

Writing with Articles of the Week  
adapted from *Readicide* by Kelly Gallagher

### Goals

Students will reflect on current events, supporting their positions with evidence from the article.

### Rationale

Kelly Gallagher argues in *Readicide* that students are ignorant of current events and politics. He assigns students one [article of the week](#). Students then submit a one-page reflection. This forces students to learn about the world and to express an opinion. When I implemented these assignments, I noticed quickly that this was an opportunity to talk about writing structure on a regular basis. In my classes, I find that two times per month works. In their reflections, I want students to include the title and author in an intro with a thesis statement. Then I want them to support that thesis statement with evidence from the text in a multi-point (and multi-paragraph) body. I also have them close with a brief conclusion. I am less concerned about their opinions on the topics than I am about how they express it. I like that as a class we have having regular discussions and practice about essay structure.

### Standards:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1](#)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1](#)

### Materials

printed articles or links in an LMS

printed support materials or links on LMS

### Activity Plan

1. Once every week or two, the teacher will select a news article or two that seem to have strong arguments for or against the topics. Teachers should choose articles that either their students will find interesting or that have significance to society. The Opinion section of newspapers are often good for topics where the writer is taking a side. For example, in the fall of 2017, my students started off the year with an article about Colin Kaepernick. Other stories included when our county was labeled as having the highest number opioid overdoses per capita in Pennsylvania. We also read about the gun debate, Puerto Rico, going to Mars, boredom, and the shortage of skilled tradespeople. I prefer to give my students the option of reading one of two stories.
2. Introduce the topic(s) on the first day. The very first time we do this for the year, I often pick another article to model how to read and write about it. Focus on the writing lesson you want them to work on for the week. For example, early in the year, I want students to have a clear intro, body, and conclusion. Over the next few assignments, we will talk about specifics that would help them the most--styles of thesis statements, what to say in a conclusion, how to structure a body paragraph, etc.

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3. Collect the essays after week. Make note of common areas where students could use more instruction. Make that the lesson focus in the next assignment.

### **Differentiation Ideas**

Structural Help: Some students may need more support with the essay structure. You can provide them with an essay skeleton to help them organize their sentences. Here is a [sample one](#) I used in a co-taught class of seniors. Later when we talked about closely matching body paragraphs to thesis statements, we used [this structure](#).

Grammar Help: Some students may need more practice with formatting titles of articles versus titles of books. Teachers could create an account at [No Red Ink](#) to access practice lessons about [capitalizing and formatting titles](#). Teachers may notice other usage issues their students could use more practice on. No Red Ink has a number of other lessons (though not all are available with the free account). Teachers can assign groups of students specific lessons based on the kinds of mistakes they are making in their writing.

Referencing Two Opposing Articles: Some students may be ready for a bigger challenge. Choose a topic and give the student two articles with opposing views. Have the student write their reflection citing both articles. Teachers may want to introduce this concept using historical newspapers. The advantage to historical newspapers is that we have hindsight for how the events unfolded. It's possible to search an event and find articles written from different parts of the country, from newspapers with different political affiliations, or from different demographic groups. [Chronicling America](#) has a database of historical American newspapers.

Choosing a Quality Article: An important lesson is to help students to learn to be conscious consumers of media. Teachers can introduce this idea with a TED Ed video called "[How to Choose Your News](#)" or also use the lesson that TED Ed created for the video. The University of Southern Maine created a [checklist](#) for evaluating sources that might be helpful. This assignment is also a good time to introduce students to the difference between a news story, feature story, or op-ed. Teachers might also want to show students news sources like the [Associated Press](#), [Reuters](#), or [The Week](#) that work as part of a network or compile stories from a variety of sources. TED Ed has other videos such as "[How False News Can Spread](#)," "[The Pros and Cons of Opinion Polls](#)," or "[How to Spot a Misleading Graph](#)" that could support a larger unit or personalized lessons on consuming media.

Political Cartoons: Reading articles isn't the only way to understand current events. Political cartoons allow students to look at how the issue is being critiqued by the cartoonist as well as pay attention to symbols and stereotypes used in the cartoons. For this assignment, introduce students to how to read political cartoons. Then have them choose an article that tells them more about the issue from a quality source. The essay could focus on whether the student agrees with the cartoonist's view. The essay could also be expository and focus on how to interpret the cartoon and how the cartoon connects to the real events. Teachers could also have students read an article or two about the topic and then draw their own cartoon. Teachers who

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are interested in using historical political cartoons may want to check out the Library of Congress (LOC). Here is a [blog post](#) from the LOC with some teaching ideas. Teachers can also refer to the LOC's [primary source set about political cartoons](#) that comes with a teacher's guide and several cartoons to analyze.