Annie Dillard - "Living Like Weasels" - Grades 11-12

Learning Objective: The goal of this four-day exemplar is to give students the opportunity to use the reading and writing habits they've been practicing on a regular basis to discover the rich language and life lesson embedded in Dillard's text. By reading and rereading the passage closely and focusing their reading through a series of questions and discussion about the text, students will be equipped to unpack Dillard's essay. When combined with writing about the passage, students will learn to appreciate how Dillard's writing contains a deeper message and derive satisfaction from the struggle to master complex text.

Reading Task*: Rereading is deliberately built into the instructional unit. Students will silently read the passage in question on a given day—first independently and then following along with the text as the teacher and/or skillful students read aloud. Depending on the difficulties of a given text and the teacher's knowledge of the fluency abilities of students, the order of the student silent read and the teacher reading aloud with students following might be reversed. What is important is to allow all students to interact with challenging text on their own as frequently and independently as possible. Students will then reread specific passages in response to a set of concise, text-dependent questions that compel them to examine the meaning and structure of Dillard's prose.*

Vocabulary Task: *Most of the meanings of words in this selection can be discovered from careful reading of the context in which they appear. Teachers can use discussions to model and reinforce how to learn vocabulary from contextual clues, and students must be held accountable for engaging in this practice. Where it is judged this is not possible, underlined words are defined briefly for students in a separate column whenever the original text is reproduced. At times, this is all the support these words need. At other times, particularly with abstract words, teachers will need to spend more time explaining and discussing them. In addition, for subsequent readings, high value academic ('Tier Two') words have been **bolded** to draw attention to them. Given how crucial vocabulary knowledge is to students' academic and career success, it is essential that these high value words be discussed and lingered over during the instructional sequence.*

Sentence Syntax Task: *On occasion students will encounter particularly difficult sentences to decode. Teachers should engage in a close examination of such sentences to help students discover how they are built and how they convey meaning. While many questions addressing important aspects of the text double as questions about syntax, students should receive regular supported practice in deciphering complex sentences. It is crucial that the help they receive in unpacking text complexity focuses both on the precise meaning of what the author is saying and why the author might have constructed the sentence in this particular fashion. That practice will in turn support students' ability to unpack meaning from syntactically complex sentences they encounter in future reading.*

Discussion Task*: Students will discuss the passage in depth with their teacher and their classmates, performing activities that result in a close reading of the text. The goal is to foster student confidence when encountering complex text and to reinforce the skills they have acquired regarding how to build and extend their understanding of a text. A general principle is to always reread the portion of text that provides evidence for the question under discussion. This gives students another encounter with the text, reinforces the use of textual evidence, and helps develop fluency.*

Writing Task*: Students will paraphrase different sentences and sections of Dillard's text, complete a series of journal entries, and then write an informative essay detailing why the author chose the title, "Living Like Weasels". Teachers might afford students the opportunity to rewrite their essay or revise their in-class journal entries after participating in classroom discussion, allowing them to refashion both their understanding of the text and their expression of that understanding.*

Outline of Lesson Plan: This lesson can be delivered in four days of instruction and reflection on the part of teachers and their students. Reasons for extending the discussion of "Living Like Weasels" might include allowing more time to unpack the rich array of ideas explored in this piece, taking more time to look closely at academic vocabulary and figurative language employed by Dillard, or participating in a writing workshop to strengthen students' writing pieces.

Standards Addressed: The following Common Core State Standards are the focus of this exemplar: RI.11-12.1, RI.11-12.2, RI.11-12.3, RI.11-12.4, RI.11-12.5, RI.11-12.6; W.11-12.2, W.11-12.4, W.11-12.5; SL.11-12.1, SL.11-12.4; L.11-12.1, L.11-12.2, L.11-12.4, L.11-12.5, L.11-12.6.

