

5 - 7 WEEKS

8th Grade: Unit Two

COURAGEOUS CHOICES

Unit at a Glance

Grade Level: 8th

Essential Question: What motivates us to be courageous? When is courage worth the risk?

Length: 5–7 weeks (see [Pacing Guide](#))

Unit Texts: (see [full list of texts](#))

- “The Terror” by Junot Díaz (Non-fiction)
- “The Friday Everything Changed” by Anne Hart (Short Story)
- “Sonnet” by James Weldon Johnson (Poem)
- “Transcript of Full Joseph McNeil Interview” by Newsday (Non-fiction)
- “The Treasure of Lemon Brown” by Walter Dean Myers (Short Story)
- “I look at the world” by Langston Hughes (Poem)
- Supplemental Texts Included (English + Spanish)
- Independent Reading and Book Club Options

Focus Skills: (see [Reading and Writing Skill Arcs](#))

Reading:

- Theme and its relationship to characters, setting and plot [RL.8.2]
- Plot and character development [RL.8.3]
- Impact of word choice and figurative language [RL.8.4]

Writing:

- Expository writing [W.8.2]

Language:

- Use verbs in the conditional mood [L.8.1.C]
- Grade-appropriate academic vocabulary [L.8.6]

Speaking and Listening:

- Pose questions that connect ideas of several speakers [SL.8.1.C]
- Respond to others’ questions with evidence and ideas [SL.8.1.C]

Unit Overview

What does it mean to be courageous? How do people find the courage to take a stand when no one else joins in? The 360 Unit, *Courageous Choices*, is anchored around five engaging texts that highlight what it looks like to choose courage over fear and doubt: “The Terror,” “The Friday Everything Changed,” “Sonnet,” “The Treasure of Lemon Brown,” and “I look at the world.” Students will meet characters who choose to face their fears because they want to do the right thing or create a change in their lives and communities. Other characters find their courage by trusting in the hope and promise of a brighter future. To help students further engage with the themes in the unit, they will also read “Transcript of Full Joseph McNeil Interview,” an interview that illustrates the courageous mindset of Joseph McNeil, a member of the Greensboro Four in North Carolina in 1960. Students also engage in a Related Media Exploration featuring videos that explore more real-world examples of young people’s courage, and think about what motivates them to act courageously.

By the end of the unit, students should be able to articulate how authors use character interactions, character change, and figurative language to develop a theme. To demonstrate this skill, they will write a literary analysis essay in which they analyze the relationship between the unit texts and a selected quote about courage. Students will also review how to introduce evidence with context and how to write strong explanations. This 360 unit also includes resources to support teachers in launching an independent reading program or book clubs that run parallel to the core instruction in the unit.

WHAT’S INCLUDED

- ✓ 6 Reading Lessons
- ✓ A Set of Supplemental Texts
- ✓ Independent Reading and Book Club Resources
- ✓ A Writing Baseline Assessment
- ✓ 4 Writing Lessons
- ✓ A Theme Reading Skill Lesson
- ✓ 2 Vocabulary Activity Sets
- ✓ 2 Vocabulary Quizzes
- ✓ 1 Grammar and Usage Activity Set
- ✓ 1 Grammar and Usage Quiz
- ✓ 1 Discussion Skill Lesson
- ✓ 1 Class Discussion
- ✓ 1 Related Media Exploration
- ✓ 1 Literary Analysis Essay
- ✓ 1 Narrative Prompt
- ✓ A Set of Alternative End-Of-Unit Writing Options

Skill Focus:

By the end of 7th grade, students should be able to determine a theme and analyze its development in a literary text [RL.7.2] and examine how elements of a story interact [RL.7.3]. In this 8th grade unit, students will build on and advance these skills. In 8th grade, students should articulate how dialogue and specific moments in a story reveal change in a character or provoke a character's decision [RL.8.3]. Students should be able to explain how character interactions create change, move the story forward, and develop the theme [RL.8.2]. Students should also be able to notice and examine how authors use literary devices and figurative language to develop a theme [RL.8.4].

Reading lessons in this unit include scaffolded questions to help students meet grade level reading standards. Independent Practice for reading lessons are aligned to RL.8.2, RL.8.3, and RL.8.4 and include both multiple choice and short answer responses. An optional theme lesson is provided for students who would benefit from scaffolded support for determining theme. This theme lesson can be applied to any of the unit texts.

Writing in this unit is focused on helping students write an end of unit literary analysis essay that analyzes how the unit texts demonstrate a specific message about courage. Students will demonstrate the unit's writing skills in their responses by using context to clarify evidence and writing strong explanations that convey how selected evidence supports a particular argument.

