

## Week Thirty: RLA Prompt

**Weekly Focus:** Response  
**Weekly Skill:** Understanding the Prompt and Planning a Response

**Lesson Summary:** Today students will have the opportunity to practice writing a response to the RLA prompt. In this lesson, students will be re-introduced to the RLA writing prompt from Lesson 26. Furthermore, students will again practice identifying the best-supported argument and practice completing a pre-writing exercise.

**Materials Needed:** RLA Prompt, Pro-Con Reading, Pre-Writing Exercise, Whiteboard and markers

**Objectives:** Students will be able to...

- Understand the RLA writing prompt
- Analyze two sides of an argument and identify the best-supported argument
- Complete a pre-writing graphic organizer
- Write a rough draft of an extended response

**Common Core Standards Addressed:** W.11-12.2., W.11-12.4, W.11-12.5., W.11-12.10.

**Notes:**

For the pro-con reading, remind students that the quality of the statements should be the focus of the analysis. There is no right or wrong answer.

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### Activities:

#### The RLA Writing Prompt

Time: 15 minutes

- **RLA WORDING OF PROMPT**

- 1) Hand out the RLA prompt to students. Read through it and ask students to tell you, in their own words, what they need to do on the RLA extended-response item.
- 2) Point out that even though the reading selection(s) will be different for each version of the test, the wording and task outlined in the prompt will remain the same.

#### Extended Response

Time: 120 minutes

- **Pro-Con Reading (35 minutes)**

- 1) Tell students that you are going to read different viewpoints on the question, "Should teachers get tenure?" While the RLA test readings will not have differing viewpoints clearly labeled "pro" and "con" (students will have to pick out the different viewpoints through reading comprehension), this exercise is extremely helpful in understanding what the prompt is asking and in practicing how to respond.
- 2) Hand out the Pro-Con Reading. Ask students to volunteer to read the different statements on each side. Read the entire "pro" column first. Then, read the entire "con" column. As you go, make sure to stop and clarify any vocabulary words or meanings of statements/statistics. The first sentence has been bolded to aid in comprehending the overall message of each statement.

- **Debate (25 minutes)**

1. Split the class into two groups. Have the groups sit on opposite sides of the room, facing each other. Assign the "pro" side of the argument to one group and the "con" side of the argument to the other. Instruct students that they will have to defend the side they were assigned to, regardless of if they agree or not.
2. First, have each group talk with each other about the points made on their side of the argument. They need to develop an understanding of the material before they can defend the viewpoint they were assigned.
3. Then, have one group start first, and make a statement to argue its side. Give the opposing group a chance to respond to the statement. The initial group has a chance to offer one counter response.
4. Next, have the other group lead with a point. The opposing group has a chance to respond to the statement. The initial group has a chance to offer one counter response.

\*\*This exercise is not meant to mimic a formal debate, but rather it is supposed to help students understand the arguments made and begin to articulate reasoning.

- **Pre-Writing Exercise (60 minutes)**

- 1) Hand out the "Pre-Writing Exercise" graphic organizer.
- 2) Complete the first page together as a class.
- 3) The second page asks students to choose the better-supported argument. Students may

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have different answers. This portion of the pre-writing exercise should be completed individually. As students are writing their response to the last question, walk around the room to make sure students are on the right track with their explanations. **NOTE:** This section is not meant to be the final draft of the extended response. The answer to this last question is meant to help students begin to articulate why they chose SIDE A or SIDE B, writing down initial thoughts of their line of reasoning.

- **Wrap-Up**

Have a few volunteers share which argument they decided was better supported and one or two reasons why (FROM THE TEXT!)

**If Time Permits/Extra Work/Homework:**

**Time: 45 minutes**

Have students write an extended response after completing the pre-writing exercise. Because this will be the first time many, if not all, students have written an extended response, still give them 45 minutes to complete the writing portion of the assignment.

**Online Resources:**

- 1) [Purdue OWL: Understanding the Prompt](#)
- 2) [Purdue OWL: Writing a Thesis Statement](#)

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### RLA PROMPT

**In your response, analyze both positions presented to determine which one is best supported. Use relevant and specific evidence from the article to support your response.**

#### **Notes:**

On the RLA test, you will have 45 minutes to complete the reading, analysis, and writing for the extended response item. While you should be sure to edit and revise your essay for grammatical errors and errors in logic, the extended response scoring system will score these essays as on-demand written responses. In other words, it recognizes that this is first-draft writing.

