

# California Writing Project

## Wrestling with the Abstract: Learning to Write Analytical/Reflective Essays

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### From Teacher to Teacher

Middle school students often find it difficult to think and write about abstract ideas and concepts. However, as they progress toward high school and college, abstract thinking will become increasingly important. This lesson guides them to write about an abstract idea, through a process of identifying, not only what the idea is, but also what it is not. In order to bring the idea more fully to life, the lesson also guides them to identify metaphors that will illustrate the concept, and anecdotes from their own lives or knowledge that will frame the concept in the essay.

The original lesson was based on reading and responding to selected passages from President Obama's 2009 Inaugural Address, which the students had watched at a schoolwide assembly. However, it could be based on any text that is rich in abstract ideas. Students read and responded to the text, both individually and in collaborative groups. Students selected an idea or concept from the speech with which they identified and wrote a reflective essay on the importance of that idea or concept in their lives.

The lesson was originally developed for 7th grade honors students who needed to be challenged to step out of the rigid, formulaic writing that had become a crutch for many of them. Prior to this lesson, these students had become familiar to the point of boredom with the construction of traditional persuasive essays and narratives. They were also familiar with various forms of figurative language, including metaphor.

Because they were excited by President Obama's speech to begin with, they were eager to try their hands at something new, in the form of a reflective essay that combined elements of argumentative or persuasive writing with elements of narrative.

### Text Resources

Texts to increase content and genre knowledge:

President Obama's Inauguration address may be accessed in several ways. The following URL provides both text and video:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/inaugural-address> (accessed July 14, 2012)

Allison, J and D. Gediman, ed., *This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women*, New York, NY: Holt, 2007.

## Teaching Context

The lesson was originally developed for seventh grade honors students, but with additional scaffolding support for the exploratory nature of a reflective essay, more students can be successful.

Please note that this class consisted of a daily 90-minute block period. Session times should be adjusted for a single-period schedule.

## Text Type, Genre, Writing Prompt

Reflective essay that makes use of narrative, informational, and argumentative text types/writing as examples for developing the reflection and analysis.

### ▪ **Writing Prompt**

Write an essay in which you analyze the significance of an abstract concept, such as responsibility, in your life. In your essay you should do the following:

- explain the concept
- express your opinion about its significance for you
- give examples to support your opinion
- describe a point of view that differs from yours
- give examples to support the differing point of view
- respond to the differing point of view
- conclude by stating why people should take note of your opinion of the significance of the concept to people in general, as well as to you personally.

**Note:** You may refer to President Obama's (or alternative text if used) speech in your essay, but you should focus mainly on expressing your own ideas in relation to the concept you have chosen to write about.

## Instructional Strategies

- Jigsaw
- Collaborative annotation of text
- Rotating stations (kinesthetic activity for reading and annotating)
- Mentor text
- Concept Map (graphic organizer)
- Peer review groups
- Conferencing
- Metacognitive reflection

### Common Core State Standards

#### READING STANDARDS FOR INFORMATIONAL TEXT 6-12

##### Grade 7

- 2. Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.**

#### WRITING STANDARDS 6-12

##### Grade 7

- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
- 4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.**
- With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.

#### COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS STANDARDS

##### Reading 6-12

- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- 2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.**

##### Writing 6 -12

- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- 4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.**
- Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences

## English Language Development Standards

### **COLLABORATIVE: BRIDGING**

1. Exchanging of information/ideas
3. Supporting opinions and persuading others
6. Reading/viewing closely
7. Evaluating language choices
10. Writing
11. Justifying/arguing

### **LEARNING ABOUT HOW ENGLISH WORKS: BRIDGING**

1. Understanding text structure
2. Understanding cohesions
6. Connecting ideas

### Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- read and comprehend selections from a complex informational text, analyzing the development of the main ideas
- summarize excerpts from the text
- analyze specific abstract concepts from the text in order to understand the author's main ideas
- draft essays, creating a structure that will effectively convey their ideas
- revise their compositions after receiving feedback from peers and teacher
- write reflective essays that combine elements of persuasion, exposition and narration, supporting their claims with anecdotes, descriptions, and specific examples.

