

Ravenscourt Books Extra Essay Questions

Writing is an important skill for students at all levels. Students must write clearly on a variety of topics for state tests, college applications, and prospective employers. Students who read below grade level often have poor writing skills. While they may be able to analyze and express ideas orally, these students stumble when they have to express their ideas in writing.

Ways Teachers Can Help Students Improve Their Writing:

- Provide students with frequent opportunities to write. For many students, the more often they write, the easier it becomes.
- Scaffold writing experiences. Begin with simple sentences and specific criteria that the students can meet. For example, “Start each sentence with a capital letter and end it with correct punctuation. Each sentence must have a subject and a verb.”
- Provide students with computer support to encourage and improve their writing.
- Use of the spelling checker can help struggling students with one of the most discouraging parts of writing.
- Not only does keyboarding improve readability for teachers, but creating a new draft from a saved file encourages students to revise.
- The writing process includes opportunities for students to confer with each other about their writing. Adolescents listen more to the suggestions of their peers than to the suggestions of their teachers.
- When students revise their essays before the teacher grades them, the essays should take less time to grade, and the grades should be better.

This outline of the Writing Process may be adapted to suit your class.

Prewriting	1. Choose your topic.
	2. Identify the purpose of the writing: persuade, inform, entertain, and so on.
	3. Identify the audience. Who will read the writing?
	4. Brainstorm or web ideas and information on the topic.
	5. Organize information into a general outline or plan.
Drafting	1. Follow the outline or plan as you write your first draft.
	2. Write the information and ideas in sentences and paragraphs.
Revising	1. Work with a partner or in a small group.
	2. Read other students' papers and provide feedback.
	3. Suggest ways to improve others' writing.
	4. Use the feedback to write a second draft.
	5. Evaluate other students' writing again, or ask the teacher to suggest changes.
Proofreading	1. Polish your writing.
	2. Check the spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation.
	3. Make a final copy.
Publishing	1. Illustrate and publish your writing, or read it aloud.
	2. Present your work to your audience.

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Use the following essay questions after students have read all the books in a set. Possible writing activities include standard five-paragraph essays, narratives, reports, and computer-generated presentations. The questions may be used also for discussion, brainstorming, webbing, or outline practice. Some of the questions could be used for speeches, oral reports, or panel discussions. Adjust the questions and activities to match your state's benchmarks and your students' needs.

The Unexpected

1. Choose your favorite book in the series. Summarize the book briefly in one paragraph. In the next paragraph, tell why it is your favorite book, and give specific examples.
2. All the stories in this set are about something unexpected or mysterious. Do you like this kind of story? Why or why not? Give examples from various books to show what specifically you like or dislike about this kind of story.
3. Compare and contrast two of the retold classics—*The Ransom of Red Chief* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*.
 - In paragraph one, define the terms *foreshadowing* and *suspense*. Give examples of each from both books.
 - In paragraph two, define the term *irony*. Give at least three examples from each book.
 - In paragraph three, summarize the roles that *foreshadowing*, *suspense*, *dialect*, and *irony* play in creating humor.
4. Choose one of the books in **The Unexpected** that uses literary devices and figurative language, such as *dialect*, *dialogue*, *flashbacks*, *foreshadowing*, *irony*, *puns*, *similes*, *symbolism*, and *suspense*. Use examples of these elements to define the writer's style and to interpret the work.
5. Compare and contrast one of the books in this set to a movie version or to the information found on a Web site. (See pages 13 and 14 of **The Unexpected Teacher's Guide**.) For example, compare the movie *Sleepy Hollow* with *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow Retold*.
6. Choose one of the books in **The Unexpected**. Analyze the importance of setting—time, place, and culture—on the mood, tone, and meaning of the text.
7. Analyze the theme **The Unexpected** as it applies to various books in this collection. Choose a book from each of these genres—contemporary fiction, nonfiction, and retold classics.
8. Two books in this series have *gold* in the title: *Making Gold* and *King Midas and the Golden Touch*. One of these books is a contemporary (new) story, and the other comes from ancient times. Compare these books.
 - In paragraph one, describe gold and what it symbolizes. Tell what gold has meant to people throughout the ages.
 - In paragraph two, compare the roles Mr. Rich and Dionysus play.
 - In paragraph three, compare the endings of the books. What do they have to say about greed and getting rich quickly? What values do these books portray?
9. Pick one of the fiction works from this set—*Making Gold*, *The Ransom of Red Chief Retold*, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow Retold*, or *King Midas and the Golden Touch*. Analyze the work using the traditional fiction plot outline. (See page 11 of **The Unexpected Teacher's Guide**.)
 - In paragraph one, identify the conflict, and list the events that make up the *rising action*. These are the events that build the suspense in the story and lead to the climax.
 - In paragraph two, identify the *turning point*, or *climax*, of the story. Explain why this is important to the story.
 - In paragraph three, list the *falling action* events that summarize and conclude the story. The *resolution* is the conclusion that ties up the loose ends.
10. Compare and contrast *Atlantis: Land of Mystery* and *The Navel of the World*. Draw a Venn diagram to use to brainstorm ideas about Atlantis and Easter Island. Consider what we know and what we don't know about each place.

