

Grade 8

Unit 8A: World War II & Narrative

Unit brief:

Why start an ELA unit that focuses on close reading by writing about your own experience? Because writing is an easier way for students to learn one of the most fundamental habits of mind they'll need in order to be good close readers: the power to pay attention to details.

As writers, students need to get used to focusing on the details of their experience. They need to look at an ordinary gym class so closely that they can see the small, strange moments that it's made of. And then they need to *stick with* one of these moments: to linger on just one detail and unpack it, to look at it some more and see what else is there, before moving on to the next thing. It's this kind of close, careful attention that turns an ordinary gym class into something special, not just a block of blank time that's part of every day.

As readers, too, students need practice focusing on a single detail and sticking with it: writing just a few more sentences about what they see happening and what they think about it—even when they may feel like they've said all there is to say.

And in order to practice this close attention as writers and as readers, our students need to learn to start believing that the things they think are interesting *are important*. They need to learn to trust that what they notice *matters*—that the one detail that catches their attention and stands out from among all the other details, is worth paying attention to. We help them build this confidence by showing our students that the details they focus on, when writing or reading, are interesting to us. When we ask why they chose to zoom in on *this* scene instead of *that* (or this passage, or this phrase, or this word), our students learn to pay closer attention to what they read—and start believing that they can come up with their own ideas about it.

Sub-unit 1: Get Started

In these 10 lessons students write about their own experiences: observing and writing about specific details in their lives and using low-stakes writing practice to hone the skills of Focus and Showing in their writing.

Sub-unit 2: *Going Solo* by Roald Dahl

Best known for a wonderful series of children's novels that include *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *James and the Giant Peach*, and *Matilda*, Roald Dahl also wrote several memoirs that are similarly full of vivid characters, fantastic settings, and thrilling events. *Going Solo* picks up Dahl's story where *Boy* (the first of his memoirs) left off, and divides its time between two parts of the writer's early life: his time in East Africa working for Shell Oil, and in the Royal Air Force, flying a fighter plane in Greece during the early years of World War II.

Throughout, Dahl's memoir is filled with sharp descriptions of the people he meets (the "Empire-building" Brits who oversee vast plantations, and the native-born Africans who work for them); the extraordinary animals he encounters (snakes, giraffes, lions...); and the exotic lands he moves through (Africa, Egypt, Greece, Israel, and finally, back home to Britain).

Dahl's memoir is, of course, very different from his fantastic fairy tales—there are no witches or giants, and none of the animals talk—but it is similarly vivid, and each of the unit's lessons taps into the excitement of Dahl's stories to draw students into the text.

Unit 8B: Biography & Literature

Unit brief:

The Biography & Literature unit stars Benjamin Franklin, the Founding Father who helped define not only American government but also American character. Students explore how Franklin used language to continually reinvent himself, his community, and his understanding of the world. Most lessons include excerpts of Franklin's writing—from his autobiography, his published writings, and his correspondence—as well as commentary and analysis from Walter Isaacson's *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*.

Throughout the unit, students will use annotation and word webbing to unpack the layers of meaning in language, and they'll conclude most lessons with an analytic writing assignment. The readings present many different sides of Franklin, and students will start to notice connections between readings as the unit progresses. All of the in-class readings are accompanied by audio recordings to help students comprehend these challenging texts.

The unit culminates in an essay in which students explore two sides of the multi-faceted Franklin and explain how it is that he embodied both aspects. Students will complete all of their writing assignments for this unit in the Loom: an app that allows them to weave together ideas from up to three different sources in a single writing assignment.

