

CALIFORNIA WRITING PROJECT
Teacher-to-Teacher Curriculum Resources

California Writing



Solving Problems to Make Our Dreams a Reality

Brooke Nicolls, Teacher Consultant
Area 3 Writing Project, UC Davis

California Writing is a statewide program of the California Writing Project.

Students can learn to improve their lives and communities by taking action and seeing themselves as problem-solvers. In this unit, students take on the role of problem-solver as they identify and examine problems in their school and neighborhood communities and explore meaningful solutions to those problems. As a culminating assignment, students write a problem-solution essay, proposing and analyzing solutions for a challenge or issue in their school or neighborhood.

Genre: problem solution essays/senior projects/action research proposals

Recommended Grades: 7-12

Overview

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”
- Margaret Mead

California is a state that offers good weather, beautiful and varied landscapes, a diverse population, and opportunities to live meaningful and successful lives. In essence, California is a place to cultivate and attain the American dream. However, there is an ugly underbelly to our Golden State. There are communities suffering from economic blight, crime, and limited opportunities—places where people in-the-know never drive to or through, fearing for their safety while ignoring the richness of the people who live there. A cloud of despair often hangs in the air, and people feel a mixture of loyalty to their community and anger at the way it looks and feels and is perceived.

In listening to my students, many can't wait to graduate and make lives of their own, far from the problems in their own school and neighborhood. Unfortunately, the problems that they want to leave behind are not limited to just their own lives and communities. Many experiences, difficulties, and issues are universal, so I want my students to learn to identify the causes of problems, and instead of just complaining or waiting for someone else to fix them, to see that as individuals they can be a positive force for change. They can be part of the solutions instead of contributing to the problems through apathy or passivity. I want them to realize that rather than remove themselves from the problems at hand, they can stay and make a better tomorrow.

Perhaps because of age, life experience, or personal circumstances my students don't see themselves as problem-solvers, playing an integral role in developing and implementing solutions that could have a positive impact. This unit is designed to help students see the richness of their own lives while identifying problems in their school and neighborhood and developing and evaluating possible solutions. The goal is to help them see themselves as agents of change while developing and improving their analytical reading and writing skills.

We begin the year by writing autobiographical and reflective pieces. These writing assignments are designed to review and reinforce what they already know about writing, and they work as a springboard into more difficult, less familiar expository writing. I rely on James Moffett's theory

of starting with the students—their experiences and what they know—then moving out to more difficult forms and content. By the time we begin this unit, we have already read narrative fiction, non-fiction texts, vignettes, and expository texts such as essays and magazine and newspaper articles, and we have discussed audience, purpose, genre, and structure in relation to our reading experiences.

The writing that immediately precedes this unit is an argumentative/persuasive essay, which gives us the opportunity to discover that a piece of analytical writing is most often not purely reflective, cause and effect, problem-solution, evaluative, definition, informational, or persuasive, but is instead a combination of many of these genres.

In problem-solution essays, writers identify a problem and examine its causes and effects. After analyzing all aspects of the problem, writers then suggest a solution, often justifying their choices by explaining how other solutions won't be as effective as the one chosen.

This unit helps prepare students for the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), the University of California Subject A Examination, and California State University English Placement Test exams because students get practice reading, discussing, and making meaning from a variety of texts. In terms of writing, it gives students the opportunity to take a stand and support it using examples and analysis.

Objectives

Students will:

- identify both the causes and effects of a problem
- provide context for the reader
- focus on a single issue or problem
- support a claim, using examples and analysis
- understand how to interweave different genres to create a coherent essay
- provide at least three possible solutions
- evaluate the solutions and choose the best one.

Applications to the California English-Language Arts Academic Content Standards

□ Eleventh/Twelfth Grades

Reading Comprehension

- 2.4 Make warranted and reasonable assertions about the author's arguments by using elements of the text to defend and clarify interpretations.
- 2.5 Analyze an author's implicit and explicit philosophical assumptions and beliefs about a subject.

Writing Strategies

- 1.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the elements of discourse (e.g., purpose, speaker, audience, form) when completing narrative, expository, persuasive, or descriptive writing assignments.
- 1.3 Structure ideas and arguments in a sustained, persuasive, and sophisticated way and support them with precise and relevant examples.
- 1.5 Use language in natural, fresh, and vivid ways to establish a specific tone.

Written and Oral English Language Conventions

- 1.1 Demonstrate control of grammar, diction, and paragraph and sentence structure and an understanding of English usage.
- 1.2 Produce legible work that shows accurate spelling and correct punctuation and capitalization.

Teaching Sequence

Note: This unit was completed by an eleventh grade, heterogeneously-grouped class.

