

COMMON CORE RESIDENCY UNIT POINT OF VIEW AND THE PYRAMIDS



Creative nonfiction writer, journalist, and educator [Liz Arnold](#) was part of T&W's Common Core Leadership Team of writers who developed creative writing teaching resources that are aligned with the requirements of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts as they apply to history/social studies and science. In this unit, Arnold offers ideas for exploring literary point of view through studying the Egyptian pyramids. T&W thanks the [William T. Grant Foundation](#) and The Cerimon Fund for their generous support of the Common Core resources initiative.

Genre(s) taught:

Creative nonfiction, research-based writing, poetry

Grade(s) taught:

7th Grade

Residency Unit Description:

This residency unit builds student understanding of point of view through reading and writing in response to literature and informational texts written from a range of perspectives. Texts include a *Harvard Magazine* article debunking the theory that the pyramids were built by slaves, a poem from the point of view of a visitor laying eyes on the pyramids for the first time, a piece about the mummy of an aristocratic young woman unearthed in a shallow pit at the foot of the Great Pyramid of Cheops, and an article from the *Egyptian Daily News* confirming the “Orion Correlation” theory. Class discussions include review of new vocabulary, reinforce awareness of the different perspectives presented, and explore how these differences affect a reader’s view of events and people. Exercises build on one another to draw on earlier lessons. For example: an assignment to write a narrative from an explorer’s perspective should ask students to utilize previously discussed information and literary devices.

Unit Objectives:

Students will:

- Develop argumentative, informative, and explanatory writing skills in preparation for high school.
- Compare literary and informational texts to recognize different authors' perspectives.
- Analyze and interpret poetry.
- Consider the connection between setting and language.
- Define new vocabulary and identify parts of speech.
- Write ordered narratives with complete sentences.
- Work collaboratively.

Common Core State Standards:

(Refer to the [English Language Arts Standards > Reading: Informational Text > Grade 7](#), [English Language Arts Standards > Writing > Grade 7](#), and [English Language Arts Standards > Reading: Literature > Grade 7](#))

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.9 Analyze how two or more authors writing about the same topic shape their presentations of key information by emphasizing different evidence or advancing different interpretations of facts.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.9 Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.6 Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.

Guiding Question:

What do texts written from different points of view teach us about a culture—and about the perspectives of the authors who wrote the texts?

LESSONS

- Invite students to observe the physical environment of the classroom. Have students make a list of what they see, smell, hear, and taste. Give them three minutes to do this. Now, ask students to write about what it is like to be a student in the classroom. What do they see? What do they feel? What are they thinking about? Invite students to move between

describing the inner world of their thoughts and feelings and the physical environment of the classroom. Give them five minutes to do this. Now, ask students to imagine that they are an inanimate object in the classroom (blackboard, desk, clock, etc.). Ask students to write from the point of view of that object.

- Provide each student with a photograph or painting of a landscape or other setting and ask students to make a list of everything they see in the photo. Give them three minutes to make the list. If there is a person in the photo, invite the student to write from that person's point of view. If there isn't a person in the image, a student may choose to write from the point of view of an inanimate object, or imagine the type of character that might be in the image and write from that point of view. Why is that person/object in that place? What does he/she/it see? What is that person/thing thinking about? RL.7.6
- Read Gwendolyn MacEwen's poem "[Inside the Great Pyramid.](#)" Invite students to underline the most striking sentence and circle any unfamiliar words in the poem. MacEwen does a wonderful job of offering her reader a window into what it would be like to behold this great wonder of the world. Ask students: "What is the most awe-inspiring sight you have ever seen? How did your body feel? What emotions did you experience? Now, imagine that you were visiting the pyramids and write a response poem exploring the feelings, images, and ideas you would experience if you were 'inside the Great Pyramid'." Invite students to read their response poems aloud to the full class or to share them with a partner. Finish with a writing prompt that asks students to reflect upon discoveries they made about MacEwen's poem through the process of writing their own poem. W.7.3



- (Part 1) Tell students that this lesson is about a mystery: Who was this 4,400-year-old smiling mummy? Read "[Smiling Mummy Found at Base of Great Pyramid](#)" aloud in class, and then say to students: Make a list of ten questions you'd like to ask the mummy, if you could travel back in time. Look at the text closely to gather specific information to ask precise questions. For example: Who do you think the teeth belonged to that lay nearby in the tomb? What kind of insects did the garlic keep away? Then, trade with a partner, and respond to your partner's questions imaginatively in first person, as if you were the mummy writing

your answers. Use your imagination to describe lifestyle, setting, customs, rituals, etc. Use descriptive writing by thinking about what you see, smell, hear, and taste. W.7.3

- (Part 2) Work with a partner to conduct research on the [process of mummification](#). See if you and your partner can find different sources in order to answer the questions that you raised in your mummy interview. W.7.6
- (Part 3) Why did Egyptians mummify their dead? Write an informative/explanatory essay to examine this topic. See if you can weave in some of the images and language that you created during your interview to support the evidence that you have found during your research. W.7.2



- Read the [New York Times](#), [Arizona Daily](#), and/or [The New Yorker](#) articles that offer glimpses of Egypt today. Invite students to spend some time reviewing the tourist information on [Wikipedia](#), to look at [some images of vendors](#) at the pyramid sites, and to watch and listen to [Ramy Essam's song about Tahrir Square](#). Ask students to imagine that they are Egyptians living in Cairo today. RI.7.6, W.7.3

