

In Common: Effective Writing for All Students Collection of All Student Work Samples, K-12

By The Vermont Writing Collaborative, with Student Achievement Partners and CCSSO

Eighth Grade Range of Writing Argument Writing Samples

File Name: A8R Years Gone By

Opinion/Argument

Grade 8

Range of Writing

Years Gone By;

The Importance of Great Literature

“That one day little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.”

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

As years have gone by, as we take actions and feel emotions, we embark upon a search for something to describe the indescribable, to understand the most complicated of thoughts, and to ease unrelenting pain. It is in this search that we stumble upon literature, and we have learned that it can be one of the most effective tools to both spiritually and bodily heal the wounds of human nature.

Martin Luther King, Jr.’s message of equality is one that has stayed rooted deep in American history. He speaks of a problem that must not be neglected. In many cases, the key to problems such as these is understanding and awareness. Through literature we find that we benefit through both. Really great literature speaks to you forever, despite years of actions taken and emotions felt.

An example of such literature is the book *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain. Through its main character, Huckleberry Finn, a young, boisterous white boy who has recently run away, and his friend Jim, a runaway slave, live the values of America and the values of a very turbulent, but loyal friendship.

Regardless of its message, Mark Twain’s talent and its ability to withstand, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is at risk of being taken off the shelves of schools across the country. As an American student, I firmly believe that we must make a stand against this potentially great loss, and make sure that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is kept in our schools and in our

Introduces a claim:

Introduction sets stage for claim to follow, connecting the purpose of great literature with the American ideal of equality

Defines problem / issue at hand (*Huckleberry Finn* being challenged in curriculum)

States focus / **claim**

minds for the sake of describing the indescribable, understanding the most complicated of thoughts and easing pain.

Some may disagree with the message conveyed by Mark Twain in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. With fire in their eyes they say that such a book encourages bad behavior and addresses racism in such a way that it should not be on school shelves.

First, they find that Huck is too unlawful a child to be portrayed as a hero. He steals, lies, and runs away. He has no problem going against the law or his own conscience and takes pride in achievements he has been taught not to strive for, they point out. However, to this point we shake our head. Many, many books have characters that lead lives that today's children are taught against. Among the pages of The Old Testament, Cain, brother of Able, stands clearly as a wrong-doer in order to help us better understand the negative forces of human nature. Though some may believe that Huck is among these undying wrong-doers, he may well be, like Cain, an example of how not to act. Yet you cannot classify Huck as a bad or good person, he is one of the many complicated characters that call the pages of great literature home. When stealing, Huck is actually "borrowing", his lies cause him great stress and come back to haunt him. When he runs away, he is running from an abusive father, taking control of a situation that was headed for disaster. When he goes against his conscience it is for the sake of a friend. In that case, Huck decides that the laws of human nature are more important than the laws that are ignorant, laws that discriminate, laws that could undeservingly take away what is yours. Huck is indeed no criminal, and if anything his values are something to be admired.

Those who still believe that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* should be taken off our schools' shelves say that it addresses racism in a way that is inappropriate for students. But that point, like the other, holds no water. It addresses racism in an appropriate and indeed necessary format. Like Martin Luther King Jr.'s message, it enables us to understand

Distinguishes claim from opposing claims in a series of counterclaims

Explains counterclaim thoroughly

Phrases and clauses clarify relationships within reasons

Acknowledges an opposing claim, which the writer distinguishes from the claim and then counters with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, demonstrating a deep understanding of the text and topic

**Organizes the reasons and evidence logically
Establishes and maintains a formal style.**

Uses words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim, counterclaim, reasons, and evidence

and at the same time helps us become aware of how poorly African-Americans were treated during the time the book was set, and it does this in a true-to-life and very real layout. Also, Huck and Jim strike a friendship that white people and slaves could not have in the limits of society during the time period and this reminds the reader in many places that everyone deserves the same freedom and equality.

You must also take into account that if there is any place to read a book with possibly risky content it would be inside classrooms, classrooms where the material would certainly be discussed and explained. In class is perhaps the safest place for one to read this book, or any book that could result in conflicting viewpoints. To take it off the shelves of schools would be to take away the ability to help children understand and be aware of the deeper meaning, and therefore they would be worse off than if it were to be in their schools.

In light of the past arguments, we must now press on to show you what an excellent book *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain really is. It is a book that contains important illustrations of racism and how to overcome it, as well as many American values.

First, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* illustrates a struggle that has been deeply rooted in our past, and remains deeply rooted in the present. Though we have come a long way, a wall built of racial cloud still stands. Huck and Jim find a way to get past this wall and despite slavery and the examples set in society, treat each other as equals. In Chapter 15, titled “Fooling Poor Old Jim” Huck tries to play a trick on Jim to make fun of him, not thinking about Jim’s feelings. When Jim discovers the truth he is deeply hurt, but is able to express that to Huck. Hearing of his friend’s sadness, Huck in turn apologizes for his actions.

