Literacy Performance Task
Grade 8-Narrative Plot and Theme

UNIT OVERVIEW
The literary elements task is embedded in a four week curricular unit on narrative writing in which students choose from two literary texts on the subject of elements of plot and theme. The students complete two assessment tasks that build in complexity and are sequenced to scaffold student learning.

TASK DETAILS

Task Name: Narrative Plot and Theme
Grade: 8
Subject: ELA
Depth of Knowledge: 3

Task Description: This task asks students to demonstrate knowledge of elements of plot and plot diagram. Students will write a narrative using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences. Students must be able to determine the theme or central idea of the text and analyze its development.

Standards:
W.8.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
W.8.3.a Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator and or characters; organize an event sequence that unfold naturally and logically.
W.8.3.b Use narrative techniques such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection to develop experiences, events, and/or character
W.8.3.c Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence, signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another, and show the relationships among experiences and events
W.8.3.d Use precise words and phrases, relevant details and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events
W.8.3.e Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on the narrated experiences or events
RL.8.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.
L.8.2 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English such as capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
Resources and Materials:
“Raymond’s Run” by Tony Cade Barbara (in McDougal Littell textbook)
“The Great Rat Hunt” by Laurence Yep (in McDougal Littell textbook)
Plot at a Glance Handout (included in the back of the document)
Plot Diagram Sheet for Pre-Writing (included within assessment task #1)
Section A: Assessment Task #1:

Use the blank space below to take notes. Your notes will be collected but not graded.

Write your one paragraph on the page with lines provided. After you’ve written your paragraph, answer the StepBack questions. Like your notes, your responses to the StepBack questions will be collected but not graded.

Answer the questions below to plan your writing. Your answers will be collected but not graded. Compose your paragraph on the page with lines provided.

Prepare to Write:
1. What do you have to read and write to complete this task? In other words, what is this task asking you to do?
2. What are the components or parts of the task?
3. What will you do first, second, third, etc.?

Space for Notes:
A. The rat leaves mysteriously.
B. The family discovers evidence that a rat invaded their grocery store.
C. The father and Yep bond over their shared fear of the rat and Yep’s dad reveals that “nobody is good at everything.”
D. The family attempts to get rid of the rat with traps, poison, and an exterminator.
E. The butcher breaks Yep’s brother’s nose during a game in Watsonville.
F. Yep’s father borrows a gun to attempt to kill the rat, but the rat charges and forces them to retreat.
G. Father mounts the rat’s head and they keep it as a trophy.
H. Laurence Yep (narrator) and his family run a grocery store in Chinatown, San Francisco.
I. The dad makes the brother throw away candy he finds in their grocery store.
J. Mother discovers the rat has moved to their apartment above the store.
K. The rat peeks out of its hole with huge teeth and beady eyes; then father shoots it.
L. The narrator’s asthma prevents him from competing at sports at which his dad and brother excel.

**TASK:** Consider what you know about the stages of plot. Read either *Raymond’s Run* or *The Great Rat Hunt*. Choose one of the short stories and view that story’s plot line. Choose the correct eight out of the given twelve events within the story and plot all eight correctly, in sequential order, on the given plot diagram. Using the events on the plot outline, identify the theme or central idea in the story that you chose. Write one paragraph stating the theme and provide examples from the text that supports your theme.
A. During the May Day race, Squeaky and Gretchen are neck and neck when Squeaky notices Raymond running alongside, cheering her on.

B. Squeaky and Gretchen share a smile of mutual respect.

C. Raymond stands up for Squeaky by telling Gretchen that she is going to lose the May Day race.

D. While signing up for the race, Mr. Pearson implies that maybe Squeaky should let someone new win.

E. Squeaky tells about caring for her older brother, Raymond, and her love of running.

F. Squeaky’s entire family cheers her on as she runs.

G. Squeaky is eager for the race to be over so she can participate in the May Pole dance.

H. Squeaky is practicing her breathing exercises with Raymond as they walk down Broadway.

I. Gretchen is announced as the winner, but Squeaky still smiles in order to save face.

J. Squeaky and Raymond encounter Gretchen and her friends. They argue about who will win the May Day race.

K. Squeaky is announced as the winner of the race.

L. Squeaky decides that she does not care if she wins or loses, but realizes that with her help Raymond could be a great runner.
StepBack Questions: Please answer the following questions in the space below. Your responses will be collected but not graded.

