

Introduction to Critical Thinking

Philosophy Unit

CREDIT RECOMMENDATION: 1.0

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DEEP THOUGHT

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Contents

Contents	3
How to Use This Thinkbook	5
Schedules	6
Scheduling Your Day	6
Scheduling Your Year	6
Assigning Credits and Grades	8
Language Notes	10
About This Unit	11
Lesson 1: Welcome to Critical Thinking	12
What is the toolkit for?	12
W: What?	12
R: Reasons	14
T: Truth	15
E: Examples	16
C: Counterexamples	16
A: Assumptions	17
I: Implications	19
Make your own version of the philosophy toolkit.	20
Lesson 2: Critical Reading Strategies	21
Set aside enough time.	22
Start with a purpose.	22
Pause to sum it up.	22
Talk back.	22
Pay attention to yourself.	22
Follow the instructions above to annotate this following text.	23
Goldilocks and the Three Bears	24
OK, back to those questions at the beginning of the story. How will you answer them?	29
Lesson 3: More Strategies for Annotating and Critical Reading	34
Questions You Should Always Ask	34
What is this reading about? Can I summarize it in a few simple sentences?	34
Who might be the intended audience for this text?	35
What might the purpose of this text be?	35
What could this text be saying about the nature of humans, community and relationships, or the world we live in?	35

Other Things to Look For	36
Patterns	36
The Seven Basic Plots	36
The Six Types of Conflict	37
Archetypes	37
Situation Archetypes	38
Details	39
Colors	39
Numbers	39
Nature	39
General Things to Look for When You're Reading	40
Details:	40
Patterns	40
Big Ideas	41
Ethics	41
Perspective	41
Connections	41
Lesson 4: Advanced Critical Thinking	43
What's one of these strategies that you're going to try in your critical reading?	51
Lesson 5: The Rhetorical Situation	52
Watch Monty Python's "The Argument Clinic."	52
Answer the following questions.	52
Speaker	56
Occasion	57
Audience	57
Purpose	58
Subject	58
Tone	58
Answer the following questions:	60
Use your notes to define the following terms in your own words:	62
Lesson 6: Analyzing the Rhetorical Situation	65
Analyze the rhetorical situation for The Brontes (Hark a Vagrant!).	65
Analyze the rhetorical situation for Don't Text and Drive (AT&T).	66
Analyze the rhetorical situation for Orbit: Cow (Wrigley).	68
Analyze the rhetorical situation for Sports Car Advertisement (Porsche).	69
Analyze the rhetorical situation for these two opposing editorials.	71
From "Gun Control Isn't the Answer"	71

From “Will America Choose Its Children Over Guns?”	74
Rhetorical Situation Project	76
Rhetorical Situation Chart	77
Checkpoint	78
Lesson 7: Bias and Viewpoint	82
Structure	84
Loaded language	85
Facts and Opinions	85
Author’s Purpose	87
Author’s Viewpoint	87
Types of Structure	88
Use your notes to identify the structure and purpose of the following examples:	89
Lesson 8: Bias and Viewpoint, Continued	92
Loaded Language	92
Facts and Opinions	95
WORDS THAT INDICATE BIAS OR OPINION	95
WORDS THAT QUALIFY POSITIONS OR BELIEFS	96
Use your notes to determine the facts and opinions in the following passages.	96
Lesson 9: Premise and Conclusion	100
PREMISE INDICATOR WORDS	102
CONCLUSION INDICATOR WORDS	102
It’s easier and makes more sense when you do it yourself, so analyze the arguments below for their premises and conclusions.	102
Checkpoint	104
Television Project	107
Lesson 10: Inductive & Deductive Reasoning	111
Watch Ninety Second Philosophy’s “Deductive vs. Inductive Arguments” video, and answer the questions below.	111
Deductive Reasoning	112
Inductive reasoning	114
Determine whether the arguments below are deductive or inductive and explain your reasoning.	117
Lesson 11: Rhetorical Appeals	123
Ethos	123
Logos	125
Pathos	126
Got it? Let’s examine a few examples and see:	129