“En when I wake up en fine you back agin, all safe en soun’, de tears come, en I could ‘a’ got down on my knees en kiss yo’ foot, I’s so thankful. En all you wuz thinking’ ‘bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is *trash*; en trash is what people is dat puts

Supports the claim with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, thereby **demonstrating deep understanding of the text and topic**, including broader ideas about education

Uses words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim, counterclaim, reasons, and evidence

Supports the claim with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, including direct quotations, thereby **demonstrating deep understanding of the text and topic**; uses precise references to text which are thoroughly analyzed and explained

dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed.' Then he got up slow and walked to the wigwam, and went in there without saying anything but that. But that was enough. It made me feel so mean I could almost kissed *his* foot to get him to take it back. It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger – but I done it and I warden't every sorry for it afterward, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd 'a' knowed it would make him feel that way.”

It is a very important time in this book when Jim is able to express to Huck how being lied to hurt him, especially when he thought of Huck as a friend. After Jim has spoken of feelings and retired for bed, Huck takes time to reflect upon his actions, and how they made Jim feel. Fifteen minutes later, despite what society taught him, Huck apologizes to Jim as only a friend would, and takes what Jim says to heart.

Not only does *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* address racism in an appropriate way and remarkably find a way to overcome it, but in many ways it reminds the reader of the important values that can only too often be forgotten in America. One of the biggest is freedom. Both Huck and Jim are searching for freedom, escaping the imprisonment of slavery and an abusive father. Another value that is evident is equality. As expressed in the quote above, Huck and Jim find that equality is an essential in their friendship. Through this understanding, they manage to stay friends despite all that life throws their way.

One clear and significant value shows in this book is perseverance. Both Huck and Jim set a valiant and enduring example of this value throughout the book. Despite Huck's father and slave catchers close on their trail; a rattlesnake skin that constantly brings them bad luck; a wrecked ship that accommodated a murder plot; a tumultuous friendship and a family blinded by bloodshed, Huck and Jim find themselves pushing that much harder to reach the freedom that their hearts desire. They find courage and want within each other, and as a heroic duo conquer all that flows to them upon the river of life.

Uses words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim, counterclaim, reasons, and evidence

Supports the claim with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, thereby demonstrating deep understanding of the text and topic; uses precise references to text which are thoroughly analyzed and explained

There are many values evident in this book that are set down in the Declaration of Independence, and values that have stood the test of time. This brings us back to the fact that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* must be taught in schools. As Huck and Jim lead their lives they set the examples that are crucial to students' education. When people learn how to treat each other and learn significant values at a young age, they are given the opportunity to apply those lessons to their future and in turn teach their children. To leave these lessons behind would be doing these students a disservice, for it is lessons like these that teach us who we are, who we need to be.

Great literature is a food that is scarce, but it will always be universal. Do your part to foster its presence in your life, and the life of the youth of America. As years have gone by, as actions are taken and emotions are felt, we all search for something to describe the indescribable, to understand an idea that is conflicting, or to ease unrelenting pain. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain is a possible outcome of that search, teaching the significance of friendship, freedom and equality. Under the nose of a visceral world, two differing runaways find shelter in a friendship banned from society. In this friendship, they teach the world the importance of understanding and the importance of great literature.

Provides a concluding section that follows from and supports the argument presented

In this assignment from a language arts class, the student was asked, after studying *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, to take a position on whether or not the book should continue to be included in the school curriculum. She gives an introduction of some background / context on the issue, and makes a claim that the book should continue to be included.

The writer develops her claim with several reasons, which she supports thoroughly and thoughtfully with relevant, accurate evidence from the text, showing deep understanding of both the text and the issue, and even of broader connections to bigger ideas like equality and the purpose of education. In a clearly organized essay, she relies on logical reasoning to develop her claim and persuade her audience of the correctness of her position. In addition, she thoroughly and thoughtfully acknowledges the counterclaim that there are reasons to eliminate the book, then refutes that counterclaim with clear and logical, text-based reasoning.

The writer maintains a formal style throughout the piece. The conclusion follows from the argument presented and synthesizes the key points.

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Opinion/Argument

Grade 8

Range of Writing

Years Gone By; The Importance of Great Literature

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File Name: A8R We Need the League

Opinion/Argument

Grade 8

Range of Writing

We Need the League

Great people of North Dakota,

I, Senator McCumber, [an actual Senator from 1919 in the League of Nations debate], have just participated in a debate regarding whether or not America should sign the Treaty of Versailles, and in doing so, join the League of Nations. The League of Nations is a unified group of nations dedicated to the preservation of peace. The League is designed to deal with international issues, adjudicating differences between countries instead of them going directly to combat.

Now, in the interests of the great state of North Dakota, I voted in favor of the treaty with no reservations. We need a fair treaty to prevent future wars as horrible as the Great War was. After the war, the central powers composed the Treaty of Versailles to create the League of Nations in an attempt to ward off future conflicts. We cannot have another war as horrible as this one. I believe, because of that, that we need a fair treaty, equal to all its members, that will restrict the use of new weapons, and prevent future wars from breaking out.

