



# MICRO ESSAY

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## LESSON PLAN

**GRADE LEVEL** High School

**OVERVIEW** Students will practice short form nonfiction writing by composing a micro essay describing how a piece of literature has influenced their understanding of the world around them. This micro essay lesson pairs well with the PACFTB [Wordstruck essay contest](#).

**ANCHOR STANDARDS** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.5

**PENNSYLVANIA CORE STANDARDS** ELA CC 1.4 B  
ELA CC 1.4 E  
ELA CC 1.4 F

**BIG IDEAS**

- Stories can shape our perspective on the world around us.
- Writing is a multi-step process that involves gathering ideas, drafting, revising, editing, and rewriting.

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How do writers vary writing when they compose for specific purposes and audiences?
- How does the writing process strengthen writing?
- How do writers use figurative and/or descriptive language to impact an audience?

### CONCEPTS

- Precision of language and the use of specific vocabulary are key factors to consider when writing.
- Writing is a recursive process.

### VOCABULARY

Theme	Simple sentence	Synonym
Support	Compound sentence	Tone
Evidence	Complex sentence	Mood
Influence	Imagery	Fragmentation
Voice	Audience	Repetition
Prose Poetry	Metaphor	Action Verb
Cliché	Simile	Passive Voice
Colloquialism	Hyperbole	

### COMPETENCIES

- Use the writing process and peer feedback to develop and strengthen writing.
- Incorporate vivid and sensory details through word choice and literary devices.
- Compose short form nonfiction with a sharp, distinct focus.

## MATERIALS

Writing utensil	Sticky notes
Paper	Tape/tacks for wall (optional)
Computer with Internet Access (optional)	<a href="#">Micro Essay Rubric</a> (optional)

## SUGGESTED ONLINE RESOURCES

- [PACFTB Wordstruck](#) Essay Contest (optional)  
[Brevity: A Journal of Concise Literary Nonfiction](#) ("The Watch" by Lisa Groeb Braner)

## SUGGESTED INSTRUCTIONAL PROCEDURES

The structure of a micro essay is used in many places: exams, presentations, application essays, blog posts, abstracts, and elevator pitches. Micro essays, or flash essays, utilize the classic essay form while highlighting the importance of word choice and clarity. Over the course of this lesson, students will be guided through a freewrite, draft, and revision to create a piece under 500 words that responds to the prompt: "Describe how a piece of literature (fiction/nonfiction/poetry/play/graphic novel) has redefined your behavior, attitude, worldview, and/or personal perspective."

**CLASS PREPARATION.** Prior to class, ask students to identify three pieces of published literature that resonate with them. These pieces could be fiction/nonfiction books, graphic novels, plays or poetry, but should be selected for their influence on the students. Request that they return to class with the titles of three pieces of literature. If available, invite the students to bring the texts to class.

Note that if students plan to submit the resulting micro essays to the Wordstruck essay contest, the selected piece of literature must be self-selected and not assigned. More information about the contest guidelines can be found on the PACFTB [Wordstruck About page](#).

**BRAINSTORM/FREEWRITE.** Begin class with a freewriting exercise. Each student will need several pieces of blank paper and a writing utensil. If desired, students may also type responses. Reminding students that they were asked to identify three pieces of literature, ask students to write the titles at the top of the page.

**Establishing a focus.** Have students take a moment to quietly consider the three literary items they have chosen:

- Why are these pieces of literature important to you?
- How do/did they resonate with you?
- How do these pieces of literature link to something within your life, your past, or your future?

Write these questions in a space where students can see them clearly and refer to them when freewriting.

**Freewrite.** Given these questions, invite students to freewrite (Elbow, 1-7) as follows:

*Write for 7-10 minutes without stopping, rereading, or talking. Ignore all rules of grammar. Do not feel the need to write in complete sentences or with proper spelling. The goal is to get subconscious thoughts onto paper and increase the flow of thought. Even if one's train of thought wanders, write the titles of three pieces repeatedly until the flow of ideas returns. Keep writing for the entire time.*

As the teacher keeps track of the allotted time, students are to quietly freewrite. In the final minutes, invite students to finish their thoughts and set their pencils/pens down.

**Review your writing.** Take a few minutes and ask students to read their writing. Do their literature selections have anything in common? Any common thread or theme? Ask students to circle phrases or descriptions that they like. Invite students to share the common thread, fun phrases, or descriptions that emerged with the class.

**Select one.** Ask students: *Which piece did you enjoy writing about more than others? Select one title and write it at the top of a new sheet of paper.*

Invite students to linger on that piece of literature:

- Envision the text – feel the heft of the book, see the cover or graphic art, imagine watching the play performance or hearing the poetry.
- Recall the content of the piece. What stands out to you – the characters, language, or themes?
- Consider the time period in which you read the piece of literature. Memories are often fragmented – what images, emotions, people, or settings come to mind?
- How did the literature influence your understanding of the world around you? How did it challenge a belief, offer insight, or change your perspective?

Again, write these questions in a place where students can see them during the second freewrite.

**Second freewrite.** In this freewrite, the focus is on conveying the essence and importance of a selected piece of literature. Again, ask students to write for 7-10 minutes and conclude with an invitation to complete their thoughts.