Choose one of the following topics, and write a rhetorical appeal for each appeal type:	131
Lesson 12: Analyzing Rhetorical Appeals	133
Evaluate the rhetorical appeals in the following passages.	133
ETHOS	133
PATHOS	136
LOGOS	139
Checkpoint	142
Analyze the argument above in an essay below.	142
Lesson 13: Persuasion versus Propaganda	148
Watch the video Persuasion vs. Propaganda. Answer the questions below about the two videos shown.	148
VIDEO 1	148
VIDEO 2	149
Propaganda Cheat Sheet	153
CHARACTERISTICS OF ARGUMENTS	153
CHARACTERISTICS OF PROPAGANDA	153
Identify whether each of the statements below is an argument or propaganda.	153
Common Propaganda Techniques	155
Find one example of propaganda (from a book/movie, news story, social media post, advertisement, etc.) for each of these propaganda techniques:	158
Lesson 14: Propaganda Fallacies	160
Begging the Question	161
Hasty Generalization	162
False Cause (Post Hoc)	163
Non Sequitur	164
Fake Dilemma	164
Faulty Analogy	165
Fallacies Cheat Sheet	167
Propaganda Project	170
Speech	170
Posters	171
Short Story (with Illustrations)	171
Comic Strip Panel	171
Lesson 15: Putting It All Together	172
Checkpoint	176
Scenario	176

How to Use This Thinkbook

This is a high school level unit, designed for students who are ready to explore complex texts from various critical perspectives.

Like most high school level curricula, it includes information that could be rated M for Mature. History is full of wars and violence. If mature content is a concern for you with your student, I encourage you to pre-read to assess your personal comfort level. (I use this curriculum with my own high school students, but comfort levels can be very personal things.) This is a completely secular program.

The lessons in this Thinkbook are designed to cover one year of high school philosophy/critical thinking (1.0 credit), but you could easily stretch the course over a longer period of time by slowing down and dedicating more research time to projects and major assignments. Some lessons might wrap up in a week; others may take you two or more weeks to complete. My best advice is to find the pace that is comfortable for you and follow that.

Every lesson includes readings, questions to consider about the reading, and work to complete. I encourage you to annotate as you read—future lessons will refer back to previous ones, so annotations will make this much easier!

The major output assignments are designed to be evaluated work, suitable for including in portfolios or assigning grades. Some of these output assignments are short and simple; others require substantial thought and work to complete.

Deep Thought curriculum is set up as an independent program for high school students, so there is no teacher guide—in this program, the student and teacher are expected to be the same person. Similarly, don't let the workbook style fool you! Yes, you can work through this curriculum just like you'd work through a traditional workbook, but there are no right answers to any of these questions. There are good answers and less-good answers. Good answers are supported by evidence—the more evidence you find and the more specific that evidence is, the better your answer is. If you can't find specific evidence to support your thinking, you may want to reconsider your position, but you're not "wrong" in the right/wrong kind of way.

That means that you'll get out of this curriculum what you put into it. If you race through it, skimming across the surface and opting for the easiest answers, you'll probably absorb some information—but if you dig deep, think hard, and take your time working through this curriculum, you'll be a better learner when you're done.

Schedules

Scheduling Your Day

You're free to set up your schedule however works best for you, but here's the method that we have found works best for us:

- Two days of hands-on, active work (labs, lectures, projects, etc.)
- Two days of reading and annotating
- One day of writing and revising
- Two days off

There may be some overlap—some weeks you may find yourself with less reading and a big project to work on, for instance, or you may be working on a big essay that needs more time—but in general, this method seems to work well for most people.

The two days off are essential: Everyone needs time to recharge, and if you can make your schedule work for a two-day stretch of time off, that's ideal. You may already have a system that works great for you, and if you do, you should stick with that. If you're still figuring out what works, this plan could be a good starting point.

Scheduling Your Year

When I teach this curriculum at our homeschool group, it takes up two pretty intense 14-week semesters. These are intentionally rigorous, work-intensive stretches of time separated by generous breaks. We schedule it this way, which is similar to how colleges schedule terms, because it gives students a chance to find a steady rhythm and to really immerse themselves in what they are studying. A not-too-distant semester end-date can be motivating for students with a tendency to procrastinate, and the long break means students have lots of time to explore the world beyond their school books and pursue things they're excited about.

