



Oakland Unified School District  
Writing Proficiency Project

**Process Writing Assessment**  
**(PWA)**

**Fifth Grade**


**Winter**

**Descriptive Essay**  
**“My Neighborhood”**

Teacher Instructions

## 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Winter Prompt Descriptive Writing


This Process Writing Assessment consists of five lessons that prepare students to write a descriptive essay. Ideally it should take place on consecutive days during your regular writing period. Due to scheduling constraints, you may have to “chunk” lessons into more/fewer days. If this occurs please do the lessons in order. Many activities are designed to be done with a

partner. Look for the partner icon and plan accordingly.  Note that shaded boxes are from the student booklet.


### *Overview of week\**


### *Suggested time*


<b>Day One</b>	<i>Overview of Week</i> Accessing Prior Knowledge	45 - 50 minutes
<b>Day Two</b>	<i>Visualize the neighborhood::</i> Draw the neighborhood Sensory details Access oral language	45 - 50 minutes
<b>Day Three</b>	<i>Controlling idea and details:</i> Categorize details Develop written vocabulary Selecting a controlling idea	40 - 50 minutes
<b>Day Four</b>	<i>Thinking and Planning:</i> Develop a graphic organizer	30 - 45 minutes
<b>Day Five</b>	<i>Writing:</i> Packet Write essay	50 - 60 minutes

 You may distribute the time allotted to each activity differently across the days, combining or splitting lessons as seems appropriate, taking up to four weeks to complete them all.

 Review all instructions in this manual and prepare materials.

 Use these lessons over the course of one week during your regular Writer's Workshop or Language Arts time. Adapt lessons to meet the needs of your students. *However, the final writing prompt is to be presented without modifications.*

 Collect student writing and score them in teams, using the rubric and anchor papers.

 **OPTIONAL** - Continue the writing process with the students, helping them take their writing through revision to publication.




### Day One: Reading and Responding to an Essay


 Pass out the student booklets and have students write their names on the front page. Read aloud the following:

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 about a neighborhood in San Francisco.
2. Analyze the descriptive essay.
3. Think about and draw a neighborhood in Oakland.
4. Plan and write a descriptive essay about a neighborhood in Oakland.

We 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.

 **GOAL:** The first goal is for students to activate and build background knowledge about neighborhoods in Oakland. The second goal is for students to find the controlling idea after reading a descriptive essay about San Francisco's Chinatown. The third goal is for students to find examples of descriptive language in the essay.

 At the start of the lesson, **generate interest by discussing** the different neighborhoods in Oakland and the neighborhood around your school. If you can, show students past and present photos of different neighborhoods. Ask students to think about ways the

neighborhood might have been different a long time ago. Optional: take students on a walking field trip around the school neighborhood, or a bus field trip to another neighborhood in Oakland.

☞ **NOTE:** Students may not be clear about what constitutes a neighborhood. It is a somewhat ambivalent term that is defined as a “district with characteristics that distinguish it from the areas around it.” This is a time to generate a classroom understanding of neighborhood. The important thing is for students to have a class-generated, working definition that will help them narrow the focus of their essays to a specific location. It might be as limited as the block where they live or as expansive as an Oakland district (Fruitvale, Laurel, Maxwell Park etc.).

☞ **Guide a class discussion on the concept of a neighborhood using the questions below as a guide.**

**1. Thinking Questions:** Cities have many neighborhoods. You live in a neighborhood. Read these questions and think about how you would answer them. Be ready to share your thinking with classmates.

What is a neighborhood?

What do you see in your neighborhood?

Who are the people in your neighborhood?

What are some landmarks of your neighborhood?

☞ Read aloud the directions as well as the essay “San Francisco Chinatown”

2. Read: The essay you will read today is about San Francisco's Chinatown neighborhood. It is a chapter in a children's book about San Francisco. As you read, circle words that you are curious about. Underline words that are examples of descriptive language.

### San Francisco's Chinatown


As soon as you pass under San Francisco Chinatown's Dragon Gate, you enter another world. You will hear people speaking Chinese, smell the spicy foods of street vendors and restaurants, and see the bright colors of t-shirts sold in tourist shops. Chinatown is a place where many people live, but it is also very busy with stores, businesses, restaurants and tourists visiting from around the world. Chinatown is a lively neighborhood that no visitor to San Francisco would want to miss.

Gung Hay Fat Choy! That means "Happy New Year!" in Chinese. You may be lucky enough to visit Chinatown in late January or early February when the Lunar New Year is celebrated. New Year's is a special time in Chinatown. People wish one another good luck and happiness, and children receive lai-see - small red envelopes filled with money. You will hear the loud noises of firecrackers and may see the colorful lion dance parade around the streets.

