

LESSON PLAN

The College Application Essay as a Descriptive Narrative

By Amina Henry

In this essay-writing lesson, T&W writer [Amina Henry](#) helps students generate ideas and practice writing the college application essay.

Grade: 11th–12th

Genre: Personal Essay



Common Core State Standards (Refer to the [ELA Standards > Writing > Grade 11–12](#)):

- ELA-LITERACY.W.11–12.2.D: Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.
- ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.E: Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

- Reflect on the [Common Application essay prompts](#). *Note: the prompts change annually.*
- Invite students to brainstorm how each prompt has played a part in their own life.
- Engage in free writing personal narratives.
- Incorporate description into those narratives.

Guiding Questions:

- What is the relationship between specific details, description, and storytelling?
- How can details enrich a story?

LESSON

Warm-up (10 minutes):

- Instruct students to look around the room and pick one object to observe. Then ask them how they would describe this object in three adjectives, without explicitly naming the object.
- Go around the room and have each student share their adjectives.

Mentor Text and Discussion (10-15 minutes):

Read a preselected college essay sample as a class and discuss. [Here are a few to choose from the *New York Times*.](#)

Invite students to discuss the narrative aspects of the essay. Ask students:

- What drew you into the essay?
- What images are still echoing for you?
- Is there a beginning, middle, and end?

Ask students to recall what they learned about the author from the essay; pinpoint what was most memorable.

Ask students to share adjectives they would use to describe the author. Ask students:

- How would you describe the author?
- What did you learn about her from the essay?
- What is she passionate about?
- What are her strengths?
- What is one thing that you like about this story?
- What is one editorial revision you might offer the author?

Writing (20 minutes):

Introduce students to the [Common Application essay prompts](#). After reading the prompts aloud, students will have 15 minutes to free-write a paragraph inspired by one of the prompts.

Closing (5 mins):

Have a few students share what they have written. Provide students with guidelines for listening by asking:

- What is one good detail in this paragraph?
- Where in the paragraph might there be an opportunity to add a descriptive word, an adjective or adverb?
- What questions do you have about this paragraph?

Materials Needed:

Paper

[Common Application Essay Prompts](#)

Sample College Essay

Multi-modal Approaches to Learning: Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Verbal-Linguistic