

“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 6 English Language Arts

### Inform/Explain

*(Short Research Essay)*

The Salem Witch Trials



# Background Information

GRADE  
6

## FRAMEWORK / CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Massachusetts Curriculum Framework  
for ELA and Literacy (2017)

**Writing Sample Title:** The Salem Witch Trials

**Text Type and Purpose:** Inform/Explain

**Grade level/Content area:** Grade 6 English Language Arts

**Type of Assignment:** Short Research Essay

**Standards Addressed:** (W.6.2), (W.6.3), (W.6.4), (W.6.8), (W.6.9), (RI.6.1), (L.6.1), (L.6.2), (L.6.3), (L.6.5), (L.6.6)

*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:

- Blends two modes of writing in an effective manner
- Links ideas with pertinent words, phrases, and clauses
- Develops ideas with paraphrased information and concise, well-integrated quotations
- Provides analysis supported by evidence drawn from research
- Uses precise language to shape the reader's understanding of the topic
- Includes domain-specific language to make descriptions more authentic
- Maintains a consistent style and appropriate tone

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## 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 the 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 the student work

EXAMPLE: **A**

#### 2. Colored 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)

**Instructional Practices:**

The teacher used the following practices:

- The teacher asked students to read historical fiction novels.
- The teacher provided students with text sets based on the themes in their historical fiction novels.

**Assignment Description:**

Students were asked to write short research essays based on their chosen themes.

**Intended Audience:**

Teacher, classmates, family

**Time:**

Unknown

**Writing Process:**

Unknown

**Materials:**

- Historical fiction novels
- Thematic text sets
- Topic development rubric
- Standard English conventions rubric

**Writing Standards:****Grade 6, Standard 2 (W.6.2)**

Write informative/explanatory texts (e.g., essays, oral reports, biographical feature articles) to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

EXAMPLES **A B C D F**

**Writing Standards:****Grade 6, Standard 3 (W.6.3)**

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

EXAMPLES: **A**

**Writing Standards:****Grade 6, Standard 4 (W.6.4)**

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

EXAMPLES: **F**

**Writing Standards:****Grade 6, Standard 8 (W.6.8)**

When conducting research, gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources.

EXAMPLES: **B**

**Writing Standards:****Grade 6, Standard 9 (W.6.9)**

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support written analysis, interpretation, reflection, and research, applying one or more grade 6 standards for Reading Literature or Reading Informational Text as needed.

EXAMPLES: **E**

**Reading Standards:****Grade 6, Standard 1 (RI.6.1)**

Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what a text states explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, quoting or paraphrasing as appropriate.

EXAMPLES: **B E**

**Please note:**

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

CONTINUED ►



**Standards Addressed**

(Continued)

**Language Standards:**

**Grade 6, Standard 1 (L.6.1)**

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking; retain and further develop language skills learned in previous grades.

EXAMPLE: **H**

**Language Standards:**

**Grade 6, Standard 2 (L.6.2)**

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

EXAMPLE: **I**

**Language Standards:**

**Grade 6, Standard 3 (L.6.3)**

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

EXAMPLE: **F**

**Language Standards:**

**Grade 6, Standard 5 (L.6.5)**

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

EXAMPLE: **G**

**Language Standards:**

**Grade 6, Standard 6 (L.6.6)**

Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; independently research words and gather vocabulary knowledge.

EXAMPLE: **D**

**Please note:**

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

END OF BACKGROUND ■



## STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

### In this sample...

The writer introduces a historical topic with a blend of narrative and informational techniques. Organization is generally clear and coherent, notwithstanding unnecessary repetition and awkward arrangement of some ideas. Relevant paraphrased information and concise, well-integrated quotations develop a clear central idea and support analysis. The writer uses precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and the conventions of standard English to create a consistent style and the serious, authoritative tone of a young historian.

### 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 normally 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 labeled arrows in the text do not necessarily appear in alphabetical order.

