

Project-based learning

The Final Word

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- ▶ analyze a particular journalist's style.
- ▶ make meaningful connections between one experience and several others in their lives.
- ▶ develop an idea for a newspaper column based on a personal anecdote.
- ▶ write a newspaper article in the narrative style of USA TODAY columnist Craig Wilson.

STANDARDS

This project meets the following national standards for high school:

NL-ENG.K-12.1: Reading for Perspective — *Students read a wide range of . . . texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the U.S. and world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society. . . ; and for personal fulfillment.* (NCTE)

NL-ENG.K-12.5: Communication Skills — *Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.* (NCTE)

NL-ENG.K-12.6: Applying Knowledge — *Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.* (NCTE)

WEEK 1: Narrative writing relates an event or series of events; in short, it tells a story. USA TODAY journalist Craig Wilson's column, *The Final Word*, is an example of narrative writing. For the next few weeks, you will spend time analyzing and imitating his narrative style.

Before beginning, collect at least three weeks worth of Wilson's column, *The Final Word* (Wednesdays, Life, 1D). First, read each article independently. Then, read the articles aloud in small groups, and share your ideas about the content and style used by the author. Be sure to take notes during your discussion. After the readings, answer the following questions in a journal: What is the purpose of the column? Can you relate to any of the anecdotes? If so, explain why. Finally, spend time free writing about two or three seemingly mundane moments in your life. What made each meaningful?

WEEK 2: Last week, you spent time reading and reflecting on several *Final Word* columns by Craig Wilson. This week, you are going to carefully examine each text, noting writing patterns, techniques and other literary devices (e.g., repetition, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, motif, alliteration, onomatopoeia, etc.) used by the journalist. (As a class, create a more comprehensive list of writing tools before beginning this exercise.)

As you reread the article, note the different patterns and writing devices that Wilson uses. In other words, attempt to define his style. What tools does he employ? How would you describe his tone? Is he humorous, serious, sarcastic, reflective, etc.? When and why? After, share and discuss your findings with classmates.

WEEK 3: So far, you have spent time reading and analyzing columnist Craig Wilson's writing style. Now, you are going to attempt to incorporate some of the same literary devices you identified last week into your own writing style.

First, review the notes you made while analyzing different versions of *The Final Word*. Answer the following questions in a journal: What is this writer's purpose? How does he reach his audience? What effect does he have on the reader? Next, begin revising the rough draft you started during Week 1 of this project. Make sure each paragraph is coherent and links to the one that precedes and follows it. Vary the length of your sentences as well as their arrangements. As you continue revising, keep in my mind that you want to hook the reader in the opening, use multiple literary devices throughout, and end with a reflective statement or question.

WEEK 4: You have written a reflective essay in the style of USA TODAY journalist Craig Wilson. This week, you will trade texts with a partner and comment constructively on each other's work. Evaluate your peer's writing based on the following criteria: sentence structure and variety; paragraph coherence; effectiveness of transitions; use of literary devices; appeal of topic (e.g., is the subject of the essay engaging or dull?); overall effect of the essay. If you don't understand a particular idea or feel it could be presented more clearly, explain your suggestions in writing. Feel free to consult with your teacher throughout the week as you fine-tune your partner's and your own essay. After you have read your final, type-written version to the class, compile all the essays into a single envelope, and mail them to: Craig Wilson, USA TODAY, Life Section, 7950 Jones Branch Drive, McLean, VA 22108.