

High School English Lesson Plan: Analyzing Essays

Introduction

Each lesson in the Adolescent Literacy Toolkit is designed to support students through the reading/learning process by providing instruction before, during, and after reading/learning.

Note that lessons incorporate the *gradual release of responsibility* model. When this model is used within a single lesson and over several lessons, students are provided with enough instruction and guidance to use the literacy strategies on their own. The following lesson includes some examples of explicit instruction and modeling, guided practice, and independent practice, but students need more practice and feedback than is possible within the context of a single lesson.

Bold print indicates a direct link to the *Content Area Literacy Guide* where readers will find descriptions of literacy strategies, step-by-step directions for how to use each strategy, and quadrant charts illustrating applications across the four core content disciplines.

The following lesson plan and lesson narrative show English teachers how they can incorporate the use of literacy strategies to support high school students to learn English content and concepts. The lesson is designed for one block period (80–90 minutes) or two traditional classes (50 minutes).

Instructional Outcomes

NCTE Standards: 1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, themselves, and the cultures of the United States and the world.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions, media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.

Content Learning Outcome: Through focused interaction and critical thinking with the text of selected essays, students will see how literary devices and style conventions are used by authors to create interest or persuade readers to take their point of view.

Literacy Support Strategies and Instruction

Before reading/learning: **Coding** (explicit instruction, teacher modeling)

- Materials: An excerpt from Carson's *Silent Spring*, projected by overhead or computer

During reading/learning: **Coding** (guided practice)

- Materials: Text or class set of handouts with four environmental essays that vary in style, length, and reading difficulty, such as Benjamin Franklin's *The Whistle*, Annie Dillard's *In the Jungle*, E. B. White's *Cold Weather*, Harry Crews' *The Hawk Is Flying*, Edward Abbey's *Desert Images*, R. J. Heathorn's *Learn with BOOK*, or a longer essay from John McPhee's *Control of Nature*

After reading/learning: **Coding Summary Template** (explicit instruction, teacher modeling)

- Materials: **Coding Summary Template** drawn or projected on the front board

Before Reading/Learning (25 minutes)

Literacy outcome: Students will learn how to identify literary devices and style conventions used by authors to convey point of view in essays.

Teacher preparation:

- 1) Review *Silent Spring* and select one or more excerpts to explicitly teach and model **Coding**.
 - Prepare examples for each of the four literary devices authors can use to show point of view: information, description, persuasion, voice, and word choice.
 - Think about what happens in your own mind when you read as you review literary devices or analyze how the author's style conveys a point of view about the environment.
 - Plan how you will convey your thinking to students so they understand *how* to analyze the text. Do not assume you can simply "assign" the coding task, even at the high school level.
- 2) If the literary terms—information, description, persuasion, author's voice, word choice, and point of view—have not previously been explicitly taught, prepare a handout defining each one.

Teacher facilitation:

- 1) Tell students you will model a reading comprehension strategy called **Coding** that students can use to focus their thinking as they read.
- 2) Distribute a copy of the *Silent Spring* excerpt and project a copy while demonstrating to students how you code by making brief focused notes on the page of text.
 - Explain that **Coding** helps the reader "have a conversation with the text." The reader decides what to focus on and creates short codes to mark the text when the key elements are located.
 - Tell students that codes are created according to the purpose for reading and learning.
 - The goal while reading the *Silent Spring* excerpt is to identify literary devices and style conventions the author uses to interest or persuade the reader about his or her point of view about the environment.
- 3) Review the four literary devices and style conventions that will be used to code the essays.
 - If the terms are already known, ask for volunteers to describe them and write a short definition on the board to activate student knowledge and provide support to all students for the **Coding** activity.
 - If the literary terms have not previously been used in the course, provide a handout with definitions.
- 4) Distribute the **Coding Template** for use with the environmental essays.
 - The template is a full page so the code can be written directly across from the location of the text which is being coded.
 - If sticky notes are available, provide them as an option to the template page.

Example of a **Coding Template**

Essay Title: _____ Student Name: _____

Directions: You may use this page to mark the codes directly next to the sentence, phrase, or word you are marking. To use the insert page, place it in your book and write the page number at

the top of the first column. Then place the code directly across from the part of the text you are coding. Each time you read a new page, pull out this sheet to add codes for the next page.