## The Salem Witch Trials

**A2** Bridget shivered and wrapped her coat tighter around her as the harsh wind blew. She passed a woman walking with a basket of eggs and when as Bridget smiled sweetly and waved the woman let out a small grunt of annoyance and turned her back on Bridget. **A2**

### Writing. Grade 6, Standard 2 AND Writing. Grade 6, Standard 3

**A** **W.6.2.a** AND **A** **W.6.3.b**

#### **W.6.2.a**

Introduce a topic; organize ideas, concepts, and information in paragraphs and sections, using strategies such as definition, classification, comparison/contrast, and cause/effect; include text features (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

#### **W.6.3.b**

Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

**A1** **A1** Examples: 1

The writer presents a clear thesis statement (*Many people in Puritanical Salem Massachusetts died because they were different, and the Puritans were afraid they could not control them easily.*).

**begin** section **end**

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES 



## STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

**B1** Bridget Bishop was the first person to be hanged during the Salem witch trials. Twenty people died in total. One man was pressed to death and nineteen people were hanged. **B1** **A2** Bridget was very different than most Puritans. She ran a tavern, was married three times and fought with her three husbands openly. Following **D2** societal expectations **D2** was a vital part of the **D2** Puritan religion, **D2** and those who did not conform were thought to be working with the Devil. The people of Salem feared the Devil very much, and when witches were thought to be working with the Devil in Salem, panic arose. People supported killing those who were different. **A2** **A1** Many people in Puritanical Salem Massachusetts died because they were different, and the Puritans were afraid they could not control them easily. **A1**

**C** Many people in Puritanical Salem did not conform to the societal beliefs and ended up losing their lives as a result. **C** There were many rules and if citizens did not follow all of those rules, they

**begin** section **end**

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



**Writing. Grade 6, Standard 2 AND Writing. Grade 6, Standard 3**  
(continued)

**A2** A2 Examples: 1 · 2

The writer uses a combination of narrative and informational techniques to introduce the thesis of this sample (*Bridget shivered and wrapped her coat tighter around her as the harsh wind blew. She passed a woman walking with a basket of eggs and when as Bridget smiled sweetly and waved the woman let out a small grunt of annoyance and turned her back on Bridget.... Bridget was very different than most Puritans. She ran a tavern, was married three times and fought with her three husbands openly. Following societal expectations was a vital part of the Puritan religion, and those who did not conform were thought to be working with the Devil. The people of Salem feared the Devil very much, and when witches were thought to be working with the Devil in Salem, panic arose. People supported killing those who were different.*).

**Writing. Grade 6, Standard 2 AND Writing. Grade 6, Standard 8 AND Reading Informational Text. Grade 6, Standard 1**

**B** W.6.2.b AND **B** W.6.8 AND

**B** RI.6.1

**W.6.2.b**

Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.

**W.6.8**

When conducting research, gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources.

**RI.6.1**

Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what a text states explicitly, as well as inferences drawn from the text, quoting or paraphrasing as appropriate.

## STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

were **D1** cast out. **D1** The religion of the **D2** Puritans **D2** was very strict and **B2** “the Puritan community rewarded conformity-you were expected to fit in and do what everybody else did” (Mills 15). **B2**

**E** The Puritans desire for **D2** conformity **D2** was so strong that they wanted to get rid of anyone that was different. The trials were an excuse for the people of Salem to **D1** expunge **D1** of all those people who were different. **E** Witches were thought to be able to harm people and therefore were feared greatly. The Puritans feared the Devil and God equally and **B2** “they believed the Devil was real, and had the intent to influence and harm” (Mills 16) **B2**. People heard about and eye witnessed the fits the Afflicted girls were having. **B1** Even the town’s doctor said the **G** evil hand **G** must be on them. **B1**

People were terrified that a witch would harm them so they wanted the witches found. Panic arose when the Devil was thought to be among the people of Salem. Many people were accused of being witches and

**Writing. Grade 6, Standard 2** AND

**Writing. Grade 6, Standard 8** AND

**Reading Informational Text.**

**Grade 6, Standard 1**

(continued)

**B1** B1 Examples: 1 • 2 • 3 • 4

The writer develops the thesis with relevant paraphrased facts and details (*Bridget Bishop was the first person to be hanged during the Salem witch trials. Twenty people died in total. One man was pressed to death and nineteen people were hanged.... Even the town’s doctor said the evil hand must be on them.... Tituba was accused then because she had different customs and she was a slave.... Sarah did not fit in because she was not as neat and clean cut.*).