ARC OF READING INSTRUCTION

| Reading Lesson 1 | Reading Lesson 2 | Reading Lesson 3 | Reading Lesson 4 | Reading Lesson 5 | Reading Lesson 6 |
|--|--|--|---|--|--|
| "The Terror" by Junot Díaz (Memoir) | "The Friday Everything Changed" by Anne Hart (Short Story) | "Sonnet" by James Weldon Johnson (Poem) | "Transcript of Full Joseph McNeil Interview" by Newsday (Interview) | "The Treasure of Lemon Brown" by Walter Dean Myers (Short Story) | "I look at the world" by Langston Hughes (Poem) |
| In this lesson, students will analyze how a theme develops over the course of the text, including how it is shaped by characterization and character change . [RL.8.2, RL.8.3] | In this lesson, students will analyze how a theme is developed over the course of the text, including how it is shaped by character interactions and specific incidents in a story. [RL.8.2, RL.8.3] | In this lesson, students will learn how imagery and juxtaposition develop the theme of a poem. [RL.8.2, RL.8.4] | In this lesson, students will analyze the connections between individuals, ideas, and events . [RL.8.3] | In this lesson, students will analyze how a theme develops over the course of the text, including how it is shaped by characterization and character change . [RL.8.2, RL.8.3] | In this lesson, students will learn how figurative language develops the theme of a poem. [RL.8.2, RL.8.4] |

This unit also includes:

- Optional supplemental texts in English and Spanish that support students in developing reading volume and stamina.
- Independent reading and book club optional to build students' volume and breadth of reading

How does RL.2 shift?

7th Grade: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and **analyze its development over the course of the text**; provide an objective summary of the text.



8th Grade: 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.

How does RL.3 shift?

7th Grade: Analyze how **particular elements of a story or drama interact** (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).



8th Grade: Analyze how particular **lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama** propel the action, **reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision**.

How does RL.4 shift?

7th Grade: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; **analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds** (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.



8th Grade: 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** and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

Unit Test

Coming Soon: Unit Tests will be available for SY 2022-2023 as part of the CommonLit 360 for Schools package of services. For more information, encourage your administrator to email 360@commonlit.org.

ARC OF WRITING INSTRUCTION

| Writing Baseline Assessment (Optional) | Writing Lesson 1: | Writing Lesson 2: | Writing Lesson 3: | Writing Lesson 4: |
|---|-----------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| In your opinion, is it important to challenge unfair rules, even if doing so gets you in trouble? | Introducing Evidence With Context | Writing Explanations | End of Unit Writing Review | Unit 2 Essay: Planning |

Prompt (Recommended): In this unit, you've read about people and characters who have shown courage. Select **one** quote about courage from the list below. Then analyze how at least **two** of the people and characters you've read about demonstrate the ideas in your quote. You can also use examples from your own life. **[W.8.2]**

- "You cannot swim for new horizons until you have courage to lose sight of the shore" —Robert Frost
- "I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear." —Nelson Mandela
- "Courage is the ability to do the right thing, all the time, no matter how painful or uncomfortable it might be" —Tony Dungy

Essay (Optional): Narrative

Prompt: You have read "The Friday Everything Changed" by Anne Hart. Rewrite the story from Miss Ralston's point of view, beginning at paragraph 30. **[W.8.3]**

VOCABULARY, DISCUSSION, AND GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION



Vocabulary

This 360 Unit includes **explicit vocabulary instruction** on 12 academic words. Students complete 5 activities for each set of words. Consistent with research, students encounter these words in context. Word usage is reinforced in reading, writing, and discussion activities **[L.8.6]**. [Learn more here.](#)



Discussion

In all 360 Units, students discuss the texts they are reading daily. In addition to multiple opportunities for **informal discussion**, there is one **formal whole class discussion** where students analyze a quote about courage and consider why it is difficult to "lose sight of the shore" and how people gain the courage to do it. Students receive explicit instruction on **making connections between ideas** **[SL.8.1.]**.



Grammar Instruction

This unit includes a short lesson and ten practice activities on **using verbs in the conditional mood** **[L.8.1.C]**. This skill helps students express more sophisticated ideas in writing.



Lessons & Materials

Below, you will find all of the materials needed to teach this unit. To better help you understand the choices and flexibility within the unit materials, individual lessons are tagged as Essential, Recommended, or Optional.

A sample Pacing Guide is available [here](#).

Unit Introduction

ESSENTIAL

ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

Get students engaged in this 360 Unit with an editable slide deck and paired handout. The materials help to hook students by giving them the opportunity to debate unit themes before they dive into the first lesson.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

- Use the slide deck to facilitate the Unit Introduction handout whole class (20 mins)

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Slide Deck](#)
- [Teacher Copy](#)
- [Student Copy](#)
- [Student Reference Sheet](#)
- [Word Wall](#)

Writing Baseline Assessment

OPTIONAL

ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

Assigning a writing baseline assessment at the beginning of the year is a great way to get to know your class and assess student strengths and weaknesses. This argumentative prompt connects to the major unit themes. It asks students to argue whether or not it is important to challenge unfair rules, using evidence from stories, movies, real world events, or experiences from their own lives.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

Distribute the Writing Baseline Assessment on paper or through Google Docs. Set aside one class period for students to compose the essay, ideally in a silent testing environment. Students may use blank paper or a digital notebook to plan their essay. Use the Grade 6-10 Argumentative Writing Rubric to score student essays. Provide direct feedback to students on their essay using the Student Feedback Form. Have students reflect on their writing and set writing goals using the Writing Baseline Assessment Goal-Setting Tool. You may use this tool to kick off 1:1 conferences with students.

