

“What should good student writing at this grade level look like?”

The answer lies in the writing itself.

The **Writing Standards *in Action* Project** uses high quality student writing samples to illustrate what performance to grade level standards looks like—in action.

Writing Standards *in Action*

Grade 8 English Language Arts

Opinion /Argument and Narrate

(Literary Interpretation Essay)

Literary Interpretation



Massachusetts Department of
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION



Background Information

GRADE
8

FRAMEWORK / CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Massachusetts Curriculum Framework
for ELA and Literacy (2017)

Writing Sample Title:

Literary Interpretation

Text Type and Purpose: Opinion/Argument & Narrate

Grade level/Content area: Grade 8 English Language Arts

Type of Assignment: Literary Interpretation

Standards Addressed: (W.8.1), (W.8.3), (W.8.5), (W.8.9),
(RL.8.1), (RL.8.2), (RL.8.4), (L.8.5)

*See descriptions of these standards
in the right column of the next page.*

Highlights:

This sample of student work meets grade level standards.
It demonstrates the following attributes of effective writing.

The sample:

- Moves beyond the standard model of literary interpretation
- Includes an engaging anecdotal hook
- Provides an interpretation of the theme of a poem and traces the poet's development of that theme
- Combines two modes of writing
- Supports interpretive claims by means of effective quotations and accurate paraphrasing
- Incorporates effective word choices
- Refers back to the lead in the conclusion

CONTINUED ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

The student writing sample that follows includes standards-based commentary. The commentary found in this column describes how the writing meets the standards in the *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy (2017)* and other content frameworks when applicable.

Understanding the Standards-Based Commentary

1. Grade-specific standards addressed are:

- Listed in the column to the right of student work by strand, grade, and number (or number and letter, where applicable)
- Marked by a colored block with a letter code, also in the column to the right of student work

EXAMPLE: 

2. Colored arrow blocks beneath each standard in the right column:

- Are of the same color and letter code as the block that marks the standard being addressed
- Mark standards-based commentary related to the standard being addressed
- Appear in alphabetical order

EXAMPLE: 

3. Corresponding colored arrow blocks within the text:

- Set off sections of student work to which commentary applies
- Do not necessarily appear in alphabetical order—but where evidence of a particular standard exists

EXAMPLE: (begin)  section  (end)

Instructional Practices:

The teacher used the following practices:

- Lessons on developing a thesis, citing textual evidence, explaining how evidence supports the thesis, leads, and conclusions

Assignment Description:

Students read and discussed poems and then wrote an interpretation of a poem of their choosing.

Intended Audience:

Classmates and teacher

Time:

3 weeks

Writing Process:

Alone; with a partner; in class; as homework; pre-writing; organizing; drafting; revising; self-editing; peer response; teacher feedback

Materials:

A “quote sandwich”- example of how to integrate a quotation in to a sentence, poem of student’s choice, model essay, literary analysis feedback sheet for review of early drafts, literary analysis assessment list for assessment of the final draft

Writing Standards:**Grade 8, Standard 1 (W.8.1)**

Write arguments (e.g., essays, letters to the editor, advocacy speeches) to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

EXAMPLE: **A B C D E**

Writing Standards:**Grade 8, Standard 3 (W.8.3)**

Write narratives to develop experiences or events using effective literary techniques, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured sequences.

EXAMPLE: **F G**

Writing Standards:**Grade 8, Standard 5 (W.8.5)**

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.

EXAMPLE: **H**

Writing Standards:**Grade 8, Standard 9 (W.8.9)**

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support written analysis, interpretation, reflection, and research, applying one or more grade 8 standards for Reading Literature or Reading Informational Text as needed.

EXAMPLE: **I**

Please note:

The samples may contain inaccuracies in wording and content or shortcomings in the use of standard English conventions.

END OF BACKGROUND ■

STANDARDS ADDRESSED LIST, CONTINUED ►



List of Standards Addressed:
(continued)

**Reading Standards for Literature:
Grade 8, Standard 1 (RL.8.1)**

Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports analysis of what a text states explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, quoting or paraphrasing as appropriate.

EXAMPLE: **I**

**Reading Standards for Literature:
Grade 8, Standard 2 (RL.8.2)**

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

EXAMPLE: **C**

**Reading Standards for Literature:
Grade 8, Standard 4 (RL.8.4)**

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning, tone, or mood, including the impact of allusion and irony.

EXAMPLE: **J**

**Language Standards:
Grade 8, Standard 5 (L.8.5)**

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

EXAMPLE: **J**

END OF STANDARDS ADDRESSED LIST ■

Please note:

The samples may contain inaccuracies in wording and content or shortcomings in the use of standard English conventions.