Use the following codes to interact with text as you read the essay:

I = Information; D = Description; P = Persuasion; V = Author's voice or word choice showing point of view; ? = I don't understand/I have questions

| Page |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | | | | | | | |

- 5) Introduce the template to the class, explaining how to insert the page into the text selection and slide it out as they code each new page.
- 6) Read part of the first page of the *Silent Spring* essay aloud, pausing to explain what was happening in your own mind as you focused on identifying how the author used the literary devices to convey a particular point of view. Using the example you prepared:
 - Model how to code in the margins on the projected image.
 - Explicitly explain how you located key information, such as from the first or last sentence in a paragraph, by asking and answering a question related to a subheading, or by asking: *What is the central message of this paragraph?* Show how you used cue words like *who, what, where, when, how*, and verbs like *is* to identify information.
 - Discuss descriptive words by pointing out how a different tone would be created if a different adjective was used.
 - For persuasion, point out cue words or phrases the author used to convince the reader: facts, data, emotional words, examples, slanted language, generalizations, etc.
 - For voice and word choice, point out specific adjectives, adverbs, or unique expressions, such as humor, the author used to convey a specific point of view.
- 7) As you continue modeling and discussing how to code the excerpt from *Silent Spring*, invite students to identify places in the next sections of text where one of the codes applies.

During Reading/Learning (35 minutes)

Literacy outcome: Students will learn to identify literary devices and style conventions used by authors to convey point of view in essays.

Teacher facilitation:

- 1) Tell students they will work in pairs to read and code an environmental essay.
- 2) Tell them each pair will select any one essay from four choices.
 - Pass out the four essays for students to preview.
 - Briefly review each essay by summarizing the topic to build interest.

- Have pairs select one essay to read, discuss, and code together.
- 3) As students read and code, circulate to assist them.
- Informally assess their coding performance and provide assistance as needed.
 - If students are struggling to locate literary devices or style conventions, ask probing questions that guide them in analyzing the text more closely.

Note: If this lesson is delivered in two parts, students should complete a short **Exit Slip** about how the **Coding** activity helped them recognize how the author used literary devices to convey meaning in the text. At the beginning of the next class, the teacher should address any questions, concerns, or new understandings raised in the **Exit Slips**.

After Reading/Learning (20 minutes)

Literacy outcome: Students will learn how to identify literary devices and style conventions used by authors to convey point of view in essays.

Teacher facilitation:

- 1) Explain that to synthesize the learning, the class will create a chart summarizing the types and frequency of the authors' use of literary devices and style conventions to convey a point of view.
- Draw or project the template on the front board.
 - Have pairs who read the same essay discuss together the amount of times each of the literary devices was used in the essay. Have students achieve consensus about the uses of the devices, as some pairs may not have observed all of them.
 - Have each group share out their data and record it on the **Coding Summary Template**.

Coding Summary Template (to be drawn or projected on the front board)

Essay Title	Information	Description	Persuasion	Voice/ Word Choice	Point of View about Environment (summarize in own words)
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					

- 2) Lead a brief discussion about the results shown in the **Coding Summary Template** of the literary devices and style conventions used in the four essays.
- Discuss how the features and conventions used by the author influenced the reader toward the author's point of view.
 - Help them transfer their understanding to their own experiences and lives by discussing any environmental texts with an essayist viewpoint, either essays they have read or media documentaries they have encountered, such as Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*.

Like all student-completed literacy strategy templates, these completed **Coding Templates** provide valuable data for teacher reflection. The **Coding Templates** should not be graded. The

student responses should be used to assess student learning and make decisions about next steps in teaching.

Suggested Subsequent Lessons

Students continue to code text, initially with teacher-created codes and later using student-created codes, to deepen their use of the **Coding** strategy. For example, the teacher could begin to gradually transfer the responsibility for **Coding** to students by having small groups of students select and code an essay on a topic that interests them, so their understanding of literary device use in essays is extended to new topics. In this lesson, the teacher would:

- Encourage students to add to the list of codes as appropriate, such as *H* for *humor*.
- Have groups share out the literary devices the author used in the essay they read.
- Have students submit the essay with their **Coding** so their ability to independently use **Coding** to identify literary devices and style conventions when reading an essay can be assessed.

The goal over several lessons would be to ensure students are able to use the **Coding** strategy independently with different texts and according to specific learning purposes.

High School English Lesson Narrative: Analyzing Essays

Teachers: As you read the lesson narrative, think about the following questions. You may want to discuss them with fellow English teachers.

- *What does the teacher do to support students' literacy development and content learning before, during, and after reading/learning?*
- *What challenges do you anticipate if you were to implement this lesson in your own classroom? How would you prepare to meet these challenges?*
- *How would you make improvements to this lesson?*

At the beginning of the semester, Mr. Thompson had administered an interest survey to students in his two 10th grade English classes. A high percentage of his students had responded that they were interested in environmental issues. He hoped the topic would be an effective “hook” to engage them in reading and critically analyzing essays.

He had introduced author Rachel Carson, who initiated global consciousness of environmental issues and policy in her book, *Silent Spring*, in the 1960s. Students had read several short excerpts from *Silent Spring* in class the previous day and their small group discussions were lively as they argued about the content. But Mr. Thompson wanted to focus their attention on the literary devices and style conventions used to interest or persuade the reader in the essay genre. He recalled in a workshop he had attended that the facilitator had shown how **Coding** could be used to help students interact with text, monitor comprehension during reading, and focus on specific learning purposes. He began to plan.

