

**Teacher Sustainability and Student Success: A First Year Teaching Challenges Self-Study**

Richard B. Montgomery

Teacher Education Department, Fort Lewis College

ED 680: Capstone Project

Dr. Suzanne Null

April 28, 2021

**Contents**

Abstract.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Literature Review.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Effective Lesson Planning.....	6
Teacher Burnout And Sustainability.....	7
Student Engagement.....	9
Synthesis.....	10
Methods.....	11
Research Setting.....	11
Participants.....	12
Self-Study Description.....	12
Data Collection Methods and Tools.....	13
Data Analysis Methods.....	14
Results.....	16
8th Grade English Language Arts Research Paper.....	16
Theme Essay Guidelines 8th Grade.....	21
My Brother Sam Is Dead Final Project.....	24
Discussion.....	27
Conclusion.....	33
References.....	37
Appendices.....	39

### **Abstract**

This reflective self-study on a first-year teachers experience aimed to find information for how to balance teacher sustainability and student success in the classroom. Additionally, it provided the teacher an opportunity to reflect on their past year of teaching and deeply examine what was successful and challenging. This self-study was focused around reflections on three separate unit assessments created by the teacher. The assessments were analyzed using a series of self-designed questions in order to provide the most detailed and informative narrative on teacher and student experiences during the units. The research showed that the teacher's level of effort and exertion in planning and creating curriculum material had a direct positive impact on the opportunities for student success in its implementation. Additionally, the research showed that students were more engaged and presented higher levels of completion and success with assessments containing more structure and displaying higher academic rigor. Lastly, the study showed that the desired balance of teacher sustainability and student success is fluid and changes over time and experiences. The implications of this research show a need for support and structured development for new teachers from supporting faculty and staff to ensure sustainability, and provide the best opportunities for student success. After completing this study, it is recommended to complete a follow up or longitudinal study examining the changes in experience for the teacher in subsequent school years.

*Keywords:* Teacher sustainability, student success, novice teacher, student engagement, teacher burnout, lesson planning, middle-school teaching, reflective feedback

**Teacher Sustainability and Student Success: A First Year Teaching Challenges Self-Study**

The first year of teaching for any teacher is a challenging task. Although the time spent in the classroom and mentorship received during a student teaching semester is immensely valuable, the leap into the full-time role of a teacher is daunting. Many of the challenges faced during my first year teaching were not unique to myself. Planning and developing curriculum, managing student behavior in the classroom, building a positive and supportive learning environment, working with peers and colleagues are all aspects of teaching with a steep learning curve. In addition to the well expected challenges throughout the year, there were additional challenges I faced which increased the difficulty and learning for myself. A steadily revolving door of administrators and therefore a lack of mentorship, evaluation and feedback, a small rural school district with limited resources, significant out of school requirements including a second job and working on a masters degree, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic and shift to online teaching all contributed to a particularly challenging year.

Through my professional career I have found it particularly effective to learn from challenges and mistakes through personal reflection. The difficulties I faced during my first year of teaching were generally expected, but my ability to manage and learn from them in the moment proved to be lacking. Having the opportunity to reflect and learn from what happened in the formal and structured method was enticing from a personal curiosity, and necessary in a professional capacity to continue working in education effectively. I did not feel that my experience during the year was something that should be accepted as a standard course for new teachers. It was not a sustainable level of work in order to have a fulfilling career in teaching, and it was not a model of success in how to provide students successful achievement. Learning

more about each of those aspects of the school year and my role as a teacher in it pushed me towards interest in the research.

The two most important pieces of the educational system are the teachers and the students. Without the ability to train, maintain, and help perpetuate the growth of teachers there will be consistent lack of experienced and highly effective teachers in classrooms. The lack of experience and effectiveness of the teachers has a direct relationship to the quality of the education provided to the students, and ultimately the opportunity for student success in the classroom. Establishing and continuing research in the fields of teacher sustainability and student success can ensure that both new and veteran teachers are being supported in sustainable long term manners, and that students are able to have the opportunities to find continued success in school and beyond.

The question being asked and researched is how can a teacher find a balance between sustainability and student success in the classroom? How can a teacher engage with a sustainable level of effort and time while ensuring that their students are supported and set up for success and achievement? Can new teachers be supported to perform in a highly achieving way that ensures they are living and working at a sustainable capacity for a long career in education?

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this self-study is to look at past teaching experiences from a first year in the classroom and analyze lesson planning methods as it correlates to student success and teacher sustainability. The question of how can a balance between teacher sustainability and student success as it relates to lesson planning, creating, implementing, and grading is the guiding principle behind the study.

Significant research has been made within the field of education regarding effective lesson planning, teacher sustainability and burnout, and student engagement in the classroom. This self-study will seek to identify links between these three aspects through the lens of a reflection on a selection of lessons created and implemented in the classroom.

### **Effective Lesson Planning**

Lesson planning in education is an extremely important part of the duties of a teacher. Lesson plans are often described as a “road map” (Milkova, n.d), necessary to understand what students will be learning in the class, how they will be learning it, and when it will happen. Without a clear and concise direction of learning, it will likely be more challenging to deliver the needed information and learning to the students. Milkova (n.d.) outlines a series of steps shown to be effective in planning a lesson; this being learning objectives, introduction, specific learning activities, check for understanding, conclusion, and a timeline. Additionally, simply creating and implementing the lesson plan is not enough. A focused reflection on the lesson plan in order to better understand what worked well and what did not, in order to improve instruction in the future is also recommended.

In addition to the steps that allow for effective lesson plans to be created, it is important to recognize what is fundamentally the basis of a well organized lesson. Grafwallner (2019) suggests that at least two questions should be asked when creating a lesson plan; “What do you want your students to know? Why is that important?” (A Framework for Lesson Planning, para. 14). Grafwallner (2019) contends that regardless of the subject matter being taught, two continuing ideas should always be considered. Those are the learning intentions and success criteria (Grafwallner, 2019, para. 7). A learning intention is used to better focus the goal of the learning and determine what it is that students are to do. A success criteria defines how the

teacher will be able to know that students have been able to learn what was intended through the learning intention.

Understanding how to effectively create lesson plans is a challenging task but necessary. A teacher using a lesson plan is able to organize and regularly use learning tools that deliver instruction to the students (Süral, 2019). This organization of tools allows for more effective lesson delivery. A more effective lesson will be able to engage the students, be rigorous, and is aligned with the learning outcome. An effective framework presented to ensure that the lesson being developed with the necessary pieces is through backwards designs. Lumberas and Rupley (2020) describe backwards design as a “...simple, rational and structured framework for student-centered learning. It allows the teacher to become a facilitator, who can identify the critical proficiencies that students need to develop while simultaneously finding authentic ways for them to demonstrate their learning...” (p. 595). In creating a lesson that will be able to meet and address the learning criteria, the teacher can then build the activity in order to meet that goal, ensuring that students are receiving the important learning effectively.

Effective lesson planning involves a number of elements and steps, but the consistent measure of effective planning is a focus on the student learning outcomes and an ability to measure those outcomes. Teachers who can create lessons with these focuses in mind will be better suited and able to deliver quality lessons that ensure student engagement and success. High quality lesson planning can lead to a more effective learning environment, improving the success for students, and reducing the stressful workload for teachers.

### **Teacher Burnout And Sustainability**

Longevity of teachers is an important consideration for teachers, the schools and districts they work for alike. More experienced teachers will more effectively pass learning onto students.

A higher rate of teacher retention will mean less onboarding and new-teacher training for districts. In order to gain a higher rate of teacher retention, schools must be able to maintain their staff for longer periods of time. Increasing sustainability through avoiding teacher burnout ensures that teachers can be able to work for longer as well as reduce costs incurred by the districts (Learning Policy Institute, 2017).

Burnout can be defined as general exhaustion from stress and pressure in the workplace (Kara, 2019). This exhaustion can affect numerous aspects of one's being including mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Along with this exhaustion, individuals experiencing burnout are also more likely to develop and present negative feelings toward work and potentially life in general (Chang, 2009). It is clear that through the definitions of burnout, the effects that this could have on teachers, and ultimately on student learning outcomes is serious. Teaching, particularly for novice teachers, can be a tremendously challenging task. Finding methods to support teachers and improve sustainability is necessary to curb burnout and improve longevity.

