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# Explain Yourself: An Expository Writing Unit for High School

Adele Barnett  
Trinity University

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# UNDERSTANDING BY DESIGN

## Unit Cover Page

Unit Title: Explain Yourself: An Expository Writing Unit for High School

Grade Level: 9/10

Subject/Topic Area(s): English Language Arts—Expository Writing

Designed By: Adele Barnett

Time Frame: 3 weeks

School District: KIPP San Antonio

School: KIPP University Prep High School

School Address and Phone: 319 E. Mulberry, San Antonio, TX 78212; (210) 290-8720

### **Brief Summary of Unit** (Including curricular context and unit goals):

This unit was designed for a class of struggling readers and writers with the short term goal of preparing them for the reading and expository essay portions of the STAAR End of Course exam. It could easily be adapted (by differentiated texts or levels of scaffolding) for either middle school or more advanced courses in high school. The longer term goal, beyond the EOC, is to help build their confidence and skill as readers and writers. This unit has them write in the expository mode while making connections to their own lives and experiences. Because of their previous writing experiences in school, students tend to enter high school most comfortable with the narrative mode of writing, and often struggle with the more formal genres such as expository writing. This unit uses that prior knowledge as a bridge to the types of writing that often prove more challenging. The overarching goal of this unit is to have students learn to write an effective expository essay that will allow them to be successful on the EOC exam, while learning more about themselves and their classmates.

## Explain Yourself! An Expository Writing UbD for High School

Stage 1 – Desired Results		
Established Goals (See Common Core Standards Table below)	<b>Transfer</b>	
	<i>Students will independently use their learning to...</i> Write an expository essay that conveys something important to their identity	
	<b>Meaning</b>	
	<b>Understandings</b> <i>Students will understand that...</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing to explain requires confident tone, specific word choice and clear organization.</li> <li>By improving our writing, we can better understand our identity by communicating our beliefs, values, and priorities.</li> <li>Expository writing is used by professional writers to convey information about themselves to their audiences.</li> </ul>	<b>Essential Questions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do writers use language and structure to explain their ideas?</li> <li>Why is “writing to explain” important to high school students?</li> <li>How do professional writers explain who they are to their readers?</li> </ul>
<b>Acquisition</b>		
<b>Knowledge</b> <i>Students will know...</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Definition and purpose of expository writing</li> <li>Definition of “implication” and “significance”</li> <li>Ways that expository writing is used by professional writers</li> </ul>	<b>Skills</b> <i>Students will be able to...</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze structure of a mentor text</li> <li>Write an effective thesis statement</li> <li>Write effective short-answer response to a text-based critical thinking question incorporating textual evidence</li> <li>Explain what is of value to them by writing an expository essay that connects to their own personal experience</li> </ul>	
Stage 2 – Evidence		
CODE (M or T)	Evaluative Criteria (for rubric)	
		Performance Task(s) <i>Students will demonstrate meaning-making and transfer by...</i> Writing an expository essay that explains one of their beliefs, values, or priorities.
		Other Evidence (e.g., formative) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Short answer response to an inference question with textual evidence cited.</li> <li>Create a “skeleton” essay from a mentor text—a devolved essay where all ideas are present but none developed.</li> <li>Objective summary of mentor text</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Essay plan + thesis statement</li> <li>• Development of ideas plan and paragraph</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 3 – Learning Plan</b>		
<b>CODE</b> (A, M, T)	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Pre-Assessment</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>How will you check students' prior knowledge, skill levels, and potential misconceptions?</i></p> <p>Ask students individually to write down what they've previously learned about the following terms: expository writing, thesis statement, transitions. Students will then share responses with the class.</p>	
	<p><b>Learning Activities</b></p> <p>Lesson 1: Idea workshop—Students will review the concept of expository writing (activate prior knowledge) and be introduced to the essential questions of the unit. Use handprint activity (Bernabei) or other to help students identify and then narrow in on what their beliefs, values, and priorities are and which they would most like to focus on in their writing during this unit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce and generally discuss all <b>essential questions</b> this day. They will be posted to easy reference.</li> </ul> <p>Lesson 2: Inference and short answer response--Students will read and analyze an expository text from a professional author (maybe have more than one option at different reading levels or about different topics for differentiation). <b>EQ focus:</b> <i>How do professional writers explain who they are to their readers?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mini-lesson on inference.</li> <li>• Students will make inferences about the values, beliefs, or priorities of the author based on the text</li> <li>• Mini-lesson on incorporating textual evidence</li> <li>• Provide model of sufficient explanation of text evidence (clarify, interpret, connect)</li> </ul> <p>Lesson 3: Idea development--Students will examine how professional authors develop a single idea throughout a text. <b>EQ focus:</b> <i>How do professional writers explain who they are to their readers?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mini-lesson: types of evidence (data, example, expert, text reference, anecdote)</li> <li>• Students will identify the types of evidence used by the author</li> <li>• Students will “devolve” the essay, taking out the evidence and its explanations and draw conclusions about the importance of these</li> </ul>	<p>Progress Monitoring (e.g., formative data)</p> <p>-Exit Ticket: list three “things about yourself—belief, value, priority</p> <p>-Inferences handout -OER with textual evidence</p> <p>-Evidence identification activity (handout/worksheet) -devolved essay + exit ticket: What’s the importance the elements you removed to an author’s writing?</p>

