

ANALYZING AWESOME AUTHORS



This guide links the *Analyzing Awesome Authors* unit to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for eighth graders. *Analyzing Awesome Authors* is an English language arts unit that allows students to study an author, including his/her influences, motivations, and experiences. Though an English language arts unit, *Analyzing Awesome Authors* also teaches students skills in the other subject areas of mathematics, science, and social studies. For example, students use logic to form conclusions, which is covered in the Mathematics TEKS; use critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, which the Science TEKS address; and use writing and research skills, which the Social Studies TEKS include. Students who choose to study authors who write about mathematics, the sciences, or the social sciences will gain more in-depth knowledge across the disciplines. The following document includes the applicable TEKS and the details of the *Analyzing Awesome Authors* unit. The asterisks indicate that those TEKS are testable on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). The final section of this document presents the applicable Texas College and Career Readiness Standards adopted by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) on January 24, 2008.

Description of Unit

Students will conduct an in-depth investigation of a selected author to understand ways in which culture, history, and society influenced the author's style and voice.

Phase I. Learning Experiences

After having read a literature selection, pose questions that relate to the author's motivation and influences on the author, such as:

- Why do you think this author chose to write this book/story/poem/etc. at the particular time he/she wrote it?
- Why did the author write in the style he/she did?

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- Why do you think the author chose the content he/she did?
- Who do you think influenced the author?
- What would the author’s writing have been like if the author had not been in contact with that person?

After the class brainstorms possible answers, provide the class with resources to explore these and other pertinent questions. You may wish to have the students present their findings in a paper or in another format.

Then explain that, in this project, students will have an opportunity to find the answers to their own questions about a published author of their own choice.

Phase II. Independent Research

A. Research process

1. Selecting an author. Each student selects an author who interests him/her. The author could be from any area—literature, social science, politics, future studies, history, science, mathematics, or other areas.
2. Asking guiding questions. Once the student has selected an author, pose the following question: When you think of your author and your previous experience with his/her works, what do you wonder about?

Each student should think of three to five guiding questions to explore, such as:

- What political, economic, religious, environmental, or gender perspectives are reflected in the author’s work?
- What were the societal and historical influences that motivated or inspired the author?
- Why did the author choose to write from the point of view that he/she did?
- What if the author had lived 25 years in the future? Would his/her point of view have changed?
- What if the author had lived in another part of the country or the world? How might his/her writing have changed?
- How have the author’s works influenced other authors?
- How did the author develop his/her voice?
- Has the writing of the author gained more or less popularity over time? What societal changes might have caused this change in popularity?

While these examples are general, the student’s questions should be specific to the chosen author. The questions should lead him/her to form individual research-based opinions. The student should also develop a hypothesis or some possible answers to the questions.

3. Designing and submitting a research proposal. The student should include numerous components in the research proposal:

- The author he/she will research
- Five questions he/she will investigate about the author
- Resources he/she will need to find answers to questions, such as the author’s works, biographies about the author, literary criticisms, and/or correspondence with the author or experts on the author

In the process of writing the research proposal, the student may refine the guiding questions.

4. Conducting the research. After the teacher has approved the student’s proposal, he/she begins using the identified resources and others they may encounter. During this stage, the student will need to keep a log, note cards, or resource process sheets of all the sources they use and what they learn from each one.

B. The product

The student shows what he/she has learned through **one** of the following written products:

1. A formal research paper. The student should show what he/she learned about the motivations of and influences on the studied author. The paper should include quotations, examples, and details and should follow appropriate stylistic rules.
2. A rewriting of a children’s story. The student should rewrite a story such as *The Three Little Pigs* or *Cinderella*, in the style and voice of the author, communicating the author’s message and reflecting the concerns of the time period in which the author lived. Students can read the story to an audience and let the audience guess who the author is. In an accompanying written explanation, students explain why they made the choices they did in retelling this story as the author they studied would have told it.
3. A chapter of a biography of the author. The student should illustrate the motivations of and influences on the author. The chapter can be from a period in the life of the author that the student feels is particularly important.

Whatever product is chosen, the student must complete a Reference List/Works Cited Page that includes at least ten references.

