



Interpretive Writing Practice Activity

For each of the following writing examples identify:

- Tangible resources – what is the primary resource that drives the piece?
- Intangible meanings – list as many as you can find
- Universal concepts – on your list of intangibles, circle the ones that are universal concepts

Write what might be a possible theme statement for each piece, based on one of the universal concepts you identified.

Example 1

Wayside Exhibit Text -- Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve

Prairie Communities

Long before cattle ranching communities were established here, grazing animals of another sort roamed these hills.

Bison, elk, and antelope were major members of a diverse association of plants and animals that once comprised the tallgrass prairie community. Hundreds of species of flowering plants, grasses, insects, birds and mammals were among the neighbors of this community. Each one had a function that served the community as a whole. Each one was adapted to the conditions that made the community unique – soils, topography, climate, grazing and fire.

The prairie we see today has been altered by human use so that some of the community members are no longer here. We must carefully protect what is left – because humans are the members of the prairie community with the power to preserve or destroy it.

“The prairie is an intricately constructed community... much more than land covered with grass. It is a slowly evolved, highly complex, organic entity, centuries old. Once destroyed, it can never be replaced by man.”

J.E. Weaver, *North American Prairie*, 1954

Example 2

Conclusion from

Oregon Trail Center – The Story Behind the Scenery

By Joyce Badgley Hunsaker

Covered wagons continued to haul goods and families along the route of the Oregon Trail even into the 1920's, but these were isolated passages. Land had been bought up, built over, and plowed under until 90 percent of the original Oregon Trail ruts were gone.

But the lore of the trail grew ever larger. Its romance was so pervasive and convincing that, over the years, we tended to lose sight of what really happened and why...

Pioneers were common, ordinary folk in extraordinary circumstances. In acting on their dreams, in overcoming the physically challenging and emotionally devastating, they changed the face of a nation. They suffered daily that for which they were unprepared and ill-equipped. They were determined, diligent, brave -- also arrogant, irresponsible, and opportunistic. They brought their prejudices and peculiarities with them. They were just like us.

And that, perhaps, is the lesson -- ordinary people make a difference. Ordinary people make history. We are all stewards of our heritage. We are all shapers of the future. It is up to us to make sure the legacy of the Oregon Trail -- in all its truths -- endures.

Example 3

Exhibit Label Copy – White House Visitor Center

What draws us to the White House? Why do we wait for hours in good and bad weather to enter in, only to glimpse briefly and incompletely at what it might be like to live and work within these walls? Partly we wait because...

The White House is power and humility. It is action and idea. It is the multiple facets of who we are. It is our national sense of ourselves conveyed by architectural details, by furniture that dates back to the first presidents, by the intangible influences of previous occupants and events, and by the fine threads of protocol that bind historical courtesy to present hospitality.

We visit the White House to see ourselves and our history reflected within a small provocative space. If we were to lose this physical structure of sandstone and paint, we would have lost merely an icon of our nationhood. Yet if we were to permit a dictator to take control of these rooms, we would have lost everything. It is the idea of the White House that perpetually draws us back.

Example 4

Park Newspaper Article – North Cascades National Park**Spirit of a Nation**

The images we link to the bald eagle are wild and sacred ones. Soaring birds ride the air currents swift as thought and graceful as a breeze. As our national symbol the bald eagle embodies much that we hold to be good and admirable in ourselves. It is a bird full of power and beauty. Its scavenger habits make it a proud survivor. The freedom expressed by a bald eagle on the wing is envied and admired by all.

It is no surprise then that these birds attract a lot of human attention whenever they visit an area in large numbers. The Skagit River is one of these places, attracting one of the largest winter gatherings of bald eagles in the contiguous United States. They travel here from places such as British Columbia and Alaska to take advantage of the late run of fall chum salmon. The spawned-out salmon carcasses are a desired commodity for bald eagles trying to eat enough food to sustain themselves through the winter. The bald eagles in turn provide a much needed service, cleansing the river of decaying remains, and returning the nutrients stored in the fish to the land.

The United States is not the first nation to hold the bald eagle in high regard. Many nations of Native American people viewed this awe inspiring raptor as a sacred being, and a much loved teacher of the lessons of life. When a bald eagle was seen flying at great heights it seemed at times to disappear into the sun, to “touch the heavens.” Hence the belief prevailed that they could provide a connection for the earthbound people to the spirit realms. The possession of a sacred bald eagle feather is considered a privilege, and perhaps even a mark of courage and honor. *Note: a permit is required for possession of feathers of any bird of prey, including bald eagles.*

There is much to admire about the bald eagle. The Skagit River is fortunate indeed to host this splendid bird in such large numbers every winter. It does not bring just its physical presence to this already rich and diverse area. It also bears the spirit of many nations.

Types of Writing

Scientific or historical: text most commonly written to share knowledge with a group of similar academic background; typically reports research findings; poses questions relating to theories and proposing hypotheses

Technical: leads the reader to accomplish a specific task or learn a skill; has its roots in statistics, operations, and mechanical processes

Informational: provides factual data for reference or other use

Creative writing: artistic expression in written form; evokes sensory impressions and images

Interpretive writing: draws from technical, informational, scientific, historical, and cultural sources and incorporates creative techniques; intends to result in a response from the readers by connecting them emotionally and intellectually to the meanings and significance of the resource(s) being interpreted

What type of writing...

Describes a theory regarding the evolutionary relationships of the Black-footed ferret and the results of a related research project

Provides a sequence of related facts for the layperson that describe the life history of the ferret

Describes how to set up a baseline data program to gather information on the ferret

Is a children's story about a fictional ferret named "Freddy" who runs away from home to join the circus with his friend, "Penelope", the prairie dog.

Tells a compelling story of near-extinction that provides opportunities for readers to form intellectual and emotional connections to the significance of the Black-footed ferret as a valuable member of the prairie community.