



Welcome to the ELA Times

Glendale, CA At Roosevelt Middle School in Glendale, CA grade seven English Language Arts students are writing their quills dry. They are writing narratives, summaries, Response to Literature essays, persuasive compositions and more.

In this first issue of the ELA Times you will be privy to several student creations from a variety of genres.

Go My Access!

In order to accomplish the many assigned writing tasks, students have been using a variety of tools, the most exciting of which are the laptops and the web-based essay-evaluation program My Access! Students have loved working with the laptops, and they have very much appreciated the immediate feedback offered by My Access!

With My Access! Students can submit essays for immediate scoring, and they can then revise their essays and re-submit them numerous times until they are pleased with their results. Because students can write several revisions of one essay, they end up with some terrific final products.

One student, Ashley Muro, earned an initial score of 4 out of 6, and then after a few revisions, in just one day, earned a 6. Here is Ashley's final essay on homelessness.

Homelessness in America by Ashley Muro

Here in the United States, there are millions of homeless people. Homelessness doesn't only mean that you live on the street, have no money or have no work. There are many types and causes of homelessness. One cause is mental problems. Another is that you use your money to buy drugs. Another is low paying work. These are a few ways some homeless people really are the way they are. Now I am going to take the time to explain three causes

of homelessness, which are, again: mental problems, spending money on drugs, and also low paying work.

One of the causes of homelessness is mental problems. Some homeless people have mental problems. They talk to themselves or have unusual reactions to things. Sometimes they think they are God. For example, one time I heard this man talking to himself. He was alone but he was talking as though he wasn't, and he said he was God. That can be an example of mental problems. I also think another cause of mental problems is when a man or woman is talking and is making no sense. This can be terribly confusing. The way I would help to stop these mental problems and resulting homelessness is to offer shelters with psychologists. If the homeless people have a place to go and someone to talk to, they might be okay.

Another cause of homelessness is spending all your money on drugs or alcohol. When a person spends all their money on drugs and alcohol, they don't have any money to spend on a home. Also, if they buy and use drugs and alcohol, they can get cancer and other terrible illnesses. So if you have money, spend it on something useful like food, clothes and more useful stuff, not drugs and/or alcohol. The way I would stop the homeless from buying drugs is to go to the shelters and offer help to stop their addictions to drugs.

Another cause of homelessness is low paying work. For example, if you have a job and you are not paid enough money, you won't be able to pay rent for your home, and they will kick you out of your home. You are then going to have to go to the street to live, which would be really cold and probably stinky. And then if you smell, you might get fired from your job. The way I would help these people who have low paying work would be to help them get new work that would give them plenty of money to pay for their home.

Some people might argue with me and say that they don't want to quit drinking or doing drugs. Or they might not

want to change jobs. But I would try to get them to see it my way so they wouldn't be homeless anymore.

In conclusion, just remember that homelessness isn't the same for everyone. Remember that homelessness can be caused by mental problems, spending all your money on drugs and having a low-paying job. This can be disturbing, but it's just the way it is. Hopefully, in the future, there will be fewer homeless people.

Perspicacious Persuasiveness

In addition to writing essays for My Access! students write essays for exams. Every time a student takes a comprehensive multiple-choice exam, he or she is asked at the end to write a six-paragraph persuasive essay either on one of my suggested topics or on the topic of his or her choice. Here are two such essays.

School on Saturdays by Eric Youn

People have argued that there should be school on Saturdays. I think that is a bad idea. It is a bad idea for three reasons. Additional school would put a lot more stress on students; some people might have sports to play on Saturdays; and many people have Sundays already full with church. When would they get free time? I think six days of school is a bad idea.

First of all, having to go to school on Saturdays would put a lot more stress on students. Such stress might cause a drop in grades and test scores. Enduring too much stress makes it hard to study and hard to go to sleep. Stress can also cause mood swings and illness. Some people might even snap and break down. This is especially true in high school where some kids already have mood swings and all kids are working hard to get into college. Having six days of school would be a bad idea.

Another reason why having school on Saturdays would be a bad idea is because many kids play on sports teams, and their games are on Saturdays. Taking sports away could take away someone's future. Many people go to college on sports scholarships, and if that opportunity is gone, a student's only shot at a successful future might be stripped away with it.

Finally, a third reason why having school on Saturdays is a bad idea is that many students have their Sundays already full with church. If Sunday was their only day off from school there would be no time to relax and play. Also there would be little time to study and complete homework. School on Saturdays would really take its toll.