C. Communication

The student demonstrates what he/she has learned through **one** of the following types of presentations, to last no more than fifteen minutes:

1. Book Talk. Each student should give a brief book talk, assuming the persona of the author studied. Book talks are usually informal and personal. In the book talk, students should:
 - Refer to previously written books, if any;
 - Include reasons why the book was written;
 - Describe particular challenges the author faced in writing the book;
 - Read a selection from the book and tell why it was important; and
 - Answer questions from the audience.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

The unit may address the following TEKS:

English Language Arts and Reading:	
8.1	Reads grade-level text with fluency and comprehension
8.2	Understands new vocabulary and use it when reading and writing* (Testable on the Grade 8 Reading STAAR, Reporting Category 1)
8.3	Analyzes, makes inferences, and draws conclusions about theme and genre in different cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provides evidence from the text to support their understanding* (Testable on the Grade 8 Reading STAAR, Reporting Category 1, Reporting Category 2)
8.9	Analyzes, makes inferences, and draws conclusions about the author's purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provides evidence from the text to support their understanding* (Testable on the Grade 8 Reading STAAR, Reporting Category 1)
8.10	Analyzes, makes inferences, and draws conclusions about expository text and provides evidence from text to support their understanding* (Testable on the Grade 8 Reading STAAR, Reporting Category 3)
8.13	Uses comprehension skills to analyze how words, images, graphics, and sounds work together in various forms to impact meaning * (Testable on the Grade 8 Reading STAAR, Reporting Category 2, Reporting Category 3)
8.14	Uses elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text
8.19	Understands the function of and uses the conventions of academic language when speaking and writing
8.20	Writes legibly and uses appropriate capitalization and punctuation conventions in their compositions
8.21	Spells correctly
8.22	Asks open-ended research questions and develops a plan for answering them
8.23	Determines, locates, and explores the full range of relevant sources addressing a research question and systematically record the information they gather
8.26	Uses comprehension skills to listen attentively to others in formal and informal settings
8.27	Speaks clearly and to the point, using the conventions of language
Mathematics:	
8.1	Uses mathematical processes to acquire and demonstrate mathematical understanding
Science:	
8.2	Uses scientific inquiry methods during laboratory and field investigations* (Testable on the Grade 8 Science STAAR)

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8.3 Uses critical thinking, scientific reasoning, and problem solving to make informed decisions and knows the contributions of relevant scientists* (Testable on the Grade 8 Science STAAR)

Social Studies:

8.23 Understands the relationships between and among people from various groups, including racial, ethnic, and religious groups, during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries* (Testable on the Grade 8 Social Studies STAAR, Reporting Category 2)

8.26 Understands the relationship between the arts and the times during which they were created* (Testable on the Grade 8 Social Studies STAAR, Reporting Category 2)

8.27 Understands the impact of science and technology on the economic development of the United States* (Testable on the Grade 8 Social Studies STAAR, Reporting Category 4)

8.29 Applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology* (Testable on the Grade 8 Social Studies STAAR)

8.30 Communicates in written, oral, and visual forms* (Testable on the Grade 8 Social Studies STAAR)

8.31 Uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings

**Additional mathematics, social studies, and science TEKS could apply, depending on whom the student chooses to study.

Texas College and Career Readiness Standards

This unit may address the following Texas College and Career Readiness Standards:

English Language Arts:

I.A.1 Determines effective approaches, forms, and rhetorical techniques that demonstrate understanding of the writer's purpose and audience

I.A.2 Generates ideas and gathers information relevant to the topic and purpose, keeping careful records of outside sources

I.A.3 Evaluates relevance, quality, sufficiency, and depth of preliminary ideas and information, organizes material generated, and formulates thesis

I.A.4 Recognizes the importance of revision as the key to effective writing

I.A.5 Edits writing for proper voice, tense, and syntax, assuring that it conforms to standard English, when appropriate

II.A.1 Uses effective reading strategies to determine a written work's purpose and intended audience

II.A.2 Uses text features and graphics to form an overview of informational texts and to determine where to locate information

II.A.3 Identifies explicit and implicit textual information including main ideas and author's purpose