Opinion/Argument and Narrate

GRADE
8

FRAMEWORK / CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Massachusetts Curriculum Framework
for ELA and Literacy (2017)

STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

In this sample...

The writer of this analysis of Jim Hall's poem, *Maybe Dats Youwr Pwoblem Too*, begins not with an interpretative claim, but rather with a brief narrative—an anecdote, about ripping her pants in fourth grade. The lead examines the notion that something seemingly funny may actually be serious. Notwithstanding an abrupt transition, the writer goes on to weave relevant textual evidence into a clear analysis of Hall's use of humor to explore the serious theme of identity. In addition, the writer traces the development of this theme over the course of the poem. Despite the occasional convoluted sentence and some difficulties with punctuation, careful use of language results in a formal-but-not-too-formal style that reveals the young writer's voice. The essay's engaging hook is echoed in the humorous conclusion.

Understanding the Standards-Based Commentary

The student writing sample that begins on this page includes in this column standards-based commentary describing how the writing meets the standards in the *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy (2017)* and other content frameworks, when applicable. Where they apply, sub-standards marked by letters are included.

Evidence for the commentary is noted in the text of the student writing using color-coded, numbered 'begin' and 'end' arrows.

For example:

A1 marks the beginning and **A1** marks the end of the relevant section in the text.

Please note that the labeled arrows in the text do not necessarily appear in alphabetical order.

Literary Interpretation

F **D1** I walk into Ms. (name of teacher)'s fourth

grade classroom with the bathroom pass loosely gripped in my

palm. **D1** **F** I reach a damp, freshly washed hand towards

begin section **end**

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



Writing. Grade 8, Standard 1

A W.8.1.a

Introduce claim(s), acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically in paragraphs and sections.

A1 A1 Examples: 1

At the conclusion of the opening anecdote, the writer introduces the essay's central claim, although the transition to the claim is somewhat awkward and syntax is a bit clumsy (*Jim Hall's poem titled "Maybe Dats Youwr Pwoblem Too" shows that just because the poem seems humorous as you read it, it had a more serious message, a little like ripping your pants.*).

STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

the doorknob casually, not at all expecting what is about to happen.

The teacher is sitting in her chair lecturing about the angles of triangles **F** as I pick up the gnarled pencil to sign in my name.

D1 The pencil slips out of my clammy grip and I bend down to pick it up. RIIPP!! Giggles erupt from the class as my pink, butterfly

undies put on a private show. **D1** **F** **H1** **G** A mean kid

with freckles named (name of student) is on the floor by now,

pointing at me and egging on the class. **H1** **D1** My face turns

cherry red as the teacher shushes the class. **D1** She starts talking,

gesturing to me **G** “Excuse me, that is not funny! (Name of

Writing. Grade 8, Standard 1

(continued)

A2 A2 Examples: 1 · 2 · 3 · 4

The writer maintains focus on the central claim of the essay and reinforces it in the concluding sentence of each of the remaining paragraphs (*You're Spiderman for life and I think that Jim Hall used the connection between having a flame resistant suit to not being able to change who you are as a serious metaphor... The author used the symbol of his suit to show that you have to keep your 'suit'... The author wonders if you being who you are can be hard sometimes... That is why I think that even though the poem seemed humorous it had serious and meaningful message that shows how you can't change who you are.*).

B **W.8.1.b**

Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.

B1 B1 Examples: 1

The writer supports the claim by explaining that Spiderman's inability to “bui de suit” conveys a serious message (*You're Spiderman for life and I think Jim Hall used the connection between having a flame resistant suit to not being able to change who you are as a serious metaphor.*).

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

student) please get a pair of pants from lost and found that will fit her and (name of student), can you please tell me why you think that that small tear in her pants is funny?" **G** **D1** (Name of student) is totally caught off guard and shrugs, a little flushed himself. **D1** He immediately stops his guffaws and returns to this seat silently. **G**

F I guess that wasn't so funny after all. **F** **A1** Jim Hall's poem titled "Maybe Dats Youwr Pwoblem Too" shows that just because the poem seems humorous as you read it, it had a more serious message, a little like ripping your pants. **A1** **D2** I think the message in Jim

Writing. Grade 8, Standard 1

(continued)

B2 B2 Examples: 1 · 2 · 3

The writer develops the essay's claim with relevant details from the poem (*As Spiderman his job is to take calls from the Governor to complete small tasks like an average police officer would do. He would have to take a lot of calls that start to get boring... "You tink when you Spiderman der's sometin big going to happen to you. Well, I tell you what. It don't happen dat way..." I know that I'd want to be Spiderman so I could trap sand monsters and slay ninjas but if I only had to catch pathetic thugs it wouldn't be that fun.*).

