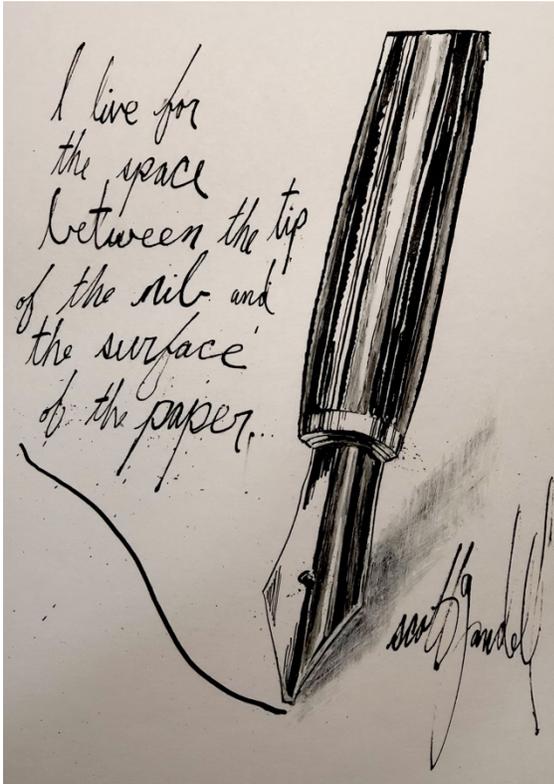


Wordsmith

By Tina Pasadena

Illustrated by Scott Gandell

Curriculum developed by Andrew Ramirez



OVERVIEW

Quick-Glance 10 Points for Usage Guide

Student Population	
Age/Grade-Level Appropriateness	* 16+/11th-12th grade
Genre/s	* Poetry * Self reflection/ journey
Length	* 154 words (3-4 minute read)
Content Advisories	* Some language
One-Sentence Summary	A poetic exploration of what it means to be a writer, and how expressing yourself can lead to positive transformation for yourself and the world.

Lesson Planning	
Topics & Key Themes Overview	<p>Topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Creative process * Harsh Realities * Self Reflection * Search for Meaning * Personal Philosophy * Perseverance through pain <p>Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Alienation * Fear * Loneliness * Stoicism * Community * Oppression * Revolution
Historic Events/Time Period for Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Early Athens * 3rd Century BCE
Complementary Text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Poem: "A Poem About Baseballs" by Denis Johnson * Essay: "Why I Write" by Joan Didion * Cartoon Strip: Meet Mr. Twitters by R. Cleat
Author	<p>Tina Pasadena is a writer, creator, and advocate in Los Angeles.</p> <p>Scott Gandell is the Art Curator at Locavore Lit LA. He is also a Board Member of The Society of Illustrators of Los Angeles.</p>
Key Common Core Standards (found in detail following the curriculum)	<p>Grades 9th-10th Common Core Standards:</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.6</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.A CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.B CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.C CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.D CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.E CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.A CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.C CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.3</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.1f</p>

Author Biography

Tina “Pasadena” Chavez is a writer, advocate, and creator in Los Angeles. (TinaPasadena.com)

Artist Biography

Scott Gandell wears many hats. He descends from a long line of creatives and business professionals. His experience is as diverse as the subjects he illustrates. He is a proud alumnus of Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. (https://www.gallerynucleus.com/artists/scott_gandell)

SYNOPSIS

This poem highlights Pasadena’s love for, and difficulties that come with, a writer’s life. Pasadena mixes ornate language with slang in this four stanza ode to writing. Pasadena draws a connection between the importance of writing her own words, as well as soaking up the works of others. As the poem progresses, Pasadena equalizes the hardships of a writer’s life as one that is warmed by an inner glow, the power of self expression that we all have and can grow and prosper from.

CURRICULUM

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

Topic

Journaling

In a 15-minute journal entry, explore the following stream of consciousness prompt:

Put your pen to the paper and do not stop writing. Start with the moment you were born, and take the reader to the moment right now, where you sit, writing. Since you will not be able to take a pause, it is important to write only the thoughts that pop into your head... and nothing else. Colors, sounds, and emotions may guide your writing, or perhaps something else entirely. Remembered phrases, slogans, etc. Whatever it may be, practice letting your mind open itself up to whatever enters your mind... and remember: Your only goal is to write everything you “see” in your mind, onto paper. Enjoy!

Afterwards, students may read excerpts of their work to the class, and receive constructive feedback on their writing.

