“What does 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.

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**Grade 8**

**English Language Arts**

**Opinion / Argument**

*(Letter to the Editor)*

Many Faiths (Version 1)
Writing Sample Title: Many Faiths (Version 1)

Text Type and Purpose: Opinion/Argument

Grade level/Content area: Grade 8 English Language Arts

Type of Assignment: Letter to the Editor

Standards Addressed: (WHST.6-8.1), (WHST.6-8.4), (WHST.6-8.9), (RI.8.1), (RH.6-8.6), (RI.8.8), (L.8.2), (L.8.3)

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

Important Note About This Sample:
This sample is the first of two posted letters to the editor written by different writers in response to the same assignment. Each writer produces an argument in reaction to an op-ed piece, “Many Faiths, One Truth,” by Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama.* The samples develop similar arguments but emphasize different elements of effective writing.

The writer of this sample, Version 1 (Sample B8-8a), agrees with the Dalai Lama’s claims by delineating and expanding upon them with a combination of evidence and reasoning expressed precisely and in a formal manner.

The writer of Version 2 (Sample B8-8b), relies on adeptly linked textual evidence, rather than elaborate reasoning, to give weight to an argument that supports the Dalai Lama’s claims without expanding upon them. For more, read each sample and the commentary that follows.

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 (2011) 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: A

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: A1

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) A1 section A1 (end)
Highlights:
This sample of student work meets grade level standards. It demonstrates the following attributes of effective writing.

The sample:
• Introduces a claim and distinguishes it from an opposing claim
• Develops the claim with clear reasoning and text-based evidence
• Demonstrates conciseness appropriate to a letter to the editor
• Delineates succinctly arguments and specific claims made in two informational texts
• Identifies aspects of two informational texts that reveal the points of view of their authors
• Includes precise words and phrases to establish an appropriate style and to indicate a formal tone
• Provides a conclusion that follows from and supports the claim

Instructional Practices:
The teacher used the following practices:
• Instruction on the characteristics of newspaper editorials and op-ed pieces
• Discussion of letters to the editor written in response to editorials and op-ed pieces
• Instruction regarding expression of a common theme across multiple genres

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects 6-12:
Grade 8, Standard 1 (WHST.6-8.1)
Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.
EXAMPLE: 

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects 6-12:
Grade 8, Standard 4 (WHST.6-8.4)
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
EXAMPLE: 

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects 6-12:
Grade 8, Standard 9 (WHST.6-8.9)
Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
EXAMPLE: 

Reading Standards for Informational Text: Grade 8, Standard 1 (RI.8.1)
Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
EXAMPLE: 

Please note:
The samples may contain inaccuracies in wording and content or shortcomings in the use of standard English conventions.
Assignment Description:
Students wrote a letter to the editor in response to a New York Times op-ed piece, Many Faiths, One Truth, by Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama.* Students used textual evidence from the op-ed, as well as materials of their choosing from a common set of thematically related materials, to develop an argument for or against the opinion presented by the Dalai Lama.

*([www.nytimes.com/2010/05/25/opinion/25gyatso.html?_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/25/opinion/25gyatso.html?_r=0))

Intended Audience:
Teacher, fellow students, others interested in the topic

Time:
2 weeks

Writing Process:
Pre-writing; organizing; drafting; revising; self-editing; peer-editing/peer response; publishing

Materials:
- Main texts: the op-ed piece, Many Faiths, One Truth, and Akbar in the Mughal Empire
- Supplemental texts: a set of thematically related materials including brief descriptions of the world’s five major religions and the poem, Tolerance by Sri Chinmoy
- Miscellaneous materials: written explanations of the terms, editorial and op-ed; writing warm-up sheet; table on which students could record and clarify confusing words and phrases from the op-ed; graphic organizer; peer review sheet; analytic “Argument Rubric”

List of Standards Addressed, Continued:

Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6–12:
Grade 8, Standard 6 (RH.6-8.6)
Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).
EXAMPLE: F

Reading Standards for Informational Text: Grade 8, Standard 8 (RI.8.8)
Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.
EXAMPLE: B

Language Standards: Grade 8, Standard 2 (L.8.2)
Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
EXAMPLE: G

Language Standards: Grade 8, Standard 3 (L.8.3)
Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.
EXAMPLE: C

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

END OF BACKGROUND
Opinion/Argument

In this sample...

The writer argues in favor of perspectives expressed in the New York Times op-ed piece, “Many Faiths, One Truth.” Logical delineation and evaluation of arguments made in the op-ed and in a second source provide support for the writer’s claim that compassion and tolerance are essential to peaceful coexistence. Careful organization and citation of salient factual information enable the writer to develop a concise letter to the editor that demonstrates purposeful coherence, clarity, and cohesion. The writer includes precise words and phrases to establish an appropriate style and to indicate a formal tone suitable to a letter written to make serious assertions about a complex topic.

Many Faiths (Version 1)


Dear Editor,

I am an eighth grade student at ______ Middle School who was moved by the Dalai Lamas’ claim, that harmony and

Writing Standards: Grade 8, Standard 1

A WHST.6-8.1.a
Introduce claim(s) about a topic or issue, acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.

A1 Examples: 1

The writer introduces a clear claim (As our technology continues to advance, we are more inclined to spread our conflicting opinions and views to people around the world. This is why we must understand that the five major religions all link through compassion. We need to take advantage of this...).