**B2** B2 Examples: 1 • 2 • 3 • 4 • 5

Although bibliographic information is incomplete, the writer provides relevant, concise, and well-integrated quotations (“the Puritan community rewarded conformity-you were expected to fit in and do what everybody else did” [Mills 15].... “they believed the Devil was real, and had the intent to influence and harm” [Mills 16].... “people in seventeenth century New England believed that a witch was a person who had made a pact with Satan and therefore had strange and terrible powers” [Stevens 28].... “she smoked a pipe, was slovenly, and was a beggar” [Stevens 39].... “Bishop became the first person to be hanged on a hill that later became Gallows Hills” [Mills 19].).

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



## STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

**B2** “people in seventeenth century New England believed that a witch was a person who had made a pact with Satan and therefore had strange and terrible powers” (Stevens 28). **B2** Holding trials was encouraged because citizens feared that the people working with the Devil would harm them. Because of the fear of the Devil and these **D2** religious beliefs, **D2** the Salem witch trials cost innocent people their lives. No one doubted the girls’ affliction.

**I** **C** When the afflicted girls started having fits the people of Salem needed someone to blame; the people of Salem went to the outcasts because they were different. **C** **I** The majority of people in Salem were English, Tituba was not. They simply assumed she was responsible for the afflicted girls’ fits. One of the first three people to be accused was Tituba and “Tituba’s unfamiliar accent and unusual traditions and stories fascinated and frightened the Parris children” (Mills 18). **I** When the girls started having fits, they needed someone to blame; **B1** Tituba was accused then because she had different customs and she was a slave. **B1** **I** Tituba was

**begin** section **end**

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►

**Writing. Grade 6, Standard 2****C W.6.2.c**

Use appropriate transitions to clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.

**C** C Examples: 1 · 2 · 3

The writer transitions from one paragraph to another by referencing at the beginning of one paragraph relevant material from previous paragraphs. The writer accomplishes this in a mostly effective, although sometimes repetitious, manner (*Many people in Puritanical Salem did not conform to the societal beliefs and ended up losing their lives as a result.... When the afflicted girls started having fits the people of Salem needed someone to blame; the people of Salem went to the outcasts because they were different.... Many people in Puritanical Salem, Massachusetts died because they were different than everybody else and the Puritans were afraid they could not control them easily.*).

**Writing. Grade 6, Standard 2 AND Language. Grade 6, Standard 6****D W.6.2.d AND D L.6.6****W.6.2.d**

Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

**L.6.6**

Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; independently research words and gather vocabulary knowledge.

**D1** D1 Examples: 1 · 2 · 3 · 4

The writer uses precise language to shape the reader’s understanding of the persecution suffered by victims of the Salem witch trials (*cast out, expunge, blemish, accusations*).

**D2** D2 Examples: 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5 · 6

The writer uses domain-specific language to make descriptions of Puritan society more authentic (*societal expectations, Puritan religion, Puritans, conformity, religious beliefs, Puritan community*).

## STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

targeted because of her uniqueness and the Puritans were quick to find her guilty. Similarly, Sarah Good preferred to live differently than others in Salem, and she was also very poor. People were easily convinced Sarah was a witch because **B2** “she smoked a pipe, was slovenly, and was a beggar” (Stevens 39). **B2** Among the other Puritans, **B1** Sarah did not fit in because she was not as neat and clean cut. **B1** Seen as a **D1** blemish, **D1** Sarah lost her life in the trials because she, too, could not be changed. Another outsider, Bridget Bishop was different because she was not exactly like other women and people did not know what to do with her. She was accused because “she spoke for herself, was married three times and fought openly with her husband’s” (Mills 19). Within the **D2** Puritan community **D2** most women were only married one time and were refined but Bishop was not. **E** This did not conform to the Puritan society’s beliefs, and made her difficult to control. Guilty of being outspoken, Bishop lost her life in the witch trials. **E** Those accused in the witch trials died because they were unique, and their society could not control them easily.