If you want to follow our schedule, start your class the week of Labor Day and continue through mid-December, with a one-week break for Thanksgiving. Winter holidays end with Martin Luther King, Jr., Day and classes continue through April/May (wherever the 14 weeks take you) with a two-week spring break sometime after midterm.

On this schedule, each lesson takes about two weeks, with two weeks allocated for major projects. This is a pretty rigorous schedule, though, especially if you are working independently, and you may want to stretch some lessons over multiple weeks. That's fine!

And if you don't finish the curriculum by the end of the year, you join the many, many students around the world who don't finish the book by the last day of class. It's no big deal. Honestly, if you do three lessons thoughtfully and thoroughly, that's more valuable than zipping through 10 lessons in five weeks.

Assigning Credits and Grades

For many high school homeschoolers, credits and grades can seem complicated and intimidating— but it’s actually easier than you think.

The simplest way to manage credits is to use Carnegie hours, which basically give you credit based on the time you spend working in each subject. One unit equals 120 hours of work over the course of the year: If you’re following a 28-week schedule, that means you should be putting in about four hours of work time each week, which is just about spot-on. Your credit distribution for this class will look like this:

Philosophy: Critical Thinking

Credit: 0.5/semester; 1.0/year

Assessment: 60% homework and participation; 40% essays and projects

Class description: This philosophy class introduces the foundations of argument, including analyzing the rhetorical situation, using inductive and deductive reasoning to build arguments, and recognizing commonly used fallacies. Students will also explore philosophical arguments in depth, working to reconstruct arguments and develop nuanced understanding.

Grades can be a little tricky for homeschoolers because you are probably working toward mastery and not toward a single exam—you’re not “done” and ready to move on to something else completely at the end of each lesson; instead, you are building on your knowledge and understanding every week. You may not do brilliantly on everything the first time (and most people don’t), but you will keep working until you can do things brilliantly (or, OK, at least with competence and confidence). So if you’re not averaging out test scores, how do you figure out your grade?

First of all, if you’re completing lessons at a steady pace, you are probably earning an A, even if you’re not always 100-percent pleased with your output. A lot of the reading and thinking you’re doing is well above standard high school level—when it feels hard, it’s because it is hard! Your goal is not to come in doing perfect work—what would even be the point of doing classes if you had already mastered them on the first day?—but to get better as the year

progresses. Your answers should deepen and expand as the year goes on. You'll know more and do better work at the end of the semester than you did at the beginning.

This means, of course, that you're not evaluating your work on a fixed scale—instead of getting easier, your work should get more challenging as you get better at it because you should keep pushing yourself to do better work.

I really don't want you to view your grade as a measuring cup that you have to fill to a certain point and then you're done. Instead, view it as a kind of learning plant that you want to keep feeding and nurturing to grow as much as it possibly can.

If at the end of the semester, you've worked harder than you've ever worked before and learned more than you could have imagined, that sounds like A level work to me. And if you've been phoning it in, clocking points without really doing any real critical thinking, reading, or writing, you know you're probably doing B-level work, whatever your total points say. I'm not the points police, so make the choices that are right for you, and feel good about them. If you've worked hard, you should feel really proud of yourself at the end of the semester. If you don't, revisit your grade.

You may not achieve mastery in one semester. (Most people don't!) But you can absolutely achieve significant personal improvement, and that's where your focus should be. Please don't let a number stand in the way of your best work.

Language Notes

I grew up in a world where he/him was the default pronoun, and so I use she/her as my default pronoun. This is a deliberate choice (in fulfillment of a vow made in my 10th grade women's studies class), not an avoidance of the awesome gender-neutral they/them.

Along those lines, I use the term Black as an adjective to refer to people of African descent wherever they live. We generally refer to people of Hispanic descent or from Spanish-speaking countries as Latinx. We try to refer to Indigenous Americans by the names of their nations whenever possible. Similarly, when we talk about people from Asia, we aim to refer to specific countries of origin but may use Asian to describe a wider group. When we're talking about the experiences of non-white people, we may sometimes refer to "people of color" as a collective noun.