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11. Research the life of Gordon Parks. Use *Born Dead: The Story of Gordon Parks* and two other resources. Unlike most biographies, *Born Dead: The Story of Gordon Parks* is not told in *chronological*, or time, order. Summarize Gordon Parks's life in chronological order—from birth to old age. Write a paragraph about his early life, another paragraph on his middle years, and the last paragraph on his later life. Describe his major accomplishments and influences in each period.
12. Research a famous person. Use at least two sources to write a biography. Be sure to include the people or events that influenced the person, his or her accomplishments, and why he or she is important to you.
13. Research Atlantis. Use *Atlantis: Land of Mystery* and two other resources. Write a persuasive essay. Take a position that money should or should not be spent to find proof of the existence of Atlantis.
 - First, present evidence showing that Atlantis did or did not exist.
 - Second, explain why finding Atlantis would or would not be valuable.
 - Third, give reasons why money should or should not be spent to search for Atlantis.
14. Playing tricks and fooling others are important elements in *The Ransom of Red Chief Retold*, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow Retold*, and *Making Gold*. Describe how playing a trick or fooling someone influences the plots of these stories.
15. Four stories in **The Unexpected** have to do with legends and myths—*The Legend of Sleepy Hollow Retold*, *King Midas and the Golden Touch*, *Atlantis: Land of Mystery*, and *The Navel of the World*. Define *myth* and *legend*. Discuss the importance of myth and legends in each story.
16. Two books in **The Unexpected**—*The Mountain Is On Fire!* and *Atlantis: Land of Mystery*—deal with natural disasters and their impact on the people who experience them. Find an article in the newspaper about a disaster, and write a first-person narrative based on what you read. Create a character who survived the disaster, and tell the story from his or her point of view.
17. The narrator, the person telling the story, has a major influence on how the story develops. With this in mind, analyze either *The Ransom of Red Chief Retold* or *King Midas and the Golden Touch*. Discuss how changing the narrator in *The Ransom of Red Chief Retold* from Sam to Johnny, the boy, or Bill, the other kidnapper, would change the story, or describe how changing the third-person narrator in *King Midas and the Golden Touch* to a first-person narrator—perhaps Dionysus or Kali—would change the story.
18. Contrast first-person and third-person points of view. Choose *Making Gold* or *The Ransom of Red Chief Retold* as an example of first-person narrative. Choose *King Midas and the Golden Touch* or *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow Retold* as an example of third-person narrative. Identify the differences between the two. Give examples of their strengths and weaknesses.
19. Describe the use of different narrative styles in the same book—*The Mountain Is On Fire!* or *Atlantis: Land of Mystery*.
 - Describe the narrative styles in the book. (*Atlantis* changes from fiction to nonfiction and from dialogue to expository. *Mountain* changes from a first-person eyewitness account to a third-person narrative.)
 - Evaluate whether each style is effective.
20. Analyze Gordon Parks's character based on his words and actions and on the writer's description.
 - Describe Parks's attitude and how it affected his behavior. Also tell what or who influenced him.
 - Tell what was important to Parks and what he liked and disliked.
21. Write a fact and opinion essay about *The Navel of the World* or *Atlantis: Land of Mystery*. Evaluate the evidence, and tell what information in the book was fact, what was opinion, and how you knew the difference.