B3 B3 Examples: 1

The writer further develops the essay's interpretation of the "serious metaphor" (*When he says, "Maybe dat's da whole pwoblem wif evwytin. Nobody can buin der suits ..." I think he believes that all people have every problem they have because they can't change who they are. The author wonders if you being who you are can be hard sometimes*).

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

Hall's poem is that you can't change who you are and he uses the humor of Spiderman to express that. **D2**

The narrator of this poem truly believes that he is Spiderman.

He says, "due to da fact, due to da awful twuth dat I am Spiderman..." **I** **B2** As Spiderman his job is to take calls from the Governor to complete small tasks like an average police officer would do. He would have to take a lot of calls that start to get boring **B2** **I** and he wants to stop being Spiderman. He wants

Writing. Grade 8, Standard 1 AND
Reading Literature.
Grade 8, Standard 2

C **W.8.1.c** AND **C** **RL.8.2**

W.8.1.c

Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

RL.8.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

C **C Examples: 1 · 2 · 3 · 4**

In the interpretation of *Maybe Dats Youwr Pwoblem Too*, the writer provides a cohesive analysis of the development of the poem's theme by repeatedly returning to the narrator's desire to "bui de suit" and adding another layer to its meaning each time (**[1.]** *You're Spiderman for life and I think that Jim Hall used the connection between having a flame resistant suit to not being able to change who you are as a serious metaphor...* **[2.]** *You can't stop being who you are so you have to continue with yourself how you are. The author used the symbol of his suit to show that you have to keep your 'suit'...* **[3.]** *The narrator was Spiderman and relates his "flame wesistant suit..." to everyone in the world's personalities...* **[4.]** *When he says, "Maybe dat's da whole pwoblem wif evwytin. Nobody can bui der suits..." I think he believes that all people have every problem they have because they can't change who they are.)*

begin section **end**

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES 



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

to try something new and exciting like what he thought Spiderman’s

job would be so **J** he tries to burn his Spiderman suit

so he could stop being Spiderman. When he tries to “burn the

suit...” he finds out that it is flame resistant. When he can’t burn

his suit he realized that you can’t just stop being Spiderman! **J**

C **B1** **A2** You’re Spiderman for life and I think that Jim

Hall used the connection between having a flame resistant

suit to not being able to change who you are as a serious

metaphor. **A2** **B1** **C**

Writing. Grade 8, Standard 1**D W.8.1.d**

Establish and maintain a style appropriate to audience and purpose (e.g., formal for academic writing).

D1 D1 Examples: 1 • 2 • 3 • 4

At first, the author uses a polished, though somewhat informal, style to tell the anecdote with which she begins the essay (*I walk into Ms.[name of teacher]’s fourth grade classroom with the bathroom pass loosely gripped in my palm... The pencil slips out of my clammy grip and I bend down to pick it up. RIIPPP!! Giggles erupt from the class as my pink, butterfly undies put on a private show... My face turns cherry red as the teacher shushes the class... [Name of student] is totally caught off guard and shrugs, a little flushed himself.*).

D2 D2 Examples: 1

By the end of the first paragraph, the writer transitions, albeit obliquely, from the polished informality of the anecdote to the formal and insightful voice of a literary critic (*...it was my choice... I was excited to cover... I think the message in Jim Hall’s poem is that you can’t change who you are and he uses the humor of Spiderman to express that.*).

E W.8.1.e

Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

E E Examples: 1

The concluding paragraph refers back to the opening anecdote and connects it explicitly to the writer’s interpretation of the poem, which is effectively summarized in the final sentence (*That is why I think that even though the poem seemed humorous it had serious and meaningful message that shows how you can’t change who you are.*).

begin section **end**

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES 



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

In the poem the narrator says. **I** **B2** “You tink when you Spiderman der’s sometin big going to happen to you. Well, I tell you what. It don’t happen dat way.” **B2** **I** The narrator thought that being Spiderman was going to be really fun and exciting but when he realizes that the Governor calls for small, boring things the ‘charm wears off’. **I** **B2** I know that I’d want to be Spiderman so **G** I could trap sand monsters and slay ninjas but if I only had to catch pathetic thugs **G** it wouldn’t be that fun. **B2** **I** The narrator begins to realize that being Spiderman isn’t what he thought

Writing. Grade 8, Standard 3**F W.8.3.a**

Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an appropriate narrative sequence.

