

Minnesota Writing Project: Demonstration Lesson

Literary Analysis: The Group Essay

Katie Carlin, Bloomington Jefferson High School

kcarlin@bloomington.k12.mn.us

Grade: High school...11th or 12th grade

Approximate length: One class period in a block schedule (approx. 1 h 20 min each day)

Objectives:

- To assess students' knowledge of two major texts covered in the term.
- To reinforce and assess the writing *process* for literary analysis essays of compare and contrast.
- To increase knowledge and confidence in struggling writers for upcoming literary analysis essays.
- To recognize similarities of themes between two very different works.
- To quickly and authentically assess students at the end of a term, using the writing process and literary analysis.

Process:

As a final assessment for a term that covers two major novels as well as essays of comparison, students write an essay of comparison between two works they have studied but have not yet compared. In my class, we compared Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

1. The day before the exam, students receive 6 essay questions that lead to simple thesis statements. They are instructed to prepare for each, though only one will be chosen for the exam. Students do not know that they will be working in groups yet. This ensures each student will prepare.
2. On the day of the exam, the teacher reveals the question, students are placed in groups, and they have the hour to complete their essay as a group.
3. Group process guidelines are distributed and essay templates are provided, both in an attempt to keep students and their writing organized.
4. After the exam, each group member individually (and privately) submits a group evaluation form, distributing a total of 40 points as seen fit to the group members (including themselves). This cuts down on student frustration and helps the teacher accurately assess each student's contributions.

Adaptations: This group essay writing can work with shorter works, too. Try pairing classic poetry to rock n' roll music. Examples: Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman" and Lauryn Hill's "To Zion;" or Robinson's "Richard Cory" and Simon and Garfunkel's "Richard Cory." I have also asked students to compare Langston Hughes' blues poetry to blues artists like Bessie Smith. The possibilities are endless, and using this group essay writing as a teaching tool, rather than an assessment, can offer different objectives that are equally beneficial.

Contact: For essay templates, essay questions (for *Hamlet* and *Things Fall Apart*), group process guidelines, and group evaluation forms, email me...kcarlin@bloomington.k12.mn.us.