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Student Copy: Writing Baseline Assessment](#)
- [Grade 6-10 Argumentative Writing Rubric and Student Feedback Form](#)
- [Writing Baseline Assessment Goal Setting Tool](#)



Vocabulary Activity Set: List 1

ESSENTIAL

**ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:**

This vocabulary activity set will help students master the 6 high-impact academic vocab words they will see in the stories they read. These 5 activities are great for a quick warm-up activity or homework.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

- Use the Slide Deck to facilitate Vocabulary Activity 1 whole-class (20 min)
- Flexibly assign the remaining activities as warm-ups, homework, or practice to prepare students for the Vocabulary Quiz.

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Student Vocabulary Activity Set](#)
- Teacher Answer Key*
- [Activity 1 Slide Deck](#)
- [Word Wall](#)

*Not available in PDF. Coming soon in digital form!

Supplemental Texts

OPTIONAL

**ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:**

Each CommonLit 360 Unit is accompanied by a set of supplemental texts that connect to the unit's themes. Texts can be printed or assigned digitally and include questions and activities.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

Review the [Guidance for Supplemental Text Sets](#) for ideas on how to implement supplemental texts across the unit.

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Katie Sowers is the first woman to coach in a Super Bowl. Her goal: 'Make sure I'm not the last.'](#) (Informational Text): This text explores the path that groundbreaking female NFL coach Katie Sowers took to become one of the first women with that job description. Use this text to offer students a modern example of the girls' struggles and courage in "The Friday Everything Changed."
- [The First Time John Lewis and I Integrated the Buses](#) (informational text): This text reveals the experiences of Bernard Lafayette Jr. and John Lewis during the Civil Rights Movement, particularly their efforts to desegregate buses through the Freedom Rides. Use this text to continue the conversation about Joseph McNeil's courage or to emphasize the idea that courage requires perseverance and hope in a better tomorrow.
- [Rosa Parks](#) (poem): This poem highlights the contributions that seemingly ordinary people made during the Civil Rights Movement. It underscores how people like Rosa Parks and Pullman Porters played an instrumental role in helping to make change. Use this text to connect to the courageous choices and actions of Joseph McNeil and the people he lists as his inspiration.
- [The Leap](#) (short story): In this short story, a narrator describes her mother, a retired trapeze performer who has gone blind. The narrator explains the courage her mother exhibited throughout her life when it came to caring for and protecting those she loved. Pair this text with "The Treasure of Lemon Brown" and continue the conversation about what motivates people to find courage in moments of danger.
- [Monkeyman](#) (short story): In this excerpt from Walter Dean Myers' collection of short stories *145th Street*, an unnamed character describes his experiences with a neighborhood friend nicknamed Monkeyman for his love of reading in a treehouse. Monkeyman's commitment to non-violence and doing what is right conveys a message about courage and the importance of community. Pair this text with "The Treasure of Lemon Brown" for a Walter Dean Myers mini author study or use it to further the discussion about how courageous actions influence others to think differently.

Independent Reading and Book Club Resources

OPTIONAL

**ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:**

This set of resources supports teachers in launching an independent reading program or book clubs that run parallel to the core instruction in this unit. It includes a list of books that align thematically to *8th Grade Unit 2: Courageous Choices*, discussion questions, reading response questions, as well as ready-made student-facing logs and handouts.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

- Start by downloading [Best Practices for Independent Reading](#).
- Check out the [8th Grade Unit 2: Courageous Choices Independent Reading Teacher Guide](#) and make a plan for independent reading.

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Student Copy: Independent Reading Materials](#)

Reading Lesson: “The Terror” (Memoir)

ESSENTIAL

**ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:**

“The Terror” by Junot Díaz is a powerful memoir that deals with courageous choices. Díaz describes some of the challenges he experienced as an adolescent, and explains how he finally found the courage to face a group of teenage bullies. As students read, they analyze theme development and character change.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

- Introduce the lesson with the slide deck (5 min)
- Lead students through the reading and questions (20 min)
- Have students complete the independent practice (20 min)
- Facilitate the quick partner discussion (5 min)

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Slide Deck](#)
- Teacher Copy*
- Student Copy*

*Student and teacher copies of this reading lesson are downloadable on commonlit.org for verified teacher accounts. Navigate to the [text page](#) and click “Download PDF” to access these materials.