**Reread.** Ask students to review their freewriting:

- *What phrases or images appeal to you?*
- *Circle or highlight these to reference later when writing your first draft.*

**Think-Pair-Share.** Either with a partner or as a class, invite students to share a bit of their freewrite:

- *What piece of literature did you choose?*
- *How does this piece of literature speak to you?*
- *The process of writing activates a retrieval process. What did you uncover, connect, or learn while writing?*

**TRANSITION TO MICRO ESSAY.** These freewrites provide an initial planning thought process for the composition of a micro essay. A micro essay is a form of expository writing. It is a framed snapshot that emphasizes the economy of expression. In utilizing shorter paragraphs, the writer's word choice and sentence structure become essential elements in the succinct communication of ideas.

For this micro essay, invite students to respond to the prompt: *Describe how a piece of literature (fiction/nonfiction/poetry/play/graphic novel) redefined your behavior, attitude, worldview, and/or personal perspective.*

As with any form of writing, knowing the conventions of the form and practicing will improve writing. Share examples of micro essays. These could be from PACFTB [Wordstruck](#), application essays, or selections from [Brevity](#) (consider "[The Watch](#)" by Lisa Groeb Braner).

Micro essays often open with little introduction and a great first sentence. The content, while minimal, is focused and the details provided create an image or emotion for the reader. In some instances, the writing follows an hourglass structure: opening with a broad statement or image, quickly narrowing to a distinct focus, and then connecting and ending broadly once again. The voice of the writer is distinctive and reflects a well-defined perspective.

**Establishing first draft.** In one sentence have students answer *how* this piece of literature redefined them. This sentence should guide the focus of the micro essay. The content of the micro essay will reveal the impact of the piece of literature on the writer. Writers are to assume that the audience is familiar with the selected piece of writing. Any references to the chosen text are to be used for illustration or connection.

Ask students to write the first draft in one sitting. The completed draft should be 300-500 words (approximately one page, single-spaced in 12-pt font). Concentrate only on a few select details that illustrate how the writer's behavior, attitude, worldview, or personal perspective were altered by the piece of literature.

**Homework.** With a completed first draft, ask students to review their writing in a series of readings. This focused revision process examines content and organization as well as word choice. If desired, students can consider a third reading to focus upon style. As an alternative to homework, teachers may select to pair students together or to create stations for focused feedback using these criteria.

The feedback from these readings should be used to compose a final draft.

### **First Reading: Content and Organization**

Goal: confirm the essay is focused, contains illustrative examples, and maintains reader interest.

- Assume that readers are familiar with the text. Does the writing avoid summarizing the selected piece of literature?
- Are there concrete personal examples that illustrate how this piece of literature redefined the writer?
- Does the piece alter sentence structure to maintain interest (simple sentences, compound sentences, complex sentences)?

### **Second Reading: Word Choice**

Goal: confirm the essay is within word count and that word choice contributes to meaning and impact.

- Consider the impact of revising for brevity. Does every sentence contribute to meaning? Omit duplicated concepts, excess explanations, clichés, and colloquialisms.
- Review nouns and verbs for clear and precise word choice.
- Review the verbs, are they action verbs? Circle conjugations of to be (am, is, are, was, were). Can sentences be written differently to remove the passive voice?

### **Bonus Reading: Style**

Goal: refine the writing to enhance imagery, emotion, and voice.

- Micro essays benefit from detail and imagery. What should your readers feel or know at the end of the piece? Consider how the use of literary devices, imagery, and pacing can influence the experience of the reader.
- Simile and metaphor can deepen meaning or add personality. Consider how the use of sensory words, hyperbole, or simple repetition can enhance the desired tone and mood.
- Concentrate on a few select details to create a single impression.

## **ASSESSMENT**

**Gallery Walk.** Remove names from final drafts and place the texts around the room, either on the wall or on desks to create a micro essay exhibit. Allow space for students to linger without crowding. Distribute five sticky notes to each student to respond to the essays.

These sticky note responses should assist the writer and offer feedback from the community. Suggested response phrases could be:

- favorite lines/word choices: "I like..."
- questions: "I wonder..."
- connections: "This reminds me of..."

Students circulate through the "gallery" silently or with minimal conversation. When the allotted time has expired (approximately 20 minutes), ask students to return to their writing to review comments.

In a virtual setting, a gallery walk can be created through a shared document or storyboard.

#### Alternatives:

- At times content can be personal. Students may select to have one or more entrusted readers review and comment upon their writing.
- Using the optional [rubric](#), students can review and grade a selected number of peer essays.
- The optional [rubric](#) can be used for formal grading.

#### EXTENSION/FURTHER STUDY

Invite students to:

1. Submit to the PACFTB [Wordstruck essay contest](#).
2. Submit to a flash nonfiction journal.
3. Create a nonfiction journal as a class.
4. Compose a letter to the author/poet/playwright of the selected piece of literature accompanied by the micro essay.

#### REFERENCES

Braner, Lisa Groen. "[The Watch.](#)" *Brevity*, Issue 33, Summer 2010.

Elbow, Peter. *Writing Without Teachers*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973, 1-7.

McClanahan, Rebecca. "[The Soul of Brevity: Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Brief Essay.](#)" *Tampa Review*, no. 43, 2012, pp. 117-123, 155.