Chinatown is colorful all year round. Walk down Grant Avenue with its streetlights that look like lanterns. Street signs are written in Chinese and English, and you'll find herb stands, fish markets, tea rooms, and splashes of red on nearly every block. The street is lined with shops selling colored objects and Chinese foods. Chinese jade, ivory carvings, incense sticks, dried fish, and herbs used as medicine packs line store shelves and window displays. Color and light everywhere make Chinatown a bright and lively place.

Wind chimes tinkle, and banners wave in the breeze. Smoked ducks hang in shop windows, and live squid swim in huge tanks. Along the crowded streets, Chinatown's many restaurants offer tasty foods from every district of China. As you eat dim sum, you will listen to the spattering pops of frying meat in the shop next door, and the bump of Chinese hip-hop coming from the apartment above. The streets are alive with the unique sounds of Chinatown.

If you want to visit some place lively, go to Chinatown. Your eyes, nose, and ears will be filled with interesting sights, smells, sounds. As you stroll through the bustling streets you will see that this neighborhood is full of surprises that will teach you about Chinese culture.

 **Guide** students through the steps to identify the controlling idea and three supporting details.

### 3. Find the Controlling Idea

A descriptive essay has a controlling idea that expresses your attitude toward that place and helps the reader understand why you include some details and not others. In academic writing, the controlling idea is often the last sentence of the introductory paragraph. What is the controlling idea of this essay about Chinatown?

Chinatown is a \_\_\_\_\_ neighborhood.

What are some details from the essay that support this idea?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

 Ask students to identify descriptive language in the Chinatown essay.


### 4. Find Descriptive Language

What are some examples of descriptive language? Write them in the lines below. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_




### Day Two: PREWRITING - Drawing Your Neighborhood


 **Goal:** The goal of this lesson is to let students access images from the neighborhood that that will be writing about. They can draw their own neighborhood or another Oakland Neighborhood that is familiar to them.

☞ **Tell students** that they will be spending this class period drawing a picture or map of their neighborhood. This drawing is to help them get ready to write their essay, so it needs to include details, landmarks, people and other images. If they can't draw it (i.e. the smells from the corner restaurant) they can **write labels** on their drawing. You might consider modeling on the board how you would start drawing your own neighborhood.

1. Draw a picture or a map of your neighborhood *and write labels to describe what you have drawn*. Try to put in as many details about your neighborhood as you can. You can also add landmarks (lakes, buildings, streets, stores, trees.)

2. Try to include the important sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures that are in your neighborhood.

☞ **SHOP TALK**  - About 15 minutes before the end of the lesson give students time to share their drawings with a partner. Focus on developing vocabulary to describe the neighborhoods. After they share, tell students they can add details that they may have forgotten to include in their original sketch.

3.  **SHOP TALK-Sharing your drawing with your writing community:** Think about how you will share your neighborhood picture with a partner or a group. Think about what questions you would like to ask a classmate about their neighborhood drawing. You can finish your drawing after you share.



### Day Three: PREWRITING-Brainstorming details and adjectives to find the controlling idea

**Goal:** The goal of this lesson is to help students find a controlling idea for their essay. Students find their controlling idea by first brainstorming details and adjectives on a graphic organizer to describe different features of their neighborhood.


☞ **Tell students** that neighborhoods are made up of lots of different elements: people, places, activities, events etc. (You might share some examples from your own neighborhood to help them get the idea.) Today they are going to brainstorm lots of details and adjectives about their neighborhoods. Then, they are going to come up with one impression (a mental image that stays in your mind) of their neighborhood that will be the controlling idea of their essay. Not only does it need to be just one impression but it also needs to be something that is interesting to write about.

☞ **Guide students** through completing the boxes. The best way to get started is to use your own neighborhood as an example or the generic examples included in each box. Students should look at their neighborhood drawings for ideas.

1. Name and describe some of the people, places, activities, and events in your neighborhood. Some might be in your drawing from yesterday. Record them below. Some of these will be the supporting details and evidence in your essay.

<p><b>People</b></p> <p>Example: <i>the crossing guard; old, friendly man, orange vest</i></p>	<p><b>Place</b></p> <p>Example: <i>Quickie Mart; magazine rack, noisy, smells like icee</i></p>
<p><b>Activities</b></p> <p>Example: <i>soccer game; cheering parents</i></p>	<p><b>Events, Festivals, Holidays</b></p> <p>Example: <i>Cinco de Mayo; music, red, white, green flags</i></p>

☞ **Read through the directions** for “Shop Talk” and do the activity together.

2.  **SHOP TALK- Sharing your ideas with your writing community**

Get ready to share what you recorded about your neighborhood. Talk about what it is like to live in your own neighborhood. Members of your group may live in different neighborhoods, so you can compare facts and details. Be sure each person has a chance to share.