Sub-unit 1: Benjamin Franklin

Students begin the Benjamin Franklin sub-unit with a look at how Franklin is fondly remembered: a man who remained down-to-earth while achieving extraordinary accomplishments. They then begin their study of Franklin's use of language by analyzing the finely tuned wit he displayed in the letters of Silence Dogood and the deliberately unthreatening argumentative style he honed after adopting the Socratic method. Next, students learn about Franklin's penchant for mutual improvement by studying two of his civic improvement schemes. They investigate the practicality Franklin displayed in his scientific work and consider how a similarly realistic approach to diplomacy made him such an effective statesman. Students wrap up the Benjamin Franklin sub-unit by examining how he structured his autobiography, and they engage in some playful partner work to take stock of what they've learned before applying it in the Declaration of Independence and Write an Essay sub-units.

Sub-unit 2: Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson

In the Declaration of Independence sub-unit, students closely read the first two paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence and write about whether key phrases sound like Franklin's handiwork. After paraphrasing the intentions declared by the document's drafters, students carefully analyze specific words and short phrases—such as “self-evident,” “created equal,” and “unalienable rights”—and examine how one of the most celebrated sentences in history changed over multiple revisions.

Unit 8C: Liberty & Equality**Unit brief:**

In this unit, students will explore how writers, particularly Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln, can use words to reshape society's understanding of long-held assumptions. Ben Franklin, Douglass and Lincoln were men of social and political action, but it is for their words that they are remembered and it is those words that suggested the most shocking innovations about new ways that humankind can interact.

This eighth grade year is about looking at the insights of some of humanity's great politicians, artists and scientists on how the world could be different—and trying to understand exactly what shift they saw—and how they were able to see it. We put those insights into historical context to keep reminding ourselves just how extraordinary some of those insights were at the time. Just as we are tempted to take for granted our most amazing scientific advances, we do so also with extreme shifts in social organization. (e.g., In the last units, we saw the shift in understanding that lightning is made of electricity and is not from a supernatural force or, in the next unit, the insight from looking at a loom that binary numbers can be used to express art.) Reading closely Lincoln's and Douglass's observations and aspirations at these moments of extreme change, students will see how they use language to show their readers a world that no one else could see—and thus, make it possible for people to act in ways that they had, up to that point, not imagined were possible.

Of course, what is so extraordinary about these texts, is that even though as contemporary readers, we approach them in moments outside of the historical context in which they were written, we can still feel their ground-shaking impact. The language of these texts is so powerful, that given a little time and a little help from some intensive instructional practices (paraphrasing), some multi-media (dramatic readings and animations), and some opportunities to write and get feedback, your students should finish this unit with an understanding of Douglass and Lincoln as brilliant inventors, as imaginative and groundbreaking as any scientist or engineer.

In order to appreciate these writers' accomplishments, students will work on their paraphrasing skills, which will help them understand the complex text. They will and also be able to describe the stylistic choices the writers have made. Particularly in reading Douglass, they will have the opportunity to look at a variety of different strategies that he uses to help the reader see the world in the unique way that he sees it. The Douglass lessons dig deep into paraphrasing tactics to make sure each and every student feels confident in the practice; paraphrasing sentence by sentence is a quick way for students to uncover subtle differences in their interpretations of a text—and becomes particularly key when reading The Gettysburg Address in the final sub-unit.

Multimedia pieces will help students appreciate the artistic value of these texts. In the case of Douglass' narrative, students will spend time analyzing the dramatic reading of chapter one by actor Chadwick Boseman and the audio reading of the later chapters by actor Reggie D. White. And in the case of The Gettysburg Address, they will compare Adam Gault's animated visual interpretation of the speech to the close reading that they themselves have done. They will also find a dramatic reading from *A Confederate Girl's Diary* by actress Elizabeth Olsen. Each of these multi-media experiences are artistic creations in themselves, expressing the artists' interpretation of the texts, and will help students focus on the aspects of these texts they may have otherwise overlooked. Lessons guide students to go back and forth between the text and the artists' interpretations, wondering what it is in these details of the text that may have inspired these choices and discussing whether or not they agree with them.