Diversity and inclusion are important to us, and we work hard to get it right—but we're always ready to learn when we don't. It's our mission to create curriculum materials that make everyone feel included. If you feel like we miss the mark, please contact us at hello@homeschoollifemag.com.

About This Unit

This is designed as a rigorous introduction to critical thinking course for high school students, demanding critical reading and thinking skills that most students won't be ready to flex this way until late middle school or high school. Ideally, students should have some familiarity with annotated reading, textual analysis, and writing about literature going into this unit.

I created this unit to help my high school students learn the basics of critical reading and writing, so it's focused specifically on tools, concepts, and strategies that help develop those skills. I think it's best when you can apply it to subjects you're studying, especially history and literature. This is really designed as a practical course rather than a theoretical one—ideally, students will walk out of this class with all the skills they need to think and read critically.

Lesson 2: Critical Reading Strategies

What happens when you write a draft of a story? As you read through it, you notice things you might not have noticed as you were putting them in: a hint of foreshadowing here, a particularly nice alliteration there.

You also notice things you might have missed: You got excited and left out a word or a sentence. You realize that there's a better way for your two main characters to meet for the first time. You notice things you want to remember: This letter needs to show up again, or you need to flesh out the description of your neighborhood or do a better job explaining your world's magic system. Every time you work on your story, it gets a little better—a little closer to the way you've imagined it in your head.

Reading works this way, too. We may not talk about reading drafts, but we should.

You probably know this already—there's probably at least one book that you've read over and over again. I bet you realize something new every time, sometimes big things, sometimes small things, but always *something*.

This year, I'd like you to think of your reading assignments the way you think of writing assignments. I'd like you to practice reading in drafts.

Now, sometimes you'll be busy, and it won't work for you to read everything multiple times, and I understand that. But in general, I'd like you to make the effort. And I'd like to practice active reading: reading with a pen in your hand and marking up your text as you go. In fact, annotating—that's the technical term for writing all over your book—is going to be part of your assignment every week.

So let's talk about what that means and what it looks like when you're sitting there with your book open in front of you, not sure what to do next.

We'll start by talking about some general techniques for critical reading—you'll probably find some of them silly and some of them helpful, so experiment until something clicks. Then we'll talk about specific annotating strategies you can start using this week as you read.

Critical reading is a long-term process, so you'll still be learning new ways to do it for your whole life. Even if you've already got annotating down, experimenting with new techniques is always a good idea.

Set aside enough time.

To begin with, try to block off twice the amount of time you'd normally spend reading so that you have time to go back and give a second read. I've intentionally scheduled shorter reading assignments early in this unit, but don't give them one quick read and call it a day. Plan to really spend time with the text, reading it from beginning to end at least two complete times.

Start with a purpose.

I don't know why so many textbooks put questions after a reading—reading discussion questions *before* you dive into the text can help you read with more clarity and purpose. In all your books, you'll find a set of comprehension and discussion questions for every reading. Scan them before you start to read, and you may find critical reading is a little easier.

Pause to sum it up.

Every few paragraphs, force yourself to slow down and summarize what you've just read. (You may find this easier to do on the second reading, when you already know what happens next.) One trick here is to give a title to each page—you might make up a title or use a quote from the page that sums that section up particularly well.

Talk back.

Don't let the text do all the talking. You have ideas, questions, occasional snide remarks, and other input, too. Write them down as you go instead of just letting them flit through your head.

Pay attention to yourself.

We all have times where we know we're doing a better job focusing and reading thoughtfully than others. When you have a particularly good reading session, think about what you were doing: Were you in a quiet place or somewhere with background noise? Were you sitting up straight at your desk or sprawling on your bed? Was it morning or nighttime? Try to pay attention to situations that are conducive to critical reading for you, and schedule as much of your reading time as you can for the times when you know you're at your best.

For these first weeks, I want you to follow this annotating strategy. (We're about to practice it together.)

