

# Thematic Analysis Using Accountability Partners and Collaborative Writing

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## OVERVIEW

In an 8<sup>th</sup>-grade English Language Arts (ELA) classroom, students co-wrote a literary analysis essay, serving as accountability partners throughout the writing process. The purpose of the lesson was to support student collaboration and foster a sense of community. Prior to the writing task, students read and analyzed a novel. During the week of writing, each accountability partner pair established mutual goals and regularly checked in with one another to ensure progress on the essay. Technology was integrated, primarily using Google Docs, for drafting, sharing feedback, and tracking revisions. The desired outcomes included improved writing skills, enhanced critical thinking through peer discussions, and a stronger sense of community as students supported each other's work.

Topics: Accountability Partners, Writing, Collaborative Learning, English Language Arts

Time: Between 1-2 weeks (divided into daily 50-minute class periods); Novel study completed 3 weeks prior

## MATERIALS

- Computers with internet access
- Google Doc access
- Assigned novel or literary text for analysis
- Digital communication tool access (e.g. email)
- [Literary Analysis Essay Presentation](#)
- [Literary Analysis Essay Brainstorm Worksheet](#)
- [Individual Literary Analysis Rubric](#)
- [Daily Progress Check Questions](#)

## CONTEXT-AT-A-GLANCE

### Setting

8<sup>th</sup>-grade students in a public, suburban middle school in the United States.

### Modality

Face-to-face

### Class Structure

Students meet daily for a 50-minute class period.

### Organizational Norms

The goal is to support student learning utilizing the required school ELA curriculum. The lesson will align with Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. These standards emphasize various aspects of writing, such as producing clear and coherent writing and developing and strengthening writing.

### Learner Characteristics

8<sup>th</sup>-grade students (13-14 year olds) with a range of ELA background and skill levels. Typical audience ranges from 20-30 students (per class period). Students have varying attitudes towards ELA, from enthusiastic eager learners to apprehensive learners.

### Instructor Characteristics

A middle school ELA teacher interested in partner dynamics, making learning collaborative, and promoting a sense of community in the classroom.

### Development Rationale

To enhance students' collaborative skills and sense of community with the use of accountability partners during a writing task.

### Design Framework

Backwards Design

## SETUP

The instructor should estimate about an hour to organize materials that students will use, such as writing rubrics and reference texts. The instructor will need to set up the tool students will use to co-write (e.g., Google Docs) and make sure desks in the classroom are physically arranged to appropriately support student collaboration and discussion (e.g., small groups/pair configuration).

## STANDARDS

The Common Core ELA Standards for Writing (Council or Chief State School Officers, & National Governors Association, 2010) were used:

- W.8.1: Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
- W.8.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- W.8.5: With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.
- W.8.6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas efficiently as well as to interact and collaborate with others.
- W.8.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- W.8.10: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

## CONTEXT AND SETTING

This lesson involved 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students in a public, suburban middle school in the U.S. The classroom modality was face-to-face, with students meeting daily for a 50-minute class period. The lesson lasted one-two weeks, but required prerequisite knowledge through a novel study, which occurred approximately three weeks before the beginning of this lesson. The

typical class size ranged from 20-30 students, which influenced the lesson design by emphasizing the use of accountability partners and collaborative tasks to effectively manage the dynamics of both small and large group sizes. The choice to use accountability partners specifically helped ensure that all students could participate meaningfully in discussions and peer feedback, allowing for more individual support and engagement in a larger class setting.

## LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS

The students in the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade class demonstrated varying levels of proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA). Some were highly motivated and showed a strong interest in literature and writing. These students typically had a solid understanding of literary analysis, strong writing skills, and a desire to improve further. On the other hand, there were also students who approached ELA with hesitation or apprehension. These students often lacked confidence in their reading and writing abilities, struggled with comprehension, or found it difficult to express their ideas in writing. The students' engagement levels also fluctuated, with some needing more encouragement and support to participate fully in class activities. For these students, providing structured opportunities for peer interaction and support through accountability partners was a deliberate strategy aimed at reducing anxiety and increasing confidence. This peer collaboration not only offered personalized support but also helped these students feel less isolated in their learning process, which allowed for a more inclusive and engaging environment.