This unit is about language—but in order to appreciate the power this language had on society, students do need to learn some history. While reading the texts of the unit and in order to begin to appreciate Douglass's and Lincoln's masterpieces, the lessons help shape the students' sense of the historical context. The lessons supplement the texts with two timelines and three maps and provide simple guidance to the teacher about how to call students' attention to the key information in these images that intersects with the information they can glean from the texts. The two lessons in the Boys' War sub-unit are the most heavily historical, and by the end of that sub-unit, before they move on to read The Gettysburg Address, students should have the following general understandings about the period:

1. Slavery was legal for a long time all over the United States (in the North, too), but many people recognized that it was in conflict with some of our founding documents like the Declaration of Independence and the *Constitution*.
2. Decades before the Civil War, the Northern and Southern states started to have different approaches to slavery and that created many years of conflict.
3. As abolitionists tried to get rid of slavery, supporters of slavery made it even more oppressive for slaves and all black people in this country: the Fugitive Slave Law, Dred Scott Decision.
4. The Civil War was not just about slavery, but about people determining how they wanted to run their own states and about how the country would grow as it expanded west.
5. Slavery was brutal, physically and psychologically. And so were the many years of fighting in the Civil War for Northerners and especially Southerners, because most of the fighting took place in the South. The country became more and more divided the longer the fighting continued.

Sub-unit 1: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass by Frederick Douglass

The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass was first published in 1845, when Douglass was only 27 years old, a mere seven years after he escaped from his life as a slave in the American South. It was an immediate sensation then, for the same reasons it is a classic now: it tells an incredible story with powerful skill. In the Narrative, Douglass tells the story of his life as a slave under several different masters, in a number of different cities and plantations. He describes many individual acts of sadism he witnessed and endured, but the real power of his story is its testimony to the basic erosion of humanity, in both master and slave, wreaked by the system of slavery. As shocking as the facts of slavery are, however, they come to life in the Narrative because of the sophisticated way Douglass presents them. The *Narrative* is a classic not only of anti-slavery writing, but of persuasive writing in general. In reading it students will learn the ugly facts about the slave system, but they will also see a living example of the power of language to change an entire culture. Slaves were forbidden to learn to read and write because slave masters rightly feared the power of their words. In one of the most famous chapters in the *Narrative*, Douglass describes his fight to teach himself to read and write, and the transformation (from victim to powerful agent of change) he underwent as a result. More than 150 years later, our country is still shaped by the consequences of that transformation.

Sub-unit 2: Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl by Harriet Ann Jacobs

Harriet Jacobs' autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, is now recognized as a crucial historical document. In it Jacobs, like Douglass before her, tells the story of being born into and then escaping from a life of slavery. Also like Douglass, she attributes her escape to the transformative power of learning to read and write. Through becoming literate she comes to believe in her right to freedom and becomes capable of securing it. Jacobs self-published her book in 1861, but her authorship was questioned (as was Douglass's), and it was not until 1987 that the book was proven definitively to have been written by her. Once that case was made, *Incidents* became essential reading, a foundational document in American literature. Jacobs' particular contribution to the literature of slavery is her portrait of the vulnerability of female slaves. Her story illustrates the horror of a system in which slave masters preyed on the women who were their legal property. Jacobs's graceful style, as well as her detailed picture of life as an enslaved woman, make *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* indispensable to our understanding of slavery's human cost.

Sub-unit 3: The Boys' War by Jim Murphy

A conservative estimate puts the number of boys younger than 16 who served in the Civil War at 250,000. *The Boys' War* offers students a unique perspective on the Civil War by describing it in the words of those boys. By quoting from the many letters and journals of actual young soldiers the author presents a vivid account of the day-to-day experience of war, from the dismal living quarters, to the fear and homesickness of the boys who ran away to fight in it, to the primitive medical treatments available at the time. In reading *The Boys' War* students will learn about the broad facts of the war, including who fought it and why, in a way that will allow them to think about the toll it took on the people, and especially the children near their own age, who fought in it. The book's account of the soldiers' hardships is an important complement to the whole unit's focus on the ideals and rhetoric of the Civil War. Douglass's and Jacobs's elegant, persuasive narratives show what was at stake in the fight against slavery, and Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" shows the power of words to ignite our moral imagination. By contrast, the plain words of the soldiers, often faulty in their grammar and uncertain in their spelling, remind us that societal change, even in the service of great ideals, often entails suffering and confusion on the way to justice.