Main Ideas

Small-Group Discussion:

What is ONE thing in your life that you would describe as “elemental” to your existence. It may be something that you love doing... or someone you love talking to... or somewhere you love to be. It can even be a thing that isn’t real, but lives in your mind and gives you strength and courage. Whatever it is... take a few minutes to think about one thing that’s elemental to your existence, and then share your answer with the group.

As you discuss, take note of similarities and differences between what matters to you, and what matters to others in your group.

Passage-Specific Themes

Small-Group and Class Discussion:

Read the following passage from “Wordsmith” by Tina Pasadena:

Exposed and vulnerable, it takes bravery and madness to be a writer. Once released, that wisely worded, meticulously edited text becomes susceptible to interpretation, judgment, and criticism; all the while, ready to be accepted, embraced, and endeared. Speaking your truth is complicated, but silence is oppression

Writing is a full body experience. You know you’re doing it right when you start to cry; that’s when you snatch up that wound and bare down on that bitch. Dead bodies don’t scar, and stripes are earned. Pen your own legacy, voice your own narrative, cuz we gotta story to tell

Question One: What do you think Pasadena means by “Writing is a full body experience. You know you’re doing it right when you start to cry...” In what ways might this line be observed as both literal AND metaphorical?

Question Two: Notice the change in language between the beginning of this excerpt... and the end. What effect does this “tone shift” have for you as a reader? Do you find it effective, or inconsistent? For this question, pick one opinion to argue, and share your persuasive thoughts with the group.

(After taking a couple of minutes to jot down some ideas and share with the group... share your answer with the whole class.)

Universal Themes

Why do you believe Pasadena chose to title this poem “Wordsmith” instead of writer, author, etcera? What effect does the word convey that a synonym might not, given the content of this poem? What does the word evoke from you, and how well does it “fit” the poem?

After thinking about this, identify 3 BIG themes in this poem, and provide a few ideas as to how they connect to the title “Wordsmith.”

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
lingo	elemental	entreat
legacy	conjure	lexicon
essence	visceral	linguistics
mystical	meticulous	
reluctant	procrastinator	
susceptible	contemplative	

Vocabulary Activity Options

1. Read this essay — “Why I Write” — by Joan Didion. (<https://lithub.com/joan-didion-why-i-write/>)

In the essay, Didion writes, “Writing is the act of imposing yourself upon other people... there’s no getting around the fact that setting words on paper is the tactic of a secret bully, an invasion, an imposition of the writer’s sensibility on the reader’s most private space.”

In what ways does this philosophy “match” what Pasadena is saying in her poem, “Wordsmith”? What similarities exist between the way Didion and Pasadena both approach writing?

Follow up: Do you believe Pasadena and Didion would both enjoy each other’s work? Why or why not?

2. For every vocabulary word, select a synonym that you like (you can find synonyms in any online dictionary). After you’ve found a synonym for all 15 words... plug them into Pasadena’s poem, instead of the original word. Then, read the poem aloud and reflect on how the words — even though they mean essentially the same thing — change the way the poem feels and affects you as a reader.

Follow up: Do you prefer the original version or synonym version of the poem? Why?

3. Read the poem — “A Poem about Baseballs” — by Denis Johnson. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48127/a-poem-about-baseballs>)

Although both poems are quite different — they both employ a stream of consciousness form that makes them feel almost dreamlike in their attempt to make sense of the world. After reading both poems, reflect on the point of view (POV) of each poem. Do you believe both poems could have the same “character” narrating them? Or do you believe these would be two *very* different narrators?

Reflect on this for a few minutes and then share your answers with the class.

Follow up: How does the form (stanza breaks/capitalization) affect the understanding of these works? How does this differ from standard writing that you might see in an essay or short story?

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

1. If you could get one person, *anyone*, to play this character in a Netflix special, who would you pick and why?
2. What is the setting of this poem? (*Don't feel required to say a place... given the stream of consciousness approach to the writing, perhaps the setting is a state of mind, or a memory?*)
3. Take a look at all 4 stanzas in this poem. Which one is your favorite? Why? Which one would you say is your least favorite?
4. Take a look at this excerpt from the poem:

*A Professional Procrastinator, reluctant to write
hesitant to dive down the rabbit hole,
and uneager to unpack the box marked Fragile*

What does the author mean by “rabbit hole” and “unpack the box marked Fragile”? When you read these lines, does this text give you a clear visual of what’s happening? Or a clouded, confusing one? Why?