The Text: Dillard, Annie. "Living Like Weasels"

Exemplar Text	Vocabulary
1 A weasel is wild. Who knows what he thinks? He sleeps in his underground **den**, his tail **draped** over his nose. Sometimes he lives in his den for two days without leaving. Outside, he **stalks** rabbits, mice, muskrats, and birds, killing more bodies than he can eat warm, and often dragging the **carcasses** home. **Obedient** to **instinct**, he bites his prey at the neck, either splitting the **jugular vein** at the throat or crunching the brain at the base of the skull, and he does not let go. One **naturalist** refused to kill a weasel who was **socketed** into his hand deeply as a rattlesnake. The man could in no way **pry** the tiny weasel off, and he had to walk half a mile to water, the weasel **dangling** from his palm, and soak him off like a **stubborn** label. 2 And once, says Ernest Thompson Seton—once, a man shot an eagle out of the sky. He examined the eagle and found the dry skull of a weasel fixed by the jaws to his throat. The *supposition* is that the eagle had **pounced** on the weasel and the weasel swiveled and bit as instinct taught him, tooth to neck, and nearly won. I would like to have seen that eagle from the air a few weeks or months before he was shot: was the whole weasel still attached to his feathered throat, a fur pendant? Or did the eagle eat what he could reach, **gutting** the living weasel with his **talons** before his breast, bending his beak, cleaning the beautiful **airborne** bones? 3 I have been reading about weasels because I saw one last week. I startled a weasel who startled me, and we exchanged a long **glance**. 4 Twenty minutes from my house, through the woods by the **quarry** and across the highway, is Hollins Pond, a **remarkable** piece of **shallowness**, where I like to go at sunset and sit on a tree trunk. Hollins Pond is also called Murray's Pond; it covers two acres of bottomland near Tinker Creek with six inches of water and six thousand lily pads. In winter, brown-and-white **steers** stand in the middle of it, merely **dampening** their **hooves**; from the distant shore they look like miracle itself, complete with miracle's nonchalance. Now, in summer, the steers are gone. The water lilies have blossomed and spread to a green horizontal plane that is terra firma to **plodding** blackbirds, and tremulous ceiling to black leeches, crayfish, and carp. 5 This is, mind you, suburbia. It is a five-minute walk in three directions to rows of houses, though none is visible here. There's a 55 mph highway at one end of the pond, and a **nesting** pair of wood ducks at the other. Under every bush is a muskrat hole or a	*Twisted* *Decoration that hangs from a necklace* *Indifference* *Solid earth* *Shaking*

beer can. The far end is an **alternating** series of fields and woods, fields and woods, threaded everywhere with motorcycle tracks—in whose bare clay wild turtles lay eggs.

6 So. I had crossed the highway, stepped over two low barbed-wire fences, and **traced** the motorcycle path in all **gratitude** through the wild rose and poison ivy of the pond's **shoreline** up into high grassy fields. Then I cut down through the woods to the mossy **fallen** tree where I sit. This tree is excellent. It makes a dry, **upholstered** bench at the upper, marshy end of the pond, a plush jetty raised from the **thorny** shore between a shallow blue body of water and a deep blue body of sky.

Luxurious;
Structure that juts out over the water

7 The sun had just set. I was relaxed on the tree trunk, **ensconced** in the lap of lichen, watching the lily pads at my feet **tremble** and part dreamily over the **thrusting** path of a carp. A yellow bird appeared to my right and flew behind me. It caught my eye; I swiveled around—and the next instant**, inexplicably**, I was looking down at a weasel, who was looking up at me.

Soft moss

8 Weasel! I'd never seen one wild before. He was ten inches long, thin as a curve, a muscled ribbon, brown as fruitwood, soft-furred, alert. His face was fierce, small and pointed as a lizard's; he would have made a good arrowhead. There was just a dot of chin, maybe two brown hairs' worth, and then the pure white fur began that spread down his **underside**. He had two black eyes I didn't see, any more than you see a window.

9 The weasel was **stunned** into stillness as he was **emerging** from beneath an **enormous** shaggy wild rose bush four feet away. I was stunned into stillness twisted backward on the tree trunk. Our eyes locked, and someone threw away the key.