□ Exploring the American Dream:

- The class brainstorms wishes and dreams for ourselves and those we care about.
 - Students list their wishes and dreams on a piece of paper and then share with a partner at least one item from their list. Afterwards they are encouraged to share with the class.
- The teacher explains the difference between short and long-term goals and elicits from the class some examples of each on the overhead.
 - On their brainstorming sheet, ask students to draw a line under their list of wishes and dreams. Below this line have the students list at least three short-term and three long-term goals. Students are invited to share a goal with the class.
- Students brainstorm and discuss the reasons why immigrants want to come to America. Begin the discussion by asking, “What does America offer that is so inviting?”
- For homework, students complete the following questionnaire.

American Dream Questionnaire

Directions: Read the questions below and write your responses in complete sentences.

- 1) What is your definition of the American dream?
- 2) How different or similar do you think your American dream is from most other U.S. teens your age?
- 3) When people achieve the American dream, what material things do they own?
- 4) When people achieve the American dream, what kinds of things are they able to do?
- 5) In what way(s) is the American dream of people your age similar to and different from that of people your parents' age?
- 6) In what way(s), if any, is a person's definition of the American dream influenced by ethnicity and/or gender?

- At the next class meeting, ask students to share their responses with the class. Most students are enthusiastic to share their impression of what it means to attain the American dream.
- Next, students examine their lists of short and long-term goals and compare them to what seems to be the American dream.
- Discuss with students how life in California does or does not support their short and long-term goals and the American dream.
- As an additional homework assignment, give students the opportunity to invite their parents/guardians to complete an extra-credit survey about their own goals and dreams and explain why they think people come to America and California.

Note: Some parents/guardians may not speak English or may not understand what is meant by the “American dream,” so the class discussion about the responses to the students’ questionnaire will provide students with the background to help their parent/guardian to respond to the questionnaire. Not every parent/guardian participates, but usually several respond, which is enough to fold an adult perspective into the discussion of American dream.

Parent/Guardian Questionnaire:

American Dream Survey (Parent/Guardian/Older relative)

For the next several weeks, your daughter/son will be examining the concept of the American dream. To add more diverse views and information to our discussions, I’d like to invite you to share your thoughts about this concept. Please take some time to respond to several questions listed below. Your daughter/son may interview you and write your responses, or you can write them yourself.

- 1) What is your definition of the American dream?
- 2) How different or similar do you think your American dream is from most other people in the U.S.?
- 3) When people achieve the American dream, what material things do they own?
- 4) When people achieve the American dream, what kinds of things do they do?
- 5) Do you think your definition of the American dream is similar to that of your children? If yes, in what ways? If no, how is it different?
- 6) If you are from a country other than the United States, in what ways is the American dream similar to and/or different from the dreams people hope to achieve in your country of origin? Please include the name of your birth country.

Parent/guardian/older relative’s signature: _____

- ❑ Writing individual “I Have a Dream” statements
 - When students return to class, ask them to share some of the responses from their parents/guardians.
 - Write the responses on an overhead transparency.
 - As a class, identify the similarities and differences between the student responses and the responses of their parents/guardians.
 - Students create their own individual “I Have a Dream” statements modeled on Martin Luther King, Jr.’s speech. (This activity was designed by Patti White.)
 - This activity takes place over three class periods, including writing a rough draft for homework.
 - First, students read aloud an excerpt from King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech.

- Afterwards, they focus on the topics he addresses/dreams about (equality, peace, etc.)
- To help students identify the topics and organization of the speech, hand out a graphic organizer (web worksheet) and together identify the dreams King, Jr. addresses. It is helpful if the teacher fills out the web worksheet on the overhead as students follow along.
- Next, give students another blank web page.
- Ask students to write in four main focus areas on their web for which they will write their dreams: education, career, community (neighborhood), and world.
- Students then fill in the details for their “dreams” in each area. Students are expected to emulate the style and literary devices (repetition, alliteration) that King, Jr. used in his speech.

Note: Have students begin webbing their ideas in class, so you can offer guidance. Once students understand the assignment, they can finish it at home.

- Students use their completed web worksheet as a guide for writing their rough draft of their “I Have a Dream” speech. This and finishing the web are part of the same night’s homework.
- During the next class period, students provide peer response to each other’s drafts.
 - ✧ Students make sure that the writer includes all four required areas, that the organizational pattern is similar to King, Jr.’s speech, and that conventions are correct.
 - ✧ The teacher can either conference with each student or collect the drafts, read them over, and return them the next class meeting.

Note: Students can handwrite or type their final drafts, but they seem to be more excited about the assignment if they can type them and print them out onto various kinds of bordered computer paper.

- When completed, students post their work on the bulletin board.
- This “I Have a Dream” activity helps students to think about their futures and to recognize that we all have dreams/goals we hope to accomplish.

