
Suburban Gopher Wars or How I Learned to Be Weak

By Rosalind Helfand

Illustrated by Scott Gandell

Curriculum developed by Tiffany Owens and Rosalind Helfand

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OVERVIEW
Quick-Glance 10 Points for Usage Guide

Student Population	
Age/Grade-Level Appropriateness	12+, 7th+
Genre/s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Fiction * Dark comedy * Eco-literature
Length	* 1,704 words
Content Advisories	* Death of a small animal
One-Sentence Summary	A girl recounts her childhood battles with garden gophers that led to her realization that the desire to please one's parents may be in conflict with one's own internal sense of right and wrong.
Lesson Planning	
Topics & Key Themes Overview	<p>Topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Coming of age * The culture of American suburbia * Choosing not to follow orders * Desire to please parents * Human attitudes towards non-human animals <p>Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Societal pressure to conform * Socio-economic prestige * Human-made landscapes versus nature * Power over life and death * Personal responsibility for determining right versus wrong * Compassion towards and co-existence with non-human animals—even when they are an inconvenience or nuisance * The ability to find humor even in the darkest moments (dark humor) * The morality of human domination over nature—and the consequences of this philosophy * An apparent weakness can be, in reality, a strength
Historic Events/Time Period for Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Suburban Los Angeles circa the late 1970s and early 1980s * The history of how suburban Los Angeles was formed and populated * The adjustment and survival of native animal species in Southern California to an increasingly built-over landscape
Complementary Classic & Historic Texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Books: <i>The Birds</i> by Daphne Du Maurier; <i>When Mountain Lions are Neighbors: People and Wildlife Working It Out in California</i> by Beth Pratt-Bergstrom; <i>Last Child in the Woods</i> by Richard Louv. (See also article: "Saving Kids from 'Nature Deficit Disorder'": http://n.pr/2v9o1Zu) * Poem: "Ode to a Mouse" by Robert Burns: http://bit.ly/2oK6aou * Short story: "Mrs. McKay and the Dead Pony" by Mary Carroll (Literature for Life, Issue 4)

<p>Author & Artist Information</p>	<p>Rosalind Helfand is an author living in Los Angeles, CA and the managing editor of Literature for Life.</p> <p>Scott Gandell is an artist living in South Pasadena, CA.</p>
<p>Key Common Core Standards (found in detail following the curriculum)</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3; CCSS.ELA- LITERACY.RL.7.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.6</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3; CCSS.ELA- LITERACY.W.7.3.B; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3.D; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.7</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1.C; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1.D; CCSS.ELA- LITERACY.SL.7.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.5</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.4.A;</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.4.C; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.4.D; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.5; CCSS.ELA- LITERACY.L.7.5.B; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.6</p>

Author Biography

Rosalind Helfand is a writer and literary curator living in Los Angeles. She grew up in the Southern California suburban town and former home of the indigenous Chumash tribe, Simi Valley. Rosalind works extensively on environmental conservation and human rights issues, and she regularly blogs and writes op-eds on these issues. Rosalind was the managing editor of Locavore Lit LA and is currently the director of The Tomorrow Prize and The Roswell Award science fiction writing competitions. She is also an advisor on policies and programs for nonprofit and government organizations.

Artist Biography

Scott Gandell is a professional illustrator, print-maker, entrepreneur, and the current Development chairperson & past president of The Society of Illustrators of Los Angeles, as well as an alumni of ArtCenter College of Design in Pasadena. His work has been featured in magazines, newspapers, and books. Scott is an active participant in the United States Air Force Art Program through the USAF APO. His work has also been exhibited in galleries across the U.S. and Canada and has been acquired by clients and collectors worldwide. He lives in South Pasadena, California.

SYNOPSIS

“Suburban Gopher Wars” chronicles a period when a mantle of responsibility is placed upon the eight-year-old narrator’s young shoulders. It is the season when her parents’ lush, green yard falls under the threat of destruction by an advancing battalion of gophers. The pristine lawn, a verdant, water-filled symbol of suburban prestige in Southern California, suffers multiplying blemishes by the industrious gophers as they excavate one hole after another. The narrator enlists as a one-girl special-forces tactical unit to stand vigil and eradicate the enemy. She gains confidence and strength, and she begins to glow under her parents’ approval as she hones her skills of destruction. But at the climax of a particularly tense battle with one gopher, she sees clearly the weakness of her rodent foe and questions everything she had previously believed, including compassion for other creatures. This story addresses personal

accountability for moral decision-making and asks the reader to consider what it means for humans to have dominion over the land and animals on planet Earth, as the narrator herself realizes she has power over life and death.

