

UNIT 2: Informative Essay



The Changing World

Unit 2

Informative Essay

Step

1

Analyze the Model

Evaluate an informative essay about the ways human actions reshape the Earth.

An informative essay is a short piece of writing that informs and explains. It is nonfiction, and deals with real people, events, and places without changing any facts. Informative writing includes newspapers, magazines, and online articles, as well as biographies, speeches, movie and book reviews, and true-life adventure stories.

The sources in this unit discuss various actions that change our planet—human projects, natural processes, and devastating events. The information in these texts is factual.

IN THIS UNIT, you will evaluate the way writers organize their informative essays, and analyze information from nonfiction articles, maps, and photographs. Then you will use what you have learned to write informative essays of your own.

Step

2

Practice the Task

Write an informative essay about changes to the physical world caused by wind, water, and ice.

Step

3

Perform the Task

Write an informative essay about the effects of a meteor impact on Earth.

Step

1

Analyze the Model

How do human actions reshape the Earth?



You will read:

- **A Letter**
from Enrique
- **A Travel Magazine Article**
Amazing Sights in Egypt

You will analyze:

- **A Student Model**
Shape Shifting

Source 1: Letter

The following letter was used by Ms. Garcia's student, Hollis Jones, as one of her sources for an essay answering the question "How do human actions reshape the Earth?" As you read, make notes in the side columns. Underline information that you find helpful.

Notes

November 12

Hey Marcelo,

You wanted some ideas for your assignment on great engineering achievements. So, here goes!

First up is something you've probably heard of—the Panama Canal. This is a man-made waterway in Central America that connects the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Before the canal, a ship traveling between New York and San Francisco had to sail 13,000 miles, around the tip of South America. The canal reduced the length of the voyage to 5,000 miles.



- New York City to San Francisco, around South America
- New York City to San Francisco, through Panama Canal



Some numbers help show what a huge undertaking it was to build the 51-mile-long canal. About 30,000 tons of dynamite were used to excavate about 200 million cubic yards of material. The job cost nearly 9 billion dollars in today's money, and about 25,000 workers died from disease and accidents.



The Panama Canal was built because land got in the way of two oceans. But how about when water gets in the way of two pieces of land? The Tsugaru Strait is a body of water between the Japanese islands of Honshu and Hokkaido. After a storm sank several ferries crossing the strait, the Japanese decided to build a train tunnel to connect the islands. The Seikan Tunnel is the longest train tunnel in the world. It stretches 33 miles, and 14 miles of it is more than 300 feet below the sea bed. There are even two underwater stations—the world's first.

People have even made land where there was only water before. Dubai has only about 40 miles of natural coastline. To encourage tourism, the state built the Palm Jumeirah island. The island is connected to the mainland by a bridge, and extends nearly three and a half miles into the Persian Gulf. It is shaped like a palm tree surrounded by a 7-mile-long crescent, and gives Dubai another 42 miles of beachfront. Over 100 million cubic yards of sand and 7 million tons of rock was used



Palm Jumeriah Island



Battery Park City

to build the island. Apparently, that is enough material to build a wall ten feet tall and one foot wide, circling the world three times!

Palm Jumeirah isn't the only major example of new land. Battery Park City, at the southern end of Manhattan, is built on a landfill! That doesn't mean it's a cheap place to live. Right now, the average rent for an apartment there is almost \$4,000 a month.

Hope these examples help!

Your big brother, to the rescue again,

Enrique

Close Read

According to the letter, what are some of the reasons that people make major changes to their surroundings?

Source 2: Travel Magazine Article

Hollis used this magazine article as a second source for her essay. Continue to make notes in the side columns as you read. Underline information that you find helpful.

Notes



Amazing Sights in Egypt

In the middle of the desert, 500 miles south of Cairo, is a huge structure that took 30,000 workers ten years to build. This is the Aswan High Dam, an engineering marvel. It's 364 feet tall and more than two miles long.

The Aswan High Dam holds back the River Nile, forming a reservoir, Lake Nasser. The lake is 300 miles long and averages 14 miles across. You can fish there, and watch an amazing variety of birds. More than 100 species live or migrate over the lake. Just don't swim near its sandy shores. Lake Nasser is also home to about 70,000 crocodiles!

However, fishing and bird watching were not at the top of the list of reasons for building the dam. The River Nile floods every year. Once the dam was

Analyze a Student Model

Hollis wrote an essay that answered the question: How do human actions reshape the Earth? The red notes are the comments that her teacher, Ms. Garcia, wrote.

Hollis Jones

January 22

Shape Shifting



Good, clear opening.

People often change their surroundings to improve their lives. Someone might dig a foundation to build a house or level some land to plant a lawn. But sometimes the changes that people make are on a scale that is hard to imagine.

This is a great observation!

Huge engineering projects have changed the shape of our world in a big way. Many of these changes involve water. We dig under the sea, we connect bodies of water, we replace water with land, and we contain water.

In Japan, the Seikan Tunnel was built to provide a safer way to travel between two islands. It is the longest underwater train tunnel in the world and makes its way 300 feet below the sea bed.

The Panama Canal is only 51 miles long, but it connects two oceans! It cuts about 8,000 miles from the sea voyage around South America. Digging a



canal that can handle big ships was a massive project. The amount of land that was moved, the dynamite used to do it, and the cost in money and workers' lives are mind-blowing.

Use a more formal word or phrase for "mind-blowing"?

People build islands, too! In the Persian Gulf, there is an island where there used to be only water. Using enough sand and rock to build a tall wall that would stretch three times around the Earth, Dubai built an island shaped like a palm tree. The edges of each leaf provide beachfront as an attraction for tourists.

You've organized the different examples in a clear way.

The problem of having too much water or too little water can sometimes be solved by building a dam. In Egypt, the Aswan High Dam stops the Nile from flooding the land, and it releases water when there is a drought. It's over two miles long, and it took 30,000 workers ten years to complete.

All of these projects changed the shape of the Earth. Each one took a huge amount of time, money, and work. And each one accomplished its purpose: to improve life.

Nice concluding paragraph!

Discuss and Decide

What is Hollis's main idea? Did she choose appropriate examples from the sources to support her main idea?

Organizing an Informative Essay

In “Shape Shifting,” Hollis used a main-idea-and-details organization. She presented her main idea in the first paragraph, and then supported the idea with details in the paragraphs that follow. Hollis summed up her main idea in the concluding paragraph.

Complete the chart below with examples from Hollis’s essay.



Introduction
Detail
Detail
Detail
Conclusion

◀ The first paragraph introduces the main idea of the essay. It usually includes an interesting detail, question, or idea.

◀ The following paragraphs support the main idea with details and examples.

◀ The final paragraph often restates the main idea, and includes a further insight or observation.