10 Our look was as if two lovers, or deadly enemies, met **unexpectedly** on an **overgrown** path when each had been thinking of something else: a **clearing blow** to the gut. It was also a bright blow to the brain, or a sudden beating of brains, with all the **charge** and intimate **grate** of rubbed balloons. It emptied our lungs. It felled the forest, moved the fields, and drained the pond; the world dismantled and tumbled into that black hole of eyes. If you and I looked at each other that way, our skulls would split and drop to our shoulders. But we don't. We keep our skulls. So.

11 He disappeared. This was only last week, and already I don't remember what shattered the **enchantment**. I think I blinked, I think I retrieved my brain from the

weasel's brain, and tried to memorize what I was seeing, and the weasel felt the **yank** of separation, the **careening** splash-down into real life and the **urgent** current of instinct. He vanished under the wild rose. I waited motionless, my mind suddenly full of data and my spirit with **pleadings**, but he didn't return.

12 Please do not tell me about "approach-avoidance conflicts." I tell you I've been in that weasel's brain for sixty seconds, and he was in mine. Brains are private places, **muttering** through unique and secret tapes—but the weasel and I both plugged into another tape simultaneously, for a sweet and shocking time. Can I help it if it was a blank?

13 What goes on in his brain the rest of the time? What does a weasel think about? He won't say. His journal is tracks in clay, a spray of feathers, mouse blood and bone: uncollected, unconnected, loose leaf, and blown.

14 I would like to learn, or remember, how to live. I come to Hollins Pond not so much to learn how to live as, frankly, to forget about it. That is, I don't think I can learn from a wild animal how to live in particular--shall I suck warm blood, hold my tail high, walk with my footprints **precisely** over the prints of my hands?--but I might learn something of mindlessness, something of the **purity** of living in the physical sense and the **dignity** of living without **bias** or **motive**. The weasel lives in **necessity** and we live in choice, hating necessity and dying at the last ignobly in its talons. I would like to live as I should, as the weasel lives as he should. And I suspect that for me the way is like the weasel's: open to time and death painlessly, noticing everything, remembering nothing, choosing the given with a fierce and pointed will.

Without dignity

15 I missed my chance. I should have gone for the throat. I should have **lunged** for that streak of white under the weasel's chin and held on, held on through mud and into the wild rose, held on for a dearer life. We could live under the wild rose wild as weasels, **mute** and uncomprehending. I could very calmly go wild. I could live two days in the den, curled, leaning on mouse fur, sniffing bird bones, blinking, licking, breathing musk, my hair **tangled** in the roots of grasses. Down is a good place to go, where the mind is single. Down is out, out of your ever-loving mind and back to your careless senses. I remember muteness as a **prolonged** and **giddy fast**, where every moment is a feast of utterance received. Time and events are merely poured, unremarked, and ingested directly, like blood **pulsed** into my gut through a jugular vein. Could two live that way? Could two live under the wild rose, and explore by the pond, so that the

Something said

smooth mind of each is as everywhere present to the other, and as received and as unchallenged, as falling snow? 16 We could, you know. We can live any way we want. People take vows of poverty, **chastity**, and obedience—even of silence—by choice. The thing is to **stalk** your calling in a certain skilled and supple way, to locate the most tender and live spot and plug into that pulse. This is **yielding**, not fighting. A weasel doesn't "attack" anything; a weasel lives as he's meant to, yielding at every moment to the perfect freedom of single necessity. 17 I think it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it **limp** wherever it takes you. Then even death**,** where you're going no matter how you live, cannot you part. **Seize** it and let it seize you up **aloft** even, till your eyes burn out and drop; let your musky flesh fall off in **shreds**, and let your very bones **unhinge** and scatter, loosened over fields, over fields and woods, lightly, thoughtless, from any height at all, from as high as eagles.	*Flexible*

Day One: Instructional Exemplar for Dillard's "Living Like Weasels"

Summary of Activities

- (BEFORE Day One) Teacher introduces the essay with minimal commentary and has students read it for homework
- (ON Day One) Teacher or skillful reader then reads the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text
- Teacher asks the class to complete an introductory journal entry and discuss a set of text-dependent questions
- For homework, teacher asks students to complete another journal entry

