The Essayist's Craft: Unit Overview

ENG4U, Grade 12 English (University), Unit 1. 14 classes of 75 minutes (about three weeks).

The big question

How does a writer turn one person's thinking into something that changes how readers see the world?

Students read six classic essays from four centuries, all public domain and included in an Essay Reader: Chesterton's familiar essay “A Piece of Chalk,” Woolf on the essay itself, Emerson's “Self-Reliance,” Thoreau's “Civil Disobedience,” Du Bois's “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” and Swift's “A Modest Proposal.” They study voice and persona, aphorism, argument, the turn from experience to concept, and satire, and practise rhetorical analysis. They write their own satirical modest proposal in a satire lab, then find, draft, workshop and publish an original essay at an essay salon. The unit ends with an in-class rhetorical analysis and a polished essay with a writer's statement.

Lessons

#	Lesson	Classes	Question	Expectations	What's inside
1	**What Is an Essay?**	1	What makes an essay an essay?	R 1.1, R 2.1, OC 1.4	Essay tasting menu; four kinds; Woolf; summatives
2	**A Piece of Chalk**	1	How does a small thing open a big idea?	R 1.3, R 1.6, W 1.2	Chesterton; paradox; small object, big idea
3	**Voice and Persona**	1	Who is speaking in an essay?	W 2.2, R 2.3, W 2.3	Voice detective; voice swap
4	**Self-Reliance**	1	Should we trust ourselves?	R 1.4, R 1.8, OC 1.6	Emerson; aphorisms; stand by it or push back
5	**Civil Disobedience**	1	When should conscience outrank law?	R 1.6, R 1.7, OC 2.1	Thoreau; argument map; test cases; influence
6	**Double Consciousness**	1	How does experience become analysis?	R 1.5, R 1.8, R 2.3	Du Bois; three moves; metaphor map
7	**Rhetorical Analysis Workshop**	1	How do writers move readers?	R 1.7, W 1.4, W 2.1	SOAPSTone; appeals; model paragraph
8	**A Modest Proposal**	1	How does satire argue?	R 1.4, R 1.8, R 2.3	Swift; persona; real targets
9	**The Satire Lab**	1	Can we satirize fairly?	W 2.1, W 2.2, W 2.3	Punch up; write a modest proposal
10	**Rhetorical Analysis**	1	Can I analyse a classic essay?	R 1.7, R 2.3, W 2.4	In-class rhetorical analysis (summative)
11	**Finding Your Essay**	1	What essay can only I write?	W 1.1, W 1.2, W 1.4	Idea mine; topic vs subject; five shapes

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#	Lesson	Classes	Question	Expectations	What's inside
12	**Openings and Endings**	1	How do I begin and end?	W 1.4, W 2.1, W 2.4	Five openings; three endings; drafting
13	**Revision Studio**	1	How do I make it sharper?	W 2.6, W 3.3, W 3.4	Four revision moves; writers' workshop
14	**Essay Salon**	1	What have I learned as a writer?	W 2.7, OC 2.4, W 4.1	Readings; salon cards; reflection (summative)

Assessment

Type	In this unit
Assessment for learning	Tasting menu, essay map, voice swap, aphorism lab, argument map, metaphor map, practice paragraph, satire planner, essay proposal, three openings
Assessment as learning	Peer checks, writers' workshop, salon cards, unit reflection
Assessment of learning	In-class rhetorical analysis (Lesson 10) and an original essay with a writer's statement (Lesson 14), with rubrics in the Summative Tasks file

Texts

Included in the Essay Reader (Start Here folder):

- **Public domain essays:** Chesterton, “A Piece of Chalk” (1909); Woolf, “The Modern Essay” (1925, excerpts); Emerson, “Self-Reliance” (1841, excerpts); Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience” (1849, excerpts); Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” (1903); Swift, “A Modest Proposal” (1729)
- **Original texts:** a model personal essay (“The Night Shift”), a model satire and model paragraphs

Du Bois discusses racism and uses the terms of 1903; Swift describes eating children and includes anti-Catholic remarks from his narrator, as satire. Lessons build in norms and content notes. In the satire lab, students punch up: no real names, no targeting identity groups, and topics approved by the teacher. Personal essays share only what students are comfortable sharing; follow your board's procedures if a student discloses harm.

What's in each lesson

- Teacher lesson plan with expectations, timed sequence, differentiation, look-fors and answer guides
- Slides with speaker notes
- Student handouts and organizers
- Editable Word and PowerPoint files, plus PDFs

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