☐ From dreamers to problem solvers:

- Ask the class how many of them think that the dreams they wrote about (end to hunger, world peace, become a lawyer, become wealthy, etc.) will come true. Many won’t think so. Many students will feel confident about their career goals/personal goals but will feel doubtful about solving social problems like poverty, homelessness, and violence. This opens up a discussion of why some dreams/goals may seem impossible to attain. This discussion is designed to get students thinking about their lives, school, and neighborhood.
- To get students focused on their daily lives in their community, ask them to draw a map of their own neighborhood—a particular street, a view from their house, the route they walk or drive to school, etc.
 - Students are asked to begin drawing this map at home. In class the next day, give them time to finish them and color them in because some students don’t have colored markers or pencils at home. Using color will enable them to add more detail to their pictures.

Note: Students demonstrate a wide range of drawing ability, but most of the students enjoy drawing the maps. Maps range from just a couple of houses to maps that cover several blocks.

- Once students finish with their drawings, have students do a gallery walk.
 - ✧ Students leave their pictures on their desks and walk around the room and look at the other drawings. Many will be able to identify the location of the buildings and streets on the maps.
- To prepare students to write a description of their neighborhood, have students read published examples of neighborhood descriptions.
 - Read an excerpt from *McTeague*, written by Frank Norris about turn-of-the-century San Francisco.
 - ✧ Discuss the descriptive language and the pictures Norris draws for the reader with his words and identify examples of sensory details.
 - For homework students read vignettes from *The House on Mango Street*, written by Sandra Cisneros —“The House on Mango Street,” “The Monkey Garden,” and “Those Who Don’t.”
 - After reading the vignettes, students respond to the questions on the following worksheet.

Vignette Questions

Directions: Read each of the vignettes. Below, answer the questions related to each one.
(Remember we have 5 senses: hearing, seeing, touching, smelling, tasting)

“The Monkey Garden”

- 1) List at least five descriptions from the vignette to describe the Monkey Garden:

“Those Who Don’t”

- 1) In your own words, describe how outsiders “see” this neighborhood. What is their impression of it?
- 2) List at least two details that Cisneros includes that make people have that impression about her neighborhood.

“Mango Street”

- 1) Describe the “real” house the family wanted to move into. (Include specific descriptions from the vignette.)
- 2) Describe the house the family ended up moving into on Mango Street. (Include specific descriptions from the vignette.)

- When students return to class, discuss their responses to the vignettes.
 - ✧ Guide students to see that descriptive writing can be more than just the physical details about a building or street. It can also communicate the atmosphere and personality of a place.
- On the overhead projector, model several paragraphs describing areas they are familiar with but are not in their immediate area. Students enjoy trying to figure out the exact location of what is being described.
- Also ask students to identify the descriptive language and sensory details.
- In class, students begin writing a description of their own neighborhood. They can describe what they drew for their neighborhood map, another part of their neighborhood, or parts of the school campus. They can model their descriptions after any of the examples they’ve read, or they can use their own ideas.

Note: This neighborhood description is not a formal piece that needs to go through the drafting process. This is just a one-time, exploratory writing. The description should be a page and include sensory details.

- Ask students to share their writing in a group of four. Students exchange their descriptions, and peers comment on the accuracy of the details. (Most students will be able to do this since they are familiar with the communities their peers are writing about.)
 - After the read-around, review what they wrote about in their “I Have a Dream” assignment:
 - ✧ Ask students to think about their own school and neighborhood communities.
 - ✧ Ask students to identify what in their communities supports the dreams they have and what works against them achieving their dreams. The teacher writes responses on the overhead.
 - ✧ Next, ask students to brainstorm some of the things they like and don’t like about the communities in which they live and go to school.
- The following assignment is a good pre-writing, pre-thinking activity to help students begin to focus on problems in their communities and possible solutions for them.

□ Neighborhood picture assignment:

For this assignment, students check out cameras and take pictures of their school and their neighborhood.

Note: I bought a total of 15 cameras, each costing under \$9.00. Most of the money came from the English department budget, and some came from my own pocket. Each camera came with a roll of film.

Here are some things to be aware of:

- 1) Although disposable cameras may seem like a good idea, having a “real” camera seems to send messages of importance and responsibility to the students.
- 2) Getting money to buy the cameras and finding 15 in one store will take some planning.
- 3) Make sure you carve an identification number on each one.
- 4) Create responsibility cards (just like book cards for those of us who still check out books in this way.)
- 5) Some students don’t know how to operate the cameras, especially the manual film advance feature, so you will want to take time to show the class how to use a camera.
- 6) Have extra film on hand.
- 7) Some students may be absent and not get the opportunity to take pictures. If that happens, send them out on a pass to take a few pictures around campus. The students have a greater interest in the process if they have taken some pictures.
- 8) Anticipate that at least one camera will get lost, stolen, or broken.
- 9) If you tell the company or person processing the film that you are a teacher and need the film developed for a school project, you may be able to get a discount on the cost of developing.
- 10) You can vary the number of pictures each student takes, especially if you are doing this assignment with more than one class.