Methods to improve sustainability through reducing stress and burnout can take many forms. Gonser (2021) states that the onus of reducing stress lies with the schools, not the teachers, and suggests a number of strategies schools can use to better help teachers reduce stress. These include: listening to teachers for what they felt they needed, giving teachers genuine breaks during the day, being more flexible with work-time requirements, making self-care a part of the school culture, more regular and informal check-ins, scheduled planning time, and modeling wellness in teachers' lives. These are all methods that can be used to better support teachers, ensuring less burnout, longer tenure, and more successful student learning.

Improving teacher sustainability and reducing burnout is a challenging endeavor. In the high pressure and stress job of classroom teaching, it is vital to ensuring quality outcomes. This can be doubly challenging when the support, or lack thereof, from the school and district make the teachers experience more difficult.

### **Student engagement**

Teachers who are not overly stressed and experiencing burnout and are producing lessons that are successful in meeting learning outcomes must have the student on-board. Energetic and healthy teachers with thoughtful lessons are not effective if students are not engaged and motivated in the learning taking place. Pino-James (2014) describes that students who are simply behaviorally and/or emotionally invested may still not be putting in the effort and energy to understand the material or lesson. The author suggests that in order to create an engaged learning environment, a teacher should seek to meet six aspects: making it meaningful, fostering a sense of competence, provide autonomy support, embrace collaborative learning, positive teacher-student relationships, and promote mastery orientations (Pino-James, 2014). Through these six approaches, Pino-James (2014) explains that the teacher can better direct the learning for the student to be more motivated to engage. The student will be engaged on a more meaningful and intentional level where they feel supported, cared about, heard, and positively reinforced.

Inclusion is an important aspect of engaged teaching. Beck and Roosa (2020) describe an inclusive learning environment as one where students feel welcomed in the classroom. Inclusivity additionally welcomes more diversity, an important consideration in education where demographic makeups regularly shift. The authors found that high structure course design better supports student engagement. High structure courses contain clear learning outcomes, course

activities both in and out of class, and organized materials (Beck and Roosa, 2020). They also found that in a higher structured course, students are asked to participate in class activities more often (p. 61). Similar to Pino-James (2014) it was determined that showing more care for students can improve success through high structured courses.

Supporting a student through their studies is found to be a factor in improving student engagement. Alrajeh and Shindel (2020) found that “...instructional support was the most dominant factor determining student engagement.” (p. 177). The authors suggested that training programs can be used to increase teachers' understanding of the different needs of students. This conclusion is in line with Lumberas and Rupley (2020) who state that “...educators need tools that will increase students’ engagement in the learning process and ensure that they are obtaining skills that are demanded (p. 595). More experienced teachers with more tools can more effectively engage students in the classroom. Higher levels of student engagement help create a more positive learning environment for the students, improving instructional outcomes and helping the teacher work in more sustainable means.

### **Synthesis**

Through the review of research and writing on the topic, it is evident that there are significant ties between lesson planning, teacher burnout and sustainability, and student engagement. An increase or decrease in one or more of the three topics can positively or negatively affect the others. Consistent and concerted efforts to regularly address each of the three topics helps ensure a more positive and effective learning environment for students.

Teachers who are rested, in a positive mindset, and feel supported are going to be able to perform to a higher standard than teachers struggling in those same factors. This will be from before they even enter the classroom. A teacher not experiencing the effects of burnout will be

able to invest more into creating effective and engaging lessons for their classes. These lessons will be better and best suited to meet students' needs. The lessons will be able to better hold their students' motivation and focus through having more inclusive, supportive, and intentional elements built into them.

A student who is given more structure and support will be able to perform better themselves. Clearly structured and student-centered lessons provide a stronger framework for success. When provided with clear objectives, that student can have a better understanding of the goals desired of them, and work towards achieving those goals and the success criteria. Teachers who are better able to put in the effort to create more thorough and engaging lessons are best suited to meet their students needs.

## **Methods**

### **Research Setting**

During the 2019-2020 school year I taught 7th and 8th grade English Language Arts (ELA) at Dolores Secondary School (DSS) in Dolores Colorado. DSS is a part of the Dolores School District RE-4A (DSD RE-4A), a small and rural school district in Montezuma County Colorado. Montezuma County is located in the Four-Corners region of the Southwest, closely bordering Utah and New Mexico. DSD RE-4A had a total student population of 692 through the 2019-2020 school year, according to the Colorado Department of Education SchoolView DataCenter (2021). Of those students, I taught 111 total, 51 in 7th grade, and 60 in 8th grade. I was the sole middle school ELA teacher for the grades.

Demographic breakdowns describe a semi-diverse school district. The ethnic breakdown of my students were 74.71% White, 16.76% Hispanic, and 5.78% American Indian or Alaska Native. Gender breakdowns of my students were 48.12% female and 51.88% male. Student

population broken down in special groups were 39.45% economically disadvantaged, 4.77% gifted and talented, 2.6% with limited english proficiency, 0.29% migrant, and 11.42% s defined as students with disabilities.

### **Participants**

The self-study includes only myself as a participant. My demographic information is a 30 year old cisgender male, white, from a middle-class upbringing in a suburban area. I was born and raised in Upstate New York. My parents are well educated, both having advanced degrees, and have worked in higher education for 40+ years. My primary and secondary education was entirely through the public school system in my hometown. Post-secondary education was achieved through a private liberal college in my hometown. My Bachelor of Science is in Outdoor Adventure Leadership, through the Recreation and Leisure Studies department.

Prior to working in secondary education, I was a year round employee in the outdoor industry. Working a mix of positions in the fields of commercial outdoor guiding, outdoor education, professional outdoor instruction, and wilderness based mental and behavioral health care. My professional secondary educational background includes field study at a public charter middle school, student teaching at a public middle school, and full-time teaching at a public secondary school.

### **Self-Study Description**

A self-study research project in this context can be one that deliberately traces the process of becoming a teacher. Methods used in a self study include value analysis, investigation of beliefs and personal metaphors for teaching. A self-study can collect multiple perspectives on practice, track progress in meeting goals, changing values, beliefs, and personal metaphors. The trustworthiness of a self-study can be established through “thick” reflection and description,

multiple viewpoints, data sets that support goals, connection to the stories of others and to the literature (Phillips and Carr, 2014).

The specific aspect of my teaching that I researched is my lesson planning, creation, implementation, and management methods and how that is translated to student success and engagement. Additionally, how I was able to or not able to find a balance between my own teacher sustainability and ensuring student success in the work will be analyzed. I investigated what my curriculum planning tools and materials were, how the materials affected methods in planning, and what the support provided to me from the district looked like. How did the situation around curriculum tools and planning affect my daily and weekly lesson planning regarding unit planning, daily lesson plans, materials used, and assessments for students?

Beyond looking at the background of my materials I examined how they were utilized in my classroom instruction. Through the study I examined questions of: Did I have sufficient curriculum materials to work with? Did I use the materials in a variety of ways to create an engaging learning environment? How were my lesson planning structures effective in the classroom? What changed about my lesson planning and delivery as the year went on? What improvements did I perceive with my change in lesson planning and delivery methods? How did these changes affect my next lesson planning and preparations?

### **Data Collection Methods and Tools**

To run my self-study, I searched through my materials from my previous year of teaching. These materials included unit plans, lesson plans, formative and summative assessments, projects, classwork, homework, among other classroom activities. It was determined to choose three distinct and different pieces of material to use as data for the self-study. The three items are ideally displaying a variety of methods and styles that can be used

to analyze and answer the guiding research question of how to find a balance between teacher sustainability and student success.