Sub-unit 4: The Gettysburg Address by Abraham Lincoln

How many words does it take to describe a nation's moral mission, unite a people around a cause, and create phrases that will become permanent parts of the world's vocabulary? The "Gettysburg Address" is evidence that fewer than 300 will do. When Lincoln delivered his speech on November 19, 1863, he claimed to be dedicating a battlefield to the memory of soldiers who died before it was halfway through. In reality he was speaking to an entire nation exhausted and demoralized by a war lasting years longer than anyone had predicted. Although his words were few, the perfection of their structure reminded the country why the war mattered and gave them the courage to continue fighting it. The Gettysburg Address has remained one of the clearest examples American history has to show that precise and beautiful language has the power to turn ideas into reality. Just as reading and writing allowed Douglass and Jacobs to see themselves not as slaves but as human beings unjustly subjected to bondage, so the story Lincoln told, of a great country founded on principles of justice and equality for all, gave a whole people a way to see themselves and re-commit to their cause.

Unit 8D: Science & Science Fiction**Unit brief:**

The Amplify ELA Science & Science Fiction unit starts two trailblazing women who charted new terrains in literature and computer science: Mary Shelley and Ada Lovelace. In *Frankenstein*—a seminal work of science fiction and a timeless literary classic—Shelley investigates the ethical questions raised by scientific exploration and probes the limits of prejudice and compassion. In her notes on Charles Babbage's Analytical Engine, Lovelace envisioned the modern computer 100 years before its invention. Both women imagined new worlds shaped by technological innovation and raised thought-provoking questions about man, monsters, and machines.

In the first 15 lessons of the unit, students read *Gris Grimly's Frankenstein*, a graphic novel that adds captivating illustrations to an abridgement of the 1818 edition of Mary Shelley's book. Then they write an essay in which, after arguing both sides of the question, students determine whether Frankenstein's creature should ultimately be considered human. In the Poetical Science sub-unit, students read two poems, a speech, and excerpts from Chapter 1 of Walter Isaacson's *The Innovators* to compare and contrast the ways in which William Wordsworth, Lord Byron, and Ada Lovelace viewed man's relationship with technology.

Sub-unit 1: *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley and Gris Grimley

Frankenstein is a timeless tale that asks universally resonant questions about scientific exploration, the responsibilities inherent in creation, and man's tendencies toward prejudice and compassion. As students read the graphic novel, they will paraphrase key excerpts, unpack Shelley's language, trace Victor's and their own responses to the creature, discuss whether Victor should comply with the creature's request for a mate, analyze how the characters evolve over the course of the book, and debate who ultimately deserves more sympathy.

To keep up the story's narrative momentum, students will skim rather than read certain non-essential passages. The text of the entire graphic novel is available if students want to read the skipped passages on their own.

Sub-unit 2: Poetical Science

In the Poetical Science sub-unit, students explore various perspectives on man's relationship with technology. In the first lesson, students read a poem by Wordsworth in which the speaker encourages his reader to eschew the "toil and trouble" of book learning and "let nature be your teacher." In the second lesson, students read

a speech by Lord Byron in which he defends the anti-technological rebellion of the Luddites. In the third and fourth lessons, students learn about Ada Lovelace's background and read her 19th-century insights on the possibilities—and limitations—of modern computers. In the final lesson, students read a poem by Richard Brautigan in which the speaker imagines an edenic "cybernetic meadow/where mammals and computers/live together in mutually/programming harmony".