- The following instructions are given to each student along with a camera:

Directions: Take 8 pictures of your neighborhood. Take 4 pictures that represent positive things in your community. Take 4 pictures that represent negative things in your community.

For example:

Positive things might include gardens, flowers, clean cars, new houses, people raking leaves or sweeping, two people walking hand-in-hand, etc. Think about what makes you feel good about your neighborhood or school.

Negative things might include empty lots with trash in them, abandoned cars, gang graffiti and or tagging, etc. Think about what makes you feel upset, frustrated, or disappointed about your neighborhood or school.

You can take a picture of a large area like an entire street, or you can zoom in on just one small thing like a broken fence or a shiny wheel.

Bring the cameras back when we return to class on _____. Have fun and be creative!

- My students had two school days and a weekend to take the pictures.
- After one group of students returns the cameras, distribute them to the second and then the third group, on so on until they have all had an opportunity to take pictures.
- Once students have taken pictures, collect the cameras and have the film developed.

Note: If you take the film in on a Friday, you will have it back by Monday. If, however, this doesn't work out, there are still plenty of reading and writing assignments here to work on with the students.

- Bring pictures to class and put students into groups of 4-5.
 - Give each group a stack of pictures (one roll's worth), and let them know that their job is to decide whether each picture represents something positive, negative, or both.
 - While still in their groups, students create a collage of the pictures, organizing them into positive, negative, or both categories. Students are given a class period (one hour) to do this part of the assignment. You will hear lots of analytical discussion, especially when students try to decide if certain pictures could represent both positive and negative things. For example, a "Say No to Drugs" sign could be positive because it is advertising a good message, but it could be negative because the sign is needed.
 - Later in the period, or the next class meeting, ask each group to stand before the class and explain the grouping of their pictures. Students are not required to do any writing...yet.
 - After each group shares their poster, ask students to develop a list of problems in their school and neighborhoods, using the pictures as an impetus for their ideas. Students share their ideas with the class while the teacher lists the responses on the overhead.

❑ **Reading and writing about problem solvers:**

- While students are taking pictures for homework and then creating the collages, we continue to do the related reading and writing assignments that follow:
 - Students respond to a journal topic about being positive and negative influences.

Journal topics:

Read the topics and write 4-5 sentences for each event you write about.

Briefly write about two different times you have had a positive influence on someone (this can include yourself).

Briefly write about two different times you have had a negative influence on someone (this can include yourself).

Examples/suggestions:

+ A time you encouraged someone to do or say something

+ A time you were a good role model

- A time you discouraged someone from taking action, doing their homework, doing the right thing, etc.

- A time you convinced yourself to put off what you need to do

- Students read a variety of articles about local people who are taking on problems and taking action to make things better.
 - Students read these articles both in class and for homework.
 - ✧ In class, read an article aloud and discuss the problems, the causes and effects, and any solutions that are offered by the writer. Brainstorm other possible solutions. These discussions model for students the kinds of information writers include when identifying and analyzing problems. Asking students for additional solutions puts them in the role of problem-solvers.
- Each night, students are given an article to read for homework. Along with each article, students respond to questions related to the content.
- Below is an example of the questions related to three of the articles. The questions focus on problems, causes, effects, and solutions.

Article: “Bundle in Pink Carries Incentive to Live Right”

Read and respond to the following questions.

- 1) List below the problems and obstacles Alysha McLean faced in her life.
- 2) What event occurred that made her want to change her life?
- 3) What did McLean do to change her life in positive ways? What actions did she take?
- 4) What outside influences and assistance has McLean had to help her positively change her life?
- 5) What are her goals in life?

Article: “Stepping up to repair homes”

- 1) What is the problem that the article addresses?
- 2) Who and/or what caused the problem?
- 3) Who is addressing the problem? In what ways? What solutions are being used?

Article: “People: dog lover, 13, has his day”

- 1) What is the problem discussed in the article?
- 2) Who and/or what caused the problem?
- 3) Who is addressing the problem? In what ways? What solutions are being used?

Note: Rather than alphabetically, the articles below are listed in the order in which they were assigned.

Article titles:

- “Bundle in Pink Carries Incentive to Live Right,” *The Sacramento Bee*
- “The Spirit of Giving,” *Grant Today*
- “Saving Lives...One Pint at a Time,” *Grant Today*
- “Students Help Keep Kids Warm,” *Grant Today*
- “Hagginwood and Grant – a Winning Team,” *The Sacramento Bee*
- “Oak Park Cleanup Begins Effort to Reclaim Area From Crime, Drugs,” *The Sacramento Bee*
- “Stepping Up to Repair Homes,” *The Sacramento Bee*
- “Foothill Farms Dog Lover Has His Day,” *The Sacramento Bee*
- “Day of Civic Service Honors King’s Ideals,” *The Sacramento Bee*
- “Come On, It’s Your Turn,” *Newsweek*

Note: I try to find news features or commentaries that are archived on websites and are either inexpensive or free to download.