### Session 1: Reading and Initial Response

1. Read and/or listen to the selected text. For the original lesson, the text was President Obama's 2009 Inaugural Address.
2. Do a 5-10 minute Quick Write.  
Prompt: What are your first thoughts about and responses to this text?
3. Share and discuss the ideas generated by the Quick Writes in small groups, and then in a whole-class discussion.

### Session 2: Collaborative Reading and Responding

**Note:** Prior to this session, select key passages from the text (ideally one paragraph for each group of three or four students). Cut the paragraphs out, and glue each paragraph onto a larger sheet of paper, so that there is space for annotation around the paragraph. Place these sheets around the room, either on desks or on the walls, so that there is space for students to move from one to another.

1. Divide the students into groups of 3 or 4, and give each group a different colored pen or marker.
2. Station each group at one of the prepared sheets. They will then rotate to each sheet in turn.
3. At each station, students will read the passage, discuss their understanding of it, and write one or more comments on the paper surrounding the passage.
4. Place a time limit of 3-4 minutes on each rotation, and use a timer to indicate when students should move to the next station.  
(**Note:** adjust the time as necessary depending on how students are responding.)
5. The groups will progress around the room until they have read and responded to each passage.  
**Note:** Although it is best to complete the whole rotation in one session, it is possible to spread it over more than one session, by having students make note of where they were when the session ended, and then picking up at the same place for the next session.

### Session 3: Summarizing Text for Key Idea

1. Show the annotated passages using a document camera, or make overhead transparencies to show on an overhead projector.
2. Conduct a whole-class discussion focusing on what students noticed in responding to the text in this way.
3. Each group should now select a passage to work with in more depth.  
**Note:** It is not essential to have each group select a different passage.

4. When they have made their selections, give each student a copy of the passage his/her group has selected, including the annotations made by the class.
5. In their groups, they will re-read the passage, and “squeeze” it down to a single sentence that captures the essential meaning of the passage.
6. When they have agreed on a “gist” sentence, they should write it down.
7. After they have composed these “gist” sentences, have each group share out to check for accuracy.
8. Tell the students that they will now “squeeze” the passage even further, to a single word, which is the main idea or concept in the passage.
9. Make a list of these concepts on the document camera or overhead.

## Session 4: Analyzing Mentor Text

1. Review the list of concepts generated by the summarizing activity.
2. Ask students to select one concept from the list to write about.
3. Do a 5-10 minute Quick Write about what this concept means to the student.  
**Prompt:** Write about what \_\_\_\_\_ means to you. You may give specific examples of times in your life when this concept has been important. You may also consider why it is important to society.
4. Provide students with copies of the mentor text, “Good Can be As Communicable As Evil, ” an essay in *This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women* by Norman Corwin.  
**Note:** Depending on your students, you may wish to choose a different essay from this anthology, or you may use a different mentor text altogether. I chose the Corwin essay because my students could easily relate to the topic, and because it provides a clear example of the power of anecdote in a non-fiction piece.
5. After reading the text, discuss the writing strategies used by Corwin in developing this essay.
6. Focus particularly on his use of anecdotes to illustrate both what he believes courtesy is, and what he believes it is not. Students should notice that Corwin opens his essay with an anecdote about the baseball player, Orel Hershiser. Discuss what makes this an effective opening for the essay. Corwin also uses metaphor in his essay (“The blood relatives of common courtesy are kindness, sympathy and consideration.”) Ask students to discuss Corwin’s possible reasons for including this metaphor. Students should also notice that Corwin has structured his essay around anecdotal examples that show both what kindness is, and what it is not. When students make the graphic organizer for their reflective essay, they will be considering these same ideas in connection with their chosen topics.
7. Note the differences and similarities in structure between this essay and the traditional essay format with which students are familiar. Students should notice that Corwin does not fully reveal the main idea, or thesis, of his essay until the penultimate paragraph. This is a common strategy in writing reflective essays, and students should discuss why the writer chose not to place his thesis in the introduction. Finally, students should notice that the essay ends with a powerful call to action, and discuss what makes it powerful.

