

# Lessons at a Glance

The unit offers six weeks of instruction and is suitable for a wide range of middle school classrooms.

### Step 1: Generate Your Topic

This beginning step supports students in developing ideas for their own writing. After determining the characteristics of a feature article, students brainstorm ideas for their own articles. At the end of this step, students submit a description of the content, angle and intended audience for their articles.

#### ***Lesson 1.1: Define a Feature Article***

After being introduced to the four key characteristics of feature articles, students examine examples and non-examples before drafting their own description of this popular writing genre.

#### ***Lesson 1.2: Know Your Expertise***

Students generate ideas for topics, considering the personal knowledge they hold that might translate into a feature article that is focused, in-depth and has a unique angle.

#### ***Lesson 1.3: Find Your Angle***

Students decide what they want their readers to know about their topics, with an aim of providing their readers with new information, a fresh perspective and or/deeper understanding. As part of this process, they identify a unique angle for their articles.

#### ***Lesson 1.4: Test Your Topics (Supplementary)***

Students work with a peer to finalize their topics in an editor's conference. Students will then continue to pre-write on their topic, focusing on their angle and personal experiences.

### Step 2: Gather Your Information

Although we want students to write about a topic with which they are very familiar, feature articles are generally written in the third person. As such, students cannot rely solely on their own experience when writing a feature article. They need to collect information and anecdotes from outside sources. During this step, students gather outside information via interviewing, web searches, surveys, etc. which they will later include in their feature articles.

#### ***Lesson 2.1: Plan a Research Strategy***

Students are introduced to the key types of evidence/factual information typically found in feature articles. After identifying them in a mentor text, students begin planning a research strategy specifically suited to the article they are writing.

#### ***Lesson 2.2: Search the Internet for Evidence***

Students search the Internet for relevant information for their feature articles. Students learn how to use search engines to find topic-related websites and then evaluate them for trustworthiness.

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## ***Lesson 2.3: Take Relevant Notes***

Students learn strategies to take effective notes and apply them to websites and/or articles relevant to their topics. Students record key information on what they find, using their own words, and indicating how the information will be used in their writing.

## ***Lesson 2.4: Prepare for an Interview***

Students prepare to conduct an interview that will deepen their feature articles. After viewing and analyzing a short video segment, students choose an interview subject and craft questions that will yield information that enriches their articles.

## **Step 3: Organize Your Article**

At this point, students organize the information they have gathered in order to make it meaningful for their audience. Some students may continue to gather information for their articles, either because they were unable to complete interviews, etc. during the previous week or because, in the process of organizing information, they recognize holes that need to be filled. By the end of the step, students should have a complete outline of their feature articles.

### ***Lesson 3.1: Clarify the Main Idea***

Students revisit the angle of their articles (from Lesson 1.3) and adjust them in response to the information they gathered while doing research. By the end of the lesson, students use their topic and angle to craft a main idea statement, consisting of one or two clear and concise sentences.

### ***Lesson 3.2: Organize Your Sections***

Students use their understanding of feature articles, the main idea they developed earlier (from Lesson 3.1) and their research to organize the body of their feature articles. In doing so, students outline the sections of the article by identifying the key “idea chunks” they plan to write about and giving the idea chunks section headings.

### ***Lesson 3.3: Complete Your Plan***

Students determine what information from their research should be incorporated in their feature articles to give readers a good understanding of the written piece. Students include information collected from interviews and surveys, as well as expert opinions and statistics found on the Internet. As part of this process, students identify parts of the article that remain “thin” or “weak” and require additional information/research.

### ***Lesson 3.4: Create a Survey (Supplementary)***

Students write survey questions on their feature article topic. Students use their questions to collect information from their classmates to accompany their feature articles.

## **Step 4: Write Your First Draft**

Students draw on both the research completed and outline constructed earlier to draft their feature articles. Students are encouraged to stay focused on their main ideas while crafting paragraphs that

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grab the attention of the reading audience. At the end of the step, each student should have a complete draft of his or her feature article.

### ***Lesson 4.1: Craft Expository Text: Body Paragraphs***

After analyzing sample body paragraphs in a mentor text, students work independently to craft the body paragraphs of their feature articles. Emphasis is placed on writing paragraphs that contain evidence connected to the main idea.

### ***Lesson 4.2: Craft Expository Text- Introduction***

Students identify a compelling way to introduce their topics to their audience. Emphasis is placed on leading with a personal story that comes from either an interview or research. Students then complete their introductions by incorporating a paragraph expressing the main idea of their feature article.

### ***Lesson 4.3: Craft Expository Text- Conclusion***

Students draft the conclusion to their feature articles. They first examine mentor texts and choose from several different approaches to ending their articles – revisiting the opening story, making recommendations or summarizing perspectives. Students then select a conclusion strategy that makes the article clear and powerful.

### ***Lesson 4.4: Use the Computer for Drafting (Supplementary)***

This lesson helps students make the best use of word processing software to prepare drafts of their feature articles for revision and publishing.

## **Step 5: Revise**

During the fifth step of the feature article unit, students add details and refine their texts for clarity. They work together with peers and the teacher to ensure that the feature articles convey the information and ideas they wish to communicate.

### ***Lesson 5.1: Peer Review for Clarity of Meaning***

After being introduced to specific guidelines for reviewing a partner’s feature article for clarity of main idea, students share their writing with one or two peers in order to get one or more sets of feedback. Peer review is scaffolded by a short series of questions and corresponding “sentence starters” that keep the process on track.

### ***Lesson 5.2: Clarify the Main Idea***

After reviewing the feedback they received from their peers, students develop and execute a plan for improving their articles. Students work independently to implement their plans, revising their writing to clarify the main idea of their feature articles.

### ***Lesson 5.3: Use Quotations to Strengthen Your Feature Article***

Students learn how quotations can make feature articles more interesting and unique by analyzing effective examples in mentor texts. Students then review their feature article drafts along with their research and interview notes to identify portions of their writing that might benefit from the quotations they have at their disposal.

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## ***Lesson 5.4: Craft Expository Text – Headings (Supplementary)***

Students learn strategies for writing headings and sub-headings that draw their readers' attention and make the text more readable.

### **Step 6: Edit & Publish**

During this final phase, students edit and proofread their written work for accuracy of grammar and spelling. Additionally, students develop visual and text elements that will enhance their published pieces. At the end of this step, they celebrate their accomplishments by publishing their completed articles online.

#### ***Lesson 6.1: Focus on Transitions***

Students learn how transition words can improve the continuity of their feature articles and help the reader stay connected to the main idea. Students then identify places in their writing where they shift from one idea to another and use transition words to strengthen the text.

#### ***Lesson 6.2: Design the Features***

Students decide on the features that will best enhance their articles. After making their choices from subheadings, photos, survey results and other visual and text elements, students will be ready to add the features to their writing in the next lesson. The process will result in a more engaging, elucidating and professional published piece.

#### ***Lesson 6.3: Edit and Publish***

Students work with a peer to edit the grammar and punctuation in their articles. They then review the final version of their feature articles in preparation for publishing. With the guidance of the teacher, students use the *Writing Matters* tool to publish online.

#### ***Lesson 6.4: Add Images***

Students search for images that will enhance their feature articles. Students learn how to find an image URL and upload digital photos to their articles on the *Writing Matters* ezine.