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- II.A.4 Draws and supports complex inferences from text to summarize, draw conclusions, and distinguish facts from simple assertions and opinions
- II.A.6 Analyzes imagery in literary texts
- II.A.7 Evaluates the use of both literal and figurative language to inform and shape the percepts of readers
- II.A.8 Compares and analyzes how generic features are used across texts
- II.A.9 Identifies and analyzes the audience, purpose, and message of an informational or persuasive text
- II.A.10 Identifies and analyzes how an author's use of language appeals to the senses, creates imagery, and suggests mood
- II.A.11 Identifies, analyzes, and evaluates similarities and differences in how multiple texts present information, argue a position, or relate a theme
- II.B.1 Identifies new words and concepts acquired through study of their relationships to other words and concepts
- II.B.2 Applies knowledge of roots and affixes to infer the meanings of new words
- II.B.3 Uses reference guides to confirm the meanings of new words or concepts
- II.C.2 Analyzes themes, structures, and elements of myths, traditional narratives, and classical and contemporary literature
- II.C.3 Analyzes works of literature for what they suggest about the historical period and cultural contexts in which they were written
- II.C.4 Analyzes and compares the use of language in literary works from a variety of world cultures
- II.D.1 Describes insights gained about oneself, others, or the world from reading specific texts
- III.A.1 Understands how style and content of spoken language varies in different contexts and influences the listener's understanding
- III.A.2 Adjusts presentation (delivery, vocabulary, length) to particular audiences and purposes
- III.B.1 Participates actively and effectively in one-on-one oral communication situations
- III.B.2 Participates actively and effectively in group discussions
- III.B.3 Plans and delivers focused and coherent presentations that convey clear and distinct perspectives and demonstrate solid reasoning
- IV.A.1 Analyzes and evaluates the effectiveness of a public presentation
- IV.A.2 Interprets a speaker's message; identifies the position taken and the evidence in support of that position
- IV.A.3 Uses a variety of strategies to enhance listening comprehension
- IV.B.1 Listens critically and responds appropriately to presentations
- IV.B.2 Listens actively and effectively in one-on-one communication situations
- IV.B.3 Listen actively and effectively in group discussions
- V.A.1 Formulates research questions
- V.A.2 Explores a research topic
- V.A.3 Refines research topic and devises a timeline for completing work
- V.B.1 Gathers relevant sources

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- V.B.2 Evaluates the validity and reliability of sources
- V.B.3 Synthesizes and organizes information effectively
- V.B.4 Uses source material ethically
- V.C.1 Designs and present an effective product

Mathematics:

- IV.D.2 Applies probabilistic measures to practical situations to make an informed decision
- VI.A.1 Plans a study
- VI.B.1 Determines types of data
- VI.B.2 Selects and applies appropriate visual representations of data
- VIII.A.1 Analyzes given information
- VIII.A.2 Formulates a plan or strategy
- VIII.A.3 Determines a solution
- VIII.A.4 Justifies the solution
- VIII.B.1 Develops and evaluate convincing arguments
- VIII.B.2 Uses various types of reasoning

Science:

- I.B.1 Designs and conducts scientific investigations in which hypotheses are formulated and tested
- I.C.1 Collaborates on joint projects
- I.E.2 Uses essential vocabulary of the discipline being studied
- III.B.4 Lists, uses, and gives examples of specific strategies before, during, and after reading to improve comprehension
- III.C.1 Prepares and represents scientific/technical information in appropriate formats for various audiences
- III.D.1 Uses search engines, databases, and other digital electronic tools effectively to locate information
- III.D.2 Evaluates quality, accuracy, completeness, reliability, and currency of information from any source
- V.C.1 Recognizes patterns of change
- V.E.1 Uses models to make predictions

Social Studies:

- I.A.2 Analyzes the interaction between human communities and the environment
- I.A.3 Analyzes how physical and cultural processes have shaped human communities over time
- I.A.4 Evaluates the causes and effects of human migration patterns over time
- I.E.2 Defines the concept of socialization and analyzes the role socialization plays in human development and behavior
- I.E.3 Analyzes how social institutions function and meet the needs of society
- I.F.1 Uses a variety of research and analytical tools to explore questions or issues thoroughly and fairly