CURRICULUM

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

Topic

In a half- to full-page paper to turn in, answer the following questions:

Given humanity's ability to control most animals in some way, alter the the landscape, and affect weather patterns, do you believe that we have responsibilities along with that power? If yes, what are those responsibilities and why? If not, why not? Explain.

Note: Although the answer to this question will be based strictly on your opinion, please write formally, following a short-essay format of three to five paragraphs.

Main Ideas

Consider the following questions, then follow the directions of the prompt below:

1. Do you like animals? Why or why not? Which ones? Do any animal companions live with you? What kind? Who in your house is responsible for them? Do you dislike any animals? If so, which ones and why?
2. Intentionally or unintentionally, have you ever been responsible for the death of another animal? What happened? How did you feel about it?
3. In your opinion, do bugs count as animals? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever experienced an infestation of any kind of wildlife in your home? (Ex: termites, ants, roaches, mice, rats, raccoons, birds, wasps, bees, feral cats, etc.) Describe the situation. How did it affect you? How did it affect the other people you live with? What was done about the situation?
5. How do you feel about nature?

You may address any of these questions as journal entries, short conversations with a neighbor, or as whole-class discussions. You can also answer each of the questions as an assignment to turn in to your teacher. (Your teacher will decide.)

Passage-Specific Themes

Read the following passage from "Suburban Gopher Wars":

"The neighbor dad was our dubious first line of defense. The weekend after the mounds appeared, Neighbor Dad took a lawn chair from his garage and set it next to the freshest pile. He settled in with a beer-filled cooler and a fishing hat to shade his eyes. He was improbably armed—with a harpoon gun. When finally the gopher peeked out, it spied the gun and immediately ducked. But Neighbor Dad took aim and shot straight through the mound, angling into the tunnel, and when he reeled the kill spike back in, there was the gopher, hanging limp."

Is this passage dramatic, comical, sad, or fun? Is it a combination of both? Look up the term “dark humor,” and then discuss in your journal your analysis of this passage and how it blends elements of drama and dark humor.

Universal Themes

Why do you think humans seek to display outward signs of wealth or prosperity? Are we all trying to show that we are better—or not worse—than other humans are? In the scheme of things, are such displays a worthy pursuit? Why or why not?

Write about your thoughts on this subject in a 10-minute journaling exercise, then conduct a class discussion exploring this issue.

Key Vocabulary

Definitions are context-dependent. Make sure any definitions you look up or work from are the ones that most correctly fit in the context of the story.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three
suburban	bling	epitomized
dimpled	bobbing	bucolic
mini-malls	surveying	vested
crew-cut	harmony	dubious
perm	pilly	angling
desired	glorious	vulnerable
faith	marvelous	albeit
mounds	protruding	transfixed
snuck	harpoon gun	laboriously
glimpse	steely	disintegrated
ducked	utter	guerrilla warfare
reeled	ensued	
nah	engaged	
strategy	mere	
bugging	incessant	
squeal	alighted	

frantic(ally)	impassable	
bellow(ed)	fateful	
commando	puttering	
lumbering	heft	
churning		

Vocabulary Activity Options

1. What are the suburbs (and suburbia/suburban)? Where does the term come from? How is living in a suburb thought to be different from city living? Research the history of American suburbs— why and how were they developed? What are the ties to segregation in the United States, as well as the rise of fossil fuel use, cars, and freeway systems? How and why did green lawns become popular as a feature of suburban homes? Write a research essay that explores these questions.
2. Examine and analyze vocabulary: Despite a seemingly placid, suburban setting, this story contains a great deal of language that evokes ideas and images of power and conflict. Select at least six terms in the story that you believe contribute to underlying themes of power and conflict. Analyze their use in the context of the paragraphs in which they appear. In a one- paragraph (or more) short-answer response, explain how the author’s use of these particular terms contributes to the overall tone of the story. (Hint: You’ll have to make some decisions about what you think the tone of the piece is.)
3. Individually or in small teams (teacher’s choice), make two lists on a page. Fold the paper in half vertically, making two columns. In the first list, include all the vocabulary terms from the Key Vocabulary chart that relate to ideas of conflict, or even violence. In the second column, list all the vocabulary terms that reveal the narrator’s well-educated intellect. When you have finished, share your two lists with a partner or with another team. Are your lists similar or different? How or where do they differ?
4. Write an alternate version of the story’s events from the gopher(s)’ point of view. Use at least 10 of the terms on the Key Vocabulary chart to write your story.