Invite students write a narrative that explores answers to the following questions:

- ✓ How old are you?
 - ✓ What do you, or what does your family do to make a living?
 - ✓ Are you a tour guide? If so, what is your area of expertise? Are you a boat driver on the Nile? What do you see as you sail along the banks of the Nile?
 - ✓ What are your concerns? What are your dreams for the future?
 - ✓ Are you aware of Egypt's history in your everyday life today? How does it feel to have people from all over the world visit your home?
- [Hunt](#), [Keats](#), and [Shelley](#) are rumored to have written their sonnets to the Nile in a friendly challenge—in 15 minutes. After the poems are read aloud, discuss: How are they alike? How are they different? Which one do you like the best, and why? Using images and information from those poems, and new vocabulary words, write your own sonnet to the Nile—in 15 minutes. RI.7.9



- Read Philip Freneau’s poem [“Pyramids of Egypt”](#) and ask students to paraphrase the poem. As in Gwendolyn MacEwen’s poem, Freneau inspires a sense of wonder and invites readers to become aware of the passage of time. The Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt is the last remaining [wonder of the world](#) and our contemplation of the mystery of the pyramids offers us a unique perspective on human history and culture. Our examination of the richly complex history of Egypt invites us to think about how people lived before us and to examine the changes and causes of change that have occurred over history. Archaeology reveals what remains and then inspires our imagination to build a picture of what we can’t see in order to understand the past.

What will happen 1,000 years from now? What will our planet be like? Is there information you have about climate change or socio-political concerns that influence your imagination? Just as Freneau has referenced specific sites in his poem, can you think about what might still remain in the future? What will stand the test of time? Write a poem that imagines looking at the past from the future. RI.7.4, RI.7.9, W.7.3



- [Archaeoastronomy](#) (also spelled **archeoastronomy**) is the study of how people in the past "have understood the phenomena in the sky, how they used these phenomena and what role the Heavens played in their cultures. Many historical sites made of stone are believed to have some correlation with the stars or to have been used as a calendar that would help civilizations track the passage of time. In the article [“The Orion Correlation Confirmed,”](#) the author refers to the work of [Robert Bauval](#), which postulates several theories about what the correlation between the pyramids and the stars could mean. What do you imagine the correlation could be? Do you believe it? Imagine you are living in the time when the pyramids were built and you are in a heated debate with one of your friends or family members. You have differing points of view about the “Orion Correlation” theory. Write two pages of dialogue between you and your friend, and cite a few different facts from the article. Extra points for additional research. W.7.2.d, W.7.3 a, W.7.3 b

Vocabulary:

Descriptive detail
 Documentary
 Imagery
 Metaphor
 Narrative
 Personification
 Point of view
 Repetition
 Setting (historical)
 Simile
 Sonnet
 Tone

RESOURCES

Poems

- [“Inside the Great Pyramid,”](#) Gwendolyn MacEwen
- [“The Sphinx, Richard Johns,”](#) *Poetry* magazine, 1931
- [“A Thought of the Nile,”](#)* Leigh Hunt
- [“To the Nile,”](#)* John Keats
- [“To the Nile,”](#)* Percy Bysshe Shelley
- [“Pyramids of Egypt”](#) Philip Freneau

**rumored to have been written in 15 minutes on the same evening, together, in friendly competition*

Informational Texts

- [A Short Walk through the Pyramids and through the World of Art.](#) New York: Knopf, 1993.

(1993) From Chapter 1, Phillip Isaacson. (Sample Informational Text: History/Social Studies)

- [“Smiling Mummy Found at Base of Great Pyramid”](#) *Associated Press*, March 17, 1989
- [“The Afterlife in Ancient Egypt”](#) PBS/Nova, January 6, 2013
- [“Who Built the Pyramids”](#) *Harvard Magazine*, July-August 2003
- [“Slaves Didn’t Build the Pyramids”](#) *Discovery News*, January 11, 2010
- [“In the Shadow of a Long Past, Patiently Awaiting the Future”](#) *New York Times* 2008
- [“The Orion Correlation Theory Confirmed”](#) *Daily News*, Egypt, April 1, 2013
- [Egyptian Tourism Entry](#) *Wikipedia*
- [“Visiting Egypt in Crisis: The Pyramids are Quiet”](#) *Arizona Daily*, September 9, 2013
- [“Nile Cruises: The River Where Time Stood Still”](#) *Telegraph*, February 13, 2014
- [“The Hero of Tahir Square Comes to New York”](#) *The New Yorker*, November 26, 2014

Video

- [“Egyptian Pyramids”](#) History Channel. Get the facts in 1 minute and 32 seconds on what makes the pyramids a true architectural marvel.
- [“Building the Pyramids”](#) History Channel. The pyramids are an engineering marvel – here’s how.
- [“Secrets of the Egyptian Pyramids”](#) Science NET.
- [“Bread and Freedom”](#) Ramy Essam

Cross-Curricular Connection

Math – invite students to draw connections between [Pi and the Great Pyramid](#). Check out this great lesson plan entitled [“Virtual Field Trip to Egypt”](#) by Laurie Barnett