Text Passage under Discussion	Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students
1 A weasel is wild. Who knows what he thinks? He sleeps in his underground **den**, his tail **draped** over his nose. Sometimes he lives in his den for two days without leaving. Outside, he rabbits, mice, muskrats, and birds, killing more **stalks** bodies than he can eat warm, and often dragging the **carcasses** home. **Obedient** to instinct, he bites his prey at the neck, either splitting the **jugular vein** at the throat or crunching the brain at the base of the skull, and he does not let go. One **naturalist** refused to kill a weasel who was **socketed** into his hand deeply as a rattlesnake. The man could in no way **pry** the tiny weasel off, and he had to walk half a mile to water, the weasel **dangling** from his palm, and soak him off like a **stubborn** label...	**1. Read the essay out loud to the class as students follow along in the text.** Asking students to listen to "Living Like Weasels" exposes them to the rhythms and meaning of Dillard's language before they begin their own close reading of the passage. Speaking clearly and carefully will allow students to follow Dillard's essay, and reading out loud with students following along improves fluency while offering all students access to this complex text. Accurate and skillful modeling of the reading provides students who may be dysfluent with accurate pronunciations and syntactic patterns of English. **2. Introduce journaling and have students complete their first entry: In your journal, write an entry on the first paragraph of Dillard's essay describing what makes a weasel wild.** Students will be keeping a running journal charting their ongoing exploration of critical moments in the text. The process of journaling brings to the fore the tension that Dillard is exploring in her essay—choosing to live like a weasel (in the moment and unreflective) while writing about that choice (in a highly reflective and self conscious way). Students should consistently be reminded to include textual evidence in their journals to back up their claims and avoid non-text based speculation (i.e. no answers of the sort "Weasels are wild because they live outdoors and are not pets"). Below is some possible evidence that students may include in their first entry: • "sleeps in his underground den" • "he lives in his den for two days" • "he stalks" • "dragging the carcasses home" • "Obedient to instinct" • "he bites his prey" • " splitting the jugular vein at the throat" "crunching the brain at the base of the skull"

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Day Two: Instructional Exemplar for Dillard's "Living Like Weasels"

Summary of Activities

- Teacher introduces the day's passage with minimal commentary and students read it independently
- Teacher or skillful reader then reads the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text
- Teacher asks the class to discuss a set of text-dependent questions and to complete another journal entry

Text Passage under Discussion	Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students
8 Weasel! I'd never seen one wild before. He was ten inches long, thin as a curve, a muscled ribbon, brown as fruitwood, soft-furred, alert. His face was fierce, small and pointed as a lizard's; he would have made a good arrowhead. There was just a dot of chin, maybe two brown hairs' worth, and then the pure white fur began that spread down his **underside**. He had two black eyes I didn't see, any more than you see a window. 9 The weasel was **stunned** into stillness as he was **emerging** from beneath an **enormous** shaggy wild rose bush four feet away. I was stunned into stillness twisted backward on the tree trunk. Our eyes locked, and someone threw away the key. [Reading intervening paragraphs.] 13 What goes on in his brain the rest of the time? What does a weasel think about? He won't say. His journal is tracks in clay, a spray of feathers, mouse blood and bone: uncollected, unconnected, loose leaf, and blown.	**1. Introduce the passage and students read independently.** Other than giving the brief definitions offered to words students would likely not be able to define from context (underlined in the text), avoid giving any background context or instructional guidance at the outset of the lesson while students are reading the text silently. This close reading approach forces students to rely exclusively on the text instead of privileging background knowledge and levels the playing field for all students as they seek to comprehend Dillard's prose. It is critical to cultivating independence and creating a culture of close reading that students initially grapple with rich texts like Dillard's novel without the aid of prefatory material, extensive notes, or even teacher explanations. **2. Read the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text.** Asking students to listen to "Living Like Weasels" exposes them a second time to the rhythms and meaning of Dillard's language before they begin their own close reading of the passage. Speaking clearly and carefully will allow students to follow Dillard's narrative, and reading out loud with students following along improves fluency while offering all students access to this complex text. Accurate and skillful modeling of the reading provides students who may be dysfluent with accurate pronunciations and syntactic patterns of English. **3. Ask the class to answer a small set of text-dependent guided questions and perform targeted tasks about the passage, with answers in the form of notes, annotations to the text, or more formal responses as appropriate.** As students move through these questions and reread Dillard's "Living Like Weasels", be sure to check for and reinforce their understanding of academic vocabulary in the corresponding text (which will be **boldfaced** the first time it appears in the text). At times, the questions themselves may focus on academic vocabulary.