The three items that were chosen to be used as pieces of data were a front page for a National History Day (NHD) quality research paper, a final assignment page for a unit ending essay on a short story theme, and a final project at the end of a novel unit. The NHD research paper unit assignment was chosen as a representative piece to illustrate the end of the spectrum that has high teacher sustainability factors, but was low regarding student success. The theme essay assignment was chosen to represent something with high student success but low teacher sustainability. The novel unit final project was chosen to represent something that is a better balance between teacher sustainability and student success.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

The three pieces of data were analyzed using a series of reflective lenses and questions with focused qualitative methods. The intention behind this was to provide a wide range of thoughts and opportunities for reflection on the data and be able to compare the analysis in multiple ways. The analysis was through the following five lenses and questions:

1. Describe in detail what the data piece is including context to the unit/curriculum it is a part of, when in the year it was used, and how did the assignment meet school/district/state requirements.
2. How was this piece of data created? Was it completely original, sourced from a curriculum, found on the internet, etc?
3. What did the implementation in the classroom look like? What were overall student perceptions and responses to the assignment?
4. Did the work required to implement this piece of data allow for a sustainable teacher

workload? What was required post implementation regarding grading and re-teaching?

5. Overall, how do you believe students were able to be successful regarding the data piece?

The five presented questions in the analysis process were decided on in order to establish a clear and wide ranging set of reflections. The first question is intended to provide insight on how the lessons were inspired and understand the level of effort and time invested into creating them. Additionally, it is intended to be used to reflect on the motivations and reasons why that assignment was created as it was, and from where the lesson objectives were gathered.

The second question of the analysis is rooted in how the specific materials for the lesson were created. Reflecting on where source materials and information for the assignments originated from can shed light on the level of effort invested by the teacher during that process. It also serves the purpose of understanding what methods used to create the lessons were more or less effective than others in creating a healthy work level and maintaining student achievement.

The third question of the analysis is intended to provide insight on what the classroom implementation looked like throughout the course of the assignment. Additionally, it is intended to present a picture of the student perceptions to the assignment. This student perception can serve to paint a picture of the classroom culture and a supportive learning environment that may or may not have been present at the time.

The fourth question in the analysis serves to reflect on whether the amount of work required to plan and implement the assignments was sustainable for a new teacher workload. In addition to the initial planning and creation of the assignment, this question takes into account the time and energy required after initial implementation with regards to grading, review, re-teaching, or any other unexpected needs by the teacher to continue work on the assignment.

The fifth and final question in the analysis seeks to provide an understanding as to how

effective or ineffective the assignment was in its ability to achieve student success criteria. This question aims to provide information that will show whether or not the effort put in by the teacher was a balanced trade-off between teacher sustainability and student success.

### **Results**

The success of a novice teacher involves a large number of variables. Two of the most prominent variables found in this study are the sustainability of the workload for the teacher and the ultimate success of the students in learning the material. The question being explored through this study is how can a balance between teacher sustainability and student success be found when it comes to planning, creating, implementing, grading, and ongoing follow-up of assignments in the classroom?

This self-study was focused around analyzing three different unit assignments in order to discover keys to finding that balance of teacher sustainability and student success. The results of the self-study demonstrated a correlation between the amount of time and labor put into creating assignments for the students and the perceived success of those students on that assignment. It was found that the less time and effort invested by the teacher, resulted in less student success with the end product. The inverse was true for materials where the teacher invested significant amounts of effort into planning and creation of curriculum. Although there is a middle ground where effort required by the teacher is presented at a sustainable level, and student success was adequate, further experience is required to create a balance that does not sacrifice student achievement.

#### ***8th Grade English Language Arts (ELA) Research Paper (see Appendix A)***

**Describe in detail what the data piece is including context to the unit/curriculum it is a part of, when in the year it was used, and how did the assignment meet**

**school/district/state requirements.** The first piece of data, “8th Grade ELA Research Paper” was created to be a National History Day (NHD) quality research paper on a history related topic. The intention was for students to obtain a strong knowledge of their topic through research prior to beginning the work on their actual projects. For the 8th grade students, their topics would have been related to United States (US) History between the years of 1750 and 1877. This was the time period that was studied in their US History class for the 8th grade.

This research paper was the first unit of the year, beginning in the second week of school. The reason for this was not by choice of myself, nor the other ELA teachers and social studies teachers, but rather as per our then principal. Our principal wanted the school to excel at NHD, thus this was intended to create that success. Ideally, I would have spent more time, other than the three days that I did have, to complete more get-to-know-you type activities with the students. As middle schoolers, I thought that this was important and necessary. Although I was able to briefly accomplish this in the first few days of the school year, it was far too little to feel comfortable tackling a large intense project with the students. I also felt that it was far too little time for the students to begin to feel comfortable with me, something that is necessary in order for them to feel supported and be willing to ask for help.

**How was this piece of data created? Was it completely original, sourced from a curriculum, found on the internet, etc.** In order to create this assignment, I primarily used the NHD website and project guidelines documents. The length and content requirements were all specific to what is required per NHD for the essay category. Although the structure of components were created by myself, with influence from my student teaching mentor teacher, much of the assignment was standard and pulled straight from NHD teacher documents and grading rubrics. Having the objectives laid out for me by my principal was to create a NHD

quality paper that would then set the students up for success on their projects, I felt that using the NHD standards would be the most appropriate.

The NHD website has a plethora of resources available to teachers to use in structuring a NHD project, even so far as a complete unit curriculum document which could in theory be directly applied to the classroom. I did not use these documents for two reasons. The first being that because I was working closely with the 8th grade social studies teacher with the project, I generally formatted much of my assignments based off of what he had developed and used over many years of teaching NHD. He would simply send over an outline template, annotated bibliography structure, etc. and I would alter it slightly for better fit in an ELA class. I also relied heavily on what I had done with NHD as a student teacher the year before. This was the inspiration for elements such as the elevator speech. Overall, I created or adapted much of the materials for the unit, although much of it was easy to replicate and apply.

**What did the implementation in the classroom look like? What were overall student perceptions and responses to the assignment?** Implementation of this assignment in the classroom was over a long time period (two months), and took a lot of coordination with my next-door US History teaching colleague. After presenting the initial document (see Appendix A) to the class, the students began work on the various pieces. First was the topic choice and thesis statement organizer (see Appendix B), short and long term impacts (see Appendix C), elevator speech (see Appendix D), annotated bibliography (see Appendix E), paper outline (see Appendix F), and final paper. Each of these items were a specific document to create, introduce, work on, grade, give feedback, and improvement throughout the two months of the unit.

All of these various elements were things presented to me from my colleague or I had done during my student teaching. Based off of my limited experiences, this was how and what I

believed was necessary and required as a part of the NHD paper process.

I did not set an actual completion date for the unit. This was partly because I did not have any idea as to how long it might take, and partly because I just did not think about creating a hard deadline as I didn't know how it would go with students in the class. We ended up spending the first quarter, or about two months on this unit. It was far too long. Students, and myself, were very much sick of the entire project when it was finally over. It was a hard lesson in curriculum and unit planning. The standard day-to-day class structure was for students to enter the class, so a brief grammar warm-up activity as instructed by the principal, go over what it was they were working on and due dates, then let the students openly and freely work for the class period. Two months of essentially the same thing every day, is far too long to focus on in school, particularly middle school.

Student perceptions of this project, from the very beginning, were generally negative. I recall vividly when announcing that the first unit was related to NHD, a collective groan emanating from much of the class. This attitude persisted and generally increased through the duration of the unit. As it went on, each element that was added drew less motivation from the class. Upon finally finishing the unit, and stating that we would be moving into reading a novel, there were genuine expressions of relief and joy from students. It was clear that it was a not popular topic that had lasted too long and had been too challenging.

**Did the work required to implement this piece of data allow for a sustainable teacher workload? What was required post implementation regarding grading and re-teaching?** The overall level of work for this assignment on my end was towards the lower end of the range as compared to the other assignments analyzed. Although there at times were busy days and evenings of grading and giving feedback for a lot of writing and reading, generally

much of what was used was simple and straightforward to create and bring to class. All work was created and turned in via Google Classroom.

The general methods for students completing the work was through introducing an assignment, then having open class time for them to work, as I circulated around and assisted during the class period. This meant that overall lesson planning and prep was minimal to none. When there was planning, prep, grading or feedback to do, it was typically only on a weekly basis. Due to this, the general workload for myself was low, and overall stress and challenge of the work was low as well. It would certainly have been a model that would ensure teaching through the year(s) would have been smooth and relatively easy.

Although generally work load upfront was low, in reality the level of difficulty for me was far beyond that. Because of the easily but poorly constructed lessons and materials, many students constantly required help, or instead of asking for help, just gave up. This led to a lot of consistent need for one-on-one work with students during class, adapting future pieces of the unit, and generally making the whole things move very slowly.

