

Grades 9–10 Playlist: Analyzing an Author’s Ideas

Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.5:

- Analyze in detail how an author’s ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text (e.g., a section or chapter).

Welcome

Authors use informational texts to present ideas and claims about a subject, but how do they do it? In most cases, an author’s claims and ideas are developed through the structure of the text itself. By carefully choosing words and arranging sentences, paragraphs, and sections, an author is able to develop claims and reveal the text’s deeper meaning. Text structure is used deliberately, but the reasons for an author’s choices aren’t always clear. Instead, readers must analyze the finer details of a text to determine the purpose and effectiveness of its structure.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- analyze the structure of a text to determine how an author’s ideas or claims are developed.
- identify how and why an author structures information to present an idea or claim.

Review

Key Terms

- A **claim** is a statement that asserts a belief or truth and generally requires supporting evidence.
- **Text structure** is the way an author orders information in a text, such as cause/effect or problem/solution.

Exploring the Standard

Sometimes a reader may come across a sentence or paragraph and wonder why an author decided to include it. For example, the conclusion of an essay about the environmental benefits of recycling might include a personal example to show how easy it is to recycle. Why would the author choose to include this? After establishing the benefits of recycling on a large scale, the essay’s relatable conclusion might encourage readers to try recycling for themselves. To analyze a text’s structure and determine how ideas are developed, readers have to think critically about the organizational decisions that the author has made.

A Closer Look: Analyzing Evidence Used to Develop Claims

When investigating how ideas and claims are developed in a text, it’s helpful to focus on portions that show the author’s viewpoints. Then readers can identify the claims the author makes and begin to look for evidence that supports those claims.



Example

In this excerpt from an address to Congress given on November 27, 1963, President Lyndon Johnson acknowledges the recent loss of John F. Kennedy and the sorrow that his assassination has caused the American people. Johnson makes the claim that the country needs to quickly move forward on President Kennedy's request for civil rights legislation. While reading, try to find evidence that supports this claim and further reveals Johnson's overall purpose for the speech.

Watch!

Watch a video recording of President Lyndon Johnson's complete "Address to Congress" on November 27, 1963:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFOTxpxIMA0>

¹[...] We meet in grief, but let us also meet in renewed dedication and renewed vigor. Let us meet in action, in tolerance, and in mutual understanding. John Kennedy's death commands what his life conveyed—that America must move forward. The time has come for Americans of all races and creeds and political beliefs to understand and to respect one another. So let us put an end to the teaching and the preaching of hate and evil and violence. Let us turn away from the fanatics of the far left and the far right, from the apostles of bitterness and bigotry, from those defiant of law, and those who pour venom into our Nation's bloodstream.

²I profoundly hope that the tragedy and the torment of these terrible days will bind us together in new fellowship, making us one people in our hour of sorrow. So let us here highly resolve that John Fitzgerald Kennedy did not live—or die—in vain. And on this Thanksgiving eve, as we gather together to ask the Lord's blessing, and give Him our thanks, let us unite in those familiar and cherished words:

³America, America,
God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good
With brotherhood
From sea to shining sea.

Johnson's purpose is to unite the members of Congress in action using the tragic death of President Kennedy as a catalyst. In the first paragraph, Johnson uses the death of Kennedy to promote his belief that "America must move forward." To Johnson, the assassination reflects a national breakdown in understanding and respect for one another. To avoid more "preaching of hate and evil and violence," Johnson claims the nation must commit itself to Kennedy's push for civil rights. The paragraph closes with powerful phrases like "apostles of bitterness and bigotry" and "those who pour venom into our Nation's bloodstream." By ending with such emotionally charged language, Johnson creates a tone of urgency for his claims, highlighting the country's need to act quickly.



Teaching Notes: Analyzing an Author's Ideas

The goal of RI.9-10.5 is for students to be able to analyze in detail how an author's ideas or claims are developed and refined by other portions of the text, such as particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger parts. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classroom as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activities

1. Ask students to bring in a recent piece of advertising that they find appealing. Direct them to think about how the writer uses persuasive techniques to convince the reader to buy something or make use of a service. Then ask students to label each technique they identify according to the following system:
 - **Pathos:** information that appeals to the reader's emotions in order to convince them of a claim or to prove a point
 - **Logos:** information that is meant to convince the reader of something through the use of data, facts, and statistics
 - **Ethos:** information that convinces the reader that the author is trustworthy or knowledgeable about a given subject
2. Ask students to work with a partner. Assign each pair a grade-appropriate excerpt from an informational text. Then direct students to take turns identifying evidence to support a given claim about the text. When they are finished, ask students to explain the evidence they found and whether or not they think it is sufficient to convince readers of the given claim. Encourage students to find at least **two** pieces of evidence each.

Writing Prompts

1. Direct students to choose a topic and write a brief persuasive piece, such as a speech, letter, or essay. Ask them to use examples of both logical and emotional appeals and to identify where in the text they do so.
2. Review President Johnson's speech with students, and direct their attention to the closing sentence, "So let us here highly resolve that John Fitzgerald Kennedy did not live—or die—in vain." Ask students to use direct quotes and other evidence from the text to write a brief essay answering the question: How does President Johnson intend to use the loss of John Kennedy to achieve progress for the nation?

Additional Resource

Consider this additional resource when teaching RI.9-10.5:

American Rhetoric Speech Bank:

This resource provides access to a thorough bank of famous American speeches that students can use to practice analyzing claims and ideas:

<http://americanrhetoric.com/>