- **CIRCLE** things that you don't feel sure about—words that aren't part of your everyday vocabulary or that you can't easily define, people or place names you don't recognize, ideas that seem confusing or unfamiliar. A circle reminds you that you want to go back and get more information without interrupting your reading. (You can do a quick Google search or jot down the questions you need help answering before your second read-through.)
- **UNDERLINE** important things. You may underline sentences and phrases you particularly like, details or important moments that help you better understand the text, or just things you want to remember.
- **WRITE** in the margins. You can jot comments, connections, patterns, and other details—we'll start building a database of these as the weeks go on, but to start, just jot down any comments that you want as they come to you. You may have a lot of comments for some readings and very few for others. What I'd really like you to focus on these early weeks is writing questions—ideally, you should have one or two questions for each Toolkit letter for every reading. Aim for that, and you'll be well on your way to critical reading.

Now you're going to put this method to work!

Follow the instructions above to annotate this following text.

I've double-spaced it to give you more room to annotate. Remember, you definitely want to read through it at least twice, annotating both times. You will probably find it helpful to keep these questions in mind as you read.

- What actually happens in this story? Can you summarize it in a few simple sentences?
- Who is the intended audience for this story?
- What might the purpose of this story be?
- Why does Goldilocks run away?
- How do you think the bears might have felt to realize someone was in their house without their permission?
- Do you think Goldilocks was sorry for breaking into the bears' house or just afraid of the bears? What makes you say that?

Goldilocks and the Three Bears

retold by Flora Annie Steel

ONCE UPON A TIME there were three Bears, who lived together in a house of their own, in a wood. One of them was a Little Wee Bear, and one was a Middle-sized Bear, and the other was a Great Big Bear. They had each a bowl for their porridge; a little bowl for the Little Wee Bear; and a middle-sized bowl for the Middle-sized Bear; and a great bowl for the Great Big Bear. And they had each a chair to sit in; a little chair for the Little Wee Bear; and a middle-sized chair for the Middle-sized Bear; and a great chair for the Great Big Bear. And they had each a bed to sleep in; a little bed for the Little Wee Bear; and a middle-sized bed for the Middle-sized Bear; and a great bed for the Great Big Bear.

One day, after they had made the porridge for their breakfast, and poured it into their porridge-bowls, they walked out into the wood while the porridge was cooling, that they might not burn their mouths by beginning too soon, for they were polite, well-brought-up Bears. And while they were away a little girl called Goldilocks, who lived at the other side of the wood and had been sent on an errand by her mother, passed by the house, and looked in at the window. And then she peeped in at the keyhole, for she was not at all a well-brought-up little girl. Then seeing nobody in the house she lifted the latch. The door was not fastened, because the Bears were good Bears, who did nobody any harm, and never suspected that anybody would harm them. So Goldilocks opened the door and went in; and

well pleased was she when she saw the porridge on the table. If she had been a well-brought-up little girl she would have waited till the Bears came home, and then, perhaps, they would have asked her to breakfast; for they were good Bears—a little rough or so, as the manner of Bears is, but for all that very good-natured and hospitable. But she was an impudent, rude little girl, and so she set about helping herself.

First she tasted the porridge of the Great Big Bear, and that was too hot for her. Next she tasted the porridge of the Middle-sized Bear, but that was too cold for her. And then she went to the porridge of the Little Wee Bear, and tasted it, and that was neither too hot nor too cold, but just right, and she liked it so well that she ate it all up, every bit!

Then Goldilocks, who was tired, for she had been catching butterflies instead of running on her errand, sat down in the chair of the Great Big Bear, but that was too hard for her. And then she sat down in the chair of the Middle-sized Bear, and that was too soft for her. But when she sat down in the chair of the Little Wee Bear, that was neither too hard nor too soft, but just right. So she seated herself in it, and there she sat till the bottom of the chair came out, and down she came, plump upon the ground; and that made her very cross, for she was a bad-tempered little girl.

Now, being determined to rest, Goldilocks went upstairs into the bedchamber in which the Three Bears slept. And first she lay down upon the bed of the Great Big Bear, but that was too high at the head for her. And next she lay down upon the bed of the Middle-sized Bear, and that was too high at the foot for her. And then she lay down upon the bed of the Little

Wee Bear, and that was neither too high at the head nor at the foot, but just right. So she covered herself up comfortably, and lay there till she fell fast asleep.

By this time the Three Bears thought their porridge would be cool enough for them to eat it properly; so they came home to breakfast. Now careless Goldilocks had left the spoon of the Great Big Bear standing in his porridge.