Another added challenge was the student behavior management throughout the whole unit. In addition to not having had a real opportunity to build trust and relationships at the start of the school year, beginning the year with a big unpopular topic, the loose structure of the class and loss of student drive resulted in regular and consistent student management issues. This, coupled with a lack of administrative support and resources regarding student discipline meant that at times, the classroom was in absolute chaos, without any ability to bring it in. Many students had a general disrespect for me as a teacher, regularly interrupted class, disrupted classmates, and refused to allow the class to function normally or effectively. The difficult classroom environment along with the poorly constructed, confusing and inadequately

implemented lessons created an environment of stress and anxiety for myself. Each successive element introduced had the intention of moving the project forward towards completion, but was often derailed or slowed down due to a lack of achievement on prior sections, a lack of knowledge from the previous year, or a lack of an effective work space. My lack of experience and skills compounded with the student behaviors created an overall poor learning environment.

**Overall, how do you believe students were able to be successful regarding the data piece?** Overall, student success on this research paper was very low. Generally speaking, only the most self-motivated and high achieving students were the ones to excel and be able to truly find success on this project. There was far too little structure as is evidenced in the various project elements, and most students at that time were unable to complete this effectively. A major contributing factor for this was that it was the first unit of the year. As per my principal, days before the school year started, this was given to me as the first unit. Middle school aged students, returning from summer break cannot be expected to complete such a highly challenging assignment at the very beginning of the year. We had not covered any other topics or gotten back into the motions of school. Students were not prepared, and regardless of my efforts, they were not set up for success from before this even started.

In addition to generally not having the most effective tools from the beginning, there was the issue of the students then not knowing how or what to do with the assignment themselves. I would have to regularly go back and reintroduce basic topics that I just assumed were known. I remember at one point in the project, having to repeat daily what a thesis meant even though we had covered it numerous times.

***Theme Essay Guidelines 8th Grade (see Appendix H)***

**Describe in detail what the data piece is including context to the unit/curriculum it is**

**a part of, when in the year it was used, and how did the assignment meet**

**school/district/state requirements.** This assignment, the “Theme Essay” was the final assessment of a creative writing/short story unit. We had spent approximately 4 weeks prior to this essay reading short stories, learning about theme, literary techniques and different styles of language use. The assignment was created with the intention of meeting standards related to reading and interpreting works of fiction, and writing standards related to analyzing literary technique.

**How was this piece of data created? Was it completely original, sourced from a curriculum, found on the internet, etc.** I created this entire assignment from scratch. I had a strong idea of what it was that I wanted, and what I wanted it to look like, and how it would be for the students. The selection of stories from the literature textbook I was using was the only source that I used for information. The structure, requirements, expectations, and options were all of my own choosing and creation.

**What did the implementation in the classroom look like? What were overall student perceptions and responses to the assignment?** In class, I sought to make the implementation of this assignment smooth and seamless. I introduced the assignment in depth, and in addition to the opening page, I had physically printed out organizers (see Appendix I) for students to use as they read their stories. Additionally, there was an electronic outline that lined up with the requirements exactly to aid in students completion so as to ensure all needs were met.

At first, students were taken aback by the size, complexity, due date and general expectations of the essay. On paper, and while presenting it, it looked massive and truthfully it was. But once I presented the smaller steps and strategies used to work through it, students were less anxious regarding the whole thing. The overall student attitude towards the creative writing

unit as a whole was positive, particularly the short story section. Although it was a highly challenging assignment, I intentionally put a lot of structure down to ensure that they would have the tools to be successful.

**Did the work required to implement this piece of data allow for a sustainable teacher workload? What was required post implementation regarding grading and re-teaching?** Creating, organizing, implementing, and grading this assignment required a huge amount of time and effort. I remember vividly spending most nights during the week(s) of this assignment at home working to either prep the assignment, or create pieces along the way for the students. I would say that this assignment did not demonstrate a sustainable teacher workload, as its requirements fell far beyond the classroom time and created a time burden on my personal life. An important aspect of this that I recognized was that this was a lot of work and was challenging, but ultimately I now knew how to do it, I had the materials created, and I had the experience in implementing it. In a future classroom if I seek to run a similar essay, I have most of the pieces in place thus reducing dramatically the amount of work necessary to bring it on board.

Although this assignment was hugely time and labor intensive, it was not emotionally taxing or draining. I think that is because the work necessary for it was not because of student struggles, behaviors or my own failures, just simply a lot of necessary to-dos. It was time and effort put in that at the end of the session, I would feel tired, but not demoralized like with other units. This was at the time a welcomed relief. Whereas previously in the school year I would feel exhausted, with a mindset of dreading enduring another day in the classroom, at this point I was exhausted, but enjoyed the teaching and time spent at school.

**Overall, how do you believe students were able to be successful regarding the data**

**piece?** I believe that overall, students were able to be very successful with this assignment. I think that can be attributed to the clarity and detail in the layout and structure of the assignment. I created it in that way intentionally to allow a student to work through and “check off” pieces as they completed them. The way it was organized also allowed for easy adaptation and modification of the essay, so I was able to work with students in a variety of manners. At the end of the assignment, I recall both a higher number of assignments completed, as well as the overall quality of the achievement being higher than in previous larger projects and assignments.

This project required overall very little after the fact clean-up work to be addressed. I had worked hard in setting up the students with the tools throughout the unit, and when the essay came around, the only true challenge for them was simply doing to work. I even created a checklist (see Appendix J) to aid students in working through each step of the process. We had covered lots of, and documented lots of the necessary elements for the essay (see Appendix I), so there was lots of practice and experience. Although many students still required direct one-on-one attention and motivation, it was not because they didn't know what was going on.

***My Brother Sam Is Dead (MBSID) Final Project (see Appendix G)***

**Describe in detail what the data piece is including context to the unit/curriculum it is a part of, when in the year it was used, and how did the assignment meet school/district/state requirements.** This assignment, the “MBSID Final Project” was the final project at the end of reading the novel *My Brother Sam Is Dead*. This was to be the final assignment of the semester, and at the end of the approximately seven weeks spent reading the novel. The assignment was more creative in nature, a contrast from the other regular assignments and work throughout the space of the novel. Truthfully, I don't recall viewing and developing this assignment via state or district standards. At the end of a very difficult first semester for

myself and the students, I wanted and needed to create something that was more fun and engaging.

**How was this piece of data created? Was it completely original, sourced from a curriculum, found on the internet, etc.** I thought of this assignment and the options for it on my own with ideas coming from internet found book unit plans. I had been using a lot of internet found work for the various pieces of work with the novel throughout the unit, but at this time, I wanted something different than what I had been seeing. I had found the link containing a map with points from the book laid out in the modern era, and I thought it'd be interesting to utilize that in some way. For the other project option, throughout the unit there had always been a lot of class discussion about the other characters in the book. I thought that giving students the opportunity to put the story in another character's shoes could have been intriguing and engaging for them.

**What did the implementation in the classroom look like? What were overall student perceptions and responses to the assignment?** In the classroom, I had presented the project, its options and guidelines, and the students had approximately one week of time in class to work on and complete the project. The intention behind completing it in class was partly that I would be around to support and assist students, and the other is that many students did not have the capacity to be able to work at home. Through the week of work, class days were typically just general free work time. I would circulate around, helping students and keeping them on track. As this was the end of the semester, no late work was allowed, and so therefore students' time on task was important and necessary.

General student perceptions to this project were not overall positive, but not negative. Knowing that they had to complete a project was not a positive experience, but after seeing that

the project options were both creative in nature and not overly complicated and intense, they eased a little bit. I recall many students actually having fun completing this project. Some of that fun was not necessarily what I would have asked for (regarding topics they included in the story) but it was better to see the mood of the classroom in a higher place than during the past semester.

**Did the work required to implement this piece of data allow for a sustainable teacher workload? What was required post implementation regarding grading and re-teaching?** I feel that this assignment demonstrated a level of work required on my part to be about middle of the road. It took a concerted level of effort and thought to gather the ideas and materials, put the options together, and create the materials for it. Overall, it did not feel like a difficult or stressless level of work required, but did leave much to be desired in terms of its detail and completeness. If I had done all to create something that was truly effective, then it would have felt like more, but likely not reached the level of feeling too demanding or unsustainable.