First, the Treaty and the League will control the use of new weapons. As stated in Article VII, "One of its (the League's) jobs will be to come up with a plan for reducing the number of weapons around the world (arms reduction)." This means that the League will be in charge of weapons issues. This will cause heavily armed countries to demilitarize and make it less possible for war to break out. This is good because heavily armed countries generally end up using those arms in some way.

Another reason why I believe we need to sign the Treaty with no reservations is we need a treaty that is fair to all its members. Reservations

Introduces a claim:

The introduction gives specific context about the issue whether to join the League of Nations in 1919. Writer makes the claim of supporting U.S. entry into League of Nations and **distinguishes it from alternate claims** that the U.S. should not vote to enter League.

States focus / claim

Defines problem, reason for debate; gives enough background / context so that a reader can follow writer's thinking.

Organizes the reasons and evidence logically

Supports the claim with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, including direct quotations, **from accurate, credible sources**, thereby **demonstrating understanding of the topic**

[proposed by the League's opponents] would give America too much power within the league, thus allowing America to bend the rules of the League to suit its own will. This would cause unrest in the League, possibly causing America to make enemies. This could lead to another war. The treaty should be as fair as possible.

Establishes and maintains a formal style.

Yet another reason why I voted for America to sign the treaty is the fact it would prevent future wars from breaking out. The way the League is designed, it would give plenty of time for the League to settle the countries' differences with a fair and equal compromise. If war were to break out, the council members in the League would all help in defending each other, thus ending the war as quickly as possible with as few deaths as possible. The treaty would prevent war from happening or end the fighting as quickly as possible.

Uses words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim, counterclaim, reasons, and evidence

Some people say that we shouldn't join the League because we would be intervening in foreign affairs, that it would cause another war. How can you not intervene when 8 million people died in the last war? How can you stand there with a clear conscience when you know you could have prevented all that carnage from ever happening? The League will help countries settle their differences with plenty of time to talk it over. Six months for the countries to listen to the council's advice, and after that another three months before they can mobilize. If we join the League, we will keep anything like the Great War from happening again.

Acknowledges an opposing claim, which the writer distinguishes from the claim and then counters with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, demonstrating an understanding of the topic

In conclusion, the Treaty of Versailles needs to be signed so the League will be put into affect. The League of Nations will prevent war from breaking out, restrict weapons development and militarism, and keep us from the horrors of another Great War.

Provides a concluding section that follows from the argument presented

Thank you.

In this assignment from a social studies class, the student was asked, in the persona of a senator from 1919, to take a position on whether or not the United States should join the League of Nations. He gives an introduction of some background / context on the issue, and makes a claim that in his view the United States should join the League.

The writer develops his claim with several reasons, which he develops with relevant, accurate, credible evidence. In a clearly organized essay, he relies largely on logical reasoning to develop his claim and persuade his audience of the correctness of his position. In addition, he acknowledges the counterclaim that there are reasons to not support the League, then refutes that counterclaim with an argument that is both moral (*eight million people died, so how can we not support the League?*) and practical (*the League will give countries time to talk out their differences instead of going to war*). Throughout the essay, the writer uses words, phrases, and clauses as transitions to clarify the relationships among claim, counterclaim, reasons, and evidence and to create cohesion.

The writer maintains a formal style throughout the piece. The conclusion is a basic restatement that follows from the argument presented.

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Opinion/Argument

Grade 8

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First, the Treaty and the League will control the use of new weapons. As stated in Article VII, "One of its (the League's) jobs will be to come up with a plan for reducing the number of weapons around the world (arms reduction)." This means that the League will be in charge of weapons issues. This will cause heavily armed countries to demilitarize and make it less possible for war to break out. This is good because heavily armed countries generally end up using those arms in some way.

Another reason why I believe we need to sign the Treaty with no reservations is we need a treaty that is fair to all its members. Reservations [proposed by the League's opponents] would give America too much power within the league, thus allowing America to bend the rules of the League to suit its own will. This would cause unrest in the League, possibly causing America to make enemies. This could lead to another war. The treaty should be as fair as possible.

Yet another reason why I voted for America to sign the treaty is the fact it would prevent future wars from breaking out. The way the League is designed, it would give plenty of time for the League to settle the countries' differences with a fair and equal compromise. If war were to break out, the council members in the League would all help in defending each other, thus ending the war as quickly as possible with as few deaths as possible. The treaty would prevent war from happening or end the fighting as quickly as possible.

Some people say that we shouldn't join the League because we would be intervening in foreign affairs, that it would cause another war. How can you not intervene when 8 million people died in the last war? How can you stand there with a clear conscience when you know you could have prevented all that carnage from ever happening? The League will help countries settle their differences with plenty of time to talk it over. Six months for the countries to listen to the council's advice, and after that another three months before they can mobilize. If we join the League, we will keep anything like the Great War from happening again.

In conclusion, the Treaty of Versailles needs to be signed so the League will be put into affect. The League of Nations will prevent war from breaking out, restrict weapons development and militarism, and keep us from the horrors of another Great War.

Thank you.