## Session 5: Organizing Ideas Using Concept Map

1. Provide students with copies of the Concept Map, a modified version of the Frayer Model.

<b>Concept Map</b>		
<table border="1"><tr><td style="text-align: center;">Word</td></tr></table>		Word
Word		
<table border="1"><tr><td style="text-align: center;">Definition</td></tr></table>		Definition
Definition		
<b>Essential Characteristics (What it is)</b>	<b>Non-Characteristics (What it's not)</b>	
<b>Examples (Anecdotes)</b>	<b>Non Examples (Anecdotes)</b>	
<table border="1"><tr><td style="text-align: center;"><b>Metaphor</b></td></tr></table>		<b>Metaphor</b>
<b>Metaphor</b>		

2. Students complete the Concept Map, which includes listing possible personal anecdotes to illustrate the concepts they have selected to write about.
3. As a challenge, students should try to think of a metaphor that will illustrate the concept. My students were already familiar with the concept of metaphor, both from their reading, and from previous writing assignments. In addition, we had discussed Norman Corwin's use of a metaphor in the mentor text "Good Can be As Communicable As Evil." Thus, they were equipped to construct metaphors of their own. However, this was an optional "challenge" in the assignment, aimed at increasing the rigor for the most gifted students in the class. Many students took the challenge, some more successfully than others.

**Note:** For ELD students and Special Education students, you may wish to provide more scaffolding for, or omit, the metaphor.

## Session 6: Drafting

1. After students have completed the Concept Map, provide them with copies of the writing prompt:  
Write an essay in which you analyze the significance of an abstract concept, such as responsibility, in your life. In your essay you should do the following:
  - explain the concept
  - express your opinion about its significance for you
  - give examples to support your opinion
  - describe a point of view that differs from yours
  - give examples to support the differing point of view
  - respond to the differing point of viewConclude by stating why people should take note of your opinion of the significance of the concept to people in general, as well as to you personally. They will now begin drafting the essay.
2. They will use the Concept Map as a graphic organizer, and they may also refer to the original paragraph from the Inaugural Address (or similar text), including the comments of their classmates, and their own Quick Writes, as well as Corwin's essay.

## Session 7: Peer Review

1. When students have completed the first draft of the essay, they will share their writing in a peer review group.
2. Students should be organized into groups of four, if possible. If the class does not easily divide into groups of four, some groups may have three students. No group should have more than four students. It is important to have the groups be of equal size as far as possible, so that each group will be able to complete each round of the read-around in the same amount of time. In addition, the more students there are in the group, the more likely it is that the comments will become redundant because of duplication. I have found that groups of four are optimal for this activity.
3. In their peer review groups, students will read each group member's essay in turn, and respond to each one on a sticky note, using the following sentence stems:  
"One thing I really liked in your writing was..."  
"Perhaps you might consider..."
4. Each student will also sign each sticky note, and attach it to the back of the rough draft, before passing it to the next reader.

**Note:** It is best to use a timer during this activity. Three minutes is usually a good time to set for the first round of reading and responding. You may adjust the time allowed as you see how students are doing.

## Session 8: Revising

When the peer review has been completed, students will revise their work and write a second draft. This may be done as homework.

**Note:** Depending on the class, and their experience with revision strategies, you may wish to include some mini lessons on targeted skills at this point. For example, you may teach a mini lesson on transitional words and phrases, after which you may ask students to re-read their drafts, circling the transitional words and phrases they have used. If they cannot find any, or if they find only a few, they should consider where they might improve the cohesion of the essay by adding transitions.