Reading Skill Lesson: Theme

OPTIONAL

**ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:**

This is an optional review lesson for students who need extra help identifying the theme of a passage. It can be applied to one or multiple texts throughout this 360 Unit. In the lesson, students review the steps for determining theme and apply them to the chosen text.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

Choose a text students will work with, then follow the guidance on each section of the lesson. Each part has clear directions that indicate if the section should be teacher-led or assigned as partner work or independent practice. (20 min)

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Teacher Copy](#)
- [Student Copy](#)
- [Classroom Anchor Chart](#)
- [Student Reference Sheet](#)

Writing Lesson: Introducing Evidence with Context

ESSENTIAL



ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

In this writing lesson, students learn how to introduce a piece of evidence with important context from the story to make their writing more understandable. Students will apply the skill in a written response to a prompt for “The Terror.”

HOW TO FACILITATE:

Follow the guidance on each section of the lesson. Each part has clear facilitation directions that indicate if the section should be teacher-led or assigned as partner work or independent practice. (40 min)

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Teacher Copy](#)
- [Student Copy](#)
- [Classroom Anchor Chart](#)
- [Student Reference Sheet](#)

Reading Lesson: “The Friday Everything Changed” (Short Story)

ESSENTIAL



ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

“The Friday Everything Changed” by Anne Hart tells the story of a group of school-aged girls who find the courage to ask why the girls and boys do not have the same opportunities. They stand firm in their beliefs even when it causes them to be ostracized. As students read, they analyze how character interactions and the story’s resolution develop the theme.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

- Introduce the lesson with the slide deck (5 min)
- Lead students through the reading and questions (60 min)
- Have students complete the independent practice (20 min)
- Facilitate the quick partner discussion (5 min)

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Slide Deck](#)
- Teacher Copy*
- Student Copy*

**Student and teacher copies of this reading lesson are downloadable on commonlit.org for verified teacher accounts. Navigate to the [text page](#) and click “Download PDF” to access these materials.*

Vocabulary Quiz 1

ESSENTIAL



ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

This vocabulary quiz assesses students’ knowledge of the vocabulary words in Vocabulary List 1.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

- To assign this quiz digitally, click “Assign” and schedule the quiz. Set aside 15 minutes for students to complete the vocabulary quiz.
- To have students complete the quiz on paper, access the student copy of the assignment materials and distribute it to students.

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Student Vocabulary Quiz](#)
- Teacher Answer Key*

**Quizzes assigned digitally will be scored automatically. To ensure assessment security, a printable answer key is not available at this time.*

Narrative Prompt

OPTIONAL

ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

This narrative prompt can be used to engage students with unit texts in creative ways while also giving them additional writing practice. For this unit's narrative, students rewrite a portion of "The Friday Everything Changed" from Miss Ralston's point of view.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

Have students respond to the narrative prompt using the Narrative Writing Checklist as they write.

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Student Copy](#)

Reading Lesson: "Sonnet" (Poem)

ESSENTIAL

ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

The poem "Sonnet" by James Weldon Johnson is about finding the courage to choose hope when it's easier to give into despair. Students will analyze the poet's use of juxtaposition and imagery as they examine his message.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

- Introduce the lesson with the slide deck (5 min)
- Lead students through the reading and questions (35 min)
- Have students complete the independent practice (20 min)
- Facilitate the quick partner discussion (5 min)

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Slide Deck](#)
- Teacher Copy*
- Student Copy*
- [Student Reference Sheet: Poetry Terms](#)
- [Student Reference Sheet: Quoting & Citing Poetry](#)

*Student and teacher copies of this reading lesson are downloadable on [commonlit.org](https://www.commonlit.org) for verified teacher accounts. Navigate to the [text page](#) and click "Download PDF" to access these materials.



Vocabulary Activity Set: List 2

ESSENTIAL


ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

This vocabulary activity set helps students master the 6 high-impact academic vocab words they will see in the stories they read. These 5 activities are great for a quick warm-up activity or homework.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

- Use the Slide Deck to facilitate Vocabulary Activity 1 whole-class (20 min)
- Flexibly assign the remaining activities as warm-ups, homework, or practice to prepare students for the Vocabulary Quiz.

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Student Vocabulary Activity Set](#)
- Teacher Answer Key*
- [Activity 1 Slide Deck](#)
- [Word Wall](#)

*Not available in PDF. Coming soon in digital form!

Writing Lesson: Writing Explanations

ESSENTIAL


ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

This writing lesson helps students internalize the difference between weak and strong explanations. The lesson teaches students to connect their explanations to the overall argument of the paragraph. Students will apply the skill in their written response to a prompt for “Sonnet.”