**Writing. Grade 6, Standard 9 AND  
Reading Informational Text.  
Grade 6, Standard 1**

**E** **W.6.9 AND E RI.6.1**

**W.6.9**

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support written analysis, interpretation, reflection, and research, applying one or more grade 6 standards for Reading Literature or Reading Informational Text as needed.

**RI.6.1**

Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what a text states explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, quoting or paraphrasing as appropriate.

**E** **E Examples: 1 • 2 • 3**

The writer provides fact-based analysis of consequences suffered by those persecuted in seventeenth century Salem (*The Puritans desire for conformity was so strong that they wanted to get rid of anyone that was different. The trials were an excuse for the people of Salem to expunge of all those people who were different.... This did not conform to the Puritan society’s beliefs, and made her difficult to control. Guilty of being outspoken, Bishop lost her life in the witch trials... Another Puritan belief was the belief of the Devil and when people thought witches were working with the Devil, the citizens of Salem were terrified and supported the trials. Innocence meant nothing for those who were different you were singled out.*)

**begin** section **end**

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



## STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

**C** Many people in Puritanical Salem, Massachusetts died because they were different than everybody else and the Puritans were afraid they could not control them easily. **C** No further efforts to conform would save their lives. Pleading not guilty did not change the outcome of Bridget’s trial, in the end she was put to death. Bridget claimed she was innocent but **B2** “Bishop became the first person to be hanged on a hill that later became Gallows Hills” (Mills19). **B2** Many other people were tried for witchcraft, and unlike Bridget, **D1** pled guilty in hopes of conforming and being spared. None the less, they were found guilty and sent to jail or killed. More than a dozen innocent people were killed even though they did nothing wrong. The **D1** accusations **D1** lasted and “by September 1692, the jails were full and twenty people had been hanged”(Mills 19). These people did not follow Puritanical rules and were considered different because of it. As a result, they were tried and put in jail or killed. The trials held did

**Writing. Grade 6, Standard 2 AND Writing. Grade 6, Standard 4 AND Language. Grade 6, Standard 3**

**F W.6.2.e AND F W.6.4 AND F L.6.3.a**

**W.6.2.e**

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

**W.6.4**

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

**L.6.3.a**

Maintain appropriate consistency in style and tone while varying sentence patterns for meaning and audience interest.

**F** Overall text reference

The writer develops the topic and organizes information in a mostly effective, clear, and coherent manner appropriate to an audience unfamiliar with the Salem witch trials. The writer maintains an appropriately formal style and serious tone.

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

**Language. Grade 6, Standard 5**

**G L.6.5**

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

**G** G Examples: 1

The writer couches the spectral overtones of a seventeenth century doctor’s diagnosis in a compelling metaphor (*evil hand*).

**begin** section **end**

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



## STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

not change the fates of the accused. Guilty of being different, those who were unique were killed in Puritanical Salem.

Many people in Puritanical Salem, Massachusetts died because they were different than everybody else and the Puritans were afraid they could not control them easily. Fitting in and conforming was very important to the Puritans and their religion. **E** Another Puritan belief was the belief of the Devil and when people thought witches were working with the Devil, the citizens of Salem were terrified and supported the trials. Innocence meant nothing for those who were different you were singled out. **E** The religious restrictions negatively viewed the unique people of Salem but today, these same traits and uniqueness would be seen positively today.

**Language. Grade 6, Standard 1****H L.6.1**

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking; retain and further develop language skills learned in previous grades.

**H Overall text reference**

The writer demonstrates control of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage consistent with edited writing. Occasional errors do not interfere materially with the underlying message.

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

**Language. Grade 6, Standard 2****I L.6.2**

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

**I Examples: 1 · 2**

The writer exceeds the grade level standard by using semicolons effectively (*When the afflicted girls started having fits the people of Salem needed someone to blame; the people of Salem went to the outcasts because they were different... When the girls started having fits, they needed someone to blame; Tituba was accused then because she had different customs and she was a slave.*).

**begin** section **end**

END OF WRITING SAMPLE ■