## Session 9: Teacher Feedback

When the second draft is complete, provide feedback to each student either by conferencing with the students, or by giving written comments and suggestions for further revision.

## Session 10: Final Revisions and Making Writing Public

1. After receiving feedback from the teacher, students will write a final draft of the essay. Two annotated student examples can be found in the Learning from Student Work section.

**Note:** I find it useful to have students include a separate reflection page with their final draft, in which they list specific moves they made in response to the peer and teacher feedback they received.

2. For publication, you may wish to collect the essays and bind them into a book as a class anthology similar to the This I Believe collection.

## Reflections

**What worked:** The intention was to have students move beyond the formulaic “Pro-Con” or narrative essay and instead have them think deeply about an abstract concept, relating it to their own experiences and producing an essay that may or not consist of five paragraphs, but that demonstrates both reflective and analytical thinking. Students were highly engaged throughout the lesson sequence, and the writing that they produced was of a very high quality.

However, although some students did break out of the traditional essay structure as I had hoped that they would, many fell back on what they were most familiar with. In future, I would wish to spend more time having students practice creating alternative structures. Gretchen Bernabei’s book *Crunchtime* contains many practical ideas to help students break out of the traditional format, and I would spend time working with some of the structures that she describes.

For students who need practice in creating metaphors, I would suggest reading the mentor text *Hailstones and Halibut Bones*, a picture book in verse by Mary O’Neill, and having students begin by creating a list of “color” metaphors like those in O’Neill’s book, followed by creating a list of “personal” metaphors: “If I were a color, I would be \_\_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_\_. If I were an animal, I would be \_\_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_\_.” Students may also create a metaphor list for a character in a novel, short story or movie, before creating metaphors to illustrate the concepts in their essays.

**Modifications:** The lesson could be modified by the use of a different base text, using one that is more complex or less complex, depending on the level of the students. Teachers in other content areas might also select texts that relate to their content standards. In addition, the end product of the lesson could be modified to meet student needs. Students could produce a podcast instead of a written essay, or they might write an illustrated paragraph instead of a full essay.

**What’s next:** The skills developed in this lesson may be extended into argumentative and literary analysis essays. In addition, as mentioned above, the essay might be recast as a podcast or digital story.

### Instructional Resources

Allison, J and D. Gediman, ed., *This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women*, New York, NY: Holt, 2007.

O'Neill, M. *Hailstones and Halibut Bones*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1990.

### Professional Resources

Beers, K. *When Kids Can't Read What Teachers Can Do*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002.

Excellent strategies to use with struggling and reluctant readers - but useful for readers of all ability levels.

Bernabei, G. *Crunchtime*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2009.

Innovative ideas for going beyond the five-paragraph essay.

Culham, R. *Traits of Writing: The Complete Guide for Middle School*. New York, NY: Scholastic, 2010.

Step by step lessons for each of the six traits (plus Presentation), as well as detailed rubrics.

Gallagher, K. *Write Like This: Teaching Real-World Writing Through Modeling and Mentor Texts*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2011.

Contains useful examples of real-world texts as well as strategies for using them in the classroom.

Gallagher, K. *Teaching Adolescent Writers*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2006.

A great all-around resource for everything connected to the teaching of writing in middle and high school.

Kirby, D. and D.L. Kirby. *New Directions in Teaching Memoir: A Studio Workshop Approach*. Portsmouth, NH Heinemann, 2007.

A fresh approach to non-fiction narrative. Useful for developing anecdotes.

Noden, H. *Image Grammar*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2011.

An excellent resource for sentence variety and sentence fluency.