HOW TO FACILITATE:

Follow the guidance on each section of the lesson. Each part has clear facilitation directions that indicate if the section should be teacher-led or assigned as partner work or independent practice. (35 min)

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Teacher Copy](#)
- [Student Copy](#)
- [Classroom Anchor Chart](#)
- [Student Reference Sheet](#)

Reading Lesson: “Transcript of Full Joseph McNeil Interview” (Interview)

ESSENTIAL


ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

In this interview with Joseph McNeil, civil rights activist and member of the Greensboro Four, students discover real-life examples of courage as he describes his experiences participating in the Woolworth’s lunch counter sit-ins during the 1960s and explains the effect it had on his life. As students read, they examine what Joseph McNeil and his experiences reveal about courage.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

- Introduce the lesson with the slide deck (5 min)
- Lead students through the reading and questions (35 min)
- Have students complete the independent practice (20 min)
- Facilitate the quick partner discussion (5 min)

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Slide Deck](#)
- Teacher Copy*
- Student Copy*

*Student and teacher copies of this reading lesson are downloadable on commonlit.org for verified teacher accounts. Navigate to the [text page](#) and click “Download PDF” to access these materials.

Vocabulary Quiz 2

ESSENTIAL


ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

This vocabulary quiz assesses students' knowledge of the vocabulary words in Vocabulary List 2.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

- To assign this quiz digitally, click "Assign" and schedule the quiz. Set aside 15 minutes for students to complete the vocabulary quiz.
- To have students complete the quiz on paper, access the student copy of the assignment materials and distribute it to students.

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Student Vocabulary Quiz](#)
- Teacher Answer Key*

**Quizzes assigned digitally will be scored automatically. To ensure assessment security, a printable answer key is not available at this time.*

Related Media Exploration: What motivates people to act courageously?

RECOMMENDED


ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

In this not-to-miss Related Media Exploration, students work with their peers to explore different examples of young people's courage, both past and present.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

Lead students through the introductory slides. Release students to complete the remainder of the exploration with partners. (65 min)

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Slide Deck](#)
- [Student Copy](#)
- [Teacher Copy](#)

Reading Lesson: "The Treasure of Lemon Brown" (Short Story)

ESSENTIAL


ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

"The Treasure of Lemon Brown" is a well-known short story by Walter Dean Myers. In it, a young boy's attitude toward his father changes after he witnesses the surprisingly courageous actions an old man is willing to take to protect what he treasures most. As students read, they analyze theme development and character change.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

- Introduce the lesson with the slide deck (5 min)
- Lead students through the reading and questions (50 min)
- Have students complete the independent practice (20 min)
- Facilitate the quick partner discussion (5 min)

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Slide Deck](#)
- Teacher Copy*
- Student Copy*

**Student and teacher copies of this reading lesson are downloadable on [commonlit.org](https://www.commonlit.org) for verified teacher accounts. Navigate to the [text page](#) and click "Download PDF" to access these materials.*

Grammar and Usage Activities

OPTIONAL



ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

Having a strong command of grammar is key for students moving into high school. This 360 Unit's grammar and usage materials contains 10 activities that focus on using conditional verbs. Great for a quick warm-up activity or homework!

HOW TO FACILITATE:

Assign the 10 activities as warm-ups, homework, or practice to prepare students for the grammar quiz.

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Student Grammar Activities](#)
- [Teacher Answer Key](#)

Reading Lesson: "I look at the world" (Poem)

ESSENTIAL



ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

In the poem "I look at the world" by Langston Hughes, the speaker describes his mindset as he considers the world for the first time. As students read, they will analyze how the poet's use of figurative language develops the poem's theme.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

- Introduce the lesson with the slide deck (5 min)
- Lead students through the reading and questions (35 min)
- Have students complete the independent practice (20 min)
- Facilitate the quick partner discussion (5 min)

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Slide Deck](#)
- Teacher Copy*
- Student Copy*
- [Student Reference Sheet: Poetry Terms](#)
- [Student Reference Sheet: Quoting & Citing Poetry](#)

*Student and teacher copies of this reading lesson are downloadable on [commonlit.org](https://www.commonlit.org) for verified teacher accounts. Navigate to the [text page](#) to download these materials.



Writing Lesson: End of Unit Writing Review

ESSENTIAL


ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

This writing lesson allows students to practice the key components of a strong paragraph before they write their unit essay. Students review how to write clear arguments with contextualized evidence and strong explanations. Students will then apply these skills as they complete a written response about “I look at the world.”

HOW TO FACILITATE:

Follow the guidance on each section of the lesson. Each part has clear facilitation directions that indicate if the section should be teacher-led or assigned as partner work or independent practice. (25 min)

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Teacher Copy](#)
- [Student Copy](#)

Discussion Lesson

RECOMMENDED


ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

Understanding how to respectfully communicate ideas in a group is a skill that students will benefit from long after they leave middle school. It's also a skill that takes consistent practice. In this discussion lesson, students make statements and pose questions to connect different ideas proposed by their classmates. The assignment materials include a handout to teach the discussion skill whole-class, a handout to help students prepare for discussion and take notes, and teacher resources to help you facilitate whole-class or small group discussions.

Students will read the provided quotation and discuss their answers to the question that follows:
“You cannot swim for new horizons until you have courage to lose sight of the shore.” ~ William Faulkner

Based on the unit texts, why is it difficult to “lose sight of the shore” and how do people gain the courage to do it?