Some people might say that six days of school would increase education and knowledge because more school means more learning. I say it is not worth it. I think that many kids would find a decline in their grades and in their

health. Many might even have trouble graduating. I think it isn't worth the risk.

In conclusion, having school on Saturdays would be a bad idea. All it would do is break students down by putting more pressure on them. It would also reduce the time students would have to reduce stress. Having six days of school would just not be worth it.

Gum Chewing on Campus by Janica DeVera

Do I think chewing gum should be allowed in class? Well, do you? Even though I really want to chew gum, I would say gum should never be allowed in class, and it shouldn't even be allowed in school. I have reasons why gum should not be allowed in school.

The first reason is about listening to teachers. Yes, listening to teachers. I say that because it is true that if students chew gum they will not pay attention to teachers. One student might ask another student for gum, and then they will start to talk. Also, if the student said "No" he didn't want to share his gum, there might be a fight. Also, if gum was allowed, students wouldn't pay attention because they would just keep getting more gum from their backpacks or getting up to spit out the gum. That could be really distracting.

The second reason gum should not be allowed in school is that it breaks and ruins the school's property. Yes, it ruins the school's property, such as the tables and chairs. Sometimes students are really lazy or bored and they just stick their gum under their desk. Or they think they are cool if they spit out their gum on the floor or the ground. But they're not cool; they're just nasty and rude.

The last reason why gum should not be allowed in school involves getting into trouble. Yes, getting into trouble. With gum in school there would be arguments that would lead to fights. A lot of parents would complain because their kids would get bruises or get suspended from fighting.

Okay, some people might argue that all of my reasons are not sufficient. Some students might plead, "I promise I won't be bad. Let me chew gum." But they are just saying that so they can chew gum.

I love chewing gum, but I love this school even more. I don't want Roosevelt to be one of the lowest schools in Glendale. I don't want Roosevelt to be gross with gum everywhere.

Chewing gum might be awesome, but think about all the reasons I said that gum should not be allowed in school. Maybe you love chewing gum, but do you love touching other people's gum? No. It's gross. So, we should agree to totally disagree with having gum in school.

Reasonable Responses

As part of the school-wide focus on writing and in preparation for the spring writing exam, students must write several response to literature essays. A response to literature essay is an essay that analyzes a particular literary work. Usually a student will read a poem, story, song or other literary piece and then analyze it on a number of fronts. The student will discuss the author's message and provide an analysis of the author's use of various literary elements and devices, such as point of view, characterization, setting, plot, mood/tone, symbolism and figurative language.

Following are two examples of effective response to literature essays.

Zebra by Maryann Adraincem

Have you ever had a tragic accident that taught you a life lesson? Did you ever meet a strange man who would eventually have a big effect on you? Well, Chaim Potok, in his story Zebra, addresses these very questions. Zebra is a story about friendship and mentorship. Chaim's message is "You can make friends and find mentors in the most unlikely of places." In order to get his message across he uses characterization and symbolism.

The story is about a boy named Adam Zebrin (nicknamed Zebra) who loves to run. One day, after running down Franklin Avenue, Zebra breaks his arm and leg and is no longer able to run. Later, at school, Adam notices a homeless man who also, coincidentally, is injured. He has only one arm. The man, who is named John Wilson, gets acquainted with Zebra. He draws Zebra a picture. After he does so, he asks about teaching an art class at Adam's school. Adam encourages him to teach at his school. Later Zebra attends John Wilson's art class and the two discover friendship. This friendship helps Zebra on his journey.

Chaim Potok's choice of characters really helps get his message out. John Wilson, a homeless veteran with only one arm, is a big part of this story. During his art class he uses garbage to make a sculpture. He shows the sculpture to the class and says, "You are all going to learn how to see in a new way." This method of teaching is unique. It is as though he is making something out of nothing. He has only one arm, and still he manages to make a sculpture. This influences Zebra throughout his recovery because he can't use both of his own arms. Zebra's character is a big part of the story too because in the beginning he loves to run but after his accident he has to express himself in a different way. Chaim Potok's use of extreme characters helps to get across his message of friendship.

In addition to characters, Chaim Potok uses symbolism to send his message. In the story, the author describes how Zebra is passionate for running. He hurts his arm and leg because of this passion. Running symbolizes freedom. Chaim Potok expresses how free Zebra is: "Then, a year ago, racing down Franklin Avenue, he had given himself that push and had begun to turn into an eagle..." Potok uses the eagle to represent freedom too, and also the zebra represents freedom. But after the accident Zebra is no longer free. He has to learn from his friend and mentor John Wilson how to be free in a different way - how to be free by making art.