## INSTRUCTOR CHARACTERISTICS

This lesson was taught by a middle school ELA teacher committed to creating a collaborative classroom environment that promotes engagement and a sense of community. For writing tasks, the instructor supported partner dynamics through strategies like peer reviews, small group discussions, and, in the case for this lesson, accountability partners. Future instructors for this lesson should have an understanding of effective collaboration in classroom settings and managing group dynamics related to peer interactions, accountability, and supporting diverse learning styles.

## DEVELOPMENT RATIONALE

Research supports that a thoughtfully designed lesson that emphasizes collaboration has the potential to significantly enhance student engagement and promote deeper learning. Wicks et al. (2015) suggest that classes fostering high levels of collaboration encourage openness, meaning making, and the co-construction of knowledge, which are essential for creating a meaningful learning experience. Additionally, Bickle et al. (2019) emphasize that factors such as peer interaction, a strong sense of community, and instructor responsiveness are key contributors to student satisfaction. Similarly, collaboration can support improved student engagement/participation, and student critical thinking and communication skills (Acharya et al., 2024). In this lesson, the use of accountability partners is integral to supporting these collaborative dynamics. As Hanningan-Page (2023) points out, accountability partners act as supportive allies who help maintain focus, provide encouragement, and ensure continued progress. These partners enable students to take shared responsibility for their work, promoting accountability while also fostering a deeper sense of community.

Through the structured collaborative tasks in this lesson, students not only developed their writing skills but also strengthened their ability to work together effectively, creating a richer, more interactive learning environment. The integration of accountability partners enhanced the social aspects of learning, which in turn lead to more engaged and motivated learners. To support these collaborative efforts, technology integration was utilized strategically. Tools such as Google Docs allowed accountability partners to work together, regardless of physical proximity. This type of technology helps to facilitate the sharing of ideas, feedback, and revisions, which enhances the writing process and encourages ongoing communication. Additionally, the instructor can monitor progress and offer targeted support through Google Docs, ensuring that students stay on track and continue to collaborate effectively.

## DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Backward Design is an instructional approach that begins with identifying the desired outcomes or goals for students. Educators first identify the specific

skills or knowledge students should acquire as a result by the end of the lesson. Then, they define what will serve as evidence of that learning. Only after these steps are completed do they plan the instructional activities and design the learning experiences that will guide students toward achieving those outcomes (Culatta, n.d.). The rationale for using Backward Design is grounded in the principle that starting with clear, measurable goals allows the educator to make more intentional decisions about how to structure the lesson.

For this lesson, the desired outcome was for students to co-write a literary analysis essay using Google Docs that connected a theme from both a play and a movie. By identifying this specific goal at the outset, the instructional planning process became targeted and student-centered. Every activity contributed directly to the development of these skills. Google Docs was chosen with backward design in mind because it provided a collaborative, accessible, and flexible platform that supported students in the specific goal of co-writing a literary analysis essay. Also, accountability partners played a key role in this process since each student was paired with a peer to collaborate throughout the assignment. This partnership fostered ongoing communication and peer feedback which allowed students to share ideas, ask questions, and refine their work together. By working with accountability partners, students not only stayed on track but also took ownership of both their learning and their partner's progress, which ensured that the co-writing process was collaborative, and that each student was fully engaged in reaching the final goal of the literary analysis.

## LEARNING REPRESENTATION

### INTRODUCTION

Students began this literary analysis assignment after reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* play (Goodrich & Hackett, 1955) and watching the movie (Krejci et al., 2001). This lesson could be adapted to work with any novel, though it was used here with *The Diary of Anne Frank* play by Francis Goodrich and Albert Hackett (1955) and the 2001 movie adaptation, *Anne Frank: The Whole Story* (Krejci et al., 2001).

The assignment's primary goal was to analyze thematic elements from both the play and the movie through collaborative writing. In alignment with the Backward Design framework, the lesson was planned with the desired outcome in mind: for students to co-write a literary analysis essay that connects themes across two different mediums, while also developing their analytical and writing skills. As accountability partners, each student was responsible for not only contributing their portion of the essay but also providing support and motivation to their partner. This dynamic encouraged a sense of shared responsibility and helped foster deeper engagement with the material.