☞ **Tell students** to think carefully about thinking of adjectives that might describe their neighborhood. Not all adjectives are equal. For example “good” is generic and is a weak controlling idea. But with “magical” we are curious about how a neighborhood could be magical. Adjectives don’t have to be positive to be a controlling idea, “weird” generates a lot of interest as does “unusual.” Even “ordinary” makes us wonder a bit.

☞ **Introduce** the word “impression” An impression is a lasting image - what stays in someone’s mind even when their eyes are closed. Which adjective best sums up an overall impression of their neighborhood **and** might be interesting to write about? The writer has to convince the reader through the careful use of details and description that their controlling idea is correct.

### 3. ORGANIZING -Selecting a Controlling Idea

\* Look back at your drawing and notes and think about what you see and do in your neighborhood. Brainstorm adjectives that describe your neighborhood.

Adjectives that describe my neighborhood: e.g. *friendly, diverse, safe, busy*

\* Look at the boxes on page five and the adjectives above. Choose the **adjective** that best sums up the overall impression you have of your neighborhood. Choose one that could be interesting to write about. This will be your controlling idea. You will be using some of the information you have written in the last few days to support this idea. Write your controlling idea.

My neighborhood is \_\_\_\_\_.  
(adjective that best describes your neighborhood)

☞ **Tell students** that after they have written their controlling idea they will test drive it to see how it works. **Guide the** students through this partner activity. Afterwards students can strengthen their controlling idea by adding new details.

**4. Test Drive Your Controlling Idea** - Read your sentence to a partner. He/she will ask you “probing questions” in order to convince them it is true. When the questions are done you get to ask if you proved your statement.

Examples of Probing Questions: “What makes you think your neighborhood is \_\_\_\_?” “Why do you think your neighborhood is \_\_\_\_?” “Tell me more about why your neighborhood is \_\_\_\_?” “What about your neighborhood makes it so \_\_\_\_?” “Are there other examples of why your neighborhood is \_\_\_\_”

**5. Strengthen Your Controlling Idea-** Add any new details that you thought of while answering the questions.



## Day Four: ORGANIZING - Planning Your Essay

**Goal:** The goal of this lesson is for students to plan their essay using a graphic organizer.

**Tell** students to circle the three most interesting details that support their controlling idea.

**Guide** students in filling out the graphic organizer. You may decide to model filling it out using details from your own neighborhood. Or you could use the following example:

**Introduction with controlling idea:** “Take a drive in my neighborhood and it looks like an ordinary place to live. My neighborhood is strange.”

**Supporting detail:** People have a lot of unusual pets in my neighborhood.

**Evidence:** Snakes, parrots, a pig, rabbit

**Supporting detail:** Once a year we close the street and have a costume party

**Evidence:** It is not on Halloween, people dress up and play games in the street

**Supporting detail:** The postman can never find the right apartment or house

**Evidence:** There are missing house numbers, someone keeps changing the numbers, they are not in order.

**Introduction**

(Introduce your neighborhood and write your controlling idea from page 7)

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Choose two or three details (people, places, activities, events) from the boxes on page six that support your controlling idea.

**Supporting detail**

**#1**

Evidence:

**Supporting detail**

**#2**

Evidence:

**Supporting detail**

**#3**

Evidence:

**Conclusion (Creatively restate controlling idea)**

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## Day Five: Writing Your Essay

### **Time Check**

These activities must be completed on the same day. If there is not enough remaining time for most students to write a complete first draft essay then students should not begin to write. The writing portion of the assessment must take place in one session.

**Tell students:** *All week we have been getting ready to write a descriptive essay about our neighborhoods. We read and analyzed the Chinatown essay to find out what is in a descriptive essay. We drew our neighborhoods, generated lists of people, places, events, activities and adjectives. Then came the controlling idea and planning the essay. Whew! Now ,today at last we can write!*

**Review** the work that they did in their packets. Encourage students to read through their packets silently.

**Read aloud** the prompt and the Writing Reminders

Here's the Prompt:

### **A Description of Your Neighborhood**

A newspaper is running a series of articles about different neighborhoods in Oakland. Write a descriptive essay about the neighborhood you live in to include in the next issue. Look back at all your charts and planning sheets in this packet so that you can think about your controlling idea and choose descriptions of your neighborhood that will support it.

### **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.

☞ Distribute writing packets and tell students to fill in the information box. Write your name and school name on the board for them to copy.

☞ Circulate through the classroom as students begin to write to help them settle into the assignment. **Less teacher input now will give you a clearer picture of student writing when you plan for future instruction.**

☞ As students finish, collect student booklets and writing packets.

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