HOW TO FACILITATE:

- Lead students through the Discussion Skill Lesson (15 min)
- Have students prepare for discussion using the Discussion Prep handout (15 min)
- Launch discussion and have students take notes during discussion (30 min)

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Discussion Skill Lesson Student Copy](#)
- [Discussion Skill Lesson Teacher Copy](#)
- [Discussion Preparation Student Copy](#)
- [Discussion Protocols](#)
- [Student Voice Tracker](#)

Grammar and Usage Quiz

OPTIONAL


ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

This grammar quiz assesses students' knowledge of the unit's grammar skill: examining and using conditional verbs.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

- Assign the grammar quiz to students (10 min)

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Student Grammar Quiz](#)
- Teacher Answer Key*

*Not available in PDF. Coming soon in digital form!

Writing: Unit 2 Essay Planning

ESSENTIAL


ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

Organizing your ideas into a coherent structure is often the most challenging part of writing an essay. In this multi-part writing lesson, students prepare for their end-of-unit essay by using planning techniques they can carry over into future essay writing assignments.

Students will:

- Break down a prompt
- Refine their ideas through discussion
- Plan their evidence
- Draft a thesis statement
- Examine an exemplar essay

HOW TO FACILITATE:

Follow the guidance on each section of the lesson. Each part has clear directions that indicate if the section should be teacher-led or assigned as partner work or independent practice. (45 min)

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Teacher Copy](#)
- [Student Copy](#)

Writing: Unit 2 Essay

ESSENTIAL


ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

This end of unit activity requires that students respond to the following writing prompt:

In this unit, you've read about people and characters who have shown courage. Select **one** quote about courage from the list below. Then analyze how at least **two** of the people and characters you've read about demonstrate the ideas in your quote. You can also use examples from your own life.

- "He who is not courageous enough to take risks will accomplish nothing in life." —Robert Frost
- "I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear." —Nelson Mandela
- "Courage is the ability to do the right thing, all the time, no matter how painful or uncomfortable it might be." —Tony Dungy

HOW TO FACILITATE:

Have students use their resources to draft their essay.

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Student Essay Prompt](#)
- [Exemplar Essay](#)
- [Essay Rubric](#)

Alternate End of Unit Writing Assignments

OPTIONAL


ABOUT THIS ASSIGNMENT:

This unit includes four additional end of unit writing task options. Teachers may consider using these as extension activities or as a replacement for the recommended prompt.

HOW TO FACILITATE:

Consider which prompt best meets your students' needs and assign that prompt in place of or in addition to the recommended unit prompt.

ASSIGNMENT MATERIALS:

- [Teacher Copy](#)
- [Student Copy](#)



Training & Support Resources

CommonLit 360 is rich with resources for teachers and administrators. In addition to this PDF Unit Guide, here are just a few additional tools available to teams for free:

- ↳ Document: [Curriculum Framework, An Overview](#)
- ↳ Document: [Themes & Topics Overview](#)
- ↳ Live Webinar: [Getting Started with CommonLit 360](#)
- ↳ Instructional support videos available on each unit's [Support and Resources page](#)

Ready to roll out CommonLit 360 in your school or district? [Read about the affordable professional development](#) we offer for schools and districts through our CommonLit for Schools packages.

Pacing Guide

With appropriate pacing, Grade 8, Unit 2 should take roughly 5-7 weeks of instructional time. This assumes **45 minutes** of daily instruction. With this assumption, many of the reading lessons can last up to 2 days/class periods and should be spaced accordingly. Supplemental reading, vocabulary activities, and grammar activities can often be assigned as homework. Teachers should expect to revise pacing as needed.

WEEK 1

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Mon. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unit Introduction • Vocabulary Activity Set List 1: Activity 1 & Slide Deck |
| Tues. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary Activity Set List 1: Activity 2 • “The Terror” Slide Deck • “The Terror” • Reading Skill Lesson: Theme OPTIONAL • “The Terror” - Independent Practice |
| Wed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary Activity Set List 1: Activity 3 • Writing Lesson: Introducing Evidence with Context |
| Thurs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary Activity Set List 1: Activity 4 • “The Friday Everything Changed” Slide Deck • “The Friday Everything Changed” - Day 1 |

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Fri. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary Activity Set List 1: Activity 5 • “The Friday Everything Changed” - Day 2 • “The Friday Everything Changed” - Independent Practice <p>Flex time for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent/Book Club reading or meetings • Supplemental text set reading • Completion of previous activities • Teacher-created activities |
|-------------|---|

WEEK 2

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Mon. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary Quiz 1 • Narrative Prompt OPTIONAL |
| Tues. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Sonnet” Slide Deck • “Sonnet” - Day 1 |
| Wed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Sonnet” - Day 2 • “Sonnet” - Independent Practice |
| Thurs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary Activity Set List 2: Activity 1 & Slide Deck • Writing Lesson: Writing Explanations |
| Fri. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary Activity Set List 2: Activity 2 <p>Flex time for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent/Book Club reading or meetings • Supplemental text set reading • Completion of previous activities • Teacher-created activities |