Follow up: In what way is this writing showing “stream of consciousness” tendencies?

** Text-Dependent Question Options

1. Identify a moment in the poem “Wordsmith” where the writer uses descriptive, sensory language to communicate ideas. How do the lines you’ve selected put you inside the world Pasadena is describing? Do the lines evoke a certain emotion or feeling from you? Why or why not?

(Hint: if you are having a hard time, start by associating colors or adjectives to each stanza... and go from there.)
2. Do you believe the author is “speaking” to someone specific in this poem... or perhaps several people? Select two excerpts from the poem that you believe aim at a certain reader or audience. What type of reader is it? By type, of course, that could mean anything — someone who is sad, someone who is young, someone who is lonely, someone who is irresponsible, angry, ambitious, jaded, etc. Don’t forget to connect your reader profile to specific lines from the poem.
3. Explain what Pasadena means by, “Speaking your truth is complicated, but silence is oppression.” To support your explanation, select another moment in the text that connects or conveys a similar emotion. What links the two excerpts, in your opinion?
4. In what ways does the artwork support or enhance the themes in “Wordsmith”? Identify 1 specific line in Wordsmith that you would use as a “caption” for the artwork. What is it about the excerpt you selected — the specific word choice, cadence or rhythm/flow, etc. — that makes it work as a caption for the art? Explain.

Writing Exercises

Narrative: Parallel Paths

After reading the poem, “Wordsmith” by Tina Pasadena, the reader might feel like they’ve been transported. The voice starts in one place and ends in another. To some it might even feel like different songs in the same album.

With this metaphor in mind, pick 3 songs that represent each stanza in the poem. What is it about the beat or lyrics of these songs that connects them to the stanza? As you pick songs, notice what kind of songs you are picking. Are the songs all the same genre, or different?

After you have selected your three songs, explain the journey these songs take you on. What is the atmosphere of the first song? How does it blend into the next song? Compared to the first song, how different is the last song? In what ways does this “journey” connect with the journey Pasadena takes you on?

Write 1 to 2 pages, and turn into your teacher.

Analysis

Take a look at the cartoon below:



In a one-page response, analyze the imagery and representation of this cartoon, as it connects to “Wordsmith.” Perhaps the stream of consciousness this person is experiencing reminds you of Pasadena’s style of writing... or perhaps the image of someone walking through life with a forced smile on their face feels oddly connected to Pasadena’s words. Whatever the case is, what connects this cartoon to the poetic words of Pasadena? Remember, even though these two texts (the poem and the cartoon) might have greatly different tones, they can still be linked by a common theme or idea.

What connects these two pieces, in your opinion?

Length: Aim for 1 to 2 pages. After you are done, turn in work to your teacher.

Description: Step into the Time Machine.

Imagine this poem had the power to take you somewhere... as if reading it were like stepping into a time machine and going somewhere completely different... maybe even a different eon. With that in mind, imagine you “walked” into this poem and got spit out of the other side. Where did it take you?

For this task, use rich, descriptive language to describe the “place” this poem takes you. For example, think of the temperature of this poem. Is the language hot? Cold? When you read it, do you feel connected with others, like in a community like school, or a sports team? Or do you feel alone, like in the middle of nowhere?

In 1 to 2 pages, write where this poem takes you. When you are done, turn your work in to your teacher.

Complementary Text Option

Read this paragraph from Joan Didion’s essay, “Why I Write.” The essay is a reflection on Didion’s early life as a writer in college. Joan views her writing as having an effect on her psyche as well as her readership... which is why she takes extreme care with her word choice and syntax:

All I know about grammar is its infinite power. To shift the structure of a sentence alters the meaning of that sentence, as definitely and inflexibly as the position of a camera alters the meaning of the object photographed. Many people know about camera angles now, but not so many know about sentences. The arrangement of the words matters, and the arrangement you want can be found in the picture in your mind. The picture dictates the arrangement. The picture dictates whether this will be a sentence with or without clauses, a sentence that ends hard or a dying-fall sentence, long or short, active or passive. The picture tells you how to arrange the words and the arrangement of the words tells you...

With this excerpt in mind, in what way does Pasadena’s poem paint a picture in your head? In your opinion, are the sentences effective at making this picture work? Or do the words maybe miss the “angle” in a few moments? (Note: For your analysis, do your best to think of Pasadena’s writing as a “view” into a thought. How does Pasadena, like a movie director, use different camera angles to tell her story?