Before Reading/Learning

Mr. Thompson began the lesson by projecting a page from *Silent Spring* onto the front board. He explained that analysis of essays requires focusing not only on the content messages, but figuring out the underlying text and language structures the author uses to convey those messages. Mr. Thompson said he would show students a technique called **Coding** that would help them identify these literary devices. He explained **Coding** was a strategy they could use on their own to increase interaction when reading, focus their attention on specific learning tasks, and help them monitor their understanding of text.

“Here’s how **Coding** works. Before you start reading, think about your purpose: why are you reading? Yesterday, your purpose was content-focused. You were considering whether Rachel Carson was right about her environmental concerns. You had great discussions, and I heard a lot of high level critical thinking. Today, we’re going to set a different purpose: what are the literary devices and style conventions that Rachel Carson used to interest or persuade the reader? What do you think they were?”

After a short pause, he repeated the question, but no one responded. Assessing they needed some explicit examples, he continued, “We usually talk about *narrative* when discussing fiction. For nonfiction, *description* is often used instead. How is the style of the author shown in descriptive nonfiction by *how* she or he writes about a main idea?” After another pause, one student finally ventured: “Do you mean like when the words make you agree or upset you?” “Great, Alice. Can you give an example?” “Well, Friday I was pretty grossed out when Carson wrote, ‘*the insects are winning: we’re on a pesticide treadmill*.’”

“Great example, Alice.” Mr. Thompson wrote on the board as he continued, “One easy way to remember how to find description in nonfiction is a rhyme—author’s voice and word choice.”

“So description is one way the author conveys his or her point of view. What is another way?” Slowly the students began to offer ideas and Mr. Thompson wrote them on the board until all four of the terms were generated—*information, description, persuasion, author’s voice/word choice*. He was pleased that terms like *irony* and *personification* had also been mentioned.

Mr. Thompson next introduced the **Coding** strategy. Drawing a large template on the whiteboard next to the projected page from *Silent Spring* and passing out some sticky notes, he explained to the students that **Coding** is simply a shorthand way of taking notes, similar to instant messaging. “Here’s how we’ll code this essay. First, you’ll read just for understanding. As you read, look for sentences or information you don’t understand or have questions about. Put a sticky note right next to that part and write a question mark on it. You and your partner will talk over these questions first.”

“Then you will reread the essay together, looking for parts where the author expresses a particular point of view, such as a criticism of human damage to the environment or a description of the beauty of the natural world. For each of these, the two of you will try to identify what literary devices or style conventions the author used to make you agree or consider this point. These are the four codes you will use: I = Information, D = Description, P = Persuasion, V = Author’s voice or word choice. In some cases, a sentence could contain more than one.”

To explicitly model how to code, he read the *Silent Spring* excerpt aloud, sentence by sentence, explaining what was happening in his own mind as he analyzed the essay for the literary structures and style conventions. “For example, when I read the lines, ‘Even the streams were now lifeless... No witchcraft, no enemy action, had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves,’ I coded *Description* because I got a mental image, a picture in my mind of the lifeless streams without fish or frogs. I coded again when I read the sentence, ‘Can anyone believe it is possible to lay down such a barrage of poisons on the surface of the earth without making it unfit for all life?’ I coded it...” “Persuasion!” called out the normally quiet Alexia.

“Exactly!” encouraged Mr. Thompson as he continued to model how to code during reading, sharing several more explicit examples of how he determined what to code. He saw several students nodding at his choice of codes, although a few gazed out the window at the pouring rain. He made a mental note to check in with them as they practiced **Coding** to be sure they had grasped the concept. He finished reviewing the examples he had chosen and invited students to identify the next places in the text where one of the codes applied. A few hands went up. When he called on these students, he asked them to think aloud, explaining how they selected the code. As the students listened to the other students, and as Mr. Thompson added clarifying comments, he saw a few more hands were being raised as students began to understand this new strategy.

During Reading/Learning

Mr. Thompson continued the lesson. “Okay, now it’s your turn. To help you understand how different authors use literary and style devices to convey their message, I’ve collected four examples of essays related to the environment. I’m going to summarize the topic to help you decide which one most interests you. Listen closely, as you’ll be working in pairs to read and code one essay of your own choice.” “Sweet,” muttered Al to a friend. “I hate it when we all have to read the same thing.” Mr. Thompson explained how Annie Dillard’s *In the Jungle* describes a specific scene—life in an Ecuador village on the Napo River, while E. B. White’s *Cold Weather* is about everyday, ordinary experiences. Several students were excited about Crews’ *The Hawk Is Flying*, about helping a wounded hawk recover and be set free. He hoped these differentiated

choices would appeal to students on several levels—interest, reading challenge level, and idea complexity. He explained each pair would select one essay to read and code, pointing at the four stacks of essays on the nearby table.