This sub-unit requires students to write about multiple texts. In "The Tables Turned," students connect Wordsworth's poem to a passage from *Frankenstein*, and in "Man and Machines," students connect Brautigan's poem to any two passages from Lessons 1–4.

Unit 8E: The Frida & Diego Collection**Unit brief:**

"They [Diego's Eyes] protrude like the eyes of a frog, each separated from the other in a most extraordinary way... it is almost as if they were constructed exclusively for a painter of vast spaces and multitudes."

— "Statement by Frida Kahlo" from *My Art, My Life: An Autobiography* by Diego Rivera

Among Mexico's most famous and provocative artists, Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo were an extraordinary couple who lived in extraordinary times. They were soul mates and complete opposites. Rivera was a brilliant muralist and painter whose work explores the history and future of humanity. Kahlo was a fearless painter whose small self-portraits depict intense physical and emotional pain through a surrealist lens. He was large, 6 feet tall and 300 pounds, a whirlwind of energy and intelligence. She was tiny, 5 feet 3 inches tall and less than 100 pounds, often bedbound with pain yet pushing artistic boundaries. The multifaceted lives and work of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo offer students a rich and fascinating subject as they examine primary source documents and conduct independent research.

In the lessons on information literacy that begin the unit, students learn how to tell the difference between primary, secondary, and tertiary sources, determine if a source is reliable, and understand the ethical uses of information. Having practiced these skills, students are ready to develop and sharpen their sourcing abilities in the next lessons where they construct their own research questions and explore the Internet for answers.

In later lessons, students analyze an unusual love letter from Frida to Diego. They compare Frida's statement to Shakespeare's Sonnet 130. After a class discussion, students write their own love letters, emulating either Shakespeare or Kahlo's approach, to such unlikely creatures as the star nose mole, the frogfish, and the proboscis monkey. In a subsequent sub-unit, students are introduced to Socratic Seminars. They rely on their research to participate in a dialogue about the complicated issues inherent in the work of Frida and Diego.

As students reach the end of the unit, they synthesize all of the skills they've developed to tackle a culminating research project—part-essay, part-multimedia collage.

Sub-unit 1: *My Art, My Life: An Autobiography by Diego Rivera*

In the ELD curriculum, students read passages from these two texts: *My Art, My Life: An Autobiography* and “Statement by Frida Kahlo” from *My Art, My Life: An Autobiography by Diego Rivera* (with Gladys March)

Unit 8F: The Space Race Collection

Unit brief:

“We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard...”

— President John F. Kennedy, Rice University speech, September 12, 1962

On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik into orbit. This small satellite circled the Earth every 92 minutes at a speed of 18,000 miles per hour. The Soviets were ecstatic. The Americans were not. They were shocked and humiliated that the Soviets had beaten them into space. Sputnik ignited the Space Race, a fierce competition between the world's two superpowers that would continue for nearly 18 years. It's a story of heroic accomplishments on a grand scale. The dramatic story of the space race offers students a rich research topic to explore. They will examine primary source documents and conduct independent research to develop a deep understanding of this unique international competition.

In the lessons on information literacy that begin the unit, students learn how to tell the difference between primary, secondary, and tertiary sources, determine if a source is reliable, and understand the ethical uses of information. Having practiced these skills, students are ready to develop and sharpen their sourcing abilities in the next lessons where they construct their own research questions and explore the Internet for answers.

In subsequent lessons, each student is assigned a cosmonaut or astronaut from the Space Race era. They research their cosmonaut or astronaut and write entries into their Space blog from their person's point of view. This lesson informs the next subunit, a Socratic Seminar where students rely on their research to examine the complicated issues inherent in the history of the Space Race.

As students reach the end of the unit, they synthesize all of the skills they've developed to tackle a culminating research assignment—part-essay, part-multimedia project.

Sub-unit 1: The Space Race: An Introduction

In the ELD unit, students read passages from the following text: *The Space Race: An Introduction*, Author: Lapham's Quarterly Editors (2014).