- In addition to reading the articles and responding to questions, ask students to highlight the description of the problem in one color and the solution(s) in another color.
 - Doing this highlighting activity for each article will give the teacher the opportunity to talk about text structure, placement of information, etc.

Note: You will be asking students to return to these highlighted articles while they are writing their essays.

❑ **Writing the problem-solution essay:**

- After creating, sharing, and discussing the collages, and reading and discussing the articles, as a class, brainstorm problems students have identified in their school and neighborhood. This list is written on butcher paper and posted on the wall.
 - Students then choose a problem in their school or neighborhood, and for homework, they list what they think are two causes and effects of the problem.
 - When students return with their homework, they begin filling out an outline that helps them to think about the causes, effects, and solutions for a particular problem.

Note: Students have not seen the essay prompt yet. They know they will be writing an essay, but by having them complete the outline first helps them to focus on the content and ideas without being worried about the length and structure of the essay.

Outline worksheets:

<p><u>Thinking through your problem and possible solutions</u></p>
1) What is the problem you are addressing? _____
2) What are three causes for this problem?
Cause #1: _____

Cause #2: _____

Cause #3: _____

3) What are three effects of this problem? (Who and what are affected? In what ways?)
Effect #1: _____

Effect #2: _____

Effect #3: _____

4) What are three possible solutions for this problem?
What is solution #1? _____

Who will this solution most benefit? _____

How much will this solution cost and who will pay for it? _____

How long will this solution take to implement? _____

Who has to be involved, and what do they have to do? _____

What is solution #2? _____

Who will this solution most benefit? _____

How much will this solution cost and who will pay for it? _____

How long will this solution take to implement? _____

Who has to be involved, and what do they have to do? _____

What is solution #3? _____

Who will this solution most benefit? _____

How much will this solution cost and who will pay for it? _____

How long will this solution take to implement? _____

Who has to be involved, and what do they have to do? _____

5) Of the three solutions, # _____ is the best one. Below list three reasons for your choice.

Reason #1: _____

Reason #2: _____

Reason #3: _____

- Students complete a cause and effect, problem-solution outline.
 - Give students time in class to begin working on this outline. Most of them will need to confer with peers or the teacher to come up with the required information.
 - Students complete their outlines for homework.

Note: Most students will not be able to complete all of the outline because they will not know about costs, length of time to implement, and all who may be involved in relation to possible solutions. They'll need additional time to do research.

- In class students share their outlines with a partner.
 - Outline response time is designed so students can get feedback about their description of the problem, the causes and effects, and their possible solutions. The task of the responder is to try to add more details and ideas if necessary. There will be lots of requests for teacher assistance, too.
- After the outlines are completed, hand out the writing prompt.

□ **Problem-Solution Writing Prompt**

Writing Situation:

Problems exist in every community. There are problems of litter, poverty, homelessness, racial tension, apathy, and more. Even at school there are problems like fights, gossip, and truancy.

Writing Prompt:

Write an essay that describes a problem in your school or neighborhood. Explain its causes and effects, and suggest several possible solutions to fix the problem. Finally, choose the solution that you believe is the best one, and explain the reasons for your choice.

- Read through the prompt with the students to make sure they understand the instructions.
 - Hand out highlighters.
 - As the teacher or a student reads the prompt, ask students to highlight each different instruction with a different colored highlighter. This will help students to see what they are being required to include in their essays.
 - Next, ask students to read through their outline and highlight in the same color the information that would meet the demands of each part of the prompt. (Ex: If a student highlights in green “Write an essay that describes a problem in your school or neighborhood” then on the outline, the part that describes the problem should also be highlighted in green. Unmatched colors indicate a need to flesh out the outline in greater depth.)
 - For homework, students begin writing a rough draft of their essay in which they identify a problem, explain the causes and the effects, and provide possible solutions. To add an evaluative component, students choose the best solution and explain in what ways their solution is the best one.
 - Allow students two nights to write their rough drafts.
- Ask students to return to the articles they read and highlighted. Review the text structures and point out the different ways writers organized their ideas. Identify again any causes, effects, problems, solutions, and justification for a particular course of action.
- After reviewing the articles, allow students time to ask for help with their rough drafts.