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Day Three: Instructional Exemplar for Dillard's "Living Like Weasels"

Summary of Activities

- Teacher introduces the day's passage with minimal commentary and students read it independently
- Teacher or skillful reader then reads the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text
- Teacher asks the class to discuss a set of text-dependent questions and to complete another journal entry

Text Passage under Discussion	Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students
14 I would like to learn, or remember, how to live. I come to Hollins Pond not so much to learn how to live as, frankly, to forget about it. That is, I don't think I can learn from a wild animal how to live in particular--shall I suck warm blood, hold my tail high, walk with my footprints **precisely** over the prints of my hands?--but I might learn something of mindlessness, something of the **purity** of living in the physical sense and the **dignity** of living without **bias** or **motive**. The weasel lives in **necessity** and we live in choice, hating necessity and dying at the last ignobly in its talons. I would like to live as I should, as the weasel lives as he should. And I suspect that for me the way is like the weasel's: open to time and death painlessly, noticing everything, remembering nothing, choosing the given with a fierce and pointed will. [Read intervening paragraphs.] 17 I think it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it **limp** wherever it takes you. Then even death**,** where you're going no matter how you live, cannot you part. **Seize** it and let it seize you up **aloft** even, till your eyes burn out and drop; let your musky flesh fall off in **shreds**, and let your very bones **unhinge** and scatter, loosened over fields, over fields and woods, lightly, thoughtless, from any height at all, from as high as eagles.	**1. Introduce the passage and students read independently.** Other than giving the brief definitions offered to words students would likely not be able to define from context (underlined in the text), avoid giving any background context or instructional guidance at the outset of the lesson while students are reading the text silently. This close reading approach forces students to rely exclusively on the text instead of privileging background knowledge and levels the playing field for all students as they seek to comprehend Dillard's prose. It is critical to cultivating independence and creating a culture of close reading that students initially grapple with rich texts like Dillard's novel without the aid of prefatory material, extensive notes, or even teacher explanations. **2. Read the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text.** Asking students to listen to "Living Like Weasels" exposes them a second time to the rhythms and meaning of Dillard's language before they begin their own close reading of the passage. Speaking clearly and carefully will allow students to follow Dillard's narrative, and reading out loud with students following along improves fluency while offering all students access to this complex text. Accurate and skillful modeling of the reading provides students who may be dysfluent with accurate pronunciations and syntactic patterns of English. **3. Ask the class to answer a small set of text-dependent guided questions and perform targeted tasks about the passage, with answers in the form of notes, annotations to the text, or more formal responses as appropriate.** As students move through these questions and reread Dillard's "Living Like Weasels", be sure to check for and reinforce their understanding of academic vocabulary in the corresponding text (which will be **boldfaced** the first time it appears in the text). At times, the questions themselves may focus on academic vocabulary.