“But we can’t write on these papers, Mr. Thompson. How can we code?” asked Jasmine, who was a member of the school’s paper reuse and recycling committee. He told the students they would use sticky notes to code their essay, writing the code on the note. He modeled how to use the sticky note, showing them how to place it parallel to the specific sentence or section being coded. He mentioned there are other ways to code, such as with books that can’t be written in. He modeled how a one page **Coding Summary Template** could be inserted in a book. Concluding his explanation, he added “I’ll be collecting your coded essays so I can review your progress and give you feedback.”

After a noisy few minutes while the pairs of students selected their nonfiction essay, he quieted them for the initial reading to code individually for comprehension. He reminded them that when they finished reading, the pairs would complete two tasks: discuss and clarify any content they didn’t understand and then re-read the essay together, using the sticky notes to identify the literary devices and authors’ style used to interest or persuade the reader to agree with the author’s point of view.

As they began to discuss and code, he circulated the room to provide support. He reminded several pairs to write the code on the sticky note and to place it at the part of the page where they found the literary device or style convention. Patiently he explained again how to use the sticky notes to two pairs of students who had been distracted by the rain. Probably thinking about cancelled sports events, he thought. He hoped the interactive nature of **Coding** would help them focus as they re-read the essay. When he looked over the paired essay **Coding** that night, he’d be able to assess their understanding.

After Reading/Learning

As students finished, several were still discussing their essay, and Mr. Thompson felt encouraged—the **Coding** had definitely helped engage the students in reading the essays. Now, he thought, students need to deepen their understanding of the essay genre by comparing the four essays. “To synthesize your learning, we’re going to compare the elements of each essay using a **Coding Summary Template**. This is a kind of graphic organizer, and I’ll bet some of you have used similar charts before. Who can think of a class or personal experience where you’ve drawn a graphic to show how information and ideas relate to one another? Come up to the board and draw it as you explain.” Many hands went up, sharing ideas like Venn diagrams, work process cycles, and cause/effect diagrams.

“Great thinking,” he commended the class. “As a whole group, we’re going to complete a **Coding Summary Template** that will demonstrate how often the four authors used the various literary devices and style conventions to engage the reader. First, let’s move into groups of all the students who read the same essay.” Once the four groups were seated, he drew the **Coding Summary Template** on the board. He continued, “We will use this chart to collect the data. You’ll see I’ve put headers across the top for the literary devices and style conventions, and there is space in the left column to write the title of each essay. In your group, count up the number of times each pair coded for each of the five categories. Some pairs may have coded more than others. So your goal is to review the coded sections, discuss how they were coded by any of the pairs, and what you think the code should be and why. Then you can tally up the final numbers for each code. Once you are finished, we’ll tally the results on the board.”

After the data was collected, he asked the class: “So what can we learn from this information?” “Well, even though we didn’t read all of the essays,” said Maria, “we can still see that every author used information, description, persuasion, voice, and word choice to convince us.” Mr. Thompson nodded and asked, “So what else does the **Coding Summary Template** tell us?” Noel replied, “Well, I never paid much attention before to how the author used persuasion and this tells me it’s happening a lot. I just assumed authors just strung a lot of information together.”

“So let’s summarize what you’ve learned. Turn and Talk with your partner. Discuss which combinations of literary devices make an effective essay.” He gave partners two minutes to talk. “So, what did you come up with? What combinations work best to persuade you as a reader to agree with the author’s point of view?” Hesitantly, Suzette responded, “Well, when the author uses vivid adjectives, that word choice interests me—I like the beauty of nature and want to help protect it.” Roberto added, “And *Cold Weather* just used a ton of information from daily life. Facts are what convince me.” Mr. Thompson expanded the discussion to have students discuss other essays or TV documentaries and explain how the author conveyed the point of view. “Like in *An Inconvenient Truth*, where lots of shocking facts were used to convince us?” asked Nelson.

As the class ended, Mr. Thompson mused that this first lesson on **Coding** had been productive, but building the students’ confidence to share their thinking felt a bit like pulling teeth. Nonetheless, the class analysis of the essay genre was richer than it had been last year. How could he continue the momentum?, he pondered. Perhaps, he thought, he could pull together texts and magazines that had essays on a variety of topics for students to read and practice **Coding** in small groups on their own. He knew it was important for them to have multiple opportunities to practice if they were to thoroughly understand and internalize the **Coding** strategy. And he knew that while today’s lesson was a good start, many students would need additional practice to feel comfortable in independently identifying the literary devices essayists use to persuade readers about their point of view.