- Students finish their rough drafts for homework.
- Give students credit for their drafts but don't collect them.
 - Display rough draft samples from former students (or ones that you create yourself) on the overhead while students are looking at copies of their own. Ask students to highlight the problem, causes, effects, solutions, and analysis of solutions all in different colors of highlighters. Do this yourself on the overhead with them.
 - Discuss organization and development.
 - Hand out the scoring rubric and go over it with the students.
 - ✧ Using the rubric to score the essays that were discussed on the overhead, model for the students how you will use the rubric to score their papers. This activity will help students to become familiar with the language of the rubric.
 - Ask students to read each other's drafts and highlight the different parts, just as they did for the essay on the overhead.
 - Peers also write comments in the margins about adding necessary details and score the paper using the rubric.
 - Students then look at their highlighted essays and revise their essays for homework.
 - When students return, they again read and discuss problem-solution essays.
 - ✧ Students read the essays by themselves and highlight the different pieces of information.
 - ✧ Students also write comments about what they thought was effective and what needed work in the essay.
 - ✧ Students form groups of 4 and discuss their responses/comments to the essays and compare highlighted areas.
 - ✧ Class discusses their responses/comments and the structure of each essay.
 - Collect the second rough drafts and write comments for revision.
 - Return the essays and give students time in class to read comments.
 - Place some of the students' drafts on the overhead and ask students to identify the strengths, weaknesses, content, and organization of each essay.
 - Students begin revising their essays and conferencing with the instructor during class time (approximately two class periods).
 - Students revise their essays and write a final draft.

□ Assessment

Note: Below is a copy of the rubric you can use when you score their papers. You may want to revise it to fit your needs. It still needs some revision.

Problem-Solution Essay Scoring Rubric

Description	Needs improvement	Fair	Good	Excellent
Introduction: Hooks reader; includes background info. and/or reflections to help reader think about the overall topic of the essay	/34	/39	/44	/50
Thesis statement is narrow enough to focus the essay; clearly states opinion/stand	/6	/7	/8	/10
Includes three different solutions	/6	/7	/8	/10
Includes a description of the problem and related causes and effects	/13	/15	/17	/19
Body paragraphs begin with a focused, narrow topic sentence	/13	/15	/17	/19
Each point has evidence (an example) (personal/observational/textual)	/27	/31	/35	/40
Analysis of each piece of evidence	/27	/31	/35	/40
Chooses one solution and justifies choice	/13	/15	/17	/19
Essay ends with a conclusion that restates the thesis/main idea and does not introduce any new information.	/27	/31	/35	/40
Overall persuasiveness of essay (effectiveness of evidence and analysis)	/34	/39	/44	/50
Overall organization is easy to follow	/34	/39	/44	/50
Grammar focus: <u>Subject/verb agreement</u>	/13	/15	/17	/20
Overall punctuation and grammar are reasonably controlled (capitalization, commas, spelling, word choice, etc.)	/13	/15	/17	/20
Reflects appropriate manuscript requirements (length, spacing, etc.)	/18			/30

Comments:

TOTAL: /

Student Samples

A terrible problem is becoming more common between teens: street racing is killing more and more of our teens now than ever. Street racing became popular in the 40's and 50's and has become even more popular with teens in today's society. If street racing is not stopped, the statistics for teen deaths may possibly become higher than teen deaths caused by drivers under the influence of a controlled substance. So, we as a community need to help stop street racing for any reasons.

Street racing should be stopped due to the fact that street racing can cause people to get hurt. When people street race whether it is for fun or not, innocent people as well as the people driving can get hurt. For example, about a year ago two teenagers and a teenage passenger decided to race down the street I live on. Things got out of control, and one of the teenagers got hurt. Also, my neighbor across the street was lucky because if she had been out doing yard work or something, she may have also been seriously injured or possibly killed when the car crashed into her yard. Street racing has serious effects and causing injury is one. If street racing is not stopped more people, including the racers, could be seriously injured.

In addition, street racing should be stopped because it is another one of the main causes of teen deaths in America. Street racing has caused many deaths and if it is not stopped many more people will continue to die. Statistics in an Internet article, Teen Driver Safety Series Part Two: Risk Factors for New Drivers, by Scott Memmer, show that "In 1997, according to NHTSA, almost a quarter (22 percent) of Americans who died in speed-related crashes were youth (15-20). And yet they represent just 6 percent of the total driving population." Besides these statistics I have seen a death occur from street racing. As I stated before, there were two teenagers driving and another teenage passenger inside one of the cars. The passenger didn't know what was going on until it was too late. As things got out of control the two cars collided, one swerved and got away, the other car with the passenger swerved onto the sidewalk, skidded across my neighbor's yard, and hit her tree. When the car impacted it split the car in half, flew the passenger about 60 feet, which ultimately cause her death. This shows that if street racing is not stopped more innocent people, including the racers, can or will be killed. With these facts in mind and probably more in mind, street racing should definitely be stopped.

