifer International, were guiding the population into herding goats, which eat the protein-rich pods of the native mesquite and disperse its seeds over the desert. In the shade of a stick shelter, a young mother set her dented pot on a dung-fed fire and showed how she curdles goat’s milk into white cheese. But milking goats is hard to work into her schedule when she, and every other woman she knows, must walk about eight hours a day to collect water.

Their husbands were digging a well nearby. They worked with hand trowels, a plywood form for lining the shaft with concrete, inch by inch, and a sturdy hand-built crank for lowering a man to the bottom and sending up buckets of sand. A dozen hopeful men in stained straw hats stood back to let me inspect their work, which so far had yielded only a mountain of exhumed sand, dry as dust. I looked down that black hole, then turned and climbed the sand mound to hide my unprofessional tears. I could not fathom this kind of perseverance and wondered how long these beleaguered people would last before they’d had enough of their water woes and moved somewhere else.
Five years later they are still bringing up dry sand, scratching out their fate as a microcosm of life on this planet. There is nowhere else. Forty percent of the households in sub-Saharan Africa are more than a half hour from the nearest water, and that distance is growing. Australian farmers can’t follow the rainfall patterns that have shifted south to fall on the sea. A salmon that runs into a dam when homing in on her natal stream cannot make other plans. Together we dig in, for all we’re worth.

Since childhood I’ve heard it’s possible to look up from the bottom of a well and see stars, even in daylight. Aristotle wrote about this, and so did Charles Dickens. On many a dark night the vision of that round slip of sky with stars has comforted me. Here’s the only problem: It’s not true. Western civilization was in no great hurry to give up this folklore; astronomers believed it for centuries, but a few of them eventually thought to test it and had their illusions dashed by simple observation.

Civilization has been similarly slow to give up on our myth of the Earth’s infinite generosity. Declining to look for evidence to the contrary, we just knew it was there. We pumped aquifers and diverted rivers, trusting the twin lucky stars of unrestrained human expansion and endless supply. Now water tables plummet in countries harboring half the world’s population. Rather grandly, we have overdrawn our accounts.

In 1968 the ecologist Garrett Hardin wrote a paper called “The Tragedy of the Commons,” required reading for biology students ever since. It addresses the problems that can be solved only by “a change in human values or ideas of morality” in situations where rational pursuit of individual self-interest leads to collective ruin. Cattle farmers who share a common pasture, for example, will increase their herds one by one until they destroy the pasture by overgrazing. Agreeing to self-imposed limits instead, unthinkable at first, will become the right thing to do. While our laws imply that morality is fixed, Hardin made the point that “the morality of an act is a function of the state of the system at the time it is performed.” Surely it was no sin, once upon a time, to shoot and make pies of passenger pigeons.
Water is the ultimate commons. Watercourses once seemed as boundless as those pigeons that darkened the sky overhead, and the notion of protecting water was as silly as bottling it. But rules change. Time and again, from New Mexico’s antique irrigation codes to the UN Convention on International Watercourses, communities have studied water systems and redefined wise use. Now Ecuador has become the first nation on Earth to put the rights of nature in its constitution so that rivers and forests are not simply property but maintain their own right to flourish. Under these laws a citizen might file suit on behalf of an injured watershed, recognizing that its health is crucial to the common good. Other nations may follow Ecuador’s lead. Just as legal systems once reeled to comprehend women or former slaves as fully entitled, law schools in the U.S. are now reforming their curricula with an eye to understanding and acknowledging nature’s rights.

On my desk, a glass of water has caught the afternoon light, and I’m still looking for wonders. Who owns this water? How can I call it mine when its fate is to run through rivers and living bodies, so many already and so many more to come? It is an ancient, dazzling relic, temporarily quarantined here in my glass, waiting to return to its kind, waiting to move a mountain. It is the gold standard of biological currency, and the good news is that we can conserve it in countless ways. Also, unlike petroleum, water will always be with us. Our trust in Earth’s infinite generosity was half right, as every raindrop will run to the ocean, and the ocean will rise into the firmament. And half wrong, because we are not important to water. It’s the other way around. Our task is to work out reasonable ways to survive inside its boundaries. We’d be wise to fix our sights on some new stars. The gentle nudge of evidence, the guidance of science, and a heart for protecting the commons: These are the tools of a new century. Taking a wide-eyed look at a watery planet is our way of knowing the stakes, the better to know our place.
### Analyzing a Craft and Structure Lesson (Grade Level ____, Name of Lesson _____________)

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Lessons as Models

go to www.unbounded.org to review Craft and Structure Lessons. Options include:

*Grade 8, Module 2A, “Taking a Stand.”*
Unit 1: Lessons 3, 5, and 15

*Grade 7, Module 3, “Understanding Perspectives: Slavery – The People Could Fly.”*
Unit 2: Lessons 3, 4, 5

*Grade 6, Module 3A, “Understanding Perspectives: The Land of the Golden Mountain.”*
Unit 1, Lessons 1, 2, 3, and 4
Optional Lesson Planning Template
Lesson Name__________________________________________________________Lesson Time ___Min

Description:

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