F F Examples: 1 · 2 · 3

The writer cleverly introduces herself and her claim with an engaging narrative hook, an anecdote about ripping her pants in fourth grade (*I walk into Ms. [name of teacher]’s fourth grade classroom with the bathroom pass loosely gripped in my palm... as I pick up the gnarled pencil to sign in my name. The pencil slips out of my clammy grip and I bend down to pick it up. RIIPP!! Giggles erupt from the class as my pink, butterfly undies put on a private show... I guess that wasn’t so funny after all.*).

G W.8.3.d

Use precise words and phrases and relevant descriptive details to convey a tone (the writer’s attitude toward the subject: e.g., humorous, serious, or ironic) and to convey experiences or events.

G G Examples: 1 · 2 · 3

Careful use of language conveys experiences and events vividly in the voice of the young writer (*A mean kid with freckles named [name of student] is on the floor by now, pointing at me and egging on the class. My face turns cherry red as the teacher shushes the class. She starts talking, gesturing to me... [Name of student] is totally caught off guard and shrugs, a little flushed himself. He immediately stops his guffaws and returns to this seat silently... I could trap sand monsters and slay ninjas but if I only had to catch pathetic thugs...*).

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

it was going to be. **J** He wants to “twy sometin different...” but the suit won’t burn. **C** You can’t stop being who you are **J** so you have to continue with yourself how you are.

A2 **H2** The author used the symbol of his suit to show that you have to keep your ‘suit’. **A2** **C** **H2**

The flame resistant suit in the poem symbolizes that you can’t change who you are. **C** The narrator was Spiderman and relates his “flame wesistant suit...” to everyone in the world’s personalities. **C** Your personalities and characteristics make up

Writing. Grade 8, Standard 5**H** **W.8.5**

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.

H1 H1 Examples: 1

Following some feedback on an early draft of the essay, the writer revises the opening anecdote to include more precise language and additional carefully chosen details (*A mean kid with freckles named [name of student] is on the floor by now, pointing at me and egging on the class.*).

H2 H2 Examples: 1 · 2

The writer revises the essay by expanding upon the point that “you can’t change who you are” (*The author used the symbol of the suit to show that you have to keep your ‘suit’... that shows how you can’t change who you are.*).

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

who you are and that is your ‘suit’. The author made the serious connection between the suit and people in his poem. So having a flame resistant suit means that you are who you are! **C** When he says, **B3** “Maybe dat’s da whole pwoblem wif evwytin. Nobody can buin der suits...” I think he believes that all people have every problem they have because they can’t change who they are. **C**

A2 The author wonders if you being who you are can be hard sometimes. **A2** **B3**

Writing. Grade 8, Standard 9 AND Reading Literature. Grade 8, Standard 1

I W.8.9 AND I RL.8.1

W.8.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support written analysis, interpretation, reflection, and research, applying one or more grade 8 standards for Reading Literature or Reading Informational Text as needed.

RL.8.1

Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports analysis of what a text states explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, quoting or paraphrasing as appropriate.

I | Examples: 1 · 2 · 3

The writer draws evidence from the poem to support her analysis of the poem (*As Spiderman his job is to take calls from the Governor to complete small tasks like an average police officer would do. He would have to take a lot of calls that start to get boring... “You tink when you Spiderman der’s sometin big going to happen to you. Well, I tell you what. It don’t happen dat way...” I know that I’d want to be Spiderman so I could trap sand monsters and slay ninjas but if I only had to catch pathetic thugs it wouldn’t be that fun.*).

begin section **end**

END OF WRITING SAMPLE ■



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

So when you walk into class, drop your pencil, and rip your pants, remember that just because it seems funny it really is serious to you. Ripping your pants is different that Jim Hall's "Maybe Dats Youwr Pwoblem Too," but both show that just because something seems funny at the time, it can be serious and have a true message. Personally, the message I got from ripping my pants was to never trust jean seams but yours could be different, like it could be different in Hall's poem. **E** **A2** That is why I think that even though the poem seemed humorous it had serious and meaningful message **H2** that shows how you can't change who you are. **A2** **E** **H2**

Reading Literature.**Grade 8, Standard 4** AND**Language. Grade 8, Standard 5****J** **RL.8.4** AND **J** **L.8.5a****RL.8.4**

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning, tone, or mood, including the impact of allusion and irony.

L.8.5.a

Interpret figures of speech (e.g. verbal irony, puns) in context.

J **J Examples: 1 • 2**

The writer's ability to interpret the metaphor of the flame resistant suit provides the basis of her understanding of the poem's theme ([1.] ...he tries to burn his Spiderman suit so he could stop being Spiderman. When he tries to "buin de suit..." he finds out that it is flame resistant. When he can't burn his suit he realized that you can't just stop being Spiderman!... [2.] He wants to "twy sometin different..." but the suit won't burn. You can't stop being who you are...).

begin section **end**

END OF WRITING SAMPLE ■