A2 Examples: 1

The writer alludes to an opposing claim (...rather than seeking out the differences...).
As our technology continues to advance, we are more inclined to spread our conflicting opinions and views to people around the world. This is why we must understand that the five major religions all link through compassion. We need to take advantage of this rather than seeking out the differences.

In my study of India, I discovered a leader named Akbar who promoted religious and cultural tolerance. He encouraged compassion will lead to a more tolerant world.

The writer provides context for the claim by alluding to ideas around which the letter will be organized (I am an eighth grade student at ______ Middle School who was moved by the Dalai Lama’s claim, that harmony and compassion will lead to a more tolerant world.).

The writer provides contextual support for the claim by introducing the ideas of a scholar who made assertions similar to those of the Dalai Lama (In my study of India, I discovered a leader named Akbar who promoted religious and cultural tolerance.).

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

Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

The writer provides contextual support for the claim by introducing the ideas of a scholar who made assertions similar to those of the Dalai Lama (In my study of India, I discovered a leader named Akbar who promoted religious and cultural tolerance.).
talk between religious leaders to discuss views and philosophies.

Akbar states “It cannot be wisdom to assert one faith over another the wise person makes justice his guide and learns from all religions.” He implies that we not only should learn from what we already know, but we must step beyond our comfort zone and educate through other perspectives as well.

No one religion owns all knowledge. Akbar contributed to the view that unity is what guides us to a more tolerant coexistence.

STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

Writing Standards. Grade 8, Standard 1
AND Reading Standards—Informational Text. Grade 8, Standard 1
AND Reading Standards—Informational Text. Grade 8, Standard 8
(continued)

B2 Examples: 1

The writer cites relevant textual evidence and draws reasonable inferences that delineate and expand upon the argument made by Akbar (Akbar states “It cannot be wisdom to assert one faith over another the wise person makes justice his guide and learns from all religions.” He implies that we not only should learn from what we already know, but we must step beyond our comfort zone and educate through other perspectives as well. No one religion owns all knowledge. Akbar contributed to the view that unity is what guides us to a more tolerant coexistence.).

B3 Examples: 1

The writer provides additional context for the major claim of the letter (From the article Many Faiths, One Truth, the Dalai Lama has conversed with a wide spread of people from different religions and cultural back rounds.).
From the article Many Faiths, One Truth, the Dalai Lama has conversed with a wide spread of people from different religions and cultural backgrounds. He found that the common thread of compassion connects all five major religions. Each religion has a different way of expressing its practice of compassion. Christianity shows it through Jesus' acts and teaching. The Dalai Lama had spoken to Merton the Monk you said, “His miracle of the loaves and fishes, his healing and his teachings are all motivated by the desire to relive suffering”. Intolerance may be as old as religion itself, but this does not mean we should follow blindly in its acts of evil. We all need to accept each other for who we are, to keep the world safe from all judgment and violence.
Buddhism also shows their dedication towards compassion because their entire religion is based off of giving up wordy desires, so people will no longer suffer. From Judaism who speaks through the Talmud, Islam from the Quran and Hindus in the Bhagavad Gita, they all express that compassion is a core principle in each religion. Intolerance may be as old as religion itself, but this does not mean we should follow blindly in its acts of evil. We all need to accept each other for who we are, to keep the world safe from all judgment and violence.

Writing Standards, Grade 8, Standard 1

WHST.6-8.1.e
Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

D  D Examples: 1
The writer provides a conclusion that, in spite of a lack of transitional elements, distills the argument made in the sample, supports the claim, and references a counter claim (Cruelty and Intolerance can lead to an unstable living environment for love to grow. Obtaining harmony and unity, to express compassion is the foundation for a peaceful world. As we come more interconnected, instead of spreading opposing views we should speak of the similarities. Tolerance is what will make the world one, so we can all get along.).
Cruelty and Intolerance can lead to an unstable living environment for love to grow. Obtaining harmony and unity, to express compassion is the foundation for a peaceful world. As we come more interconnected, instead of spreading opposing views we should speak of the similarities. Tolerance is what will make the world one, so we can all get along.

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**Writing Standards. Grade 8, Standard 4**

**WHST.6-8.4**

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**Overall text reference**

The writer produces a suitably formal, concise letter to the editor that makes a clear argument in response to an op-ed piece.

*Note: Comment refers to the piece as a whole rather than a specific example within the text.*

**Writing Standards. Grade 8, Standard 9** AND **Reading Standards. Grade 8, Standard 6**

**WHST.6-8.9** AND **RH.6-8.6**

**WHST.6-8.9**

Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**RH.6-8.6**

Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

**F1 Examples:** 1 · 2

The writer includes and synthesizes textual evidence to identify Akbar’s point of view regarding religious tolerance and coexistence (Akbar states “It cannot be wisdom to assert one faith over another the wise person makes justice his guide and learns from all religions…” Akbar contributed to the view that unity is what guides us to a more tolerant coexistence.)
Opinion/Argument

F2 Examples:

1. The writer includes and synthesizes textual evidence to identify the Dalai Lama’s similar point of view regarding religious tolerance and coexistence (... the common thread of compassion connects all five major religions... We all need to accept each other for who we are, to keep the world safe...).

2. Language Standards. Grade 8, Standard 2

L.8.2

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Overall text reference

The writer’s control of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling enhances the clarity of this sample.

Note: Comment refers to the piece as a whole rather than a specific example within the text.