“SOMEBODY HAS BEEN AT MY PORRIDGE!” said the Great Big Bear in his great, rough, gruff voice.

Then the Middle-sized Bear looked at his porridge and saw the spoon was standing in it too.

“SOMEBODY HAS BEEN AT MY PORRIDGE!” said the Middle-sized Bear in his middle-sized voice.

Then the Little Wee Bear looked at his, and there was the spoon in the porridge-bowl, but the porridge was all gone!

“SOMEBODY HAS BEEN AT MY PORRIDGE, AND HAS EATEN IT ALL UP!” said the Little Wee Bear in his little wee voice.

Upon this the Three Bears, seeing that some one had entered their house, and eaten up the Little Wee Bear's breakfast, began to look about them. Now the careless Goldilocks had not put the hard cushion straight when she rose from the chair of the Great Big Bear.

"SOMEBODY HAS BEEN SITTING IN MY CHAIR!" said the Great Big Bear in his great, rough, gruff voice.

And the careless Goldilocks had squatted down the soft cushion of the Middle-sized Bear. "SOMEBODY HAS BEEN SITTING IN MY CHAIR!" said the Middle-sized Bear in his middle-sized voice.

"SOMEBODY HAS BEEN SITTING IN MY CHAIR, AND HAS SATE THE BOTTOM THROUGH!" said the Little Wee Bear in his little wee voice.

Then the Three Bears thought they had better make further search in case it was a burglar, so they went upstairs into their bedchamber. Now Goldilocks had pulled the pillow of the Great Big Bear out of its place.

"SOMEBODY HAS BEEN LYING IN MY BED!" said the Great Big Bear in his great, rough, gruff voice.

And Goldilocks had pulled the bolster of the Middle-sized Bear out of its place.

“SOMEBODY HAS BEEN LYING IN MY BED!” said the Middle-sized Bear in his middle-sized voice.

But when the Little Wee Bear came to look at his bed, there was the bolster in its place! And the pillow was in its place upon the bolster!

And upon the pillow—?

There was Goldilocks’s yellow head—which was not in its place, for she had no business there.

“SOMEBODY HAS BEEN LYING IN MY BED, —AND HERE SHE IS STILL!” said the Little Wee Bear in his little wee voice.

Now Goldilocks had heard in her sleep the great, rough, gruff voice of the Great Big Bear; but she was so fast asleep that it was no more to her than the roaring of wind, or the rumbling of thunder. And she had heard the middle-sized voice of the Middle-sized Bear, but it was only as if she had heard some one speaking in a dream. But when she heard the little wee voice of the Little Wee Bear, it was so sharp, and so shrill, that it awakened her at once. Up she started, and when she saw the Three Bears on one side of the bed, she tumbled herself out at the other, and ran to the window. Now the window was open, because the Bears, like good, tidy Bears, as they were, always opened their bedchamber window when

they got up in the morning. So naughty, frightened little Goldilocks jumped; and whether she broke her neck in the fall, or ran into the wood and was lost there, or found her way out of the wood and got whipped for being a bad girl and playing truant, no one can say. But the Three Bears never saw anything more of her.

THE END

- OK, back to those questions at the beginning of the story. How will you answer them?

What actually happens in this story? Can you summarize it in a few simple sentences?

Who is the intended audience for this story?

What might the purpose of this story be? (Why do you think it's being told to this particular audience?)

Why does Goldilocks run away? (What's the evidence from the text?)

How do you think the bears might have felt to realize someone was in their house without their permission? (What's the evidence from the text?)

Do you think Goldilocks was sorry for breaking into the bears' house or just afraid of the bears? What makes you say that?

Can you rewrite a version of this story where the message is about the importance of sharing what you have with other people who need it? Keep the same plot—Goldilocks comes into the bears' house and uses their stuff—but change the characters and language to reflect your different message.

Rhetorical Situation Project

We tend to think of rhetoric as some fancy thing that's relegated to academic writing, but every time we use language—whether we're writing papers or texting a friend—we are engaging in rhetoric. For this project, you'll be looking at all the ways you use rhetoric in your everyday life over the course of one day.