In conclusion, the story Zebra by Chaim Potok conveys the message that it is not impossible to make friends and to learn from people who seem like the least likely people. Throughout the story, the author uses characters and symbolism to get his message across clearly. This lesson of friendship and mentorship is a lesson everybody should understand.

The Turtle and the Swans by Manuel Kapukchyan

The story The Turtle and the Swans retold by Robert Scott is a story about big mouths. The author uses characterization and symbolism to get across his ultimate message, which is "Big mouths will always find themselves in trouble."

The Turtle and the Swans is a story which begins with a turtle making friends with a pair of swans. The turtle and the swans talk a lot about previous experiences. One year, the lake they all live near begins to dry up, so the swans make plans to move to another lake. They don't want to leave their friend the turtle behind, so the turtle suggests that he go on one of the swan's back, but they say he is too heavy. After a while of thinking, they all agree that the turtle can hold onto the middle of a long stick with his mouth while the swans hold onto the ends of the stick with theirs. This plan could only work if all of them were to keep their mouths shut until they reach the new place. While they are flying, the talkative turtle hears people on the ground: "Up there those two swans are carrying a turtle on a stick..." "I'll say! Very clever birds..." The turtle gets made because he doesn't get the credit. He opens his humongous and out-of-control mouth and tells the people on the ground "It was my plan." Then he falls and dies.

The characters in this story are chosen very well. The protagonists in this story are the swans because they want to help the turtle from dying in the dried-up lake. The antagonist is the turtle because he and his big mouth cause him to fall off the stick and die. The character the author chooses for the big impatient mouth is great (and ironic) because turtles are slow creatures that are usually patient. If and when turtles finally reach somewhere, they are able

to do things for a very long time. This turtle can't even keep his mouth shut for a short time. Swans are an exquisite character choice because swans are known to be gentle creatures. They always make others so happy, and they are so delicate. In this story, the swans are great friends because they say, "If only you could fly...we'll try to think of something." They try to help the turtle.

This story also uses symbolism. I think that the stick represents the path you take in life. If you make a mistake then bad things will happen. I think the swans represent the people who want you to be successful in life, and the people on the ground represent those who don't want you to succeed.

I can relate this story to myself because once, when I was nervous, I had a big mouth. When I was in the sixth grade someone had stolen our teacher's stapler. Our teacher questioned every single student outside one by one. When it was my turn to answer her I was so nervous that my mouth kept saying weird things. I was then blamed and was told that I would have to pay \$20 for a new stapler. My mom spoke to the teacher; I don't know what she said, but afterward I didn't have to pay the \$20.

The story *The Turtle and the Swans* retold by Robert Scott is a great story where the author says "Big mouths are not good!" The author uses characterization and symbolism to say that big mouths will always find themselves in trouble.

Imperative Narratives

Students at Roosevelt don't just write essays, they also write stories fresh from the imagination. Some stories are third-person past tense and others are first-person present; some exemplify realism and others fantasy. But all are original and entertaining. Here are two such stories. Quiz: From which point of view and for which genre was each story written?

Forever by Esmeralda Alonzo

Yesterday I went out. I was very lonely. I saw a girl walking, and she was crying. In her right hand there was a leash. Walking right next to her was a fluffy puppy. The puppy looked upset but no more than the girl. The girl sat down next to me and smiled. While wiping tears from her eyes she said, "Hi. I'm Jasmin."

I said, "Hi. My name is Rebecca."

I asked her what her dog's name was. She said "Bailey." I asked her why she was crying, and she said she was having family problems. I felt sad, and I asked her if she wanted to play with me. She said, "Yes! I would love to play with you!"

So, we went to the parking lot to play. First I told my mom I was going to go to the parking lot and then we went. Jasmin was scared at first because cars might come. I told her, "Don't worry. It's almost like a playground. And here there is only a door to go in and out. No one can park here." She told me she felt safe.

In the parking lot we were dancing, singing, running around and doing all kinds of things. We eventually got hungry and went to my house to get strawberries. We brought the strawberries back to the parking lot. When we sat down to eat Jasmin started to talk about the family problems she was having. I gave her some advice like "Don't argue with your family." She asked if she could stay over at my house. I asked my mom, and she said "Yes." She asked her mom, and she said, "I don't care." That's when I noticed that her mom didn't care very much for her. Jasmin started crying again. I didn't blame her because I felt like crying as well. I told her "I barely met you, but I feel as though you are my sister." She said, "Really? I feel that way too! You want to know something? I have always wanted a sister." I answered, "Yeah, same here."