## THEME SELECTION & PLANNING

After finishing both the play and the movie, students were paired with their writing accountability partner (either chosen by the teacher or through student selection). First, the teacher reviewed what a literary analysis essay is, what themes are, ways to find themes in a text, and prompts to guide students' thinking when determining the themes (see Literary Analysis Essay Presentation [PPT], slides 2-5). Then, the whole class brainstormed themes to choose from (see Literary Analysis Essay Presentation [PPT], slide 6), such as:

- It is human nature to look for the good in any situation.
- Having hope can help get people through tough times.
- In spite of extraordinary circumstances, people deal with many normal problems of adolescence.
- Difficult circumstances cause people to suffer many hardships.

Students (as pairs) were required to choose one of these themes for their essay and brainstorm evidence from the both the play and the movie to support the chosen theme. If none of these themes interested them, they had the option to research and propose a different theme, but this had to be approved by the teacher before continuing. By allowing for student choice, the lesson provided an element of differentiation, catering to diverse interests and learning preferences while maintaining the overall structure. The lesson maintained flexibility while ensuring that students were working toward the end goal of writing a cohesive literary analysis essay. This approach adhered to the principles of Backward Design by ensuring that the activities (theme

selection, brainstorming, and evidence gathering) directly supported the final goal of analyzing and writing about thematic connections between the play and movie.

Once a theme was selected, students determined, within their accountability partnerships, who would be responsible for writing each section of the essay (see Literary Analysis Essay Presentation [PPT], slide 7). Each partner took ownership of two paragraphs, which included evidence from the play and movie. The conclusion was written collaboratively. The structure of the essay was as follows:

- Introduction: Co-written with the teacher as a class exercise and to model collaborative writing.
- Body Paragraph 1: Evidence from the play that supports the chosen theme (responsibility of Partner 1).
- Body Paragraph 2: Further evidence from the play supporting the theme (responsibility of Partner 2).
- Body Paragraph 3: Evidence from the movie that supports the theme (responsibility of Partner 1).
- Body Paragraph 4: Additional evidence from the movie supporting the theme (responsibility of Partner 2).
- Conclusion: Written collaboratively by both partners.

## TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

In line with the Backward Design framework, the integration of technology was purposefully chosen to support the final goal of co-writing a literary analysis essay. Students primarily used Google Docs to co-write their essays in real time, facilitating both in-person and online collaboration. Each day's focus was on drafting one paragraph, and students wrote together during class using shared documents, which allowed both partners to monitor progress. This structure aligned with the Backward Design model, as it helped break down the larger task (writing an entire essay) into manageable steps to help guide students toward the final goal.

## WRITING ACTIVITY BREAKDOWN

### DAY 1: INTRODUCTION WRITING

First, the teacher reviewed the expectations of accountability partners (see Literary Analysis Essay

Presentation [PPT], slide 8). Then, as a class, the teacher guided students in writing the introduction to ensure a strong opening for the essay. This was co-written with the teacher's direct involvement, modeling proper structure and tone for the rest of the essay. The introduction paragraph, along with sentence starters and stems to support differentiation, was structured into three main parts as follows (see Literary Analysis Essay Presentation [PPT], slides 9-12):

- Hook
  - Rhetorical Question
    - "Do you...?" "Have you ever...?"
  - Direct Quotation
    - A quote from the play or movie
  - Figurative Language Statements
    - "Imagine..."
    - Simile or metaphor
  - Definitions
    - Define one of the keywords in your theme, such as "hope"
- Background information (What basic facts about the play/movie/about Anne are important for your reader to know?)
  - Introduce me to Anne Frank
    - Anne Frank was a young girl who...
  - Tell me about her diary
    - During her time in hiding...
  - Introduce me to the play and movie
    - A play version of Anne's diary was made called *The Diary of Anne Frank* by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett (1955).
    - Later, several movies were made, one being *Anne Frank: The Whole Story* (Krejci et al., 2001).
- Thesis statement (How can you summarize your entire paper in one sentence?)
  - One theme from *The Diary of Anne Frank* is.....because....
  - From Anne's story, a lesson to be learned is....because....
  - A common theme in both the play and movie version of Anne Frank's diary is...because...

