

“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

(Letter to the Editor)

Many Faiths (Version 1)



Background Information

GRADE
8

FRAMEWORK / CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Massachusetts Curriculum Framework
for ELA and Literacy (2017)

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:	(WCA.6-8.1), (WCA.6-8.4), (WCA.6-8.9), (RI.8.1), (RI.8.8), (RCA-H.6-8.6), (L.8.2), (L.8.3) <i>See descriptions of these standards in the right column of the next page.</i>

Important Note About This Sample:

This sample is one 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.

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: **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 the Content Areas 6-12:**Grade 6-8, Standard 1 (WCA.6-8.1)**

Write arguments focused on *discipline-specific content*.

EXAMPLE: **A B C D**

Writing Standards for Literacy in the Content Areas 6-12:**Grade 6-8, Standard 4 (WCA.6-8.4)**

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

EXAMPLE: **E**

Writing Standards for Literacy in the Content Areas 6-12:**Grade 6-8, Standard 9 (WCA.6-8.9)**

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

EXAMPLE: **F**

Reading Standards for Informational Text: Grade 8, Standard 1 (RI.8.1)

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

EXAMPLE: **B**

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**

STANDARDS ADDRESSED LIST, CONTINUED ►

Please note:

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

CONTINUED ►



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)

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"

Please note:

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

END OF BACKGROUND ■

END OF STANDARDS ADDRESSED ■

**List of Standards Addressed,**
Continued:**Reading Standards for Literacy in
the Content Areas—History/Social
Studies 6-12: Grade 6-8, Standard 6
(RCA-H.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**

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**

STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

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.

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.

Many Faiths (Version 1)

(Reaction to the following: Gyatso, Tenzin. “Many Faiths, One Truth.” *The New York Times*, May 24, 2010.

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

Dear Editor,

A3 I am an eighth grade student at _____ Middle School

who was moved by the Dalai Lamas’ claim, that harmony and

begin section **end**

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



Writing in the Content Areas. Grade 6-8, Standard 1

A WCA.6-8.1.a

Introduce claim(s) about a topic or issue, acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims/critiques, and organize the reasons and evidence logically in paragraphs and section.

A1 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 A2 Examples: 1

The writer alludes to an opposing claim (*...rather than seeking out the differences.*).

STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

compassion will lead to a more tolerant world. **A3** **A1** As our technology continues to advance, **C** we are more inclined **C** to spread our conflicting opinions and views to people around the world. **C** This is why we must understand **C** that the five major religions all link through compassion. We need to take advantage of this **A1** **A2** rather than seeking out the differences. **A2**

B1 In my study of India, I discovered a leader named Akbar who promoted religious and cultural tolerance. **B1** He encouraged

Writing in the Content Areas.
Grade 6-8, Standard 1

(continued)

A3 A3 Examples: 1

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 Lamas' claim, that harmony and compassion will lead to a more tolerant world.*).

Writing in the Content Areas.**Grade 6-8, Standard 1 AND****Reading Informational Text.****Grade 8, Standard 1 AND Standard 8****B** **WCA.6-8.1.b** AND**B** **RI.8.1** AND **B** **RI.8.8****WCA.6-8.1.b**

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

RI.8.1

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

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.

B1 B1 Examples: 1

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.*).

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

talk between religious leaders to discuss views and philosophies.

F1 **B2** Akbar states “It cannot be wisdom to assert one faith

over another the wise person makes justice his guide and learns

from all religions.” **F1** **C** He implies that **C** 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. **F1** Akbar **C** contributed

to the view that **C** unity is what guides us to a more tolerant

coexistence. **B2** **F1**

Writing in the Content Areas.**Grade 6-8, Standard 1 AND****Reading Informational Text.****Grade 8, Standard 1 AND Standard 8**

(continued)

B2 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 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.*).

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

B3 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. **B3** **C** **B4** He found that **C**

F2 the common thread of compassion connects all five major religions. **F2** 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 relieve suffering”.

Writing in the Content Areas.**Grade 6-8, Standard 1 AND****Reading Informational Text.****Grade 8, Standard 1 AND Standard 8**

(continued)

B4 B4 Examples: 1

The writer cites relevant textual evidence and draws reasonable inferences that delineate and expand upon the argument made by the Dalai Lama (*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 relieve suffering”.* Buddhism also shows their dedication towards compassion because their entire religion is based off of giving up worldly 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.).

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

Buddhism also shows their dedication towards compassion because their entire religion is based off of giving up worldly desires, so people will no longer suffer. From Judaism who speaks through the Talmud, Islam from the Quran and Hindus in the Bhagavad Gita, **C** they all express that **C** compassion is a core principle in each religion. Intolerance may be as old as religion itself, **C** but this does not mean **C** we should follow blindly in its acts of evil. **F2** We all need to accept each other for who we are, to keep the world safe **F2** from all judgment and violence. **B4**

Writing in the Content Areas.**Grade 6-8, Standard 1 AND****Language. Grade 8, Standard 3****C WCA.6-8.1.d AND C L.8.3****WCA.6-8.1.d**

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

L.8.3

Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

C C Examples: 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5 · 6 · 7

The writer includes precise words and phrases that, despite occasional abrupt transitions, establish an appropriate style and indicate a formal tone suitable to a letter written to make serious assertions about a complex topic (...we are more inclined... This is why we must understand... He implies that... contributed to the view that... He found that... they all express that... but this does not mean...)

Writing in the Content Areas.**Grade 6-8, Standard 1****D WCA.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.*).

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

D 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. **D**

Writing in the Content Areas.
Grade 6-8, Standard 4

E WCA.6-8.4

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

E 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 in the Content Areas.

Grade 6-8, Standard 9 AND

**Reading in the Content Areas–History/
Social Studies.** Grade 6-8, Standard 6

F WCA.6-8.9 AND F RCA-H.6-8.6

WCA.6-8.9

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

RCA-H.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 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.*).

begin section **end**

END OF WRITING SAMPLE ■



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

Writing in the Content Areas.**Grade 6-8, Standard 9 AND****Reading in the Content Areas-History/
Social Studies. Grade 6-8, Standard 6**
(continued)**F2** F2 Examples: 1 · 2

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...*).

Language Standards.**Grade 8, Standard 2****G** L.8.2

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

G 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.

begin section end