What did you do to complete the Performance-Based Assessment task? List the steps that you took to complete the task.

What did you find easy about the Performance-Based Assessment task?

What did you find difficult about the Performance-Based Assessment task?
**TASK:** Consider what you know about the stages of plot. Read either Raymond’s Run or The Great Rat Hunt. Choose one of the short stories and view that story’s plot line. Choose the correct eight out of the given twelve events within the story and plot all eight correctly, in sequential order, on the given plot diagram. Using the events on the plot outline, identify the theme or central idea in the story that you chose. Write one paragraph stating the theme and provide examples from the text that supports your theme.
Grade 8 Literacy: Narrative Plot and Theme  
Primary Trait Scoring Guide for Assessment Task 1

**Primary Trait of Assessment Task # 1:** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Point</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Student identified 6-8 correct plot elements from the given choices and accurately placed them on the plot diagram. Student used the correct plot elements to analyze a central theme of the text, and the student composed a complete paragraph. Explanation is a relevant and concise analysis of textual evidence, using what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Student identified 4-5 correct plot elements from the given choices and accurately placed them on the plot diagram. Student used the correct plot elements to identify a central theme of the text, and the student composed a complete paragraph stating the theme using support from the text. Explanation is a general analysis of textual evidence, using only what the text says explicitly.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Student identified 2-3 correct plot elements from the given choices and accurately placed them on the plot diagram. Student used the correct plot elements to identify a central theme of the text. The paragraph makes minor references to the text or does not explain or analyze the theme fully.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student identified 0-1 correct plot elements from the given choices and accurately placed them on the plot diagram. Student used the correct plot elements to attempt to identify a central theme of the text. The paragraph makes minor or no references to the text and does not explain or analyze the theme.</td>
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Grade 8 Literacy: Narrative Plot and Theme
Primary Trait Scoring Guide for Assessment Task 1

Explicit Statements about What Will Be Expected As Evidence of a Score Point 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Trait: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.</th>
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**Score Point 4**
Student identified 6-8 correct plot elements from the given choices and accurately placed them on the plot diagram. Student used the correct plot elements to analyze a central theme of the text, and the student composed a complete paragraph. Explanation is a relevant and concise analysis of textual evidence, using what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
A. The rat leaves mysteriously.
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L. The narrator’s asthma prevents him from competing at sports at which his dad and brother excel.
Possible themes for "The Great Rat Hunt"

1) a person's value is not determined by athletic ability
2) adults have flaws too
3) adversity brings people together
4) parental love is not determined by accomplishments

Sample Score 4

One possible theme in "The Great Rat Hunt" is adversity can bring people together. In this story, Laurence felt distant from his father because of his lack of athletic ability. "Father and Eddy would start once more while I watched, doomed to be positively un-American, a weakling, a perpetual spectator, an outsider. Worse, I felt as if Eddy were father's only true son." Even when Laurence agreed to help his father shoot the rat and his brother declined, he still felt his father would have preferred his brother's help. "I thought he was silent because he was disappointed: he would rather have Eddy's help than mine." But it was the adversity of the situation with the danger of the rifle and their fear of the rat, that brought the two together. Laurence and his father really spoke for the first time. "I'm lousy at sports," he confessed...and his dad replied, "Then you'll find something else," and he put his arm around him. If it had not been for the difficult situation, these two might never have come to their understanding of each other.
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<td>Raymond stands up for Squeaky by telling Gretchen that she is going to lose the May Day race.</td>
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<td><strong>D.</strong></td>
<td>While signing up for the race, Mr. Pearson implies that maybe Squeaky should let someone new win.</td>
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<td><strong>E.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>F.</strong></td>
<td>Squeaky’s entire family cheers her on as she runs.</td>
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<td><strong>L.</strong></td>
<td>Squeaky decides that she does not care if she wins or loses, but realizes that with her help Raymond could be a great runner.</td>
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**Possible themes for “Raymond’s Run”**

1) You cannot always put yourself first, but must instead raise other people up.
2) Everyone has given talents, and it is important to use those talents in selfless ways.
3) Instead of seeing faults in others, look for the potential that is there.
4) The greatest rewards come from helping others.