## DAYS 2-6: BODY PARAGRAPH WRITING

Each writing workday focused on one of the main body paragraphs.

- Day 2: Partner 1 wrote Body Paragraph 1, while Partner 2 supported by providing ideas, feedback, and suggestions.

- Day 3: Partner 2 wrote Body Paragraph 2, while Partner 1 offered support and feedback.
- Day 4: Partner 1 wrote Body Paragraph 3, while Partner 2 offered support and feedback.
- Day 5: Partner 2 wrote Body Paragraph 4, while Partner 1 offered support and feedback.
- Day 6: Partners worked together to write the conclusion.

Prior to students writing, the teacher reviewed the different components of body paragraphs (see Literary Analysis Essay Presentation [PPT], slides 13-18). Students used Google Docs and worked together in person during class time. Partners completed the Literary Analysis Essay Brainstorm Worksheet [DOC] indicating who was writing each section and the possible evidence, based on their chosen theme, that could be used to support their claims.

After the Literary Analysis Essay Brainstorm Worksheet [DOC] was completed and reviewed by the teacher, the students could begin writing. If it was Partner 1's turn to write, Partner 2 provided support and acted as their accountability partner. They mediated ideas and offered feedback, and vice versa. This approach helped maintain accountability and it also allowed each student to contribute meaningfully to the essay. Each body paragraph was structured as follows:

- 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph (body paragraph 1), 5-8 sentences
  - Topic sentence
  - #1 example/evidence/reason that supports theme from the play
  - Analysis of evidence/how does it support the chosen theme?
- 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph (body paragraph 2), 5-8 sentences
  - Topic sentence
  - #2 example/evidence/reason that supports theme from the play
  - Analysis of evidence/how does it support the chosen theme?
- 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph (body paragraph 3), 5-8 sentences
  - Topic sentence
  - #1 example/evidence/reason that supports theme from the movie
  - Analysis of evidence/how does it support the chosen theme?
- 5<sup>th</sup> paragraph (body paragraph 4), 5-8 sentences
  - Topic sentence
  - #2 example/evidence/reason that supports theme from the movie
  - Analysis of evidence/how does it support the chosen theme?

- 6<sup>th</sup> paragraph (conclusion), 5-8 sentences
  - Restate/summarize thesis from introduction
  - Discuss significance of theme/recap main points from body paragraphs
  - Concluding sentence

In alignment with the Backward Design framework, assessment methods were carefully structured to ensure students met the final goal. To assess student progress, partners completed daily progress checks/exit tickets (completed using Google Forms; see Daily Progress Check Questions [DOC]) that required them to reflect on their collaboration and how well they worked with their accountability partner that particular day. These served as check-ins to ensure both partners were fulfilling their roles and allowed for the instructor to adjust any instruction based on student responses (a form of differentiation). The final essays were graded using a rubric which focused on their analysis of the play and movie, their ability to connect evidence to the theme, and the overall structure and flow of their writing (see Individual Literary Analysis Rubric [DOC]).

## SCAFFOLDS & DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

In this lesson, scaffolds and differentiated instruction were integral in supporting students at various skill levels. Sentence starters/stems served as one of the main scaffolding tools that offered structured guidance to students who needed extra help organizing their thoughts and starting their writing. Providing these supports helped to ensure that all students, especially those who struggled with language or writing structure, could participate meaningfully in the assignment without feeling overwhelmed.

At the same time, differentiation was incorporated through various strategies. For instance, students who needed more of a challenge were encouraged to select or propose their own themes which offered them an opportunity to engage in deeper, more critical analysis. This allowed for a level of flexibility in the task to accommodate different skill levels that gave students more control over their learning while still adhering to the lesson's objectives.

The accountability partner system also played a role in differentiation. By pairing students with a partner, opportunities were created for peer support, where

stronger writers could guide their peers, and students that needed more assistance had someone to rely on. This peer collaboration was essential not only for fostering a sense of community but also for meeting individual learning needs, as students were able to work at their own pace with the help of their partner.