	<p>elements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggested text: “Chocolate Equals Love” by Diane Ackerman</li> </ul> <p>Lesson 4: Objective summary and structural analysis— Students will be able to identify the major thesis or claim of a text, explain how it is organized, and produce an objective summary. <b>EQ focus:</b> <i>How do writers use language and structure to explain their ideas?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independently, devolve additional mentor text (create backwards outline)</li> <li>• Use outline to make inferences about how the author organizes and orders his/her ideas. Model with piece read on previous day</li> <li>• Mini lesson on objective vs. subjective interpretation (“it says”/ “I say” examples)</li> <li>• Suggested text: “Runner” by Laura McLaurin</li> </ul> <p>Lesson 5: Thesis statements—students will review what they have previously learned about writing thesis statements; identify examples and non-examples, and write thesis statements for their own essays. <b>EQ focus:</b> <i>Why is “writing to explain” important to high school students?</i></p> <p>Lesson 6: Logic and transitions—Students will be able to see the connections between an author’s ideas and create a resource for themselves of ways to transition between ideas in paragraphs. <b>EQ focus:</b> <i>How do writers use language and structure to explain their ideas?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships determined by complex sentences</li> <li>• Moving from connecting paragraphs with transition words to connecting ideas</li> <li>• Start some of their own writing using ideas generated in Lesson One and make decisions about structure and transitions (pre-writing)</li> </ul> <p>Lesson 7: Development of ideas revisited—Students will review what they learned about types of evidence when examining another author’s writing. <b>EQ focus:</b> <i>Why is “writing to explain” important to high school students?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide students a model thesis and have the class generate questions that would lead the author of that thesis to the appropriate evidence to prove it</li> <li>• In pairs or small groups, have students share their thesis statements and ask one another similar questions to create a list of the possible types of evidence needed in their essay.</li> <li>• Students will come up with evidence for their essay</li> </ul>	<p>-2<sup>nd</sup> devolved text -Structural analysis -Objective summary</p> <p>-Thesis statements</p> <p>-Transition practice with sentences provided by teacher -Complete pre-writing template (structured outline)</p> <p>-Informal checks for understanding through evaluating questions generated by class -Evidence list -Fully developed body paragraph including evidence</p>
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	<p>in all categories (data, example, anecdote) and choose one to go through the process of thoroughly explaining (use clarify, interpret, connect model or adaptation as appropriate), resulting in one full body paragraph.</p> <p>Lesson 8: Conclusions—Students will be able to write effective conclusions that communicate the significance or implications of their topic. <b>EQ focus:</b> <i>How do writers use language and structure to explain their ideas?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze conclusions of multiple professional pieces</li> <li>Define “significance” and “implication” and practice by applying to areas outside</li> </ul> <p>Other experiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing workshop days (roughly 2-3 days, some being half days)</li> <li>Peer review (1 day)</li> <li>Culminating sharing activity of final products (or some piece that they are willing to share). <b>EQ focus:</b> <i>Why is “writing to explain” important to high school students?</i></li> <li>Inferencing/short answer test to assess reading skills taught during unit</li> </ul>	<p>-significance and implication practice (whole class, small group, individual) -Conclusion paragraph</p>
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### Common Core Standards Table

Standard	Relevant Learning activities	Student product or experience (assessment)
<p><b>Reading:</b> Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inferencing lesson</li> <li>Citation lesson</li> <li>Short-answer responses including textual evidence</li> </ul>	<p>Short answer response to an inference question with textual evidence cited.</p>
<p><b>Reading:</b> Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze how single idea is developed through details</li> <li>Objective summary (distinguish objective vs. subjective)</li> </ul>	<p>Complete and analysis and an objective summary of a mentor text</p> <p>Complete an analysis and an objective summary of a peer’s essay</p>