**Overall, how do you believe students were able to be successful regarding the data piece?** This assignment was found to have a mixed level of success with students. Many students, particularly those who were more self-motivated and engaged were eager to complete and put effort into the project, with most of them completing the alternative point-of-view option. Other less motivated students, who viewed the map option as less work or the easier of the options, were not as successful. Although, this was typically from students who had demonstrated a lack of effort and motivation not just in my class. There were a number of students who had not been performing well that did seek to complete the project and put effort into it. I think that if there were more details, options and structure to the project students would have been able to be more successful.

## Discussion

### **Highly structured lesson design results in increased student engagement and achievement**

The balance between teacher sustainability and student success can be difficult to achieve, particularly for a novice teacher. Solace can be held in the evidence that student success is possible in the classroom. Through determined effort and providing highly structured learning opportunities for students, there can be a more regular and increased level of achievement in the classroom.

In my classroom during the studied time period, it was evidenced that the higher student achievement and output came as a result of increased teacher performance. The students consistently demonstrated to me that they respond positively to increased rigor and challenge when presented with structured instruction and higher levels of support.

The classroom in which I implemented the studied assignments was much more accustomed to a more rigid and direct instructional method, as opposed to a more hands-off, self-motivating method. This lesson can be applied to my classrooms in the future with the goal of continuing to increase student success.

Evidence of increased student achievement while simultaneously increasing rigor is evident in the 8th Grade Theme Essay assignment. While the requirements and expectations themselves were quite advanced and significant for many students in the grade, the level of structure and support provided to them allowed for a better opportunity for success. Students were presented with detailed requirements, strict grading policies, and a thorough list of expectations. Additionally, the presentation of project options allowed students to choose their level of challenge specific to them, which helped increase buy-in, motivation, and engagement. Specifically, the higher levels of student completion rates, higher grade achievements, and ability

to complete the large assignment within a relatively short time period showed that the students positively responded to the challenge I presented to them.

The positive relationship between more thorough and structured lessons and higher levels of student engagement and achievement is consistent with the literature on previous research. Reviewed literature had found that a major key to increased student engagement was through better structured and prepared lessons. This is particularly in line with the work of Alrajeh and Shindel (2020) and Lumberas and Rupley (2020). They suggest teachers who possess the skills necessary to provide this level of structure and support to students are more effective in creating stronger student engagement. Maintaining this focus on new teacher development is vitally important both for the success of the teacher and their students. Training during teacher education programs, inservice teacher training, and staff mentoring can all be effective means of learning these skills for teachers to utilize in the classroom.

The applications for this learning for teachers and researchers will be instantly useful in the classroom. In future classroom applications, I know that with increased work output and effort, there will be an increase in student achievement. This knowledge allows for me to create more engaging and rigorous work when pushed, and challenges students to create higher quality work. I should remember to continually provide on-going support for students through the process. Simply providing a detailed list of expectations and structure is not the only key, but rather being present and showing that the teacher cares and is willing to work with the student.

A potential opportunity in the classroom that could be explored would be how students respond to a changing level of structure throughout the year. If a school year began with and maintained a high level of structure for a significant time period, would a gradual decrease in the level of structure be able to be successful with the students staying motivated and engaged.

Experience has shown that students who are in a motivated and engaged mindset based off of classroom culture can maintain it for periods of time. Giving students more autonomy over the course of the school year could provide them with more opportunities in their learning. It could also be a benefit for teacher sustainability by not necessarily needing to maintain an exceptionally high level of effort throughout the entirety of the school year, thus allowing for better teacher experiences and less potential burnout.

### **Teachers experiencing burnout create and implement less effective and engaging lessons**

A teacher that is not performing at their best will not be able to provide the best educational services for their students. Although providing “less work” may seem like a better recipe for increasing sustainability, the reality is that the consequences of what happens in the classroom during that period is not truly reflective. In the classroom during the studied assignments, although initially my workload and stress levels were minimal, the increasing level of student challenge and decreasing level of student achievement flipped that balance dramatically.

During the implementation of the 8th Grade ELA Research Paper, my initial workload was very minimal. This was due to a number of contributing factors as explained in the results. As the unit progressed over the two month period, teacher workload, stress, and emotional fatigue increased at a steady rate. Due to a consistent challenge to engage and motivate students in the classroom, combined with the regular need to re-teach, review, and slow progression, the overall experience for both myself and the students was poor.

The project as a whole achieved very little in desired student outcomes. students were not engaged in the work due to there being so little structure in place. This lack of engagement resulted in significantly higher negative behaviors in the classroom, and a significant lack of

student work completion. The combined effects of struggling student classroom management and low achievement meant that my overall stress level experienced was high. There was a constant need to spend time addressing problems in the classroom, and adapting work in order to meet constantly sliding achievement. The end result of the project was a very low completion rate among students. Among those that did complete the assignment, very few managed to create high quality work. All these factors combined resulted in a continually difficult experience for the teacher, with each week and assignment becoming more emotionally challenging to manage.

The research reviewed on this topic supports what was found during the study. Kara (2019) and Chang (2009) both describe teachers experiencing burnout as developing negative emotional feelings towards work and students, a general feeling of tiredness. There is concurrence that these feelings from the teacher result in poorer quality of work in the classroom, and thus negatively affecting the student's educational achievement. Gosner (2021) described a number of methods that could be applied to reduce teacher stress and burnout. Many of those methods were non-existent or impossible in the school structure during the study period. Researchers acknowledge that schools must take action in order to support teachers to reduce stress and burnout. Upon reflection, many of the recommended actions that schools could enact would have had a positive effect on the teachers stress levels.

The teaching experience I had during the study period can be difficult to describe in positive terms. Moving forward in the education profession, the lessons learned in how to better manage stress, sustainability and burnout will be invaluable. A major learning is to seek out information as to what schools and districts do in order to address these issues when seeking employment. A school that puts effort into supporting their teachers and ensuring that they are performing their best will be happy to describe the methods that they employ to achieve that. It is

an important consideration when seeking teaching employment, particularly as a novice teacher.

Continual research on this topic will be more important as years progress. Education funding and support in many states are continuing to lag behind growth and development, making teaching a more challenging profession to join. With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and how it has affected schools and teachers, focused research on teacher stress, burnout and sustainability will be all the more important in the next years as challenges continue.

### **Desired balance for teacher sustainability and student success dynamics are fluid**

The quest to find an effective balance between teacher sustainability and student success, although seemingly ideal and hopeful, is ultimately impossible to answer. A large number of factors play into each side of the equation and make it a fluid problem that changes regularly. The initial thought that putting in less work, thus more sustainable, ended up not being a consistent factor. Although the upfront work could have been, and during the study was, this just created more work on the back end for myself and more challenging situations for the classroom environment.

The classes included as a part of the study period demonstrated a negative response to the “less is more” approach to planning and preparation. What the students needed was more structure and guidance, not more freedom. With the lack of structure and guidance, the students exhibited significantly higher levels of negative behaviors and lower levels of achievement.

These ideas are evident across all of the data pieces used in the study. The ELA Research Paper, although less work initially, created a situation where there were more behavioral issues, less achievement, and an increased level of stress, emotional distress and struggle on the part of the teacher. The hypothesis that a more sustainable teacher workload is simply due to less work put into the classroom is false. This method proved to be a failure in the end.

The My Brother Sam Is Dead Final Project was perhaps the closest data point to the desired “balance.” Although there were still struggles regarding student behavior challenges and low achievement rates, both were improved over the research paper. Much of these issues can be traced back to the research paper unit (immediately prior to the book). After the struggles during the first months of the school year, the classroom culture was not accustomed to more structure and challenge. Although imposing more assistance in a small way, it by no means solved the problems.

The 8th Grade Theme Essay assignment and its preceding unit were by far the most successful of the three; partially due to the previously discussed structure, but also endured the least amount of negative student behaviors throughout its course. This assignment, although requiring more effort and work in the front end, necessitated much less work and emotional toll during its implementation and after the fact.