Although not applicable in this setting since students were well-versed in using Google Docs, in the future, if an instructor feels that students may vary in their ability to effectively use Google Docs for collaboration, accommodations could be made. For example, students who are less familiar with the platform could receive a brief tutorial on how to use the comment and suggestion features within Google Docs, or they could be paired with more tech-savvy peers to support their collaboration. This would help bridge the gap for students who may need additional guidance in using technology effectively and ensure that the collaborative aspect of the lesson remains accessible to all learners.

In future implementations, I, or other instructors teaching this lesson, might consider adding more multimedia options for students to express their ideas, such as allowing them to create videos, infographics, or podcasts in addition to, or instead of, writing a traditional essay. This would enhance differentiation by accommodating different learning preferences and providing students with varied ways to demonstrate their understanding. For example, students who struggle with writing might be given the option to record a video analysis or create a visual representation of their thematic connections, which would allow them to engage with the content in a way that aligns with their strengths. This approach would help make the assessment process more inclusive and provide students with a variety of ways to showcase their skills.

## CRITICAL REFLECTION

The lesson was implemented during the school year with the primary goal of supporting student collaboration and fostering a sense of community through the use of accountability partners. The lesson's structure, which encouraged students to co-write their essays using Google Docs, allowed students to collaborate in real-time while holding each other accountable for their assigned work. This collaborative effort met the intended goals, as students engaged in meaningful dialogue, supported

each other's writing, and offered constructive feedback.

While the lesson was successful in many respects, one observed challenge was that some pairs struggled with the accountability aspect when one partner was absent or less engaged. In these cases, the workload became uneven, and certain students took on more responsibility, which impacted their overall experience. For cases where one partner was absent, it may have been helpful to create a "backup plan," such as allowing students to submit their individual progress and having a contingency plan for the remaining work. In most cases, students showed strong collaboration and engaged in deep discussions about the themes of the play and the movie. For example, one pair of students worked exceptionally well together and demonstrated not only strong thematic understanding but also effective collaboration skills, offering each other constructive feedback and refining their arguments.

In terms of fitting into the larger instructional context, the lesson aligned well with the broader objectives of the ELA curriculum. It integrated writing skills, critical thinking, and thematic analysis while promoting collaboration. The lesson specifically connected to Common Core ELA Standards for Writing (Council or Chief State School Officers, & National Governors Association, 2010):

- W.8.1: Students were required to develop a clear argument (thematic analysis) and support it with evidence from both the play and the movie.
- W.8.4: The structured approach to co-writing essays allowed students to create clear, focused, and well-organized essays.
- W.8.5: The use of accountability partners allowed students to collaborate, plan, revise, and strengthen their writing.
- W.8.6: The integration of Google Docs facilitated real-time collaboration and allowed students to use digital tools to enhance their writing process.
- W.8.9: Students were required to incorporate evidence from both the play and the movie to support their thematic analysis, which aligned with the expectation to use evidence from texts.
- W.8.10: The daily writing tasks and collaborative nature of the assignment allowed students to engage in sustained writing over an extended period.

To ensure that assessment tools such as the Individual Literary Analysis Rubric [DOC] and Daily

Progress Check Questions [DOC] were closely aligned with these objectives, the rubric was designed to evaluate specific aspects of the thematic analysis (W.8.1), organizational clarity (W.8.4), and evidence integration (W.8.9; (Council or Chief State School Officers, & National Governors Association, 2010). Daily progress checks were incorporated at key stages in the process to monitor student collaboration, understanding, and writing development. It offered opportunities for feedback and revision that directly supported the standards and learning goals.

The effectiveness of the accountability partner approach was evident in the overall engagement and quality of the final essays. Students who were actively engaged in their partnerships tended to produce higher-quality work and demonstrate a deeper understanding of the thematic connections between the play and the movie in their writing. Future data collection, such as collecting feedback from students on their accountability partnership experience, could provide further insight into the impact of accountability partners on student success.

For future implementations, modifications such as more structured progress check-ins or rotating accountability roles could be beneficial. Additionally, providing more scaffolding or extra support for students who need help staying on task would ensure both partners contribute equally. Overall, while the lesson supported collaboration and community effectively, further refinements could help address occasional imbalances in partner participation.

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