Oakland Unified School District ✐ Process Writing Assessment
Descriptive Writing - Fall

STUDENT NAME: _____

Writers do their best writing when they have time to read, think, and plan. During the next few days you will:

1. Read a descriptive essay written by a published author.
2. Analyze the descriptive essay.
3. Think about and draw a place where you have lived.
4. Plan and write a descriptive essay about a place where you have lived.

Teachers hope you learn more about writing, enjoy these activities, and do your best work. When you finish, your teacher will read your essay, score it and then plan lessons to help you become a better writer.

DAY ONE: Reading and Responding

1. The selection you will read today is author Laurence Yep's description of his grandmother's apartment.

➲ Use the *My Notes* space to write what you think or wonder about the apartment and what you notice about what the author says is unique or special about it.

2. Reading the Story

The Lightwell
By Laurence Yep

My grandmother lives in a tiny studio apartment in Chinatown. Her home, in the rear of the building, receives no direct sunlight even though her window opens on a lightwell; for the lightwell seems to stretch endlessly upward and downward among the many buildings. At its brightest, it is filled with a kind of tired twilight.

Although the lightwell is a poor source of light, it is a perfect carrier for sound. In the mornings it carries sound from all the other apartments – the slap of wet laundry being hung in the window, the rush of water into a sink, the crying of a baby. During the afternoons, bits of conversation float into my grandmother's home like fragments of little dramas and comedies-just as, I'm sure, the other tenants can hear the shuffling of my grandmother's cards and her exclamations when she loses at solitaire.

Toward evening, as my grandmother clanks pots on her stove, I can hear matching sounds from the other apartments as her neighbors also prepare their meals. And the smell of my grandmother's simmering rice and frying vegetables mingles with the other smells in the lightwell until there are enough aromas for a banquet.

Side by side, top and below, each of us lives in our own separate time and space. And yet we all belong to the same building, our lives touching however briefly and faintly.

My Notes

I wonder what a lightwell is. Why is it important?

☆Put a star by passages that were so descriptive you could imagine the scene.

❍ Circle any parts you have questions about.

3. Facts: Now you know a number of facts about his grandmother's apartment. Write two or three of these facts.

I know… (Facts)

1. _____

2._____

3._____

4._____

4. Opinions: You also know what the author thinks is special or unique about his grandmother's apartment building. Write two or three statements giving your opinion about how he feels about his grandmother's apartment

I think he feels. . .(Opinions)

1._____

2._____

3._____

4._____

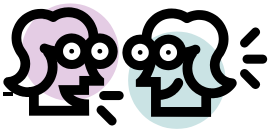
5. Controlling Idea: A controlling idea is the author's central idea, opinion, position or claim about a particular topic. What do you think is Laurence Yep's controlling idea in his writing? What evidence do you have?

I think the controlling idea of "Lightwell" is_____

_____

because_____

_____.



DAY TWO: Making Connections

1. Review your work from Day One. Share your facts, opinions, and thoughts about the controlling idea with a partner. Listen to your partner.

   - Share the descriptive parts that you starred when you read.
   - Share your questions from *My Notes*. Try to answer your partner's questions.
   - Discuss the controlling idea. Does your partner have a different controlling idea?

2. The controlling idea of the essay you will write is how your house or apartment makes you feel or what is special or unique about it. You will need to describe your home using details and events that have contributed to your feelings about it. You can write about a place where you no longer live.

My home makes me feel_____

_____because_____

_____

_____

My home is unique or special because_____

_____

_____

3. In “Lightwell,” Laurence Yep includes many facts about his grandmother’s apartment that support his controlling idea. With your partner, pick out some of these facts and write them in Column One. You can use the **controlling idea** from yesterday, or revise it if necessary.

4. In **Column Two** list facts about your house or apartment that support your controlling idea.

Column One	Column Two
Laurence Yep’s controlling idea:	**My controlling idea:**
Facts that support his controlling idea:	**Facts that support my controlling Idea:**

DAY THREE: Drawing and labeling your house/apartment

1. Draw a picture of your house or apartment with details that support your controlling idea.
2. Include images you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch.
3. Use descriptive words to label parts of your house or apartment.
4. Discuss your finished drawing with a partner. You may add things to your drawing as you share.

My Home

DAY FOUR: Sensory details and specific vocabulary

In "Lightwell" Laurence Yep uses descriptive language. He uses words to "paint" a picture of his grandmother's apartment. Today you will do some activities to help you paint with words in your essay.

1. Look at the drawing of your house/apartment and now paint a picture with words. Write words, phrases or metaphors that describe what you can see, hear, smell, taste, and touch when you are at the house/apartment. You will use this descriptive language when you write your essay.

See:
Hear:
Smell:
Taste:
Touch:

2. Write words, phrases or metaphors that describe what is special or unique about your house or apartment. Use the sentence frames, or make your own.

My home is like a _____

because_____.

My home is a _____

that _____.

My own words that describe what is special or unique about my home:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

DAY FIVE: Writing a Descriptive Essay

Write a descriptive essay for your teacher that describes your house or apartment. Describe details and events that show how your home makes you feel or what is special or unique about it. Paint a word picture using vivid, descriptive, sensory language so that your teacher experiences your home as you do.

Before you begin to write, take a few minutes to look through your booklet and decide what you want to include in your essay. You can also include information that is not in your booklet.

Writing Reminders:
Keep the following points in mind since you won't have time to rewrite:

- Introduce your house/apartment with a sentence that captures the reader's attention.
- Organize your ideas so that they are easy to follow.
- Use precise and vivid vocabulary to describe your house/apartment.
- Use a variety of sentence types.

After you write:

- Check your punctuation. Use capital letters, commas, periods, quotation marks and spelling correctly.
- Give your essay a title. (Write a title that will help your reader know what your essay is about).
- Go back and check that you have done everything on this checklist.