Extended Definition Essay
Al Capone Does My Shirts
By Gennifer Choldenko.

Context

An extended definition essay is a way for students to summarize ideas they learned from the discussions in Al Capone. An extended definition is an essay that uses facts, antidotes, and examples to define a term. Terms explained in an extended definition should not be concrete terms like lamp, floor, or car, but abstract terms like love, courage, or loyalty. This strategy helps students think deeply about the theme of the novel and should be done after the novel has been read completely. Writing an extended definition about courage will help students conceptualize the ideas presented in the novel. Moose displays courage when he resists Piper’s scheme and when he asks the Warden and Al Capone for help. Students can relate to Moose’s struggle to act courageously and exactly what that means; students need courage to resist peer pressure, stand up against a bully, or face junior high with pimples on their face! Students will be able to learn more about courage as they work to define it.

Statement of Purpose

Working to define a term makes students think about what it really means, thus extending their vocabulary. Writing an extended definition moves students away from the strict dictionary definition to defining the term
through personal meaning and experience or even what it is not. An extended definition creates more literate students. Students use examples of courage and the dictionary meaning to formulate their own definition. By including their own personal experiences along with connections to the text, student increase their literacy and their engagement with the texts, especially when this assignment is paired with activities on the topic while reading the text. Students will improve their writing abilities; the assignment will take students through the entire writing process from brainstorming to drafting to revising.

In their extended definition essay, students will define what it means to be courageous (although other words from the novel could be used. Optionally, you could provide students a short list of terms and they could select the one to define.) Because courage is one of the themes in Al Capone Does My Shirts, students should be prepared to discuss what it means to be courageous while reading the novel. Additionally, some activities before, during, and after reading should include discussions on courage; these discussions will further prepare students to maximize their learning on this assignment.

Directions

Materials Needed:
- Instruction sheet for assignment
- Dictionary for students
- Computers for research, writing, or revisions

Time: Multiple class periods. Depending on each school, class periods can be used for brainstorming, research (limited to mainly the text Al Capone and personal experiences), drafting on the computer, peer editing, and any revision or conferences that are necessary. The assignment can also be assigned as homework, but time will still be needed in class to discuss the assignment, review models, and peer edit. Additional class time could be used for writing and revising or writing conferences.
**Instructions:**
After completing the novel, explain to students:
- They will define the word *Courage* (or the teacher will select a few relevant topics from the text for students to choose) in an essay.
- Pre-writing strategies include: what it is, what it is not, a description of a person with courage, an example from the text, and a personal connection.
- They should use the dictionary, personal experience, the novel *Al Capone Does My Shirts*, and other resources.
- The essay should have strong voice and include a thesis statement. This essay can be organized in a five-paragraph essay.

Pass out the assignment sheet and have students fill in the assignment due dates.

**Assessment**

Because this writing assignment covers the entire writing process, it should be assessed as an L3—a level three that is assessed on voice, conventions, ideas, textual support, research, citations, and other traits found in the Common Core that are being covered and emphasized in this unit. There should be time in class for feedback prior to the final project. Additionally, students will be assessed on inclusion of the pre-writing activities in the final project.
Extended Definition Essay Assignment

You will be doing an extended definition essay on courage, using examples from *Al Capone Does My Shirts*, your own life, and the dictionary. It must be between 1 ½-2 pages in length, double-spaced. Please note the due dates below!

You will use four different strategies to fully clarify the meaning of courage before you start writing.

- **Definition:** what courage is (1 paragraph, using examples in your life and background knowledge)
- **Anti-definition:** what courage is not (1 paragraph; use terms that some people may confuse for courage, examples of a lack of courage you have seen)
- **Description:** write about who in your life who shows courage (1-2 paragraphs; a person you know well with many specific and descriptive details)
- **Example from the novel:** (1-2 paragraphs)
- **Illustration by example:** research someone who showed courage in a difficult situation—look in newspapers or research historical figures—this must be a person reasonably well-known so you can research. (2 paragraphs—min, a picture should be included, but does not take the place of the writing, include facts, opinions of others, and how the person showed courage)

To write your essay, you will use:

- The dictionary
- Background knowledge (what you already know)
- *Al Capone Does My Shirts*
- Personal experience
- Researched information (1 print source, 1 internet source)

We will have time to work on these in class, but there will be some homework. We will use the pre-writing activity to form your essay, so it is important that you have all the parts by the due date!

**Due dates are as follows:**

- Prewriting Activities (listed above): _________________________
- Rough Draft of Essay: ________________________________ ______
- Final Copy of Essay: ________________________________ _______