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

1. In a class discussion, analyze and explain the dichotomy between the rational, intellectual behavior and thinking in the story versus the visceral, animal violence. (If you completed vocabulary activities questions two and three, reflect back on these.) How do those two very different aspects lend insight into the main character’s conflict?
2. Option One: Why is the lawn important to this family?

Option Two: Break into groups of four and research the history of the American lawn and how it came to be a status symbol. Do lawns exist only in suburbia? Then, discuss in this context why the lawn might be so important to the family in “Suburban Gopher Wars.” Record and share each group’s thoughts with the rest of the class.

Bonus: Given the history of the lawn as a status symbol, why is it ironic that the gopher continuously destroys it?

Additional Bonus: Given the climate of Southern California, why isn't a lawn the best choice for a yard? Research more drought friendly options to lawns.

3. How do you feel about the narrator by the end of the story? Do you find yourself caring more about her or about the fate of the gopher? Why?
4. The title of the story is "Suburban Gopher Wars or How I Learned to Be Weak." What does the narrator mean by "How I Learned to Be Weak"? Do you consider her to be weak? Do you think she considers herself to be weak? If not meant literally, then what point is she actually making?

Text-Dependent Question Options

1. How many different ways does the family in the story attempt to kill the gophers? Rank them in order from most to least violent, in your opinion. Then, discuss the following question: Does the violence bother you? Why or why not? If it doesn't, do you feel that it should bother you more? Explain.
2. "Suburban Gopher Wars" blends elements of both comedy and drama. Is it more of a comedy or a drama? Cite examples from the text to support your answer.
3. Is there a "good guy" or a "bad guy" in the story? Is it the mom, the gopher, the dad, or the narrator? Is it none or all of these characters? Explain your answer citing examples from the text.
4. How does the main character's attitude toward gophers change as the story unfolds? How does she grow?
5. Consider literature's use of symbolism—an object that, intentionally or unintentionally, represents, stands for, or evokes ideas about something else. What might the lawn symbolize in this story?
6. Based on the depiction of the gopher in the story, how do you think the story's art is meant to make you feel? Analyze the way in which the gopher is depicted—the black and white art, which portions of the gopher's body are showing, and what the author chose to place in the background and the foreground. Why do you think the artist made these choices and what might they mean? Include examples from the text to support your answer.
7. Do you consider this to be a realistic story? Is it possible that the events are based on real experiences? Or does it appear too far outside of the realm of possibility? Explain your answer citing examples from the text.

Writing Exercises

Narrative

Imagine what happens next, after the point at which the written story ends. Will the parents' stance towards the narrator's final actions change? How might her feelings about her parents change as a result of this experience? What happens next?

Write a one- to two-page dialogue that the narrator has with her parents at the end of the day, reflecting on the events leading up to the gopher's demise.

Descriptive

What is a crisis of conscience? How is it different from a moral dilemma? Research, create examples for, and discuss these terms in class.

Then, in a writing exercise, describe an experience from your own, real life in which you faced a crisis of conscience, when you had a realization about something you did that changed your viewpoint or expanded your understanding in some way.

Analysis

Read the following section of text, then write an analytical paper discussing the questions below:

. . . sure enough, a small, brown, bristly head popped out of the hole, I fired! It was a clean shot. The BB punched straight between the gopher's eyes, and when it slid, dead, back down its tunnel, I ran and got the spaghetti tongs to fish it out.

I'd never felt so proud. I remember that I didn't feel the least bit sorry for the goher. A gun can be so clean and fast. There was no pain that I can see, no squeal of fear. Without emotion to respond to, I seemed to have none myself. I was a warrior.

This excerpt reveals that the narrator is surprised by how easy it was to kill the gopher using a gun. Later in the story, she does not wish to kill another gopher up close using a shovel. What is it about the difference between these methods that accounts for the difference in her feelings?