Think about everything you have done in the past 24 hours and write down the situations in which you wrote anything. Some examples include writing a note or emailing your teacher, text messaging a friend, taking notes for a class, filling out a job application, etc..

List these activities in the chart. Identify the rhetorical situation for each of these activities in the space provided, then determine what features of writing are involved in each particular situation—what expectations are there about the length of writing, vocabulary, required content, medium, format, tone, audience, level of detail, etc.?).

Finally, think about why or how you know these rhetorical requirements. You should have at least seven completed entries.

Rhetorical Situation Chart

RHETORICAL SITUATION	FEATURES OF WRITING	HOW DO I KNOW?

Checkpoint

Here's an opportunity to check in with yourself to make sure you're understanding the concepts we've covered so far.

Don't think of this as a test. Nobody's grading you. If you zip confidently through it, awesome. If you find that you need to go back and spend more time with some concepts, that's awesome, too. This isn't a race, and you can't fall behind. Take the time you need to feel like you're ready to move forward.

Use your close reading skills and understanding of the rhetorical situation to read the passage below and answer the corresponding questions.

From The Ballot or the Bullet by Malcolm X (April 3, 1964)

(1) If we don't do something real soon, I think you'll have to agree that we're going to be forced either to use the ballot or the bullet. It's one or the other in 1964. It isn't that time is running out — time has run out!

(2) 1964 threatens to be the most explosive year America has ever witnessed. The most explosive year. Why? It's also a political year. It's the year when all of the white politicians will be back in the so-called Negro community jiving you and me for some votes. The year when all of the white political crooks will be right back in your and my community with their false promises, building up our hopes for a letdown, with their trickery and their treachery, with their false promises which they don't intend to keep... This government has failed the Negro. This so-called democracy has failed the Negro. And all these white liberals have definitely failed the Negro.

(3) So it's time in 1964 to wake up. And when you see them coming up with that kind of conspiracy, let them know your eyes are open. And let them know you — something else that's wide open too. It's got to be the ballot or the bullet. The ballot or the bullet. If you're afraid to use an expression like that, you should get on out of the country; you should get back in the cotton patch; you should get back in the alley...

(4) In 1964, it's time now for you and me to become more politically mature and realize what the ballot is for; what we're supposed to

get when we cast a ballot; and that if we don't cast a ballot, it's going to end up in a situation where we're going to have to cast a bullet. It's either a ballot or a bullet.

(5) So, where do we go from here? First, we need some friends. We need some new allies. The entire civil-rights struggle needs a new interpretation, a broader interpretation... Expand the civil-rights struggle to the level of human rights...

(6) We will work with anybody, anywhere, at any time, who is genuinely interested in tackling the problem head-on, nonviolently as long as the enemy is nonviolent, but violent when the enemy gets violent....

(7) If you don't take this kind of stand, your little children will grow up and look at you and think "shame." If you don't take an uncompromising stand, I don't mean go out and get violent; but at the same time you should never be nonviolent unless you run into some nonviolence. I'm nonviolent with those who are nonviolent with me. But when you drop that violence on me, then you've made me go insane, and I'm not responsible for what I do. And that's the way every Negro should get. Any time you know you're within the law, within your legal rights, within your moral rights, in accord with justice, then die for what you believe in. But don't die alone. Let your dying be reciprocal. This is what is meant by equality. What's good for the goose is good for the gander.

What assumptions and/or biases of the author are revealed in paragraphs 1 and 2?

What do paragraphs 1 and 2 reveal about the context surrounding this text? What motivated the speaker to use this rhetoric?

What are the implied subjects of the speech you can infer from paragraphs 1 and 2?

What does paragraph 2 reveal about the speaker's target audience?

Circle the words/phrases below in the text. What do these words reveal about the author's attitude/tone toward the subjects?

- *ballot or bullet, time has run out, explosive, wake up*

- *jiving, crooks*

- *false promises, trickery, treachery*

What do paragraphs 3 and 4 reveal about the text's purpose?

How is the tone of the speech maintained in paragraphs 3 and 4?

What do we learn about the speaker's viewpoint or purpose in paragraphs 5 and 6?

How is the speaker's viewpoint and/or purpose further developed in paragraph 7?