Also, there is NO right or wrong answer. Potentially, a case can be made for EITHER side of the argument. However, you must be able to construct a response that provides relevant and specific evidence FROM THE TEXT to support your argument.

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### "Should Teachers Get Tenure?"

Text taken from: <http://teachertenure.procon.org/>

Teacher tenure is the increasingly controversial form of job protection that public school teachers in all states receive after 1-7 years on the job. As of 2008, 2.3 million teachers have tenure.

| PROs   | CONS   |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Tenure protects teachers from being fired for personal, political, or other non-work related reasons.</b> Before tenure, teachers could be dismissed when a new political party took power or a principal wanted to make room to hire his friends. Women were dismissed for getting married, becoming pregnant, wearing pants, or being out too late in the evenings.</li> <li>2. <b>Tenure prohibits school districts from firing experienced teachers to hire less experienced and less expensive teachers.</b> The threat of firing has increased in recent years as many school districts face budget cuts. Marcia Rothman, a teacher for 14 years, said at a Dec. 16, 2010 protest in New York, "They don't want old experienced teachers who are too expensive. It's a concerted effort to harass older teachers, so they can hire two young teachers."</li> <li>3. <b>Tenure helps guarantee innovation in teaching.</b> Without the protection of tenure, teachers may feel pressured to use the same lesson plans and teach directly to standardized tests. Former California Teachers Association President Barbara Kerr said, "Teachers are afraid to try new, innovative things if they are afraid of losing their job."</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Teacher tenure creates complacency because teachers know they are unlikely to lose their jobs.</b> Tenure removes incentives for teachers to put in more than the minimum effort and to focus on improving their teaching.</li> <li>2. <b>Tenure makes it difficult to remove underperforming teachers because the process involves months of legal wrangling by the principal, the school board, the union, and the courts.</b> A June 1, 2009 study by the New Teacher Project found that 81% of school administrators knew a poorly performing tenured teacher at their school; however, 86% of administrators said they do not always pursue dismissal of teachers because of the costly and time consuming process. It can take up to 335 days to remove a tenured teacher in Michigan before the courts get involved.</li> <li>3. <b>Tenure makes seniority the main factor in dismissal decisions instead of teacher performance and quality.</b> Tenure laws maintain the "last-hired, first-fired" policy. On Feb. 24, 2010, the American Civil Liberties Union filed suit against the Los Angeles Unified School District, claiming that basing layoffs on seniority harms younger teachers as well as "low-income students and persons of color." On Oct. 6, 2010, both sides</li> </ol> |

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4. **Tenure allows teachers to advocate on behalf of students and disagree openly with school and district administrators.**

Award-winning history teacher Kerry Sylvia said that without tenure, she would be afraid of being fired because of her public opposition to initiatives by administrators.

5. **Contrary to public perception, tenure does not guarantee a teacher a job for life.** Each state's tenure laws establish strict requirements and processes for removing a tenured teacher. Tenure also guarantees teachers a termination hearing before the board of education or an impartial hearing panel.

settled to cap or end layoffs at schools.

4. **Tenure makes it costly for schools to remove a teacher with poor performance or who is guilty of wrongdoing.** It costs an average of \$250,000 to fire a teacher in New York City. New York spent an estimated \$30 million a year paying tenured teachers accused of incompetence and wrongdoing to report to reassignment centers (sometimes called "rubber rooms") where they were paid to sit idly. Those rooms were shut down on June 28, 2010.

5. **With most states granting tenure after three years, teachers have not had the opportunity to "show their worth, or their ineptitude."** A Nov. 21, 2008 study by the University of Washington's Center on Reinventing Public Education found that the first two to three years of teaching do not predict post-tenure performance.

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**PRE-WRITING EXERCISE**

| SIDE A                      | SIDE B                          |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Teachers should get tenure. | Teachers should not get tenure. |



| <b>Good Supporting Evidence For SIDE A</b><br>(paraphrase as much as possible) | <b>Good Supporting Evidence For SIDE B</b><br>(paraphrase as much as possible) |
|--|--|
|  |  |

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### Which one had the better-supported argument?

Circle one:

SIDE A

SIDE B

In the space provided below, explain WHY you chose SIDE A or SIDE B, using reasoning based on the TEXT. (You can and should use your own words to connect the ideas from the text.)