**Score Point 4**

The main theme of “Raymond’s Run” is that people should look for the potential in others rather than seeing their faults. In the beginning of the story, Squeaky sees Raymond as being a drag and an obligation. She feels that caring for him and standing up for him is her “duty”. In the first paragraph she even says “I don’t have much work to do… All I have to do in life is mind my brother Raymond, which is enough.” However, Squeaky views Raymond in a new light near the end, when she sees him running alongside her. She says “And on the other side of the fence is Raymond with his arms down to his side and the palms tucked up behind him, running in his very own style, and it’s the first time I ever saw that and I almost stop to watch my brother Raymond on his first run.” Squeaky grows to see Raymond not as a drag, but as a great runner, equal to her. Instead of having to “mind” Raymond, she now wants to dedicate herself to him and help him fulfill his potential. She thinks to herself, “It occurs to me that Raymond would make a very fine runner” and ”I can always retire as a runner and begin a new career as a coach with Raymond as my champion.” “…my brother Raymond, a great runner in the family tradition.” This goes to show that Squeaky no longer sees Raymond as someone who holds her back but as someone with whom she can share her life’s joy.
Section A: Assessment Task # 2

Student Name: ___________________________  Class Period: ________

**TASK:**

You are now the author. Below, in the “Space for Notes,” brainstorm ideas for an original story. Choose one of those ideas to fill out the plot diagram on the next page. You should plot at least eight events on the plot diagram, and you must include at least one event in each of the five stages of plot.

Use the plot diagram you create to compose an original 1-2 page narrative. Include effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences. Your narrative should include the plot elements you will write on your plot diagram, and it should also contain clear organization, characterization, narrative techniques, transitional words, and descriptive details. Follow the conventions of standard English grammar such as capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

Answer the questions below to plan your writing. Your answers will be collected but not graded. Compose your 1-2 page narrative essay on the page with the lines provided. After you’ve written your essay, answer the StepBack questions. Your responses to the StepBack questions will also be collected but not graded.

**Prepare to Write:**

1. What do you have to read and write to complete this task? In other words, what is this task asking you to do?
2. What are the components or parts of the task?
3. What will you do first, second, third, etc.?

**Space for Notes:**
TASK: Performance Task # 2

You are now the author. In the space below for notes, brainstorm ideas for an original story. Choose one of those ideas to fill out the plot diagram on the next page. You should plot at least eight events on the plot diagram, and you must include at least one event in each of the five stages of plot.
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**StepBack Questions**: Please answer the following questions in the space below. Your responses will be collected but not graded.

What did you do to complete the Performance-Based Assessment task? List the steps that you took to complete the task.

What did you find easy about the Performance-Based Assessment task?

What did you find difficult about the Performance-Based Assessment task?
**Primary Trait of Assessment Task # 2:** Write a narrative to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Primary Trait of Assessment Task # 2</strong></th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction, Characterization, and Organization</strong></td>
<td>Student engages and orients the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introduces a narrator and/or characters; student organizes an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.</td>
<td>Student orients the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introduces a narrator and/or characters; student organizes an event sequence that unfolds logically.</td>
<td>Student provides a point of view and introduces a narrator and/or characters, but does not orient the reader; student organizes an event sequence, but it does not unfold naturally and/or logically.</td>
<td>Student struggles or does not provide a point of view and has trouble introducing a character; student includes events in the story, but there is no sequence and they do not unfold naturally or logically.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative Techniques</strong></td>
<td>Student uses many and varied narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.</td>
<td>Student uses many narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.</td>
<td>Student uses few narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.</td>
<td>Student uses no narrative techniques to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Transition Words, Phrases, and Clauses</strong></td>
<td>Student uses a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence, signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another, and shows the relationships among experiences and events.</td>
<td>Student uses transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence, signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another, and shows the relationships among experiences and events.</td>
<td>Student uses few transition words, phrases, and clauses throughout the narrative. Student does not shift from one time frame to another.</td>
<td>Student does not use or has extreme difficulty using transition words and phrases. There is no relationship shown between relationships and experiences and events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Descriptive Details</strong></td>
<td>Student consistently uses precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.</td>
<td>Student occasionally uses descriptive details: precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language.</td>
<td>Student rarely uses descriptive details: precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language.</td>
<td>Student struggles using descriptive details throughout the entirety of the narrative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>Student provides a conclusion that follows from and reflects on the narrated experiences or events.</td>
<td>Student provides a conclusion that reflects on the narrated experiences or events, but does not follow form.</td>
<td>Student provides a conclusion, but it does not follow and reflect on the narrated experiences or events.</td>
<td>Student does not provide a conclusion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grade 8 Literacy: Narrative Plot and Theme
Primary Trait Scoring Guide for Assessment Task 2

