

## Grades 11–12 Playlist: Using and Refining Key Terms Over the Course of a Text

*Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.4:*

- *Analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).*

### Welcome

Authors often repeat key terms throughout a piece of writing. Repeating a key term alerts the audience to the fact that it is important, and it gives the author a chance to develop and refine the meaning of the term over the course of a text. Each time the term appears, its context may be different. It may be linked to other terms in ways that help the audience to more fully understand its meaning.

### Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn and practice the following skills:

- identify key terms in a passage.
- trace how the refinement of key terms is developed throughout the passage.
- understand the importance of the context of a word or phrase.

### Review

#### Key Terms

- **Context** is the relationship between the words, themes, and ideas in a passage as well as the relationship between the literary, social, and historical situations in which they appear. Understanding the context of a term can help a reader figure out its meaning in a particular text.

#### Background

Watch this short video about the women’s suffrage movement in the United States:

- <http://www.teachertube.com/video/a-brief-history-of-the-women039s-suffrage-movement-139862>

#### Exploring the Standard

Susan B. Anthony’s speech “On Women’s Right to Vote” discusses in detail what it means to be a citizen. An American suffragette, Anthony delivered this speech not long after she was arrested for voting. In the passage below, she makes the point that what she has done should not be against the law. She argues for the right to vote for women who are U.S. citizens. She develops this argument around two key terms and refines the meaning and purpose of these terms throughout the speech.



Read the excerpt below and think about how Anthony uses key terms to develop her argument.

<sup>1</sup>Friends and fellow citizens: I stand before you tonight under indictment for the alleged crime of having voted at the last presidential election, without having a lawful right to vote. It shall be my work this evening to prove to you that in thus voting, I not only committed no crime, but, instead, simply exercised my citizen's rights, guaranteed to me and all United States citizens by the National Constitution, beyond the power of any state to deny.

<sup>2</sup>The preamble of the Federal Constitution says:

"We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

<sup>3</sup>It was we, the people; not we, the white male citizens; nor yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed the Union. And we formed it, not to give the blessings of liberty, but to secure them; not to the half of ourselves and the half of our posterity, but to the whole people - women as well as men.

[...]

<sup>4</sup>Webster, Worcester, and Bouvier all define a citizen to be a person in the United States, entitled to vote and hold office.

<sup>5</sup>The only question left to be settled now is: Are women persons? And I hardly believe any of our opponents will have the hardihood to say they are not. Being persons, then, women are citizens; and no state has a right to make any law, or to enforce any old law, that shall abridge their privileges or immunities. [...]

### A Closer Look: Understanding the Use of the Word "Citizen"

Reading this passage closely, one can notice how the meaning of *citizen* evolves throughout the passage. Anthony uses the word "citizens" six times. The overall goal for Anthony, most likely, is to make her audience accept her interpretation of the preamble to the Federal Constitution, that "We the People" refers to everyone. Thus, she explores the different ways the term is used in defining what it means to be a citizen of the United States.

In paragraph 1, Anthony implies that all people she is addressing are U.S. citizens when she says, "Friends and fellow citizens." Next, she builds on this idea by describing a right of all citizens: the right to vote. She states that when she voted at the presidential election she "simply exercised [her] citizen's rights" because it is a right that is "guaranteed to me and all United States citizens." By stating that voting is her right, Anthony is also implying that women are, in fact, citizens. In this way, Anthony makes the term inclusive. However, note that she has yet to define the term.

In paragraph 3, Anthony elaborates on what it means to be a citizen based on the preamble to the Federal Constitution. She explains how the term "citizen" does not apply only to white men: "It was we, the people; not we, the white male citizens; nor yet we, the male citizens."



## Teaching Notes: Using and Refining Key Terms Over the Course of a Text

The goal of RI.11-12.4 is for students to determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings. Another goal is for students to be able to trace how an author uses and refines the meaning of key terms over the course of a text. This playlist focuses on the latter. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classroom.

### Passage from “Exploring the Standard,” with highlights

<sup>1</sup>Friends and fellow citizens: I stand before you tonight under indictment for the alleged crime of having voted at the last presidential election, without having a lawful right to vote. It shall be my work this evening to prove to you that in thus voting, I not only committed no crime, but, instead, simply exercised my citizen’s rights, guaranteed to me and all United States citizens by the National Constitution, beyond the power of any state to deny.

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### Activities

1. Instruct students to pick a couple of the highlighted phrases and discuss in groups how these highlighted phrases contribute to Anthony’s understanding of the term “citizen.”
2. **(Discussion starter)** In this discussion starter, students are asked to think about context. They are directed to pay attention to the words and phrases around the term “citizen” and consider how the context in which the term appears shapes its meaning. To help students do this, allow each student to read through the passage and identify the term or terms he or she thinks are most important in the text. After each student has had the opportunity to do this, work through the passage together as a class and stop at each instance of the word “citizen” to discuss how its meaning unfolds depending on the context of the term.

