GRADE 8

FRAMEWORK / CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED:
Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for ELA and Literacy (**2017**)

"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)

Massachusetts Department of ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

Many Faiths (Version 2)

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Writing Standards *in Action* Project
www.doe.mass.edu/candi/wsa

Background Information

GRADE 8

FRAMEWORK / CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED:
Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for ELA and Literacy (2017)

Writing Sample Title: Many Faiths (Version 2)

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), (RI.8.1), (RI.8.8), (RCA-H.6-8.6), (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 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 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.

In comparison, the writer of **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. 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)

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Highlights:

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

The sample:

- Introduces clear claim
- Cites clear and convincing text-based evidence to support the claim
- Refers to arguments and describes relevant claims made in two informational texts
- Identifies aspects of two informational texts that reveal the points of view of their authors
- Integrates text-based evidence and enhances style with a variety of linking words, phrases, and clauses
- Demonstrates conciseness appropriate to a letter to the editor
- Provides a conclusion that reemphasizes 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

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

CONTINUED

Writing Standards for Literacy in the Content Areas 6-12: Grade 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 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

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

Background Information

GRADE 8

FRAMEWORK / CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for ELA and Literacy (2017)

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 ■

List of Standards Addressed,
Continued:

Reading Standards for Literacy in the Content Areas–History/Social Studies 6–12: Grade 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

END OF STANDARDS ADDRESSED ■

Opinion / Argument

GRADE 8

FRAMEWORK / CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED:
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In this sample...

The writer argues in favor of perspectives expressed in the *New York Times* op-ed piece, "Many Faiths, One Truth." Weight of evidence, rather than elaborate reasoning, bolsters this writer's claim. Citation of clear and convincing evidence from the op-ed and a second source enables the writer to build concise support for the claim that compassion and tolerance are essential to peaceful coexistence. The writer creates coherence, clarity and cohesion with a variety of transitional words, phrases, and clauses that clarify relationships among ideas and enhance the sample's style.

Many Faiths (Version 2)

(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,

A2 I am an 8th grade student who recently read the Dalai Lama's "Many Faiths One Truth." A2 A1 To respond to this I'd

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES

STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

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.

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 sections.

A1 **A1 Examples: 1**

The writer introduces a clear claim *(To respond to this I'd like to say that he was absolutely right. You can see that all five major religions of the world share a common theme of compassion. Since they all share this theme they really should try and come together and relate to each other.)*.

A2 **A2 Examples: 1 · 2**

The writer introduces the sources around which the sample is organized *(I am an 8th grade student who recently read the Dalai Lama's "Many Faiths One Truth..." Even Akbar, an ancient Mughal leader thinks in this way and made huge efforts to make this happen.)*.

MORE COMMENTARY

like to say that he was absolutely right. You can see that all five major religions of the world share a common theme of compassion. Since they all share this theme they really should try and come together a nd relate to each other. A1 C2 A2 Even Akbar, an ancient Mughal leader thinks in this way and made huge efforts to make this happen. A2

B1 In my social studies class we learned about Akbar. C2 He was the greatest and most powerful Mughal king of all time. B1

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES

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 social studies class we learned about Akbar. He was the greatest and most powerful Mughal king of all time)*.

B2 B2 Examples: 1

The writer cites relevant textual evidence to state the claim made by Akbar *(He once said, "It cannot be wise to assert one faith over another.")*.

F1 B3 His main goal as king was to spread compassion and tolerance to unite the major religions and find a common ground. B3 B2 He once said, "It cannot be wise to assert one faith over another." B2 F1 He followed through with this through his years as king and it caused his empire to flourish. C2 B3 He did the same as the Dalai Lama was trying to get across in his article. All religions can be united through compassion and tolerance. B3

F2 B4 The Dalai Lama wrote about how he found compassion as a common ground to all religions. B4 C2 F2

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES

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

B3 **B3 Examples: 1 · 2**

The writer suggests, rather than delineates, Akbar's argument *(His main goal as king was to spread compassion and tolerance to unite the major religions and find a common ground... He did the same as the Dalai Lama was trying to get across in his article. All religions can be united through compassion and tolerance.)*.

B4 **B4 Examples: 1**

The writer provides additional context for the major claim of the letter *(The Dalai Lama wrote about how he found compassion as a common ground to all religions.)*.

B5 **B5 Examples: 1**

The writer cites abundant relevant evidence from the op-ed to give weight to the claim *(He found it in Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. In Hinduism, he found examples such as Baba Amte who founded a leper colony for those who were normally shunned by society. In Islam, an example is the name of their god, which means "Compassionate and Merciful." For Judaism, he mentions how the Talmud and the Bible both share a theme of compassion, and that you should "love your neighbor as yourself." He also learned about Jesus' act of compassion and selfless teachings in Christianity.)*.

B6 **B6 Examples: 1**

The writer restates the outlines of the Dalai Lama's argument, giving additional weight to the claim *(...all five major can come together and find a common ground. If all these religions would realize this, the world would be able to come together and the world would be much more peaceful.)*.

B5 He found it in Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. C1 In Hinduism, he found C1 examples such as Baba Amte who founded a leper colony for those who were normally shunned by society. C1 In Islam, an example is C1 the name of their god, which means "Compassionate and Merciful." C1 For Judaism, he mentions C1 how the Talmud and the Bible both share a theme of compassion, and that you should "love your neighbor as yourself." C1 He also learned C1 about Jesus' act of compassion and selfless teachings in Christianity. B5 C1 All of these examples

Writing in the Content Areas. Grade 6-8, Standard 1 AND **Language. Grade 8, Standard 3**

C WCA.6-8.1.c AND **C L.8.3**

WCA.6-8.1.c
Use words, phrases, and clauses with precision to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims/ critiques, reasons, and evidence.

L.8.3
Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

C1 **C1 Examples: 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5 · 6**

The writer enhances style and creates cohesion with a variety of transitional elements that clarify relationships among ideas cited in text-based evidence *(In Hinduism, he found... In Islam, an example is... For Judaism, he mentions... He also learned... All of these examples help... If all these religions would realize this..)*

C2 **C2 Examples: 1 · 2**

The writer transitions between adjacent paragraphs by referencing key material from a previous paragraph in the next *(Even Akbar, an ancient Mughal leader thinks in this way and made huge efforts to make this happen. In my social studies class we learned about Akbar... He did the same as the Dalai Lama was trying to get across in his article. All religions can be united through compassion and tolerance. The Dalai Lama wrote about how he found compassion as a common ground to all religions.)*

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES

help C1 to prove the point that B6 all five major can come together and find a common ground. C1 If all these religions would realize this, C1 the world would be able to come together and the world would be much more peaceful. B6

D This is why I agree with the Dalai Lama. You can clearly see how all major religons share the theme of compassion. It shows they should try and come together and realize this common ground. D

begin section end

END OF WRITING SAMPLE ■

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 brief conclusion that restates rather than supports the claim *(This is why I agree with the Dalai Lama. You can clearly see how all major religons share the theme of compassion. It shows they should try and come together and realize this common ground.)*.

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 claim supported by relevant text-based evidence.

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

FRAMEWORK / CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for ELA and Literacy (2017)

STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

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

F 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

The writer identifies with textual evidence Akbar's point of view regarding religious tolerance and coexistence *(His main goal as king was to spread compassion and tolerance to unite the major religions and find a common ground. He once said, "It cannot be wise to assert one faith over another.")*.

F2 F2 Examples: 1

The writer identifies with textual evidence the Dalai Lama's similar point of view regarding religious tolerance and coexistence *(The Dalai Lama wrote about how he found compassion as a common ground to all religions.)*.

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