<p><b>Reading:</b> Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze structure including internal connection and transitions</li> </ul>	<p>Structural analysis of a mentor text (guided by scaffolding and then in a short-answer format)</p>
<p><b>Writing:</b> Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan for writing including introduction, order of ideas/paragraphs, and transitions</li> </ul>	<p>Graphic organizer/pre-writing template</p>
<p><b>Writing:</b> Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write effective thesis statement</li> <li>Determine the facts, definitions, and details necessary to explain central idea</li> </ul>	<p>Thesis statement</p> <p>Topic sentence/claim + evidence chart</p>
<p><b>Writing:</b> Use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze and create transitions between ideas and paragraphs (beyond "first," "another," etc.)</li> </ul>	<p>Transition analysis (maybe part of structural analysis)</p> <p>Plan first and last sentences of paragraphs (enhanced pre-writing template)</p>
<p><b>Writing:</b> Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define implications and significance.</li> <li>Practice articulating significance on ideas unrelated to topic essay</li> </ul>	<p>Write a conclusion paragraph for a sample essay and for your own.</p>

## Explain Yourself!

**Summary:** The first major SUMMATIVE assessment<sup>1</sup> of this nine-weeks will be an expository essay that you write about...yourself! The prompt for this essay is in the box below.

Write an essay **explaining** one of your values, beliefs, or priorities.

**Focus:** The learning in this unit will help us explore these **Essential Questions**:

1. *Why is “writing to explain” important to high school students?*
2. *How do writers use language and structure to explain their ideas?*
3. *How do professional writers explain who they are to their readers?*

In order to help you explore these questions, you will do the following:

- Examine how professional authors explain facts about their own lives
- Learn about the best ways to structure an expository essay
- Practice how to fully develop ideas in your writing
- Practice, practice, and practice writing effective thesis statements

As the result of these experiences, you will be prepared to write an expository essay that uses the **strategies of effective** writing and tells your audience more about **who you are**.

**Reminders:** Use the checklist below to make sure you have all of the required elements in your final essay:

- Essay is typed, double-spaced, and has proper MLA heading, title, and formatting
- Essay is 2-3 pages in length
- Essay is divided into paragraphs and each body paragraph contains evidence and explanations
- Final draft is turned in with all previous drafts, feedback, and rubric attached.

**Assessment:** Your essay will be evaluated according to an adapted version of the STAAR EOC Rubric for expository essays (see back of this page). The categories of **Organization** and **Development of Ideas** will count the most for grading purposes.

**Final Draft Due**

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

## One Page Expository Rubric<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Summative Assessment: An assignment that requires you to use everything you've learned in a particular unit. SUMS up the knowledge and skills you've practiced. A major grade. Like a test.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from TEA STAAR EOC Expository Rubric



<p><b>ONE (NEEDS A LOT OF WORK)☹</b></p> <p>Organization/Progression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> No paragraphs or organization</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Thesis statement is missing, unclear, or doesn't make sense</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Does not stay focused on topic</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> No connections between sentences or paragraphs</li> </ul> <p>Development of ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Details and examples don't make sense or don't relate to the topic</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Writer does not seem to understand the prompt</li> </ul> <p>Use of language/conventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Many words are used incorrectly or are very vague</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Tons of mistakes in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar</li> </ul>	<p><b>TWO (NEEDS WORK)☹☹</b></p> <p>Organization/Progression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Essay is not always clear. Paragraphs and sentences are disorganized.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Some ideas and information do not relate to topic</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Thesis is weak or hard to understand</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Choppy transitions between sentences and paragraphs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Repetitive or wordy</li> </ul> <p>Development of ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Does not explain ideas well</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Essay is unoriginal</li> </ul> <p>Use of language/conventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Some words are used incorrectly</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Uses many vague words (like "thing," "it," "good," etc.)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Many mistakes in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar</li> </ul>
<p><b>THREE (PRETTY GOOD) ☺☺☺</b></p> <p>Organization/Progression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Order of paragraphs and sentences makes sense</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Clear thesis</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ideas related to thesis</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sentences and paragraphs connected to each other with transitions</li> </ul> <p>Development of Ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Details and examples back up thesis</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Response is original</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ideas are explained</li> </ul> <p>Use of language/conventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Words and sentences are accurate</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Word choice creates appropriate tone</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Mostly correct spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar</li> </ul>	<p><b>FOUR (AWESOME!) ☺☺☺☺</b></p> <p>Organization/Progression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Order of paragraphs and sentences makes sense and creates a great essay</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Clear thesis</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> All ideas strongly relate to thesis</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Essay makes sense and all parts go together</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sentences and paragraphs are connected to each other with smooth transitions</li> </ul> <p>Development of Ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Specific details and examples back up thesis well</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Essay is interesting to read</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> All ideas are explained well</li> </ul> <p>Use of language/conventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Words and sentences are accurate and powerful</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Word choice creates appropriate tone (it's formal if it needs to be formal)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Correct spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar</li> </ul>