I was wondering Why didn't her mom care much about her? Later that night while Jasmin was asleep, I went to talk to my mom about it. My mom said she would try to fix the problem. I was trying to go back to sleep, but I couldn't. I was thinking Was it the right thing to do telling my mom about it? Well, I didn't know. I fell asleep.

Before I knew it, morning was here. My mom told me to keep Jasmin entertained while she went to go talk to Jasmin's mom. I agreed. I felt bad lying to my friend, even though it was for her own good. Jasmin wanted to go home. I told her to stay because I wanted to show her something. (I hated lying, but I really had to). I made something up. I told her stories and said we had to bake a cake for everyone. Eventually she said, "What were you going to show me?" I told her I had forgotten. She then said she had to get going home. I said "Wait! Can you sleep over again?" She said "OK." I told her I already asked her mom. She said she had to go to the bathroom. While she was in there I started to think I am only getting myself in a bigger and bigger lie. When she came out she said, "I am happy that you don't lie to me." I looked at her and told her the whole truth. I felt much better that way.

Jasmin told me her mom was going to get mad because she would think that Jasmin had my mom talk to her. I told her not to worry about it; my mom would fix everything. I could tell she was becoming very scared. I tried to calm her down but she wouldn't calm down.

Then my mom came in the house and said we had adopted Jasmin! She showed us the papers. It was true!

Jasmin ran to a room that was empty and now hers. I ran in and asked her, "Why are you crying? I thought you wanted me to be your sister." She answered, "I know." She said, "Half are tears of joy because you're my sister. The other half is because I never knew my mom would agree to have me adopted."

Later that day, as we were leaving to go to her old house to get her things, my dad came running and said hello to his new daughter. Again Jasmin started to cry, but this time only tears of joy.

Once at her house, Jasmin didn't want to see the lady who was no longer her mother. She felt bad when she walked in the door and into her old ugly room. The lady wanted to talk to her. When Jasmin got to her room the lady shouted "Get your behind over here!" We gathered her stuff and ran outside.

My father told the lady she would never have to see Jasmin again after that day. Jasmin and I could hear them screaming and arguing over Jasmin. Jasmin felt bad, but she didn't want to go back inside.

About thirty minutes passed, and then our parents came out. The lady came running out, "Give me back my aughter!" Jasmin yelled back, "I am not your daughter. I never was and I am never going to be." She yelled through tears.

We left for home knowing that tomorrow, Saturday, was Jasmin's birthday. We were planning a surprise birthday party. Lots of people were invited. The lady called that day to say "Happy birthday" to her daughter Jasmin, but Jasmin didn't want to talk to her. She knew she would trick her into doing something she didn't want to do.

When Jasmin and I were walking home one day, we saw her old mother. She was not looking so happy. We turned and started walking a different way. As we ran, she ran behind us. When we got home we ran inside, closed the door and locked everything. We heard the lady banging, and we ran to my room. We looked through the window. The lady was climbing up the wall as if it were stairs. We both screamed and ran to our parents' room and called them. They were on their way.

When they got home the lady was still trying to get inside. Our parents told us we had done a good job of being safe and they called the police. The police came and took the lady away. We all lived happily.

My Underwater Trip by Royce Moreno

Have you ever wondered what's really down under the ocean? Have you seen what's down there? Well, I have been there, done that.

It all started a long, long time ago...well, really not that long. It started when my mom bought golden trout for

dinner. There wasn't any more food good enough to eat, so I had to eat golden trout (by the way, I hate to eat fish). I felt or tasted something weird (not just because I don't like the taste). We ate dinner, did everything else as usual, and then we slept.

On the next day, which was a Saturday, we went to the beach. I was happy because the beach was my second favorite place to relax and have fun. The moment the car stopped, the door opened and I ran out toward the water. My family got a spot to stay. They got situated while I was already swimming. I kept on swimming in the water. I was relaxing in the water.

While I was relaxing in the water, the waves got higher and higher. It was high tide. Suddenly, one wave became so big. I started running, but I was slowed by the water, and I was dragged in. I was sucked further and further into the ocean. I yelled for help but no one heard me. I tried to swim back, but the waves kept on dragging me further and further out. I know it was the end of me.

Suddenly, I realized that I could breathe under water. I was shocked that I could do that. I said to myself I can go back now... without drowning... to the beach. As I went in the direction of the beach, using the waves to guide me, another part of me said, What the heck?! This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity - to roam in the ocean! I headed the other way and started to explore the true underwater.

