

## Notes to my TN Teachers:

I wrote this several years ago to use in my 5th grade ELA classroom to show students options on how to layer evidence and commentary. In MS we only have one passage on the state test. Since your students will see 2 passages and therefore require the ability to synthesize, this will not be reflective of where you want your students to end up. However, it can be a starting point for teaching the difference in evidence and commentary, that you would want them to apply to their own essays after lots of teacher modeling from you.

The **Teacher Cheat Sheet** on page 3 uses the following highlighter colors:

- **Yellow:** Thesis. This answers the prompt (not just restates) and lets the reader know what you're going to be writing about.
- **Orange:** Topic Sentences (I called them Reasons that support the thesis statement.)
- **Blue:** Evidence. This comes from the text and can be quoted, paraphrased, or summarized.
- **Pink:** Commentary. This comes from the writer's head (really, linguistic data pool). Commentary is the hardest part to teach and well-written commentary is how you move from a 2 on the state test rubric to 3's and 4's. In commentary you explain, extend, connect, predict, illustrate.

I would give students a printed copy of the essay (page 2) and highlighters. I would have them read it silently. Then we would make a key for highlighter colors, and read through the body paragraphs together to determine whether each sentence was evidence (what type) or commentary (what are the moves we make in commentary?)

Our whole school used these highlighter colors and when they wrote their own essays they could go through and highlight their evidence and commentary. They will quickly see where they need to revise.

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## Writing Prompt:

You have watched *The Lion King*, produced by Disney. Explain how the different settings shape the plot throughout the movie. Provide key details and examples from the movie to support your writing.

# Explanatory Mentor Text

## *The Lion King*

By Merideth Myers

Most people regard Disney's *The Lion King* as a kid's movie, but in reality it is a clever adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In the movie a wise king, Mufasa, gets killed and his son, Simba, takes the blame. Ostracized by his own guilt, Simba runs away and grows up in an oasis, where he later learns that his evil uncle, Scar, has taken over the pride. Simba then returns to right the injustice of his father's murder. Throughout the movie the components of the different settings help to shape the plot by creating the tone of the scenes and giving viewers clues about the characters.

The negative settings in the movie reflect Scar's evil character traits and foreshadow conflict. The first inkling the audience gets of this is when Mufasa warns Simba to never go to "that shadowy place," the elephant graveyard. This later becomes Scar's lair, where he plans to take over the pride with the help of the hyenas. During this scene Scar tells his hyena henchmen in the dark of night to "be prepared for the death of a king" while green lava bubbles, smog rises, and shadows dance on the rock walls. These aspects of the setting are a big clue to the audience that Scar is malevolent, and that he has a nefarious plan, which is the main conflict of the movie. The effect would have been quite different if this scene had taken place in an open, sunny field in the middle of the day. The producers and illustrators chose this setting carefully to help the audience understand how formidable an opponent Simba would be facing.

Conversely, positive settings indicate Mufasa's power and Simba's revitalization. At the beginning of the movie baby Simba is held up as an heir to the lion pride's throne on top of Pride Rock. It can be inferred that Pride Rock is the seat of goodness because the colors associated with it—gold, amber, yellow—are all regal in nature. The height of the rock, the sunbeam that shines on Simba, and the gathering of all the other animals also indicate Mufasa's power, Simba's importance, and that they are revered by their subjects. As Simba grows up Mufasa tells him that, "Everything the light touches is our kingdom." This quote reinforces the idea that everything in their kingdom is good, due to it residing in the light. As long as the characters remain in the lighted area of their kingdom, then they are safe. During the rising action, Timon and Pumbaa are shown to live in a lush oasis, surrounded by waterfalls, open spaces, and plenty of juicy bugs to feast on. The producers are showing that this is a safe place for Simba to grow up, get refreshed, and move past the guilt he feels over his father's death. It is the perfect place for him to figure out what matters most and to gather the courage he needs to face Scar.

Overall, the setting served as an echo for the motif of good versus evil throughout the movie. Through the producers' careful selection of varying settings, the audience is indirectly given clues about character traits and the plot. Perhaps in the future people won't be so quick to write off *The Lion King* as a simple movie made only for children.

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