The research reviewed presented little evidence and information related to the specific research question; likely because of the impossibility to effectively study and determine the “balance” that is desired. Much of the research pointed more to a trend that the more work put in, the better results at the end. This is for student engagement, achievement, behavior management, and teacher sustainability. Creating better balanced and stepped lesson plans allows for a more clearly defined learning path as described by Milkova (n.d.), Grafwallner (2019), and Süral (2019). The increased lesson structure allows for an increase in student engagement which can positively affect behavior, achievement, motivation, and teacher experience (Pino-James, 2014).

Teaching in the future presents an opportunity to make changes from the past and improve overall teacher craft and quality of education provided to the students. Attempting to find this “balance” between sustainability and student success should not be seen as the goal, but

rather a focus on creating high quality lesson plans and materials that will allow for better student engagement and achievement, as well as reduce opportunities for negative student behaviors.

Further questions that this study has brought up relate to the effectiveness of the studied factors as they relate to different instructional styles. How do these principles apply to project based learning, experiential education, self-guided learning, and online learning, in particular? The application and effectiveness in “standard” pedagogical methods has been clear through the study, but how it applies to other methods seen and becoming more popular in modern education would be valid research topics.

### **Conclusion**

The information gleaned from the self-study research has shown itself to be valuable and relevant in learning from the challenges and mistakes and improving as a teacher. Concerning the question of finding a balance between teacher sustainability and student success, the answers are not necessarily clear and distinct. The results and discussion have shown that it is not a black and white matter; there are too many other factors that influence the results. What can be determined is that there is a direct link between the level of teacher effort and the level of success students are able to achieve. Although this is not a new idea in the field of education, it is an important recognition for a young teacher aiming to find success for themselves and their students in the classroom. The most direct way to potentially answer the research question would be to say that in order for students to have the opportunities for success in the classroom, teachers must be willing to put in the work to achieve it. Success and achievement cannot be placed into the students hands when the tools, support, and structure is not already present in their education.

The most important learnings pertaining to the research question are: more structure and support in the classroom for the students will likely result in higher achievement and success, unsustainable teacher work levels lead to less creation of engagement and effective lessons, and that searching for an ideal balance between teacher sustainability and student success is a fluid problem with no direct answer.

A teacher, especially a rookie teacher, arguably learns as much during their first years in the classroom as their students do, albeit about different topics. Looking back and reflecting on my first year in the classroom has been a valuable experience and opportunity. I have recognized and learned a lot about myself as an educator, most importantly of which is that my times of higher challenge, stress, and difficulty in and out of the classroom are tied to the times where I don't have a clear support system and focus on growth and development. Teaching for the first time was a challenge in itself, teaching for the first time without much, and at times any, support from peers, mentors, and administrators made the job feel impossible. That feeling was in many cases also a reality. While trying again and again to do what I felt was right and important for the students, yet not having the support to understand how to do it effectively was demoralizing and ultimately a failure.

Understanding that I perform best when there is a healthy and functional support system in place places a few priorities and changes on my shoulders moving forward as an educator. It will be vitally important for me to ensure that whatever setting I will be heading into in the future will be one with solid support structures in place. This will take the form of asking interviewers what their new teacher training and evaluation process looks like, what opportunities there are for professional development, what do teacher mentor programs look like, how is collaboration between peers utilized and encouraged, and what resources are available for curriculum

development and support. These pieces of information will put myself at ease knowing that I can lean-on and seek support and guidance during my time. It will also give me comfort knowing that the school cares about and is committed to me as an educator.

The improved and committed support structures from the school will allow me to better perform as an educator for my students. With all of the structures in place, it will be easier to create a classroom environment that is supportive, effective, and creates success opportunities for students. I can go into a unit knowing that the highly structured lessons that I have in place that have been developed with the aid of veteran teachers, implemented in a classroom by a teacher who has had regular evaluations, to students who feel better supported, will be more successful for the students. This knowledge and confidence radiates and helps create a positive environment for the students. It will be a significant priority of mine to ensure that I maintain this classroom environment for the benefit of the students.

Completing this research raised some new questions for thought and potential future research. Most notably on my mind regarding future research would be how the results would change throughout the years of a teacher's development. A first year teacher will typically have more challenges, and the question must be asked how do their experiences and thoughts change with each passing school year completed. As teachers learn and improve, the ability to create a quality curriculum becomes easier, thus reducing the stress and effort, and improving sustainability all while continuing to maintain positive student success. A longitudinal study, or a similar study performed for a future school year could produce interesting data to compare and shed light on long term teacher development and how to improve young teacher retention rates.

This research project has been a difficult undertaking, but ultimately a valuable and worthwhile effort. Before my time working as a teaching, much of my professional development

and growth was focused on reflection and self-feedback as a means of improvement. Although I did not have those opportunities during a challenging school year, the ability to reflect after the fact will show itself to be more valuable in the long term. Through this research project, I have learned far more about my teacher craft and abilities that I would have otherwise, and discovered a lot about myself as a person and how I can be the most successful regardless of occupation.

### References

- Alrajeh, T. S., & Shindel, B. W. (2020). Student engagement and math teachers support. *Journal on Mathematics Education*, (11)2, 167-180.
- Beck, E., & Roosa, K. (2020). Designing high structure courses to promote student engagement. *Journal of the Human Anatomy and Physiology Society*, 24(2), 58–63.  
<https://doi.org/10.21692/haps.2020.019>
- Chang, M. L. (2009). An appraisal perspective of teacher burnout: Examining the emotional work of teachers. *Educational Psychology Review*, 21(3), 193-218.
- Colorado Department of Education SchoolView DataCenter. (2021, February 1). *Dolores RE-4A*.  
[https://edx.cde.state.co.us/SchoolView/DataCenter/reports.jsp?\\_adf\\_ctrl-state=pac20phpb\\_p\\_4&\\_afrLoop=6735119761949622&\\_afrWindowMode=0&\\_adf.ctrl-state=19a2d5bvqz\\_4](https://edx.cde.state.co.us/SchoolView/DataCenter/reports.jsp?_adf_ctrl-state=pac20phpb_p_4&_afrLoop=6735119761949622&_afrWindowMode=0&_adf.ctrl-state=19a2d5bvqz_4)
- Gonser, S. (2021, February 11). *Schools, not teachers, must reduce stress and burnout-Here's how*. Edutopia.  
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/schools-not-teachers-must-reduce-stress-and-burnout-heres-how>
- Grafwallner, P. (2019, April 19). *A framework for lesson planning*. Edutopia.  
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/framework-lesson-planning>.
- Kara, S. (2019). Investigation of job satisfaction and burnout of visual arts teachers. *International Journal of Research in Education and Science*, 6(1), 160.  
<https://doi.org/10.46328/ijres.v6i1.817>

- Learning Policy Institute. (2017, September 13). *What's the cost of teacher turnover?*  
<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/the-cost-of-teacher-turnover#:~:text=Research%20shows%20that%20urban%20districts,2%20years%20after%20being%20hired.>
- Lumbreras, Jr., R., & Rupley, W. H. (2020). Pre-service teachers' application of understanding by design in lesson planning. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*, 9(3), 594-599. <https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v9i3.20491>
- Milkova, S. (n.d.). *Strategies for effective lesson planning*. University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching. [https://crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p2\\_5](https://crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p2_5).
- National History Day. (2020). *Contest rule book. June 22, 2020 edition*.  
<https://www.nhd.org/sites/default/files/NHDRuleBook2021Digital.pdf>
- Phillips, D. K., & Carr, K., (2014). *Becoming a teacher through action research: Process, context, and self-study* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Pino-James, N. (2015, December 11). *Golden rules for engaging students in learning activities*. Edutopia.  
<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/golden-rules-for-engaging-students-nicolas-pino-james>
- Süral, S. (2019). An examination of pre-service teachers' competencies in lesson planning. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 7(3), 1-13.  
<https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v7i3.3902>

## Appendix A

### ELA Research Paper

**What you will produce:** By the end of the unit, you will have a completed research paper on a topic of your choice or an NHD Topic related to US History years 1750-1877. This paper will be 1500-2000 words in length, and include an annotated bibliography for 3 primary sources and 3 secondary sources. Over the course of working on this paper, you will complete at least the following assignments and tasks:

- Thesis Statement Organizer
- Thesis Elevator Speech
- Annotated Sources
- Annotated Bibliography
- Complete Paper Draft (Submitted twice)
- Final Paper Submission
- Final Paper Presentation

Each piece of the overall project will add up to the final unit grade. The way the assignments are laid out are intended to flow and aid in completing the paper smoothly. Not completing a certain piece can make it more difficult to move onto to the next part of the process. Overall grading breakdown will be about as follows:

- 40%: Thesis Statement Organizer, Annotated Sources, Annotated Bibliography
- 30%: Elevator Speech, Final Paper Presentation
- 30%: Complete Paper Draft x2, Final Paper Submission

This project is intended to give you more practice and experience to create high quality academic work and research, as well as a foundation to create high quality National History Day Projects.