### Digital Resources

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/inaugural-address> (accessed July 14, 2012)

## Learning From Student Work

For assessing and annotating the writing, I used Education Northwest's 5-point rubric for grades 3-12, one of the 6+1 Trait Rubrics. Link here: [http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm\\_send/140](http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/140)

### Student Sample A

#### Responsibility

"Take out the trash! Pick up your clothes! Clean your room! Finish your homework!" These are only a fraction of what gets shot at me every day. I myself feel irresponsible. Responsibility is the sort of thing that doesn't come naturally, and it just so happens that I haven't developed the trait. Therefore, it is because of me, both my mother and father lose their voices consecutively. Therefore, there is one word that describes me most. Lazy.

To complete your duties to God and your country is responsibility. Current president Obama's inaugural address states that it is our duty as American citizens to rebuild this nation and untangle ourselves from the knot of problems we are currently in. In addition, we must responsibly "leave Iraq to its own people, and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan." President Obama is basically saying that we the American people have to clean up the mess we made and put things back to how they were supposed to be. There are many people in this nation that would like to end this war, and withdraw the United States military force from the present war zones at this very moment. However, it is not as easy as it looks. If we just withdraw, then Iraq might return to its old state, so we the people of the United States have to act just like a mother to the Iraqi people. We must take responsibility to nourish them and teach the Iraqi the way of democracy. You see, Iraq is currently a mess, and we the people of the U.S. caused that problem. If we do not act as the doctors and treat our patients, then our worldly issues will continually grow until our nation is proven untrustworthy, and our alliances severed.

In addition, to be responsible is to complete your duties and chores. You are also proven responsible when you are able to do jobs not even assigned to you. Trustworthy, dependable, capable and liable are example of synonyms to responsibility. If you are capable of completing the duties that are assigned to you, then do them! Responsibility can be found everywhere; from your local community to a far off place like Washington DC. If people in your local community depend on you to assist them in any way, then by all means do! Senators, congressmen and other members of the U.S. government all are responsible for their appointed job. Any American taking part in the government of the U.S. was either elected or appointed because he or she possesses a unique part of responsibility. These people represent our nation and by all means assist each other through political arguments. Therefore, it is in our responsibility to fulfill out duties and obligations whether it is to complete our chores and finish our homework, or to vote on a bill and give a speech, but once all the duties thrown at us are complete, you feel good about yourself and others will see you as responsible.

Being lazy like me is not being responsible. Procrastinating is not very responsible either because all it does is give you a bigger lode of homework later. Teachers give a one or more days to complete homework or projects depending on the assignment so that you wouldn't be up all night working, but if you procrastinate that is exactly what you will be doing. Also, you must answer your obligations for ones conduct and not be lazy! Littering is very irresponsible because it destroys the Earth, and this is a matter spoken of tons of times. Proving to be responsible is proving then you are mature, and maturity is how people survive in the big world. To be civilized and not holding mommy's hand any more is a step in life that everyone is bound to make.

Responsibility, a trait needed by anyone who succeeds, is a way to gain one's trust. Obeying your parents, completing all duties given to you, and not procrastinating are three ways to gaining the title of responsible. So what are you waiting for? Get out there and earn your title of responsibility!

## Annotation – Student Sample A

### Strengths of the writing:

The writer of Student Sample # 1 (“Responsibility”) has a strong voice, and some unique perspectives on the concept of responsibility. His writing demonstrates clear thinking and a genuine effort to express his ideas in an interesting and insightful manner. He supports his ideas with examples and anecdotes that are specific, relevant and interesting.

### Connections to Rubric:

**Ideas:** The writer has a clear idea of the message he wishes to communicate. In choosing to begin his piece with an anecdote that illustrates the antithesis of the concept on which his piece is focused, he has taken a deliberate risk. However, the risk is not quite successful, because he does not provide a clear transition between the first and second paragraphs. The writer also makes an effort to develop an extended metaphor (Mother and child). While there are places in the essay where the metaphor is a little strained, he is generally successful in using this device to unify the piece. The main idea of the piece is clear, but not sufficiently focused.