WEEK 3

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Mon. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary Activity Set List 2: Activity 3 • “Transcript of Full Joseph McNeil Interview” Slide Deck • “Transcript of Full Joseph McNeil Interview” - Day 1 |
| Tues. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary Activity Set List 2: Activities 4-5 • “Transcript of Full Joseph McNeil Interview” - Day 2 • “Transcript of Full Joseph McNeil Interview” - Independent Practice |

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Wed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary Quiz 2 • Related Media Exploration RECOMMENDED |
| Thurs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Treasure of Lemon Brown” Slide Deck • “The Treasure of Lemon Brown” - Day 1 |
| Fri. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Treasure of Lemon Brown” - Day 2 • “The Treasure of Lemon Brown” Independent Practice <p>Flex time for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent/Book Club reading or meetings • Supplemental text set reading • Completion of previous activities • Teacher-created activities |

WEEK 4

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Mon. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammar and Usage Activities: Parts 1-3 OPTIONAL • “I look at the world” Slide Deck • “I look at the world” - Day 1 |
| Tues. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammar and Usage Activities: Parts 4-5 OPTIONAL • “I look at the world” - Day 2 • “I look at the world” Independent Practice |
| Wed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammar and Usage Activities: Parts 6-7 OPTIONAL • Writing Lesson: End of Unit Writing Review |
| Thurs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammar and Usage Activities: Parts 8-10 OPTIONAL • Discussion Skill Lesson RECOMMENDED |
| Fri. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammar and Usage Quiz OPTIONAL • Class Discussion RECOMMENDED <p>Flex time for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent/Book Club reading or meetings • Supplemental text set reading • Completion of previous activities • Teacher-created activities |

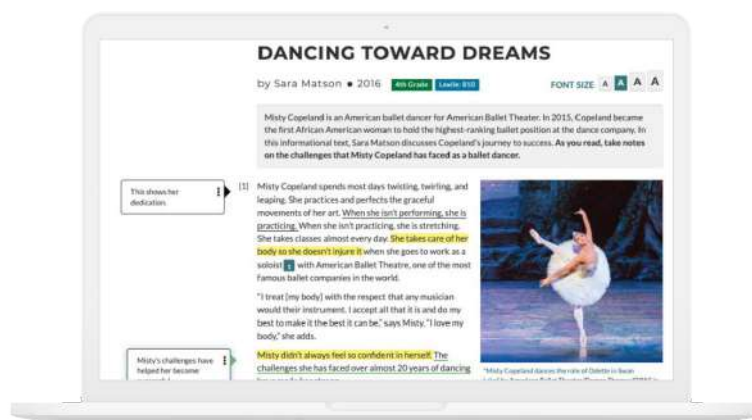
WEEK 5

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Mon. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Writing Lesson: Unit 2 Essay Planning |
| Tues. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unit 2 Essay: Drafting - Day 1 |
| Wed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unit 2 Essay: Drafting - Day 2 |
| Thurs. | <p>Flex time for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Independent/Book Club reading or meetings• Supplemental text set reading• Completion of previous activities• Teacher-created activities |
| Fri. | <p>Flex time for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Independent/Book Club reading or meetings• Supplemental text set reading• Completion of previous activities• Teacher-created activities |



CommonLit 360: Digital Experience

One of the reasons CommonLit 360 is so unique is that it is accessible through a free, state-of-the-art digital platform. Reading, writing, and vocabulary lessons and assessments within a CommonLit 360 unit can be assigned to students through CommonLit.org. During and after the lesson, teachers can view formative assessment data through a real-time lesson dashboard to easily track completion and progress. All of these digital features are free for teachers and students, just like the rest of CommonLit. To learn more about the digital experience, [sign up for an upcoming CommonLit 360 webinar](#) or email help@commonlit.org.



Appendix I: Text Selection & Text Complexity

When selecting texts for this unit, CommonLit considers both quantitative and qualitative measures of text complexity.