## Appendix B

### Thesis Statement Organizer

<b>What is your topic?</b> <i>What is the topic of your research paper going to be?</i>

<b>What is your position?</b> <i>What stance, position, or argument are you going to be taking and then supporting through your research. What is the overall point or main idea of your research paper going to be.</i>

<b>What are the reasons or points you will use to support your position?</b> <i>3-5 points that you will research and use to support your position. These will be the topics for the main body paragraphs of your paper.</i>
--

<b>Reason 1:</b>

<b>Reason 2:</b>

<b>Reason 3:</b>

<b>Reason 4:</b>

<b>Reason 5:</b>

<b>Put it all together:</b> <i>Copy and paste your topic, position, and supporting reasons below to form your thesis statement. Edit it into 1-2 coherent sentences.</i>
--

--

<b>Thesis Statement Checklist:</b>
------------------------------------

- Does it **take a position**?
- Can it be backed up by **research**?
- Does it express **one main idea**?
- Is it **arguable**? Is there something you're trying to **prove**?
- Is it written as a 1-2 sentence **statement**, not a topic or question?
- Is it **narrow** and specific?

## Appendix C

### Short And Long Term Impacts

**Using your research topic, we are going to think about the short and long term impacts of that event/person/action and why those impacts are important.**

**Short term impacts:** What were the **immediate** effects of your topic during that time period.

- What resulted in the immediate aftermath of your topic?
- What evidence is there to show you what happened directly afterwards?

**Long term impacts:** What were/are the long term historical impacts of your topic?

- What long term consequences came out of your topic over time?
- What is your evidence?
- How does your topic continue to affect people today?
- What is your evidence?

## Appendix D

### Elevator Speech

#### NHD Elevator Speech

**What you will create: A ~1 minute long speech delivering a number of important details and pieces of information about your topic.**

- Speeches must cover all points of information below.
- Speeches will be 45-1:15 in length.
- You will be graded on both quality and thoroughness of content, as well as presentation skills.

<b>Intro and Thesis:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think of a good “hook” about your topic.</li> <li>• Make sure you cover “who” and/or the “what” of your topic.</li> </ul>
<b>Background Information:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is the “what”, “where”, and “when” of your topic.</li> <li>• Keep it short and to the point. Think of the most important details you need to convey.</li> </ul>
<b>Importance:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Why” is your topic important.</li> <li>• This is your short &amp; long term impacts.</li> <li>• Why should we be “bought in” to your topic.</li> </ul>
<b>Closing:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrap up your speech with a memorable and catchy conclusion. Something that will stick in the listeners mind.</li> <li>• It could be useful to restate your most important points about your topic.</li> </ul>

**I would recommend putting all together into one easy to read script that you can practice for time and know really well.**

## Appendix E

### Annotated Bibliography

**Step 1: Copy and paste you source from your research log into the top section.**

Source Name:

Author: Publisher: City: Date: Page: Date accessed (online): Other information:	Notes: Step 1: Purpose Step 3: What Bias do I recognize? Step 4: What is happening in the World/Country that could be influencing this? Step 5 What stands out to you? Step 6: What do I think it means? Step 7: How does this prove my theory/thesis or how does it help me understand the information/topic better?
---	---

**Step 2: Use a citation creation source (citationmachine.net, easybib.com, or others) that create an MLA style citation for your source. Paste that below.**

Citation:

**Step 3: Answer the following questions about your source.**

1. What type of source is this? (Book, website, newspaper article, photo, etc...)
2. Is this a primary or secondary source and why?
3. What information from the source is important or will be used in your research?
4. How does the source help you prove or support your argument?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

**Step 4: Put it all together. See example below.**

**Example**

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division, The New York Public Library. "To be sold, on board the ship Bance Island, ... negroes, just arrived from the Windward & Rice Coast" *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1840 - 1860.  
<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47db-b78d-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

This source is an advertisement for a slave auction in Charleston, South Carolina between the years of 1840-1860. This is a primary source from the era from a newspaper during the times of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. This source shows that during the Transatlantic Slave Trade slaves were treated as property and not humans beings, proving how horrific the treatment of these people during that time period was by equating them to property or livestock sold at auction.

**TO BE SOLD** on board the  
 Ship *Bance-Island*, on tuesday the 6th  
 of *May* next, at *Abley-Ferry*; a choice  
 cargo of about 250 fine healthy  
**NEGROES,**  
 just arrived from the  
 Windward & Rice Coast.  
 —The utmost care has  
 already been taken, and  
 shall be continued, to keep them free from  
 the least danger of being infected with the  
**SMALL-POX**, no boat having been on  
 board, and all other communication with  
 people from *Charles-Town* prevented.  
*Austin, Laurens, & Appleby.*  
 N. B. Full one Half of the above Negroes have had the  
**SMALL-POX** in their own Country.

## Appendix F

### Narrowing Essay Outline

- I. The Thesis Statement (Start Here)
  - A. Hook
  - B. Proving point one (Preview)
  - C. Proving point two
  - D. Proving Point three
  - E. Introduction Information (Background information)
- II. Proving Point One (Paragraph Two)
  - A. Show how it proves your thesis
  - B. Evidence ( Reference to your research) relating to your thesis
  - C. Detailed Information related to Proving point one (because...)
- III. Proving Point Two (Paragraph three) (*Most Exciting/Important relationship to the Thesis*)
  - A. Show how it proves your thesis
  - B. Evidence ( Reference to your research) relating to your thesis
  - C. Detailed Information related to Proving point one (because...)
- IV. Proving Point Three (Paragraph Four)
  - A. Show how it proves your thesis
  - B. Evidence ( Reference to your research) relating to your thesis
  - C. Detailed Information related to Proving point one (because...)
- V. Conclusion Statement (Needs to be a restatement of the Thesis Statement with proving the conclusion, Stated as a fact)(Lawyer Moment)
  - A. Detailed Information about topic and thesis, to sum up, any hanging thoughts
    1. (Do not summarize with things like THE END, THIS IS WHY...COUNTRY IS GREAT TODAY, This is why I'm right, etc.)
    2. Make sure it has an ending
  - B. Other provided information needed to conclude or solidify my thesis statement.

## Appendix G

### My Brother Sam Is Dead Final Project 8th Grade ELA

Choose one of the options below to complete as a final project for My Brother Sam Is Dead.