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14 I would like to learn, or remember, how to live. I come to Hollins Pond not so much to learn how to live as, frankly, to forget about it. That is, I don't think I can learn from a wild animal how to live in particular--shall I suck warm blood, hold my tail high, walk with my footprints **precisely** over the prints of my hands?--but I might learn something of mindlessness, something of the **purity** of living in the physical sense and the **dignity** of living without **bias** or **motive**. The weasel lives in **necessity** and we live in choice, hating necessity and dying at the last ignobly in its talons. I would like to live as I should, as the weasel lives as he should. And I suspect that for me the way is like the weasel's: open to time and death painlessly, noticing everything, remembering nothing, choosing the given with a fierce and pointed will. [Read intervening paragraphs.] 17 I think it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it **limp** wherever it takes you. Then even death**,** where you're going no matter how you live, cannot you part. **Seize** it and let it seize you up **aloft** even, till your eyes burn out and drop; let your musky flesh fall off in **shreds**, and let your very bones **unhinge** and scatter, loosened over fields, over fields and woods, lightly, thoughtless, from any height at all, from as high as eagles.	*Without dignity*	**(Q11) What was the purpose of Dillard coming to Hollins Pond?** • "to forget… how to live" "learn something of mindlessness" • "I would like to live as I should" "the purity of living in the physical sense" • "open to time and death painlessly" "the dignity of living without bias or motive" • "noticing everything, remembering nothing" • "choosing the given with a fierce and pointed will" **(Q12) Find evidence for what Dillard means by "living in necessity" in paragraph 14, and put her ideas into your own words in a brief two or three sentence paraphrase** • "to forget...how to live" "the purity of living in the physical sense" • "mindlessness" "the dignity of living without bias or motive" Insisting that students paraphrase Dillard at this point will solidify their understanding of Dillard's message, as well as test their ability to communicate their understanding fluently in writing. Teachers should circulate and perform "over the shoulder" conferences with students to check comprehension and offer commentary that could lead to on-the-spot revision of their "translation" of Dillard's ideas. **(Q13) In paragraph 15, Dillard imagines going "out of your ever-loving mind and back to your careless senses." What does she mean by "careless" in that sentence, and how is that reflected in the rest of the paragraph?** On a literal level, Dillard means that living by one's senses is to set aside human cares and concerns and merely live in the moment. On a figurative level, she seems to imply that one can see more by caring less. Advanced students would bring in evidence from before the quote, e.g. "I should have gone for the throat...I should have lunged" and "mute and uncomprehending." **(Q14) Dillard urges her readers to "stalk your calling" by "plug[ging] into" your purpose—yet she describes this process as "yielding, not fighting." What message is she trying to convey with these words?** By returning to the opening symbol of the weasel dangling from the eagle's neck, Dillard illustrates the sort of tenacity she's asking of her readers in pursuing their own purpose. **Homework: Dillard revisits the opening image of a weasel dangling from the neck of an eagle in the final paragraph of her essay, but this time substituting the reader. In your journal, describe how that image contributes to your understanding of her overall message.**

Day Four: Instructional Exemplar for Dillard's "Living Like Weasels"

Summary of Activities

- Teacher asks the class to discuss a set of text-dependent questions and to complete their final journal entry
- Teacher leads a discussion on students' journal entries

Text Passage under Discussion	Directions for Teachers/Guiding Questions For Students
1 A weasel is wild. Who knows what he thinks? He sleeps in his underground **den**, his tail **draped** over his nose. Sometimes he lives in his den for two days without leaving. Outside, he **stalks** rabbits, mice, muskrats, and birds, killing more bodies than he can eat warm, and often dragging the **carcasses** home. **Obedient** to **instinct**, he bites his prey at the neck, either splitting the **jugular vein** at the throat or crunching the brain at the base of the skull, and he does not let go. One **naturalist** refused to kill a weasel who was **socketed** into his hand deeply as a rattlesnake. The man could in no way **pry** the tiny weasel off, and he had to walk half a mile to water, the weasel **dangling** from his palm, and soak him off like a **stubborn** label. [Read intervening paragraphs.] 17 I think it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it **limp** wherever it takes you. Then even death**,** where you're going no matter how you live, cannot you part. **Seize** it and let it seize you up **aloft** even, till your eyes burn out and drop; let your musky flesh fall off in **shreds**, and let your very bones **unhinge** and scatter, loosened over fields, over fields and woods, lightly, thoughtless, from any height at all, from as high as eagles.	**(Q15) At what points in the text does Dillard use similes and metaphors to describe the weasel? Why does she choose figurative language to do this?** • "like a stubborn label" "a fur pendant" "thin as a curve" "a muscled ribbon" • "brown as fruitwood" "his face...small and pointed as a lizard's" • "he would have made a good arrowhead" Dillard's point in describing the weasel through metaphors is two fold; first, she cannot see what it is like to be a weasel, as there is no conscious mind there comparable to a humans; second, she wants to describe the weasel vividly in order to make her ultimate comparison of what it would be like to be a person living like a weasel. **(Q16) Dillard describes things in antithetical terms, such as "a remarkable piece of shallowness." How do phrases like this help advance her observations regarding what it is like to live like a weasel?** • "two lovers, or deadly enemies" "very calmly go wild" • "the perfect freedom of single necessity" Examining how Dillard writes also serves the function of exploring the central paradox of the essay—choosing a life of necessity, or in Dillard's particular case, reflectively writing about being inspired by the unreflective life of a weasel living by its instincts. **(Q17) Dillard also employs reflexive structures such as, "I startled a weasel who startled me." Identify an additional instance of this. What is the purpose of these sentences?** • "I was looking down at a weasel, who was looking up at me" (paragraph 7) These instances are a great way of introducing reflexive self-consciousness into the discussion. This is an advanced concept, so if students struggle, you may have to help them with a basic understanding: Seeing the weasel helps Dillard become more aware of her own presence and helps her to "see" herself in a new, and more transparent manner. It returns her to her own sense of self and provides a space for reflection - It "startles" her very self.