I explored the beautiful ocean with this incredible ability to breathe and swim like a fish. I saw creatures I had seen only on T.V. and in books. I saw lots of different kinds of fish. I saw colorful plants and creatures. I saw dolphins and turtles. The most interesting thing I saw was a bunch of sharks ganging up on an old whale.

That's when it hit me (not the shark). I remembered two things: one, sharks love blood and two, the day before I had scraped my knees. I had jumped off a swing where there was glass in the sand. Somehow my wounds were still fresh and the sharks would obviously sense it. I kept on saying in my head: Please don't sense it...Please don't sense it... over and over again. Just as I thought the sharks had left, they turned around and went straight for me. I must have totally jinxed things, or else I just couldn't get away fast enough. Either way, I was sunk.

I began swimming frantically to get away from the sharks. That might seem like a stupid thing for a mere human to do, but for a human with fish capabilities, it seemed smart. Anyway, I ran for my life. I mean I swam for my life. I went into a dark cave. The cave looked really weak and old. The sharks were still coming, so I kicked and hit the cave walls. I tried many times to collapse the cave. Finally the walls started to tremble and drop slowly. I went deeper and deeper into the cave using my hands to feel where I was going. As I went more deeply inside I

saw an opening on the other side. I arrived at the opening, and a huge flash of light blinded my eyes.

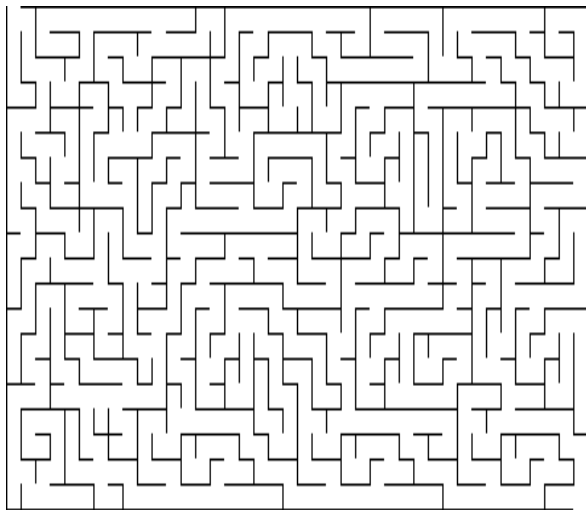
I saw a beautiful place. It was a mine full of crystals. It was the most appealing place I had ever seen. The water was crystal clear, and there were beautiful glowing crystals that were like petals on an enormous rose. I saw a necklace with a crystal shaped like a raindrop. I took it and put it in my pocket.

I went to another opening, which was dark. I took out the necklace and it glowed. Then the walls reflected the light making a road of light. I got out of the cave and headed to the surface of the ocean. I saw a white dome. I realized I was near the Sydney Opera House in Australia.

I went under water again. Then I realized I couldn't breathe under water anymore. I headed to the surface but I knew I wouldn't make it. I relaxed so as to float. I didn't want to waste my energy. I trusted that the air in my body would help me float like a bubble.

When I got to the surface, I was too tired to swim and the waves were bringing me down. I saw the sharks coming toward me. Just as they were about to...something happened.

I woke up. I was wearing different clothes. I looked at the clock next to my bed. It was eight o'clock at night. Next to the clock was the necklace. I ran down the stairs to see my sister eating. I asked, "What are you eating?" She replied, "Golden trout...Mom and Dad said we're going to the beach again."



Love Song

Students in grade seven ELA don't just write essays and stories, they also write poems and songs. This was one student's answer to the assignment: Write a love song.

Love Life by Maricruz De Jesus

I have my love
I have my life
The only thing is
He ain't by my side
We're still in love
But we're apart
Knowing we are still
Together in our heart
Crying for a wish
Wishing on a dream
Dreaming of him
Of him being with me
Wanting it to happen
Wanting each other
But not sure
I love him so much
He loves me
But in some way
We can't be.

Scrambled Names

Now, as a final feat, can you unscramble these students' names?

trviioca _____ smlsiae _____

karindan _____ maar _____

vddai _____ slmye _____

agnainveel _____ nugyo inj _____

nadlie _____ xanonra _____

Thanks for perusing this first issue of the ELA Times. Be sure to appraise subsequent issues, and if you are in Ms. Kittelson's class, feel free to submit a sample or two of your literary wares.