Some solutions that have been found to stop or could be used to stop street racing are speed bumps, hidden traffic cameras, closing old empty lots or spaces that can be used for street racing, and providing more police services. The first solution, speed bumps, has been found to work in stopping some street racers. For example, after the fatal street racing incident the city decided to put in speed bumps all down my street. Since then, no street racing has occurred. Though speed bumps may work, the cost of putting them in is one disadvantage that may stand in the way. Speed bumps run up to \$1000 to \$1500 each. The cost may be a disadvantage but the fact remains that they have been found to work in stopping street racing.

The second solution is to put in more hidden traffic cameras in place such as main streets that racers may have been spotted on and possibly residential streets where street racing has been known to occur. In doing this the police who have been tracking street racers down can have more information such as pictures, license numbers, and the amount of people known to hang out in the places where street racing has occurred. In addition, with this information the police can go to these places and stop the racing possibly before it even happens. If not that then the police can pick up the street racers whose photos they have from the cameras. Though hidden cameras may work, the cost of putting them in is also another disadvantage that may stand in the way. Putting in these cameras will cost about an average of \$50,000 a piece. This cost may also be a disadvantage but the benefit of having the hidden cameras is a big step up from the "anonymous tips" that the police rely on to help them stop street racing.

The third solution is to close down old empty lots or spaces that were used for street racing. This would help in stopping street racers because it could limit the places where street racers can race. If street racers had limited places to race, then it may possibly slow street racing down or stop it completely. The disadvantage to this is also the cost of either putting up fences or bulldozing the building and closing it up with fences. The cost of demolishing the buildings, workers' fees and the interest on that money, the cost can range from \$130,000 to \$974,468. As costly as it may be, the advantage to this is limiting and possibly even stopping street racing altogether.

The fourth solution is to provide more police services. This could pose a threat and possibly stop street racers. If more police services are provided more accidents and deaths could be stopped. For example, if we had had a patrol car going up and down the streets I live on the day the street racing incident occurred, then the race wouldn't have happened, and the death of the teenage passenger wouldn't have happened. The disadvantages to this are the cost of paying extra for police patrols put out to watch for street racing, the fact that not enough police services may be available, and the fact that police have to then to more important emergencies that are higher priority. In addition, in our society today a lot of people are not intimidated by police, but being teenagers it may have an effect on them when they see the police. Though this may be, it would be a little bit of a benefit to have more police services to help crack down on street racers.

With all these solutions and possibly more in mind, there is a lot we can do to help stop street racing. Street racing has become increasingly popular, but at the same time, it has been becoming one of the leading causes of deaths in America. If street racing is not stopped more and more deaths of teens will start to increase, as well as those of innocent people caught in the crossfire.

By Brandy

In Our Neighborhood... (rough draft)

In our neighborhood we have a very serious, dirty problem. Careless people seem to love to live in trash because in the middle of the night someone always seems to leave us a big surprise—a pile of trash in the back street. These are people who only care for themselves and don't want to pay for the dump fee. It affects the whole community because it makes us look dirty and careless, as well. At times it even affects small children. They are not able to play in that area because parents are afraid they might find unwanted things such as needles or other dangerous objects.

Another cause for this problem is people not taking responsibility as adults and taking advantage of people who care about their's. The street no longer looks taken care of because neighbors are tired of cleaning after others who don't care, and good people who would have moved in to make the neighborhood better now won't move in because of the appearance of the streets.

For this problem, we should all help in what ever way we can. For example, we can start by cleaning up after ourselves. That way we show that we care and that even though it isn't enough, we're doing our part in solving this problem. This of course wouldn't cost so much, seeing that it is volunteer work. We would all get our reward when people see our clean and well taken care of homes and streets.

A secondary solution is to put up more street lamps to light the shadows. This would prevent not only people who litter but also those who also do drugs. They would have nowhere to hide, so they would leave. There is a problem with this solution though. The cost of this operation would

cost thousands, too much for only a couple of people to pay. But in my opinion this is the best solution.

This disgusting problem is becoming a huge embarrassment for some and habit for others. Another way to solve this would be to have better or more law enforcement. Although this would probably take raising taxes, it would be worth it to prevent useless people from trashing our streets.

This to me is a serious problem, one that we should all be embarrassed about because our community never does anything about it. Yet, we always complain. What we should do is actually do something about it and make our lives as clean and as easy as we can.