- I.F.2 Analyzes ethical issues in historical, cultural, and social contexts
- II.B.1 Explains and evaluates the concepts of race, ethnicity, and nationalism
- II.B.2 Explains and evaluates the concept of gender
- II.B.4 Evaluates how major philosophical and intellectual concepts influence human behavior or identity
- II.B.6 Analyzes how individual and group identities are established and change over time
- IV.A.1 Identifies and analyzes the main idea(s) and point(s) of view in sources
- IV.A.2 Situates an informational source in its appropriate contexts
- IV.A.3 Evaluates sources from multiple perspectives
- IV.A.4 Understands the differences between a primary and secondary source and use each appropriately to conduct research and construct arguments
- IV.A.5 Reads narrative texts critically
- IV.A.6 Reads research data critically
- IV.B.1 Uses established research methodologies
- IV.B.3 Gathers, organizes and displays the results of data and research
- IV.B.4 Identifies and collects sources
- IV.C.1 Understands/interprets presentations critically
- IV.D.1 Constructs a thesis that is supported by evidence
- IV.D.2 Recognizes and evaluates counter-arguments
- V.A.1 Uses appropriate oral communication techniques, depending on the context or nature of the interaction
- V.A.2 Uses conventions of standard written English
- V.B.1 Attributes ideas and information to source materials and authors

Cross-Disciplinary Standards:

- I.A.1 Engages in scholarly inquiry and dialogue
- I.A.2 Accepts constructive criticism and revises personal views when valid evidence warrants
- I.B.1 Considers arguments and conclusions of self and others
- I.B.2 Constructs well-reasoned arguments to explain phenomena, validates conjectures, or supports positions
- I.B.3 Gathers evidence to support arguments, findings, or lines of reasoning
- I.B.4 Supports or modifies claims based on the results of an inquiry
- I.C.1 Analyzes a situation to identify a problem to be solved
- I.C.2 Develops and applies multiple strategies to solving a problem
- I.C.3 Collects evidence and data systematically and directly relate to solving a problem
- I.D.1 Self-monitors learning needs and seeks assistance when needed
- I.D.2 Uses study habits necessary to manage academic pursuits and requirements
- I.D.3 Strives for accuracy and precision
- I.D.4 Perseveres to complete and master tasks

- I.E.1 Works independently
- I.F.1 Attributes ideas and information to source materials and people
- I.F.2 Evaluates sources for quality of content, validity, credibility, and relevance
- I.F.3 Includes the ideas of others and the complexities of the debate, issue, or problem
- I.F.4 Understands and adheres to ethical codes of conduct
- II.A.1 Uses effective prereading strategies
- II.A.2 Uses a variety of strategies to understand the meanings of new words
- II.A.3 Identifies the intended purpose and audience of the text
- II.A.4 Identifies the key information and supporting details
- II.A.5 Analyzes textual information critically
- II.A.6 Annotates, summarizes, paraphrases, and outlines texts, when appropriate
- II.A.7 Adapts reading strategies according to structure of texts
- II.A.8 Connects reading to historical and current events and personal interest
- II.B.1 Writes clearly and coherently, using standard writing conventions
- II.B.2 Writes in a variety of forms for various audiences and purposes
- II.B.3 Composes and revise drafts
- II.C.1 Understands which topics or questions are to be investigated
- II.C.2 Explores a research topic
- II.C.3 Refines research topic based on preliminary research and devise a timeline for completing work
- II.C.4 Evaluates the validity and reliability of sources
- II.C.5 Synthesizes and organize information effectively
- II.C.6 Designs and presents an effective product
- II.C.7 Integrates source material
- II.C.8 Presents final product
- II.D.3 Presents analyzed data and communicates findings in a variety of formats
- II.E.1 Uses technology to gather information
- II.E.2 Uses technology to organize, manage, and analyze information
- II.E.3 Uses technology to communicate and display findings in a clear and coherent manner
- II.E.4 Uses technology appropriately

COVER SHEET

Name: _____

District: _____ School: _____

Project I.D. Number: _____ Topic: *Analyzing Awesome Authors***Items submitted:**

_____ Cover sheet

Research process:

_____ Research proposal

_____ Research evidence (log, note cards, or resource process sheets)

Product:_____ Product, including ten references (select **one** of the following)

_____ Research paper

_____ Rewriting of a children's story

_____ Chapter of a biography

Communication:_____ Videotape or audiotape (select **one** of the following)

_____ Book talk, including the Q&A session

_____ Interview, including the Q&A session

For the Student:

I certify that all work submitted is totally my work and that I have credited others for their contributions.

Student Signature: _____ **Date:** _____**For the Teacher:**

I certify that all the work submitted is totally that of this student.

Teacher Signature: _____ **Date:** _____