**Organization:** In organization, this writer has a clear sense of the structure required to communicate his ideas. There is an introduction that draws the reader into the piece, and a conclusion that leaves the reader with a sense of closure while also giving the reader more to think about. The body of the essay is structurally less sound than the introduction and conclusion. The ideas often do not flow naturally. This problem could be alleviated by the use of effective transitions to improve the coherence of the body paragraphs. It should be noted that, although this piece consists of five paragraphs, it does not have the formulaic quality of a traditional five-paragraph essay. Students were encouraged to find alternative ways of organizing their writing for this assignment, but many of them, in the end, wrote five paragraphs. This was probably because it was the structure with which they were most familiar, and indicates that they needed more practice with alternative structures.

**Word Choice:** The word choice in this piece is quite strong. The writer has chosen words and phrases that make the essay lively and interesting, while at the same time conveying meaning effectively and precisely.

**Sentence Fluency:** The writer has made a strong effort to include sentence variety in this piece, by varying the length and structure of the sentences, as well as by beginning sentences in a variety of ways. However, as mentioned above, the lack of unifying transitions in the body paragraphs shows that the student's control over sentence fluency is not consistent.

**Voice:** As previously noted, the writer's voice is strong in this paper. However, there are some inconsistencies in diction. For example, the use of the second person pronoun tends to be intrusive, and it is not always clear to whom he is referring. In addition, he mixes formal and informal diction, a strategy that is occasionally effective, but is more often ineffective.

**Conventions:** This writer demonstrates a good grasp of grade level conventions. Punctuation, capitalization and basic grammar are strong. However, there are weaknesses in usage, as well as occasional spelling errors. None of the errors is sufficiently serious to impede the reader's understanding or enjoyment of the piece.

Overall, on the Six Trait Rubric, this essay would score a 4 on the 5-point scale.

**Next steps:** With this writer, the next step would be to focus on organization, and on coherence within and among paragraphs. The writer has a strong voice, but he needs some guidance in controlling the piece so that the reader follows his ideas without confusion. He would benefit from some mini-lessons on the effective use of transitions. An additional follow-up to this piece would be to provide the writer with more self-editing strategies to enable him to correct the errors in usage. While these do not impede the reader's understanding of the piece, they are distracting, and a writer who has such excellent ideas to impart, would benefit from revision strategies that will enable him to produce writing that is as technically competent as it is interesting to read.

## Student Sample B

### The Red Carnation

Together we, the people, could lead America into future prosperity with confidence and determination. In this part of President Obama's inauguration speech, there is a sense of pride in his voice of reuniting America and leading it to the time of accomplishment and peace. President Obama expresses the meaning of pride as having the satisfaction or the proudness of an overcome goal or challenge. The word pride itself refers as a symbolization of a red carnation because of its bold color that stands out when the carnation has at last blooms widely bursting with brilliant colors of red, showing its delicate texture on the pedals and leaves. With this symbol, President Obama reveals that we have the power of overcoming the tough times of economy crisis that could lead to the creation of a new America with the teamwork and effort from the individual citizens of this nation. In return we gain the pride and the prosperity feeling within ourselves.

Pride could come from either the most enormous or the tiniest kind of challenge that has been triumphed. This major accomplishment turns into a representation of dignity and emotions that will not only make you wear a broad smile, but something that also makes you have faith and hope in your heart. In other words, having the feeling of succeeding again, the emotion of confidence beyond what's within us. When the war of independence for America ended, the Americans were the ones that had the victory and the pride that they finally earned for their belief of liberty and freedom. As for the civil war, in the middle of the battle the North had lost to the South, however, in the end the North, persistent and courageous, had won the war for the freedom and justice of slavery. From both of these battles, the armies had lost thousands of lives for what they believed was right and since they were victorious on those two important wars, it gave the Americans the determination to overcome what they face. This is the pride President Obama mentions in the Presidential Inauguration Speech, indicating us to be strong and to go into depth of bringing the proud-ness we deserve when we work hard to accomplish whatever challenges we set.