Refer to at least one or two specific places in the text to support your answer, and include your own research (from excellent sources) into the psychology of gun use.

Complementary Reading Text

Read "Ode to a Mouse" written in 1785 by Scottish poet Robert Burns and complete the writing exercise below. Note that "Ode to a Mouse" is written in a Scottish dialect. Have fun reading it outloud and deciphering its meaning!

Ode to a Mouse

By Robert Burns

On Turning up in Her Nest with the Plough, November, 1785

Wee, sleeket, cowran, tim'rous beastie, O, what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
Wi' bickerin brattle!
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee
Wi' murd'ring pattle!

I'm truly sorry Man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion,
Which makes thee startle,
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
An' fellow-mortal!

I doubt na, whyles, but thou may thieve;
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!
A daimen-icker in a thrave
'S a sma' request:
I'll get a blessin wi' the lave, An' never miss 't!

Thy wee-bit housie, too, in ruin!
It's silly wa's the win's are strewin!
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,
O' foggage green!
An' bleak December's winds ensuin,
Baith snell an' keen!

Thou saw the fields laid bare an' waste,
An' weary Winter comin fast,
An' cozie here, beneath the blast,
Thou thought to dwell,
Till crash! the cruel coulter past
Out thro' thy cell.

That wee-bit heap o' leaves an' stibble
Has cost thee monie a weary nibble!
Now thou's turn'd out, for a' thy trouble,
But house or hald,
To thole the Winter's sleety dribble,
An' cranreuch cauld!

But Mousie, thou art no thy-lane,
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men
Gang aft agley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
For promis'd joy!

Still, thou art blest, compar'd wi' me!
The present only toucheth thee:
But Och! I backward cast my e'e,
On prospects drear!
An' forward tho' I canna see,
I guess an' fear!

Writing Exercise

In a short essay, compare and contrast the narrator's developing attitudes towards nature in "Suburban Gopher Wars" and "To a Mouse." Who are they at the beginning of the story/poem and how, if at all, do their attitudes change by the end of each? In what ways are the narrators alike and different?

Activity Options

Classroom Activity One

Research the lives of pocket gophers. What do they look like? What do they eat? What do their underground homes look like (from both above and below ground)? What are their lives like?

After taking extensive notes, work as a class to create a large classroom mural of a pocket gopher habitat underneath a lawn. Sketch the mural, and then designate squares for class groups to draw and paint. Add explanatory notes about the gopher's habitat to the mural.

Classroom Activity Two

Note: This activity may take more than one class period to complete. In order to take the nature inventory, consider setting up a "BioBlitz" for your school through the nature data-collecting and -identifying website/application called iNaturalist. Learn more at www.iNaturalist.org (<http://www.iNaturalist.org>). If you'd like help setting up your BioBlitz, contact the Citizen Science department at the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum.

Become "Citizen Scientists" and conduct a nature inventory/census of the living creatures, large or small, that coexist on your school's grounds. Working in pairs or small teams, walk the campus and search for, identify, and photograph any natural life (plant or animal) that lives there. (If this is not feasible on your campus, try to arrange a walk to a nearby park or other close-by green space with your class as a single-period field trip. If your school is in a semi-residential neighborhood, you could even walk around the block to see what lives along the sidewalks or in people's front yards.) Make absolutely certain you do not disturb or harm any plants or animals during this activity.

Once you return to the classroom, try to research online those species you found. Answer the following questions:

1. What is this species' name?
2. Is it native to Southern California or was it transplanted from somewhere else?
3. What should its original, natural habitat be?
4. How is it surviving on a school campus? How does it get what it needs to stay alive? How, specifically, has it adapted to survive with humans in an urban, developed environment?

Finally, write an account of your experience conducting this nature inventory/census.

Home Activity

Become a "Citizen Scientist"*** and conduct a nature inventory/census of the living creatures, large or small, that coexist in your neighborhood. Walking around your neighborhood, search for, identify, and photograph any natural life (plant or animal), that live there. (If this is not feasible, try to arrange a walk to a nearby park or other close-by green space. You could even try a walk around the block to see what lives along the sidewalks or in people's front yards.) Make absolutely certain you do not disturb or harm any plants or animals during this activity.