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Overcoming Adversity

1. Choose your favorite book in the series. Summarize the book briefly in one paragraph. In the next paragraph, tell why it is your favorite book, and give specific examples.
2. All the stories in this set are about survivors and people who overcome adversity. Do you like this kind of story? Why or why not? Give examples from various books to show what specifically you like or dislike about this kind of story.
3. Compare and contrast two of the retold classics—*Monte Cristo's Prison Years* and *Robinson Crusoe's Adventures*.
 - In paragraph one, define the terms *foreshadowing* and *suspense*. Give examples of each from both books.
 - In paragraph two, define the term *irony*. Give examples from each book.
 - In paragraph three, summarize the roles that *foreshadowing*, *suspense*, and *irony* play in setting the mood.
4. Choose one of the books in **Overcoming Adversity** that uses literary devices and figurative language, such as *dialect*, *dialogue*, *flashbacks*, *foreshadowing*, *irony*, *puns*, *similes*, *symbolism*, and *suspense*. Use examples of these elements to define the writer's style and to interpret the work.
5. Compare and contrast one of the books in this set to a movie version or to the information found on a Web site. (See pages 13 and 14 of **Overcoming Adversity Teacher's Guide**.) For example, compare the movie *Troy* with *The Trojan War*.
6. Choose one of the books in **Overcoming Adversity**. Analyze the importance of setting—time, place, and culture—on the mood, tone, and meaning of the text.
7. Analyze the theme **Overcoming Adversity** as it applies to various books in this collection. Choose a book from each of these genres—contemporary fiction, nonfiction, and retold classics. Compare the adversity in each book and how the character overcomes it.
8. Water, in some form, plays an important part in several of the books in this series—*Walls of Water*, *Robinson Crusoe's Adventures*, *The Last Boat*, and even *Monte Cristo's Prison Years*. Choose three of these books for the following writing activity.
 - Describe what water means to people in general, what it symbolizes, and what kind of water is in the stories you have chosen.
 - One conflict in literature is “man versus nature.” Tell what role water (or nature) plays in each of the stories. Is the conflict fundamental to the story?
9. Pick one of the fiction works from this set: *The Last Boat*, *No Need to Shout*, *Robinson Crusoe's Adventures*, or *Monte Cristo's Prison Years*. Analyze the work using the traditional fiction plot outline. (See page 11 of **The Unexpected Teacher's Guide**.)
 - In paragraph one, identify the conflict, and list the events that make up *rising action*. These are the events that build the suspense in the story and lead to the climax.
 - In paragraph two, identify the *turning point*, or *climax*, of the story. Explain why this is important to the story.
 - In paragraph three, list the *falling action* events that summarize and conclude the story. The resolution is the conclusion that ties up the loose ends.
10. Compare and contrast the two baseball books in this set: *Playing Through Pain* and *Once There Were Two*. Identify and analyze the settings, including the culture, literary devices such as *foreshadowing* and *irony*, and the themes in these stories.
11. What makes a person a hero? Compare and contrast Roberto Clemente with either Achilles or Odysseus in *The Trojan War*. Do we expect different characteristics from our heroes today than people expected of heroes in the past?
12. Research the life of Roberto Clemente. Use *Playing Through Pain: The Story of Roberto Clemente* and two other resources. Summarize Clemente's life in a short biography. Write a paragraph about his personality, another about what influenced him, and the last one about his legacy—what he left behind.