By Angel

Recommended Instructional Resources

- ❑ Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. New York: First Vintage Contemporaries, 1984.
- ❑ Creamer, Anita. "Bundle in Pink Carries Incentive to Live Right." *The Sacramento Bee* 30, Nov. 2003: L1+.
- ❑ Davis, Regina. "The Spirit of Giving." *Grant Today*. December 2003
<http://www.grant.k12.ca.us/Communications/Stories/dEC-2003/TheSpiritOfGiving.htm>
- ❑ Davis, Regina. "Saving Lives...One Pint at a Time." *Grant Today*. December 2003
<http://www.grant.k12.ca.us/Communications/Stories/dEC-2003/SavingLives.htm>
- ❑ Davis, Regina. "Students Help Keep Kids Warm." *Grant Today*. January 2004
<http://www.grant.k12.ca.us/Communications/Stories/jAN2004/StudentsHelpKeepKidsWarm.htm>
- ❑ Furillo, Andy. "Oak Park Cleanup Begins Effort to Reclaim Area from Crime, Drugs." *The Sacramento Bee* 14, Dec. 2003: B1+.
- ❑ "Hagginwood and Grant – a Winning Team." *The Sacramento Bee* 24, Dec. 1990: D2.
- ❑ Lau, Edie. "Day of Civic Service Honors King's Ideals." *The Sacramento Bee* 20, Jan. 2004: B1+.
- ❑ Minugh, Kim. "Foothill Farms Dog Lover Has His Day." *The Sacramento Bee* 4, Dec. 2003: G2+.
- ❑ Norris, Frank. *McTeague*. New York: Penguin Publishing, 1982.
- ❑ Rindfleisch Granville, Julie. "Come On, It's Your Turn." *Newsweek* 8, July 1996: 30
- ❑ "Stepping Up to Repair Homes." *The Sacramento Bee* 17, Nov. 2003: BD3+.

Note: You can download the articles from the *The Sacramento Bee* for a \$2.95 charge by going to <http://www.sacbee.com/static/live/search/>

Recommended Professional Resources:

- ❑ *High School Handbook*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. 1995.
- ❑ Moffett, James. *Active Voice: A Writing Program Across the Curriculum*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook-Heinemann Publishers, 1992.
- ❑ Wilhelm, Jeffrey D., Tanya N. Baker, and Julie Dube Hackett. *Strategic Reading: Guiding Students to Lifelong Literacy, 6-12*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers-Heinemann, 2002.

Online Professional Resources: *CAP 8 Writing Guides: Problem Solution* /download at:
<http://californiawritingproject.org/Teachers/resources.html>

About the Teacher Consultant

Brooke Nicolls teaches English at Grant Union High School in Sacramento, California. She is an Associate Director with the Area 3 Writing Project and presents workshops on expository reading and writing. She has participated in the NWP Focus on Standards teacher research project and in the CWP Improving Students' Academic Writing evaluation study. She also participates in the annual UC System-wide Subject A scoring sessions and earned her National Board Certification in 2003.

American Dream Questionnaire

Directions: Read the questions below and write your responses in complete sentences.

- 1) What is your definition of the American dream?

- 2) How different or similar do you think your American dream is from most other U.S. teens your age?

- 3) When people achieve the American dream, what material things do they own?

- 4) When people achieve the American dream, what kinds of things are they able to do?

- 5) In what way(s) is the American dream of people your age similar to and different from that of people your parents' age?

- 6) In what way(s), if any, is a person's definition of the American dream influenced by ethnicity and/or gender?

Neighborhood picture assignment

Directions: Take 8 pictures of your neighborhood. Take 4 pictures that represent positive things in your community. Take 4 pictures that represent negative things in your community.

For example:

Positive things might include gardens, flowers, clean cars, new houses, people raking leaves or sweeping, two people walking hand-in-hand, etc. Think about what makes you feel good about your neighborhood or school.

Negative things might include empty lots with trash in them, abandoned cars, gang graffiti and or tagging, etc. Think about what makes you feel upset, frustrated, or disappointed about your neighborhood or school.

You can take a picture of a large area like an entire street, or you can zoom in on just one small thing like a broken fence or a shiny wheel.

Bring the cameras back when we return to class on _____. Have fun and be creative!

Thinking through your problem and possible solutions

1) What is the problem you are addressing? _____

2) What are three causes for this problem?

Cause #1: _____

Cause #2: _____

Cause #3: _____

3) What are three effects of this problem? (Who and what are affected? In what ways?)

Effect #1: _____

Effect #2: _____

Effect #3: _____

4) What are three possible solutions for this problem?

What is solution #1? _____

Who will this solution most benefit? _____

How much will this solution cost and who will pay for it? _____

How long will this solution take to implement? _____

Who has to be involved, and what do they have to do? _____

What is solution #2? _____

Who will this solution most benefit? _____

How much will this solution cost and who will pay for it? _____

How long will this solution take to implement? _____

Who has to be involved, and what do they have to do? _____

What is solution #3? _____

Who will this solution most benefit? _____

How much will this solution cost and who will pay for it? _____

How long will this solution take to implement? _____

Who has to be involved, and what do they have to do? _____

5) Of the three solutions, # _____ is the best one. Below list three reasons for your choice.

Reason #1: _____

Reason #2 _____

Reason #3: _____