On the contrary, an accomplishment is not always conquered every time and it sometime leads to failure. As we continue to fail, we begin to lose the pride we hold onto ourselves. When we try to escape from the problems that need to be faced again because of the previous failure; it becomes more to a mixed emotion of hopelessness and shame rather than related to the words of proud-ness itself. Despairing, trouncing, these are some characteristics of a wilting, feeble flower and in a way is the same as to us at times. It reveals how we sometimes have that lack of hope, and other numerous traits when we are defeated from the failure of the goal we strive to achieve. Although when we keep on trying to attain, it will be easier to complete the goals we set. As our reward for the completion of the accomplishments, there would be pride and dignity looming in our hearts as a sign of strength.

Pride could symbolize for numerous of things, such as the red carnation because it reflects off the boldness and powerful colors to show its confidence and pride. Centuries ago, our ancestors had begun digging a path for us to glide and smooth out. Now our only job we need to do on that road is to: move forward with our heads held high into the future of prosperity together, similar to a red carnation blooming its illuminating pedals in the sunlight.

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## Annotation – Student Sample B

### Strengths of the writing:

The writer of Student Sample #2 ("The Red Carnation") is making a strenuous effort to produce a piece of writing that captures the importance of the concept (pride) that she has selected to write about, while also going beyond the mundane or expected. She is taking some risks with her writing, and can be seen to be trying valiantly to incorporate the ideas from the lesson into her piece.

### **Connections to the rubric:**

**Ideas:** Unlike the writer of “Responsibility,” this writer’s ideas are somewhat vague and unclear. The idea of pride as the main topic of the piece emerges gradually. The focus of the piece is inconsistent, with too much emphasis on the Inaugural Address itself, rather than on the writer’s reflection on the concept of pride. The extended metaphor of the red carnation, while intriguing, is not sufficiently well developed to provide a clear framework for the piece.

**Organization:** This writer has strong sense of organization. She has selected a four-paragraph structure, which mirrors the Concept Map that she made in the pre-writing stage of the process. This structure works well here, and she has provided a conclusion that goes beyond simply re-stating the ideas she has already presented. Within each paragraph, however, the organization is somewhat weak, especially in the introduction, where the writer tends to jump from one idea to another with few logical connections.

**Word Choice:** Like the writer of Student Sample #1, this writer is making a strong effort to include precise and interesting word choice in her piece. However, the words she chooses occasionally seem stilted or forced, and sometimes seem to show a misguided use of the thesaurus. (“Despairing, trouncing...” in paragraph 3, for example).

**Sentence Fluency:** Sentence fluency is fairly strong in this piece. Unlike the writer of Student Sample #1, this writer makes good use of transitions, especially within paragraphs. She also has a good variety of sentence types, and her writing flows well.

**Voice:** This writer’s voice is not as strong as that of the writer of Student Sample #1. She is earnest and sincere, but the effort she is making is too obvious, and thus the writing seems rather impersonal. She has a sense of audience and purpose, but her paper is not compelling or particularly engaging for a reader.

**Conventions:** This writer, like the writer of Student Sample #1 has a strong grasp of grade level conventions such as spelling, capitalization and basic grammar. However, there are some major weaknesses in usage and syntax, which often lead to confusion for a reader. (“...it becomes more to a mixed emotion of hopelessness and shame...” from paragraph 3, for example). There is significant need for editing in this paper.

**Next steps:** The next steps with this writer would begin with one-on-one conferencing around the clear communication of ideas. The writer will need help with how to connect one idea to another, as well as with strategies to communicate the significance of a metaphor more clearly. In addition, like the writer of Student Sample #1, this writer would benefit from learning additional self-editing and revision strategies, to enable her to take her writing to the next level.

Overall, on the Six Trait Rubric, this essay would score a 3 on the 5-point scale.

Concept Map