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13. Research a player from *Once There Were Two* or some other historic figure who is not well known although he or she accomplished a lot. Use at least two sources to write your biography. Be sure to include the people or events that influenced the person, his or her accomplishments, and why he or she is important to you.
14. Research a disaster in newspapers, in books, or on the Internet. Write a first-person narrative based on what you read. A possible topic is the Great Molasses Flood.
15. Research the ancient city of Troy and make a computer presentation about it. Discuss where Troy might have been located, who rediscovered it, the excavation of the site, and the evidence that the site is Troy.
16. Write a newspaper article about the end of the Trojan War or about the return of Robinson Crusoe. Follow newspaper style, with a headline, a byline, a dateline, and the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, and *how* of the story.
17. Rebelling against authority is an important aspect of *The Last Boat*, *No Need to Shout*, and *Robinson Crusoe's Adventures*. Describe how rebelling against authority influences the plot of these stories.
18. Guilt and innocence play an important part in *No Need to Shout* and *Monte Cristo's Prison Years*. Compare and contrast how guilt and innocence influence the plot and the main character's behavior in each of these stories.
19. What are the differences between perseverance and stubbornness? First, define the differences, and then give examples of either perseverance or stubbornness from several of the books.
20. The narrator, the person telling the story, has a major influence on how the plot develops. Analyze the narration of either *The Last Boat* or *Robinson Crusoe's Adventures*. Discuss how changing the narrator from Luis to Auntie Boom or from Crusoe to Friday would change the story.
21. Imagine changing the third-person narrator in *The Trojan War* to a first-person narrator. How would the story be different from the viewpoint of Helen, Eris, or another character?
22. One book in **Overcoming Adversity**—*Walls of Water*—deals with a natural disaster and the impact of the flood on the people who experienced it. Create a character who survived the disaster, and tell his or her story.
23. Choose two characters from the books you have read. Write a conversation between them in correct dialogue form. Some pairs might be Luis and Vernon, Roberto Clemente and Jackie Robinson, or Edmond Dantès and Robinson Crusoe.
24. Write a persuasive speech or an editorial as a character from one of the books. For example, as Vernon, write a speech arguing against mixing chemicals outside the classroom, or as a survivor of the Johnstown Flood, write an editorial about flood prevention.
25. Review the definition of a “coming-of-age” story. Describe how *The Last Boat* or *No Need to Shout* fits the definition. Describe the main character (Luis or Vernon), what caused him to change, and how he had changed by the end of the story.
26. Not all main characters are heroes. Choose at least five books in this set. Categorize the main characters in each book as heroic or not heroic. Give reasons why the character belongs in one category or the other.

Reaching Goals

1. Choose your favorite book in the series. Summarize the book briefly in one paragraph. In the next paragraph, tell why it is your favorite book, and give specific examples.
2. All the stories in this set are about people who set goals and work to accomplish them. Do you like this kind of story? Why or why not? Give examples from various books to show what specifically you like or dislike about this kind of story.

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3. Compare and contrast two of the retold classics—*The Story of the Time Machine*, *The Call of the Wild Retold*, or *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea Retold*.
 - In paragraph one, define the terms *foreshadowing* and *suspense*. Give examples of each from both books.
 - In paragraph two, define the terms *irony* and *symbolism*. Give examples from each book.
 - In paragraph three, summarize the roles that *foreshadowing*, *suspense*, *symbolism*, and *irony* play in setting the mood.
4. Choose one of the books in **Reaching Goals** that uses literary devices and figurative language, such as *dialect*, *dialogue*, *flashbacks*, *foreshadowing*, *irony*, *similes*, *symbolism*, and *suspense*. Use examples of these elements to define the writer's style and to interpret the work.
5. Compare and contrast one of the books in this set to a movie version or to the information found on a Web site. (See pages 13 and 14 of **Reaching Goals Teacher's Guide**.) For example, compare the movie *The Time Machine* with *The Story of the Time Machine*.
6. Choose one of the books in **Reaching Goals**. Analyze the importance of setting—time, place, and culture—on the mood, tone, and meaning of the text.
7. Analyze the theme **Reaching Goals** as it applies to various books in this collection. Choose a book from each of these genres—contemporary fiction, nonfiction, and retold classics.
8. Time, in some form, plays an important part in several of the books in this series—*The Story of the Time Machine*, *On Time in Orange*, *Race to the North Pole*, and even *Joanie's Fire*. Choose three or more of these books to compare and contrast.
 - Describe what time means to people in general and what it symbolizes.
 - Tell what role time plays in each of the stories. Is it fundamental to the story?
9. Pick one work of fiction from this set—*Joanie's Fire*, *On Time in Orange*, *The Story of the Time Machine*, *The Call of the Wild Retold*, or *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea Retold*. Analyze the work, using the traditional fiction plot outline. (See page 11 of **The Unexpected Teacher's Guide**.)
 - In paragraph one, identify the conflict, and list the events that make up the *rising action*. These are the events that build the suspense in the story and lead to the climax.
 - In paragraph two, identify the *turning point*, or *climax*, of the story. Explain why this is important to the story.
 - In paragraph three, list the *falling action* events that summarize and conclude the story. The *resolution* is the conclusion that ties up the loose ends.
10. Compare and contrast the two retold classics—*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea Retold* and *The Story of the Time Machine*. Compare the main characters, scientific devices, settings, and endings.
11. Compare and contrast the two science fiction books about time travel—*The Story of the Time Machine* and *On Time in Orange*. Compare the characters, themes, and settings. Which story did you like better? Why?
12. Choose a modern-day hero. Compare and contrast him or her with Hercules. What characteristics do they have in common? How are their labors similar or different? What do we expect of heroes in today's world?
13. Compare *The Labors of Hercules* to *Race to the North Pole*. What characters or actions in these stories are epic or heroic?
14. Research the life of one of these famous authors—H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, or Jack London. Write a brief biography telling about the writer's influences and achievements. How are the writer's experiences and views reflected in his writing?
15. Research one important event in the life of Bessie Coleman, Ellen Ochoa, or Narciso Monturiol. Write journal entries in the first person, telling about the event.