BONUS: If you’re having a little trouble getting started, think of your favorite movies. Can you connect Pasadena’s work with a director or actor’s work that you have seen? How is it “linked” thematically or stylistically?

Happy writing!

**** Writing Exercise**

In “Wordsmith,” Pasadena writes:

Exposed and vulnerable, it takes bravery and madness to be a writer. Once released, that wisely worded, meticulously edited text becomes susceptible to interpretation, judgment, and criticism; all the while, ready to be accepted, embraced, and endeared. Speaking your truth is complicated, but silence is oppression

10-Minute Quick Write: Both “Wordsmith” and “A Poem about Baseballs” exhibit insecurity and worry in their stanzas. In your opinion, do you believe insecurity is a valuable part of human growth? In other words, do we need insecurity to become better people, or does insecurity strictly hold us back? Consider both ends of the argument in your writing, and then weigh which one is the stronger choice.

Follow up: Do you think Johnson and Pasadena would agree with your conclusion? Why or why not?

Bonus: Write a script between you, Johnson, and Pasadena. Set the scene with location, setting, time of day, etc. Then, write your dialog in the format of a Hollywood movie script! Be sure to include gestures and other other forms of non verbal language (a shrug, slouch, grin, etc.) to create a rich and engaging world.

Activity Options

Classroom Activity One: Pieces of Poetry

Create a class poem, where every student contributes one line. Have students each take a notecard and write one line that describes the “attitude” of the class in one line. Examples of this can be lines of comparison like *Fierce like a tiger, sleepy as a cat...* or perhaps more stream of consciousness, such as: *Dr. Pepper puddle, laughter goes the clock, fifteen minutes fast, who’s got the hall pass?*

Then, collect everyone’s notecard and arrange each line into a master poem on poster board, surveying the class to see what fits where, etc. Students may choose to keep their line anonymous or not... up to them!

To help facilitate, teacher may select one student to help tape notecards onto the poster board... or a student with amazing handwriting can write them with a marker.

Journaling:

In a 10-minute journal entry, respond to the following questions:

How does the class poem surprise you or challenge what you thought of this class before you read it? How does your line fit into the class poem? Does it challenge some of the other lines, or agree with them? Does your line seem different to you, now that you can see it in the “bigger” picture? Explain.

Classroom Activity Two: Triangle LLC

Put 3 poster boards in each corner of the room, or equally distanced throughout the class any way that works. Label each board Love/Loathe/Collaborate:

- **Love:** Students write one thing they absolutely loved about the poem “Wordsmith” by Pasadena
- **Loathe:** Students write one thing they disliked about this poem, or a moment that felt inauthentic or confused
- **Collaborate:** Rewrite one stanza of the poem, to better create the feeling or mood of this poem (or, if you’d like, rewrite the whole poem)

Have students rotate around the room, meet and greet style, going from poster to poster, adding their ideas. To keep students on task, keep instructions on a google slide, or written on the board, so they know the goal of each station.

Journaling:

In a 10-minute journal entry, explore the following questions:

What did you learn about this poem, based on the other ideas you saw at each poster board station? Did you find yourself agreeing or disagreeing with a lot of what other people had written? Lastly, which station was your favorite to visit and write on?

To close, share your response with a partner.

Home Activity: Visual Stream of Consciousness

Either in your yard or at a park, take pictures of things that “catch” your eye. These things could be artwork you see in the street, a beautiful tree or lake, even a colorful bug you see on a flower. After you snap a few pictures, arrange them into a slideshow that tells a story, no matter how abstract or “out there” it may be. Sometimes unusual things can be the most interesting! After you arrange the pictures, pick a song you like that, in your opinion, accompanies the atmosphere of the photo arrangement. Lastly, give it a title!

When you finish, take your work into class the next day and show your teacher.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS REFERENCE

This story and its exercises are appropriate for 11th grade and above. 11th- and 12th-grade standards are cited.

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.A - Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.B - Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.C - Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.A - Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B - Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed

Vocabulary Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1 - Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2 - Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3 - Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters/archetypes are introduced and developed).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4 - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5 - Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6 - Analyze a case in which grasping point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.6 - Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.D - Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.E - Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5 - Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.C - Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives

Text-Dependent Question Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3 - Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters/archetypes are introduced and developed).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4 - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on

meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5 - Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Writing Exercise Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.E - Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1 - Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D - Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

Complementary Reading Text (Comparative Writing Exercise)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5 - Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6 - Analyze a case in which grasping point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.6 - Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.

Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B - Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.3 - Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.3 - Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.1 - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.