Secondary Trait of Assessment Task 2: Student explanation demonstrates use of standard English focusing on standard capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scoring Guide</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Explicit Statements about What Will Be Expected As Evidence of a Score Point 4

**Primary Trait:** Write a narrative to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

**Score Point 4**

Student engages and orients the reader by establishing a context and point of view, introduces a narrator and/or characters, and organizes an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically. Student uses many and varied narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters. Student uses a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence, signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another, and shows the relationships among experiences and events. Student consistently uses precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events. Student provides a conclusion that follows and reflects the narrated experiences or events.
Example of Narrative Essay

“Jalapeños Anyone?”

It was an ingenious idea. It was my idea. During lunch one day, we loaded up two trays with as many jalapeño peppers as they would hold. Then the fun began.

Let me tell you how it all started. Tom and I were in the cafeteria, eating. It was fourth period in May. I grunted with a mouth full of ham, “I got an idea.” Tom was so busy eating his hot dog with everything on it that he didn’t hear me.

“Tom!” I yelled, sending bits of ham onto his tray.

“What? Huh?” he replied, looking up from his hot dog momentarily. Tom is my best friend, and he looks exactly like me. If we told you we were twins with different last names, you would probably believe us. We have brown hair and blue eyes. We also wear rimless glasses. We think alike, too.

“So let’s hear this great idea of yours,” Tom stated, brushing ham from his fries.

“Well, seeing as you like your jalapeños…” I paused for a moment and pointed at his hot dog, which was covered in them. “Maybe you would like to have an eating contest with someone.” He didn’t hesitate. We decided that Anahi, who is Mexican (and in our heads used to hot stuff), should be the other contestant. She thought it was a good idea too.

After they each had a tray full of jalapeños in front of them, I started the countdown. “On your mark, get set, go!” Anahi put two in her mouth, then spat them out and ran to the drinking fountain, forfeiting the contest. The rules stated that once you took a drink or ate anything else, you were out of the running.

Meanwhile, Tom was stuffing peppers 37 and 38 in his mouth. He just kept eating, as though he didn’t know that his rival had given up. We turned our attention to him and started counting off the jalapeños as he shoveled them in.

“Come on, Tom. You can do it!” I encouraged, pounding the table, “50, 51, 52, 53, 54…Come on…55, 56, 57.”

“Yahoo!” Tom shouted. He threw up his hands in triumph even though he looked like he would actually throw up.

The crowd went wild. “All right Tom!” I yelled. People around us started clapping as he ran frantically to the drinking fountain. When he got back, I handed him his prize—a bag of candy, as promised.

“I am never eating another jalapeño pepper in my life,” Tom proclaimed after stuffing his face with chocolate bars. I couldn’t do anything but laugh.

It’s a little harder to get Tom to partake in my other schemes since I sent him to the drinking fountain for hours! I still have hope that he can pack down 58 peppers if he just works at it, though. I’m sure you can imagine how much luck I’m having convincing him to try.

What about you? Bon appetit!

By Joe Sanders
Humphrey Middle School
Plot at a Glance

To draw readers into a story and maintain their interest, a writer must do more than simply introduce an intriguing conflict. He or she has to show how that conflict develops at every twist and turn, at every stage in the story’s plot. A plot, or the series of events in a story, typically includes five stages. It’s important to remember, though, that not every story follows this exact pattern.

Take a look at the following graphic, which shows a traditional plot structure. Notice what happens to the conflict at the different stages.