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16. Research the life of a polar explorer other than Henson or Peary. Write a short report describing the explorer's achievements and challenges.
17. Research a famous runner such as Wilma Rudolph, Marion Jones, Frank Shorter, Roger Bannister, Kipchoge Keino, or Steve Prefontaine. Tell about his or her life, and find out what might have inspired him or her to run. Make a computer presentation with text and pictures.
18. Two of the stories are adventure stories that take place in the far north—*Race to the North Pole* and *The Call of the Wild Retold*. Analyze the importance of the setting in both stories. (Remember that setting includes time, place, and culture.)
19. Use as your thesis statement: "Reaching goals requires taking risks." Choose at least three books from this set, and write a five-paragraph essay to prove the thesis. Give specific examples from the works to prove the thesis.
20. What motivates someone to set a difficult goal and work to achieve it? Choose at least two books from this set, and draw conclusions about the motivations of the main character(s).
21. Describe and analyze one of the major characters from this set of stories. Write both a physical description and a personality description of the character. Give examples of how the story would have been different if the main character had a different personality.
22. Buck is the main character in *The Call of the Wild Retold*. Describe what influenced his personality, how he changed, and how his relationships with humans changed. Use specific examples from the story.
23. When Jules Verne wrote *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* in 1870, he described submarine travel and undersea exploration, reaching the South Pole, and traveling from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. Research these events to find out if, how, and when his predictions came true.
24. Write a persuasive speech or an editorial as a character from one of the books. For example, as Bessie Coleman, write an editorial urging people to donate money for your flight school, or as Hercules, write a speech telling the gods why you should not be punished.
25. Use examples from *The Story of the Time Machine* to describe H. G. Wells's view of the future.
26. As Rosa, write a letter to a friend telling about your friend Joanie, or as Filby, write a newspaper article about what happened to the Time Traveler.
27. The four friends from *On Time in Orange* decide to build a new science project. Write the first chapter of this story. Start by deciding what the project is, what each of the friends will do, and what the goal of the project is.
28. Create a dialogue between two characters from two different stories. Perhaps have Narciso Monturiol and Captain Nemo discuss submarines, or have Ellen Ochoa and Bessie Coleman share flying experiences. Write a conversation between two Eloi or two Morlocks about the Time Traveler's visit, or write a conversation between two Inuit about their trip to the North Pole with Peary and Henson.
29. What do you think life will be like in the future? Imagine traveling in a time machine 1,000 or 10,000 years into the future. Write a journal telling about your travels.
30. Three of the works in this set are science fiction—*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea Retold*, *The Story of the Time Machine*, and *On Time in Orange*. Choose one of these books, and explain how it fits the definition of science fiction.
31. The stories in this set are interrelated in several ways. Categorize the stories by type, genre, setting, themes, characters, and so on. Find as many ways as possible that the stories can be tied together. Use a web to get started.