UNIT TEXTS

| Title by Author | Lexile | Description |
|--|-----------|--|
| “The Terror” by Junot Díaz (Memoir) | 920L | “The Terror” by Junot Díaz is a powerful memoir that deals with courageous choices. Díaz describes some of the challenges he experienced as an adolescent, and explains how he finally found the courage to face a group of teenage bullies. As students read, they analyze theme development and character change. |
| “The Friday Everything Changed” by Anne Hart (Short Story) | 1280L | “The Friday Everything Changed” by Anne Hart tells the story of a group of school-aged girls who find the courage to ask why the girls and boys do not have the same opportunities. They stand firm in their beliefs even when it causes them to be ostracized. As students read, they analyze how character interactions and the story’s resolution develop the theme. |
| “Sonnet” by James Weldon Johnson (Poem) | Non-Prose | The poem “Sonnet” by James Weldon Johnson is about finding the courage to choose hope when it’s easier to give into despair. Students will analyze the poet’s use of juxtaposition and imagery as they examine his message. |
| “Transcript of Full Joseph McNeil Interview” by Newsday (Interview) | 970L | In this interview with Joseph McNeil, civil rights activist and member of the Greensboro Four, students discover real-life examples of courage as he describes his experiences participating in the Woolworth’s lunch counter sit-ins during the 1960s and explains the effect it had on his life. As students read, they examine what Joseph McNeil and his experiences reveal about courage. |
| “The Treasure of Lemon Brown” by Walter Dean Myers (Short Story) | 750L | “The Treasure of Lemon Brown” is a well-known short story by Walter Dean Myers. In it, a young boy’s attitude toward his father changes after he witnesses the surprisingly courageous actions an old man is willing to take to protect what he treasures most. As students read, they analyze theme development and character change. |
| “I look at the world” by Langston Hughes (Poem) | Non-Prose | In the poem “I look at the world” by Langston Hughes, the speaker describes his mindset as he considers the world for the first time. As students read, they will analyze how the poet’s use of figurative language develops the poem’s theme. |

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXTS (ENGLISH)

| Title by Author | Lexile | Description |
|---|-----------|---|
| <u>"Katie Sowers is the first woman to coach in a Super Bowl. Her goal: 'Make sure I'm not the last.'"</u> by Adam Kilgore (Informational Text) | 840L | This text explores the path that groundbreaking female NFL coach Katie Sowers took to become one of the first women with that job description. Use this text to offer students a modern example of the girls' struggles and courage in "The Friday Everything Changed." |
| <u>"The First Time John Lewis and I Integrated the Buses"</u> by Bernard Lafayette Jr. (Informational Text) | 760L | This text reveals the experiences of Bernard Lafayette Jr. and John Lewis during the Civil Rights Movement, particularly their efforts to desegregate buses through the Freedom Rides. Use this text to continue the conversation about Joseph McNeil's courage or to emphasize the idea that courage requires perseverance and hope in a better tomorrow. |
| <u>"Rosa Parks"</u> by Nikki Giovanni (Poem) | Non-Prose | This poem highlights the contributions that seemingly ordinary people made to the Civil Rights Movement. It underscores how people like Rosa Parks and Pullman Porters played an instrumental role in helping change become a reality and not just a dream. Use this text to connect to the courageous choices and actions of Joseph McNeil and the people he lists as being his motivation and inspiration. |
| <u>"The Leap"</u> by Louise Erdrich (Short Story) | 1210L | In this short story, a narrator describes their mother, a retired trapeze performer who has gone blind. The narrator explains the courage their mother exhibited throughout her life when it came to caring for and protecting those she loved. Pair this text with "The Treasure of Lemon Brown" and continue the conversation about what motivates people to find courage in moments of danger. |
| <u>"Monkeyman"</u> by Walter Dean Myers (Short Story) | 670L | In this excerpt from Walter Dean Myers' collection of short stories <i>145th Street</i> , an unnamed character describes his experiences with a neighborhood friend nicknamed Monkeyman for his love of reading in a treehouse. Monkeyman's commitment to non-violence and doing what is right conveys a message about courage and the importance of community. Pair this text with "The Treasure of Lemon Brown" for a Walter Dean Myers mini author study or use it to further the discussion about what courage looks like and how courageous actions influence others to think differently. |

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXTS (SPANISH)

| Title by Author | Lexile | Description |
|---|-----------|--|
| <u>"Katie Sowers es la primera mujer en ser entrenadora para un Super Bowl. Su objetivo: 'Asegurarme de no ser la última'"</u> by Adam Kilgore (Informational Text) | 1550L | This text explores the path that groundbreaking female NFL coach Katie Sowers took to become one of the first women with that job description. Use this text to offer students a modern example of the girls' struggles and courage in "The Friday Everything Changed." |
| <u>"La primera vez que John Lewis y yo nos sentamos adelante en un autobús"</u> by Bernard Lafayette Jr. (Informational Text) | 1480L | This text reveals the experiences of Bernard Lafayette Jr. and John Lewis during the Civil Rights Movement, particularly their efforts to desegregate buses through the Freedom Rides. Use this text to continue the conversation about Joseph McNeil's courage or to emphasize the idea that courage requires perseverance and hope in a better tomorrow. |
| <u>"Rosa Parks"</u> by Nikki Giovanni (Poem) | Non-Prose | This poem highlights the contributions that seemingly ordinary people made to the Civil Rights Movement. It underscores how people like Rosa Parks and Pullman Porters played an instrumental role in helping change become a reality and not just a dream. Use this text to connect to the courageous choices and actions of Joseph McNeil and the people he lists as being his motivation and inspiration. |