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1 A weasel is wild. Who knows what he thinks? He sleeps in his underground **den**, his tail **draped** over his nose. Sometimes he lives in his den for two days without leaving. Outside, he **stalks** rabbits, mice, muskrats, and birds, killing more bodies than he can eat warm, and often dragging the **carcasses** home. **Obedient** to **instinct**, he bites his prey at the neck, either splitting the **jugular vein** at the throat or crunching the brain at the base of the skull, and he does not let go. One **naturalist** refused to kill a weasel who was **socketed** into his hand deeply as a rattlesnake. The man could in no way **pry** the tiny weasel off, and he had to walk half a mile to water, the weasel **dangling** from his palm, and soak him off like a **stubborn** label. [Read intervening paragraphs.] 17 I think it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it **limp** wherever it takes you. Then even death**,** where you're going no matter how you live, cannot you part. **Seize** it and let it seize you up **aloft** even, till your eyes burn out and drop; let your musky flesh fall off in **shreds**, and let your very bones **unhinge** and scatter, loosened over fields, over fields and woods, lightly, thoughtless, from any height at all, from as high as eagles.	**(Q18) Paragraphs 12 and 13 contain several questions instead of statements. What is the effect of using questions rather than declarations at this point in the essay?** Students should recognize that the questions are a way to trail off or to make things seem inconclusive. In this way, Dillard is pushing readers to consider these questions on their own - to ponder them and to come to some of their own conclusions - much like she wants her readers to do with their own lives. **(Q19) Dillard provides a plot summary early and efficiently in paragraph 3 ("I have been reading about...") and returns to the visions of the weasel in paragraph 7. This helps to effectively bracket the description of Hillis Pond with mention of looking at the weasel. Why does she give readers this "bare bones" summation and why does she do so at this point in the text? In other words, what is the effect of bracketing the discussion of Hollis Pond with mention of the weasel?** **(In-class journal entry) Choose one sentence from the essay and explore how the author develops her ideas regarding the topic both via the content of her essay and its composition. If students struggle with locating a sentence, here are some examples:** • "The weasel lives in necessity and we live in choice, hating necessity and dying at the last ignobly in its talons" • "I remember muteness as a prolonged and giddy fast, where every moment is a feat of utterance received" • "If you and I looked at each other that way, our skulls would split and drop to our shoulders. But we don't. We keep our skulls. So."

Writing Assessment Guidance for Teachers and Students
Students should write an adequately planned and well-constructed informative essay regarding the meaning of the essay's title - "Living Like Weasels". Why has the author chosen this title? Why is it significance? Students should include at least three pieces of evidence from the text to support their thoughts. Strong essays should explore the desire for humans to live (like weasels) by instinct and necessity. Students may also choose to describe the choice humans have to "latch on" to the life they choose and how Dillard symbolically represents that choice. Whatever avenue students choose, they must cite three pieces of textual evidence and clearly explain the connection between their evidence and how this supports their ideas on the essay's title. If teachers assign this essay for homework, they could have a writing workshop the following day, where students provide feedback to their classmates regarding their essay. Following this, students may be given the opportunity to revisit their essay for homework. Teachers could also assign the prompt as an in-class essay, but also use the following day for peer-to-peer feedback.