Once you return home, try to research online those species you found. Answer the following questions:

1. What is this species' name?
2. Is it native to Southern California or was it transplanted from somewhere else?
3. What should its original, natural habitat be?
4. How is it surviving in your neighborhood? How does it stay alive? How, specifically, has it adapted to survive with humans in an urban, developed environment?

Finally, write an account of your experience conducting this nature inventory/census.

** We suggest downloading the iNaturalist app (www.iNaturalist.org (<http://www.iNaturalist.org>)) onto your phone. Photograph and upload your finds, and if you're in LA, tag them to the "LA Nature Map" project.

Guest Speaker

Option One: Invite the author, Rosalind Helfand, to come to your classroom or school as a guest speaker. You may ask her about the difference between her story and the real experience it was based on. Ask how she made decisions about what to include, what to alter, and what to leave out. Consider how authors make decisions when bringing an idea to fruition.

Option Two: Invite a speaker from the Friends of the LA River (<https://foliar.org> (<https://foliar.org>)), or the LA River Conservancy to come and speak to your class about how humans and nature coexist in urban environments like Los Angeles. How do humans impact nature? How does nature impact humans?

Option Three: Invite Beth Pratt-Bergstrom, the author of *When Mountain Lions Are Neighbors*, to come and speak to your class about how humans and nature coexist in urban environments like Los Angeles. How do humans impact nature? How does nature impact humans?

Additional Options: Invite a ranger from Griffith Park or a Citizen Science leader from the LA County Natural History Museum.

Field Trip

Plan and arrange a field trip to the LA River Conservancy. Have a guide take you on a walking tour of the soft-bottom portion of the LA River. Pay special attention to the ways in which nature has adapted to the expansion of human beings into every area. Ask about how people have altered the original, natural course of the river, its characteristics, and the species who live in and rely upon it.

Follow-up Writing Exercise: Reflect in your journal on your experience at the LA River. What did you learn about human's impact on the LA River? As we seek to revitalize the river, how must we adapt to living with wildlife as they have had to adapt to living with us?

TEST PREPARATION COMPONENT

Instructions: Closely read this passage from "Suburban Gopher Wars or How I Learned to Be Weak," using the graphic organizer to develop your thoughts.

Text:

At eight years old, I desired my parents' faith in my abilities above all else. And, recognizing their passion, I

excelled at the lawn. On Saturday mornings, I watered it and pulled the weeds while Dad mowed and Mom worked the planters. Together we epitomized bucolic harmony. Dad in his mud-spattered jeans—Mom in her gardening gloves. I took a sort of innocent, easy pride in my work, in the responsibility my parents had vested in me.

Yes, all was golden, until the day our neighbors were invaded—by a gopher.

I remember when the mounds first appeared—soft, dark, pilly dirt piles, a perfect hole at the center of each. I snuck over to my neighbor’s yard to see if I could catch a glimpse of the gopher. How glorious when I saw a mound move, exhale, and a bit of soil fly through the air. How marvelous to see a dandelion disappear into the tunnel. Wait! Was that a nose? Protruding yellow teeth? But my parents called me home and shook their heads. I was made to understand: the enemy had arrived. It was only a matter of time until the invasion spread.

<p>Who is telling the story and why?</p> <p>What is their point of view?</p> <p>Their tone?</p>	<p>Unpack a few resonant words the author uses to tell her story:</p> <p>What other rhetorical choices are made and why?</p>
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<p>What is memorable about the characters?</p>	<p>What is/are the main idea(s)?</p>
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COMMON CORE STANDARDS REFERENCE

This story and its exercises are appropriate for 7-12th grade. Seventh-grade standards are cited.

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1: Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.7: Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Vocabulary Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1: Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.7: Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 7 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.4.A: Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.4.C: Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning or its part of speech.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.4.D: Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.5.B: Use the relationship between particular words (e.g., synonym/antonym, analogy) to better understand each of the words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.6: Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.7: Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1.C: Pose questions that elicit elaboration and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant observations and ideas that bring the discussion back on topic as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1.D: Acknowledge new information expressed by others and, when warranted, modify their own views.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 7 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Text-Dependent Question Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1: Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3: Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.6: Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.

Writing Exercise Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1: Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3.B: Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3.D: Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.7: Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation.

Complementary Reading Text (Comparative Writing Exercise)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1: Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.7: Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.4: Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.5: Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations to clarify claims and findings and emphasize salient points.