All projects must be turned in done no later than **Thursday the 19th by the end of school. - NO LATE PROJECTS.**

<p><b>Write a portion or major event of the book from a different character's point-of-view</b></p> <p>Choose another character in the book (Sam, Ms. Meeker, Life, etc.) and write the story from their point of view rather than Tim's. There is some flexibility as to what style you want to write in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You could be Ms. Meeker and talk about seeing her family being in conflict during the time.</li> <li>You can write a series of letters from Sam back home to his family discussing the various events and battles that he is experiencing.</li> <li>It could be a narrative from Life as a Loyalist watching the war develop and eventually become involved in it.</li> </ul> <p>Think of any character from the book that is of interest to you and create a way of telling the story from their eyes. It could be in the form of letters, and short story like the book, and single lengthy conversation like a play, etc.</p> <p><b>Requirements:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Story centers around the same events and characters as My Brother Sam Is Dead</li> <li>Written in a similar style of writing as James Collier, or time-period appropriate.</li> <li>Is a mix of events from the books and your own events to fill in the details.</li> </ul> <p><b>Total writing should come to around 3-4 pages worth of writing.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Typed, 12 point font, double spaced.</li> </ul>
<p><b>History of Book Area</b></p> <p><b>Cartography/Topography</b>—Geography is key to the novel. The battles, travelling and struggles of the Meekers takes place over a variety of locations. <a href="#">Explore this map</a> of locations spoken about or having events taking place during the novel.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose a section of the story that is of particular interest or note to you.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Word choice/errors</b></p>	<p>Word choice, is skillful, precise and sophisticated, while reflecting the individual student's writer's voice.</p> <p>Contains few, if any errors in English grammar, usage, and mechanics.</p>	<p>Word choice, is thoughtful and effective, and reflects the individual student's writer's voice.</p> <p>May contain some errors in English grammar, usage, and mechanics.</p>	<p>Word choice is general and basic, but still reflects the individual student's writer's voice.</p> <p>May contain some to many errors in English grammar, usage, and mechanics.</p>	<p>Word choice is general and basic and does not reflect the individual student's writer's voice.</p> <p>Contains many errors in English grammar, usage, and mechanics.</p>	<p>Word choice is poor and does not reflect the individual student's writer's voice.</p> <p>Contains excessive errors in English grammar, usage, and mechanics</p>
<p><b>Relation to My Brother Sam Is Dead</b></p>	<p>The written part of the project clearly and skillfully summarizes/analyzes the most significant portions of the text in the <u>student's own words</u>.</p>	<p>The written part of the project adequately summarizes/analyzes the most significant portions of the text in the <u>student's own words</u>.</p>	<p>The written part of the project summarizes/analyzes some portions of the text in the <u>student's own words</u> but may also have some copying of main ideas from other sources.</p>	<p>The written part of the project does not summarize or analyze the text in the <u>student's own words</u> and may also have some copying of main ideas from other sources.</p>	<p>The written part of the project does not summarize or analyze the text in the <u>student's own words</u></p>
<p><b>Column Total</b></p>					
					<p><b>Project Total</b> /50</p>

## Appendix H

Due By **March 2nd, 2020**

### 8th Grade Short Story Theme Essay

**Objective:** You will be writing a 6-8 paragraph essay based on themes and lessons from short stories. You will be required to read a story or stories, determine what important themes or lessons from the stories are, support your answers with citations from the text, and explain in your own words how the citations support your answer. The essay will use the ACES format for writing and shaping the paragraphs.

**There are two options for completing the essay. Option 1 has less required work, but will be graded more strictly. Option 2 requires more work but is graded more leniently.**

**Option 1:** You will choose **one** short story from the *Language of Literature* textbook to read. You will find **three** themes or lessons from the story that are important. With each theme or lesson you will find **three** quotes or examples from the text of the story to support why they are important themes or lessons. In addition to discussion about each theme, your essay will include a one paragraph description of the story.

**Option 2:** You will choose **three** short stories from the *Language of Literature* textbook to read. You will find **three** themes that are common across all three of the stories. For each theme you will find one citation from each story to prove the commonality. Your essay will include a one paragraph description for each story.

Below are the paragraph by paragraph requirements for each essay:

Option 1	Option 2
<b>Introduction Paragraph</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Hook</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Brief introduction to the story used</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Overview of three themes being discussed</li> </ul>	<b>Introduction Paragraph</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Hook</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Brief introduction to the story used</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Overview of three themes being discussed</li> </ul>
<b>Plot Summary</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Characters</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Setting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Conflicts</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Important events or actions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Climax of story</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Resolution of story</li> </ul>	<b>Plot Summary #1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Characters</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Setting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Conflicts</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Important events or actions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Climax of story</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Resolution of story</li> </ul>
<b>Theme #1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Description of first theme</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> First citation from text for support</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of citation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Second citation from text for support</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of citation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Third citation from text for support</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of citation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Paragraph summary</li> </ul>	<b>Plot Summary #2</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Characters</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Setting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Conflicts</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Important events or actions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Climax of story</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Resolution of story</li> </ul>
<b>Theme #2</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Description of second theme</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> First citation from text for support</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of citation</li> </ul>	<b>Plot Summary #3</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Characters</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Setting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Conflicts</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Second citation from text for support</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of citation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Third citation from text for support</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of citation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Paragraph summary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Important events or actions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Climax of story</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Resolution of story</li> </ul>
<p><b>Theme #3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Description of third theme</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> First citation from text for support</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of citation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Second citation from text for support</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of citation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Third citation from text for support</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of citation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Paragraph summary</li> </ul>	<p><b>Theme #1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Description of first theme</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Citation from first story</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of citation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Citation from second story</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of citation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Citation from third story</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of citation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Paragraph summary</li> </ul>
<p><b>Conclusion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Restating of the three important themes from the story</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Conclusion statement</li> </ul>	<p><b>Theme #2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Description of second theme</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Citation from first story</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of citation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Citation from second story</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of citation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Citation from third story</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of citation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Paragraph summary</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Theme #3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Description of third theme</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Citation from first story</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of citation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Citation from second story</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of citation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Citation from third story</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of citation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Paragraph summary</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Conclusion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Restating of the three important themes from the story</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Conclusion statement</li> </ul>

**List of Short Stories from *Language of Literature 8*:**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Raymond's Run page 32</li> <li>-A Mother in Mannville page 59</li> <li><b>-The Ransom of Red Chief page 69</b></li> <li>-Born Worker page 84</li> <li><b>-The King of Mazy May page 148</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>-Flowers for Algernon page 220</b></li> <li><b>-The Bet page 285</b></li> <li>-The Treasure of Lemon Brown page 334</li> <li><b>-Rules of the Game page 348</b></li> <li>-The Moustache page 395</li> <li>-The Dinner Party page 565</li> <li>-The Lady, or the Tiger? Page 592</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Future Tense page 605</li> <li><b>-The Tell-Tale Heart page 624</b></li> <li>-The Third Wish page 672</li> <li>-The Monkey's Paw page 680</li> <li>-War Party page 737</li> <li>-The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse page 839</li> </ul>
--	--	--

**Appendix I**

**8th Grade Theme Essay Organizer - Option 1**

**Name:**

Use the organizer below to keep track of what you are reading, finding, and going to be writing for your essay. Be sure to reference the requirement page handed out in class as to what is needed and expected.

**Title and Author of story you're using:**

---

**What are the three themes that will be discussed in your essay?**

---

---

**Plot Summary**

Characters:

---

Setting

---

Rising Actions Events

---

---

Climax Events

---

---

Resolution

---

**Theme #1:** What are three citations from the text of the story you'll use to support theme #1?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Theme #2:** What are three citations from the text of the story you'll use to support theme #2?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Theme #3:** What are three citations from the text of the story you'll use to support theme #3?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Appendix J

### Theme Essay Checklist

**Essay Due Monday March 2nd, 3:35 PM**

**As you are working on your theme essay, regularly go through this checklist to ensure that you are completing all the necessary parts of the assignment.**

- Reading your story or stories and completing the “Theme Essay Organizer”
  - The more thorough you work on this, the easier the rest of the essay writing will be.
  - A completed organizer will be turned in along with your finished essay so be sure to complete it and do not throw it away.
- Use the “Theme Essay Outline” on Classroom to organize your information from the organizer.
- Add in the additional needed areas of information
  - Explanations in each citation paragraph
  - Introduction paragraph
  - Conclusion paragraph
- At this point you have an almost entirely complete essay. Simply remove each heading from the outline, and put your sentences together into the paragraphs.
- Arguably the most important step is revising and editing.
- **Use this checklist as a guide when editing your essay.**
  - Is each sentence clear and complete?
  - Can any short, choppy sentences be improved by combining them?
  - Can any long, awkward sentences be improved by breaking them down into shorter units and recombining them?
  - Can any wordy sentences be made more concise?
  - Can any run-on sentences be more effectively coordinated or subordinated?
  - Does each verb agree with its subject?
  - Are all verb forms correct and consistent?
  - Do pronouns refer clearly to the appropriate nouns?
  - Is each word in the essay appropriate and effective?
  - Is each word spelled correctly?
  - Is the punctuation correct?
- Finally, make sure that your essay meets the format requirements as laid out on the “Theme Essay Grading” Doc.