Appendix A: Extension Readings

“The Fish” by Elizabeth Bishop

I caught a tremendous fish
and held him beside the boat
half out of water, with my hook
fast in a corner of his mouth.
He didn't fight.
He hadn't fought at all.
He hung a grunting weight,
battered and venerable
and homely. Here and there
his brown skin hung in strips
like ancient wallpaper,
and its pattern of darker brown
was like wallpaper:
shapes like full-blown roses
stained and lost through age.
He was speckled and barnacles,
fine rosettes of lime,
and infested
with tiny white sea-lice,
and underneath two or three
rags of green weed hung down.
While his gills were breathing in
the terrible oxygen
--the frightening gills,
fresh and crisp with blood,
that can cut so badly--
I thought of the coarse white flesh
packed in like feathers,
the big bones and the little bones,
the dramatic reds and blacks
of his shiny entrails,
and the pink swim-bladder
like a big peony.
I looked into his eyes
which were far larger than mine
but shallower, and yellowed,
the irises backed and packed
with tarnished tinfoil
seen through the lenses
of old scratched isinglass.
They shifted a little, but not
to return my stare.
--It was more like the tipping
of an object toward the light.
I admired his sullen face,
the mechanism of his jaw,
and then I saw
that from his lower lip
--if you could call it a lip
grim, wet, and weaponlike,
hung five old pieces of fish-line,
or four and a wire leader
with the swivel still attached,
with all their five big hooks
grown firmly in his mouth.
A green line, frayed at the end
where he broke it, two heavier lines,
and a fine black thread
still crimped from the strain and snap
when it broke and he got away.
Like medals with their ribbons
frayed and wavering,
a five-haired beard of wisdom
trailing from his aching jaw.
I stared and stared
and victory filled up
the little rented boat,
from the pool of bilge
where oil had spread a rainbow
around the rusted engine
to the bailer rusted orange,
the sun-cracked thwarts,
the oarlocks on their strings,
the gunnels--until everything
was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!
And I let the fish go.

“What is it like to be a bat?” by Thomas Nagel

Conscious experience is a widespread phenomenon. It occurs at many levels of animal life… the fact that an organism has conscious experience at all means, basically, that there is something it is like to *be* that organism… [A]nyone who has spent some time in an enclosed space with an excited bat knows what it is to encounter a fundamentally alien form of life… [they] present a range of activity and a sensory apparatus so different from ours that the problem I want to pose is exceptionally vivid (though it certainly could be raised with other species).

Now we know that most bats (the microchiroptera, to be precise) perceive the external world primarily by sonar, or echolocation, detecting the reflections, from objects within range, of their own rapid, subtly modulated, high-frequency shrieks. Their brains are designed to correlate the outgoing impulses with the subsequent echoes, and the information thus acquired enables bats to make precise discriminations of distance, size, shape, motion, and texture comparable to those we make by vision. But bat sonar, though clearly a form of perception, is not similar in its operation to any sense that we possess, and there is no reason to suppose that it is subjectively like anything we can experience or imagine. This appears to create difficulties for the notion of what it is like to be a bat. We must consider whether any method will permit us to extrapolate to the inner life of the bat from our own case…

Our own experience provides the basic material for our imagination, whose range is therefore limited. It will not help to try to imagine that one has webbing on one's arms, which enables one to fly around at dusk and dawn catching insects in one's mouth; that one has very poor vision, and perceives the surrounding world by a system of reflected high-frequency sound signals; and that one spends the day hanging upside down by one's feet in an attic. In so far as I can imagine this (which is not very far), it tells me only what it would be like for me to behave as a bat behaves. But that is not the question. I want to know what it is like for a bat to be a bat. Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted to the resources of my own mind, and those resources are inadequate to the task. I cannot perform it either by imagining additions to my present experience, or by imagining segments gradually subtracted from it, or by imagining some combination of additions, subtractions, and modifications (*The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 83, No. 4 (Oct., 1974), 436, 438-9)